

Regionalizing Identities

Ethnicity in Italy between Crisis and Loyalty to Tradition

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Current researches on ethnicity, ethnic revival and nationalism focus on the present dimension of this phenomenon. This paper explicitly draws on the concept of *longue durée*, followed by an examination of some important suggestions formulated by Immanuel Wallerstein. The paper tries to clarify by means of historical anthropological analysis some essential components of the socio-historical framework of "ethnic discourses" in Italy. The central issues of the inquiry refer to the continuity of the conflict between legality and legitimacy respectively the perception of the gap between the North and the South of the country. In this context will the question be formulated: Isn't the construction of ethnicity in Italy, even though it is undoubtedly the expression of the "dark evil" of the end of the century, currently also a form of loyalty to tradition which has been going on since the formation of the unitary state?

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Speaking of the redefinition of identities in general and of ethnic affiliations in particular as a sign of either a generalized feeling of uneasiness or of an on-going, political, social, economic and cultural crisis has, at this point, become a somewhat obvious discourse particularly since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the rebirth of nationalism in the Balkans and in the rest of East Central Europe. This discourse is almost like a mumbled and repeated litany which unites the progressive and illuminated spirits to which most intellectuals believe themselves to belong. In fact, the widespread assertion that present day nationalism in post-socialist Europe is essentially the product of the social-economic and cultural crisis provoked by the breakdown of the system and by the (maybe only temporary) annihilation of the communist ideology has become more like a facile refrain of a popular song than a refined symphonic *idée fixe* in the style of Berlioz, if you will pardon my musical metaphor. Here I certainly can't develop a sacrosanct criticism of this unfortunate hypothesis, which has almost become an acquired truth, as in this case I would have to

change the theme of my paper. However the reference to East Central Europe is neither arbitrary nor inconsistent but emblematic of a specific and increasingly dominant way of approaching social sciences which favors the interpretation of the present by use of the present. Those scholars who carry out research into the present day forms of ethnicity in western Europe and in other continents can easily run up against the same trap into which many of those who have analyzed and are analyzing the phenomenon of the "ethnic revival" in the societies of the ex-communist block have fallen: Namely to consider only the present dimensions of 'crises'. It is for this reason that my paper explicitly draws on the concept of *longue durée* (Braudel, 1958), followed by an examination of some important suggestions formulated by Immanuel Wallerstein in his excellent book *Unthinking Social Sciences* (Wallerstein, 1991), and finally on the debates which are still in progress on the utility of an historic anthropology (Kalb, Marks and Tak, 1996). I would here like to underline the fact that I am in agreement with the idea of Wallerstein of working to create what he has

named the "historic social sciences" although I believe the idea of a total fusion of subjects to be illusory for previously published reasons of a methodological nature (Giordano, 1996: 98 *et seq.*). On the other hand it seems to me that Wallerstein, by using the plural "historic social sciences" evokes this fact, if only implicitly.

The question which I have set out to clarify by means of historic-anthropological analyses, is, if the present day identity constructions, based on ethnic criteria in the end-of-the-millennium "Italian crisis" – for instance "*legghismo*" – don't have historical equivalents, and if, as a consequence of these, there doesn't exist a social-historic framework which, in particular moments, favors a specific way of fabricating ethnicity in Italy. However, I will leave aside all questions linked to the so-called ethno-linguistic minorities which are today recognized by the State (South Tyrolese, Slovenians etc.). The assertion that the cinema crisis began with the Lumière brothers has been attributed to a well-known Italian film director. This type of witticism obviously is of limited value but possesses the indubitable quality of making one think, and, for this reason, I intend later on to formulate the already mentioned question in this way: Isn't the construction of ethnicity in Italy, even though it is undoubtedly the expression of the "dark evil" of the end of the century, currently also a form of "loyalty to tradition" which has been going on since the formation of the unitary State?

With the aim of making my argumentation more solid, I shall spend some time looking at two aspects which seem to me to be the essential components of the social-historic framework which surrounds and nourishes the "ethnic discourses" in Italy. These are:

- the continuity of the conflict between legality and legitimacy and
- the perception of the gap between the North and the South of the country.

The Fracture between Legality and Legitimacy

Max Weber in his famous analysis of the forms of legitimate power speaks essentially of three types: charismatic, traditional and legal. Legal

power, in order to be also legitimate, must be based on the recognition, on the part of society, of the "validity" of a system of rules and norms "controlled" by administrative-political frameworks (Weber, 1956: vol. 1, 124 *et seq.*). As also Gaetano Mosca said, legal power is based on a "political formula" and not on an arbitrary use of violence (Mosca, 1966: 85 *et seq.*). Nevertheless Weber saw legal power as the most modern and most rational of the different forms of legitimate power and he could hardly imagine, probably because of his juridical training, the real case of the divergence or conflict between legality and legitimacy. This case of fracture is in fact much more widespread than one would believe and marks a great part of the East-Central European and Mediterranean societies, including Italy, where one can observe two overlapping systems of norms and rules which are often in direct "competition" with each other.

On one side we have the State laws and regulations i.e. legality which, as already mentioned, is "administrated" by an appropriate bureaucratic machinery and which, in the best of hypotheses, can in fact only count on a precarious recognition of both itself and of the rules which it "controls". On the other we find ourselves up against one or more social codes whose norms are considered legitimate by the involved actors even though they, not infrequently, lie on the outside of legality. The contraposition between legality and legitimacy can be summed up in the following scheme:

Judicial norms and dispositions	Social norms and rules
Legal	Partially Illegal
Non-Legitimate	Legitimate

This scheme has to be read in the sense that the divergence between legality and legitimacy is a sign that the "citizens" don't develop a "sense of attachment", to once again paraphrase a Weberian formula, to the State to which they belong – let alone to its institutions (Weber, 1956: vol. 1, 122). The consequences of this attitude are evident as, in this way, there is a questioning of an essential point of the legal power of the State i.e. its "monopoly on physical violence" (Weber, 1956: vol. 2, 832) or, in other words, exclusive

rights on inflicting corporal punishment as, for instance, limiting movement by forcing the condemned to prison (Etzioni, 1972: 76). This representation of the continual "abuse of power" on the part of the State, which was so well identified by Leonardo Sciascia in his famous interview with Marcelle Padovani (Sciascia, 1979: 78), is not an abstract vision of arbitrariness but assumes feasibility in a series of symbols and negative roles. It seems to me important to stress that Sciascia considered Sicily explicitly as a metaphor for whole Italy.

We should first remember the suspicion which surrounds local powers and I cannot content myself with drawing to your attention the ethnographic materials relative to the perception of the police and communal administrations which were collected above all by Anglo-Saxon scholars in the South of Italy who could be reproached with, if only partially true, having written an "anthropological novel" (Davis, 1977; Giordano, 1990: 111 *et seq.*). But in confirmation of these data we can add the dramatic and more disturbing testimonies of magistrates such as Rocco Chinnici and of other high officers of the forces of order such as General Carlo Alberto Dalla Chiesa who, with sometimes desperate tones, spoke, only days before their assassinations, of their own "solitude", hinting not only at the connivances of collaborators but also of the indifference, if not contempt, of the population for their action in defense of the legal power of the State. In this sense Chinnici and Dalla Chiesa followed the tradition of famous predecessors such as Franchetti and Sonnino (*Inchiesta in Sicilia*), Turiello (*Governo e governati in Italia*) or Mori (*Ai ferri corti con la mafia*). But analogous statements, less systematic and more fragmentary, although just as meaningful, have been and continue to be expressed – to cite only two examples – both by magistrates from Palermo (Falcone, Borsellino, Caselli, etc.) and by those in Milan, the so-called "pool of clean hands".

Solitude and therefore isolation of local powers is after all the logical consequence of a profound mistrust in these on the part of many citizens who, on the contrary to what one would believe, express their opinion rather outspokenly. In fact, in 1983 a group of researchers

and students from the Institute of Cultural Anthropology of the University of Frankfurt carried out an investigation, under my direction, into the perception of various State institutions in five Sicilian communes. Before we began this research I was rather skeptical about the feasibility of the project, believing that the interviewees, classing us as foreigners and therefore part of the "public sphere" would refuse to respond or, in the best of cases, would present us with pre-packaged opinions in accordance with the "official moral". This was not at all the case. To my surprise the interviewees submitted to the devised test, which for reasons of time I can't describe here, with great enthusiasm, giving vent, for me in an unexpected way, to their hostility towards the local institutions, personified above all by the regional Sicilian government (Giordano & Greverus, 1986: 345). However already back in the seventeenth century they were saying "Up with the King and down with the Viceroy". Some data should be remembered as they give an idea of how symbols and negative roles are attributed to local powers; in fact for 75% of the interviews the Sicilian regional government was "inefficient" while for 74% it was also made up of "swindlers". Furthermore 71% considered it "immobile", 70% "unreliable", 65% "lazy" while "only" 60% defined it as "temperamental" (Giordano & Greverus, 1986: 359). It is also interesting to note that out of 19 positive items, the value of a good 15 were by far under 50% (Giordano & Greverus, 1986: 344).

We can now ask ourselves if this "vote of no confidence" as we called it then (Giordano & Greverus 1986), is still topical and if things haven't changed a little. Personally, following the development of the Italian situation at close quarters, it doesn't seem to me that one can with all honesty maintain that the legitimacy of the local institutions has substantially increased. Also certain events which could make one think of such a change as, for instance, the birth of certain associations, the promotion of specific projects or the organization of marches and demonstrations, are still too ephemeral to be able to speak of a "new" perception of the State at a level of local institutions. Just think of the melancholic decline of Leoluca Orlando's

"Rete" and remember that similar events are above all the expression of the young generation which, in a short space of time, returns to the old schemes for which reason the only thing that remains for future generations is to begin all over again. In this way, that continuity which is necessary to really make changes in representation and behavior is not possible. Permitting myself a short digression, I would like to add that also the *pentitismo* of a Mafia stamp is anything but the expression of a real strengthening of legal power. Apart from the many juridical doubts that one can have about such a way of proceeding, and which I leave to the experts, the behavior of the so-called "turncoats of the Mafia" represents, to come to the point, a skillful strategy of infiltration in the State structure which can serve to many ends as for example that of discrediting a "boss" or a rival "gang" in order to side-track inquiries or cover up for "friends" and "friends of friends". But in this way it is evident that legal power cannot acquire greater legitimacy just because firstly the local institutions and secondly the more central ones remain at the disposition of a modern version of the old, efficient, tried and tested Mafia tradition i.e. the exploitation and possible neutralization of legality by subtly insinuating themselves into the public sector.

But let's go on to the second set of negative symbols and roles that I would like to circumscribe with the formula "the injustice of justice". Also in this case many foreign anthropologists, all to some extent followers of Montesquieu, who have carried out research in Italy, have been surprised by the fact that in the "country of law" State justice enjoys so little consideration. Pitrè in *Proverbi siciliani*, a piece of work which takes into account many variations originating from other Italian regions, already back then dedicated a short chapter to this theme (Pitrè, 1978: Vol. 2, 339 et seq.). All the same, ethnographic data and above all proverbs don't carry much weight on their own as it is well known that "popular wisdom", although undoubtedly a symptomatic indication of a certain collective way of building and thus also of knowing reality, is very ambiguous and often contradictory, as one can find in it everything and nothing. And it is just that

selectivity of whoever collects or uses these materials that makes them unreliable if taken as the sole source. In support of these data, one finds in Italy, as in almost all the Mediterranean cultures, literary testimonies which tell of the precarious relationship between citizen and justice and these occur with unthinkable frequency in respect to other literature, especially that of Western and Northern European countries. There is also the school of thought of popular novels such as the extremely well-known Luigi Natoli's *I Beati Paoli* in which one finds a true and proper apotheosis of the private or semi-private justice of a secret association which competes with the deeply unjust and naturally corrupt public magistracy (Natoli, 1981). According to the historian and art critic Rosario Lo Duca this *feuilleton* represents in Sicily "the only book that many people have read in their whole lives" and that is also because it confirms, feeds and shapes some certainties about the ineluctable, incorrect functioning of State justice. But the descriptions of the "deeply rooted injustice of justice" so effectively described by the author of *I Beati Paoli* ninety years ago, are surprisingly confirmed by the memoirs of men of law and by present-day sociological research. Of the latter I would only like to quote that of Lorenzo Barbera especially because in one of the published interviews the rhetoric of the "unjust justice" appears in its most essential terms:

"Justice is a net to catch the mass of the people. It is a net with holes in it however, to allow to escape wealthy outlaws, those who rob from peasants and workers, from the earth, work and home" (Barbera, 1980: 107).

Maybe somebody will catch a glimpse of how reminiscent this is of the old "peasant civilization" with its *archaic idiosyncrasy* for every form of State interference and which Eric Wolf has defined as "natural anarchy". There have been attempts to interpret declarations of a type above cited as testimonies of a world which is dying out, on the strength of events which took Italian society and State by surprise in the nineties. I can't however get rid of the suspicion that, in spite of everything, the idea of a manipulated and thus tendentially unjust public justice still prevails.

In fact with the *tangentopoli* which emerged from the judicial inquiries of the so-called "pool of clean hands" in Milan and which was imitated by magistrates in other regions of Italy, one could think of a kind of "judicial revival" which can't help but modify, the deeply negative, classic image of justice. If one then thinks that all these facts have contributed to the construction of an improbable if not impossible "hero" figure as impersonated by a magistrate, one can be tempted to contradict my assertion. And yet it is just the Di Pietro phenomenon which makes me think more of a "loyalty to tradition" than of a real strengthening of the image of Italian justice. By analyzing in detail the behavior of Di Pietro both during the trials which – a not negligible fact – were televised and in many of his statements outside the courtroom, one couldn't help but observe an unusual way of acting and rhetoric which, I would say, was "unconventional" and therefore not very much in accordance with the "traditional" bureaucratic style of Italian justice. The intimidating use of the familiar form of "you" to the defendants in front of millions of Italians, the repeated use of an invective stuffed with not well-educated but popular metaphors and metonyms, which "call a spade a spade", the ungrammatical formulae of "those who speak like you do" – all of these have transformed the people's perception of the magistrate, by definition unjust, into the much awaited person who puts wrongs to right or, if you like, avenger. But if we follow Hobsbawm, were these not the roles attributed in the past to brigands and chiefs of the people when they fought, maybe only in the collective memory of a village or region, against the vexations of the powers of the State one of which was justice?

I don't know if Di Pietro really committed acts of abuse during his activity as magistrate and not being a jurist, it simply doesn't interest me. From an anthropological point of view however, it seems to me that Di Pietro is rather a paradoxical figure in as much that he as a magistrate is a "servant of the State" who, however, uses methods and takes on roles which are considered typical of those who, on the contrary, fight against the "unjust and corrupt" State. But to assume roles also means to re-

awaken others' expectations. And it is just here, as I said before, that lies the secret of Di Pietro's popularity as, to many Italians, he appears a "hero" on the strength of his behavior which gives the idea of someone who "puts wrongs right" and is the "avenger". He portrays an "anti-magistrate", who is practically outside of and immune from a justice which however remains unjust by its very nature. In my opinion the indubitable "charisma" of Di Pietro as well as his "heroisation" is not a confirmatory sign of his greater legitimacy but of an aversion to the third power.

Charisma is, as Max Weber said, an ephemeral phenomena characterized by its own intrinsic transiency. We'll have to wait and see however, what happens if Di Pietro enters permanently into national politics where conformism is almost obligatory if one doesn't want to finish in a marginal position. In this case my prediction is of an unstoppable decline of popularity and the progressive diminishing of his charisma. But this assertion leads us directly to the third and last set of negative roles and symbols which regard central power in its two most typical expressions i.e. the national government and the bureaucratic machinery.

The same observation which I made for the two previous sets of negative roles and symbols also hold true for this one. In an attempt not to repeat myself, I would only like to point out that ethnographic materials collected by anthropologists and literary testimonies of writers which give some idea of the perception which vast strata of the population have of the "Rome government" are not in short supply – on the contrary they are numerous. On the whole the main themes dealt with in these sources correspond to the results of the already cited research in five Sicilian communes which was carried out by the Institute of Cultural Anthropology of the University of Frankfurt. From this research it emerged that 81% of the interviewees considered the government in Rome to be "distant" and at the same time "unjust". 72% on the other hand considered it "weak" and "inefficient" while for 71% it was "selfish", for 70% it was made up of "swindlers", for 66% "immobile", for 62% "lazy" and so on (Giordano & Greverus, 1986: 358 *et seq.*). Also in this case the

value of the positive "items" (13 out of 19) are in the overwhelming majority far inferior to 50% (Giordano & Greverus, 1986: 344). If one reduces these results to a formula, which is maybe a little schematic, it can be summed up by saying that the image of the "Rome government" is that of a handful of petty politicians who "suck the blood of the people" as my sources often repeated and when referring to the bureaucrats of the capital added that they were "all devours and unscrupulous businessmen". If then the local representatives of legal power are "intruders" and if "justice is unjust" from the third set of negative roles and symbols one can infer that the central institutions of power appear to be the tool of a "kleptocracy" a term which I will come back to later as it represents an important element of the "ethnic rhetorics" in Italy.

But the thing that fortifies even more this sensation of scanty identification and thus of a lack of legitimacy in the central legal power which is impersonated by the "political class" and the "bureaucratic" system in Rome in the various national institutions, is above all certain forms of rhetoric and semantics which at this point are part of the everyday language – also that used by journalists in their work or in media interventions. Even though there are many others, I will allude here mainly to two terms i.e. *stanza dei bottoni* (room of buttons) and *il Palazzo* (the Palace). In the first case we are dealing with an expression which maybe originally didn't possess such an openly derogative connotation and was used to circumscribe the exercise of decisional power in a political, administrative, economic or business activity. However the moment this term began to be used in the political-bureaucratic ambience it began to evoke the ideas of "not very transparent", "oligarchic power", etc.. Nevertheless the metaphoric use of *Palazzo*, introduced in 1975 by P.P. Pasolini to represent power in its two negative aspects i.e. authoritative and prevaricating, is much more derogatory. Now it is important for me to underline three facts:

– The term *Palazzo* has had an enormous success and has become of such common usage all over Italy that it has almost been forgotten who coined it and that its creation is very recent.

– At the same time it has become more and more a synonym of those Roman palaces in which the more representative institutions of the State were in office.

– It is difficult to find it in countries where the legitimacy of legal power is still recognized, even though it may be slightly weakened by the generalized crisis of delegitimation that is hitting almost all the West at the end of this millennium. As an Italian in Switzerland I can speak of the latter where the use of a metaphor identical or analogous to that of Pasolini would be unthinkable. In Switzerland, when one speaks of "Palace" one means the "Federal" one i.e. the respectable Bern seat of the Helvetian government which is still well respected. The idea that a government can resemble more a Renaissance court of the type of Borgia, full of intrigues, conspiracies and abuse than an assembly of fundamentally honest politicians, even if these can sometimes appear provincial, awkward and quite often ridiculous, is still far from the minds of most confederate citizens.

The lack of legitimacy of legal power is not only observed in the myriad of cognitive constructions which have only been in part mentioned but also in a series of modes of behavior which can be classified in three groups:

– The opposition strategies through which the actors enter into direct and violent conflict with the State and its institutions. Here I'm talking principally of phenomena which belong mainly to the past but which sporadically reappear in particularly marginalized zones. I'm speaking obviously of the banditry and rebellion of a rural or urban background. I would add terrorism to these however which in Italy, contrary to Germany, was more "anti-State" than "anti-capitalist". Let's remember that in Italy the most sensational kidnapping, also from a symbolic point of view, was of a politician, Aldo Moro, while in Germany it was that of a President of the Industrialists' Association, Hanns-Martin Schleyer.

– The infiltration strategies which consist of neutralizing or influencing in one's own favor the public structures. State infiltration generally happens by means of the personalisation of apparently "objective" social relationships between politicians and bureaucrats on the one

hand and the simple citizen on the other. At the basis of personalisation there is a symmetrical or asymmetrical exchange of favors in which one can observe a "balanced reciprocity" in the sense given to this term by Marshall Sahlins. Practices of patronage system, the various forms of corruption and a good part of the Mafia "savoir faire" belong in this type of strategy. I would remember that the operations of the Mafia don't solely consist of blatant criminal acts which maybe set alight the imagination but which, by a long way, are not as customary as those intense underground activities which mark the Mafia's attempt to insinuate themselves into the State machinery. In fact we wouldn't be able to understand anything of the Mafia and of its analogous organizations as well as its obstinate persistence if we limited ourselves to the violent dimension and if we were not aware of its extraordinary ability to infiltrate public institutions.

– The dissociation strategies which can be characterized above all by the "construction" of an alternative identity to that proposed by the State to its citizens. I'm talking of a dissociative collective identity as Georges Devereux would call it, whose "fabrication" or "invention" tends to erect frontiers not so much to distinguish themselves from analogous groups as – from their own viewpoint – to defend themselves from the disastrous actions of the State. To this type of strategies belong all those forms of ethnicity and ethnic discourses in Italy which are not however "products" of the various ethno-linguistic minorities recognized and protected by State power, but results of the specific intra-Italian construction of differences.

Certainly the distinction put forward here is to be considered idealtypical, in the Weberian sense of the term, as in reality the various strategies are often combined and overlapping.

The Perception of the Gap between North and South. From the "Southern Question" to the "Northern Question"

With the publication of the *Lettere meridionali* of Pasquale Villari edited in Florence in 1878, the Italians realized that their country which had been unified for only a few years, although

not being a simple "geographical expression" as Metternich had contemptuously defined it, was neither able to consider itself a uniform entity from a social-economic point of view. As Bruno Caizzi, a fine connoisseur of the problem justly remarked, the South, whose history for more than a thousand years was nothing more than a series of political upsets and subsequent internal destruction, didn't quite turn out to be that sort of "garden of Hesperides" which many Southern patriots had spread the news about before 1860 especially in Genoa and Turin – thus proving true the observation of Massimo d'Azeglio who said that after "having made Italy", it was necessary to also "make the Italians".

And so was born the "Southern question" which would cause debates and controversy to go on throughout Italy for more than a century and is still far from being calmed down. As this outlet of awareness of the gap between North and South emerges, inevitably in my opinion, in the constructions of ethnicity and of "ethnic discourses" of the past and present, it seems to me necessary and essential to reconstruct those argumentative slopes which lent themselves to the ethnic interpretation of the "two Italy". It is well known that the discovery of the "Southern question" has generated a specific school of thought – the *meridionalismo* which has tried, assuming in most cases the Southern point of view, to question itself on the historic causes, on the current terms and on the possible future solutions to this social-economic problem. Here I certainly don't want to set out to reconstruct the terms of the "Southern question" but it seems important to me to at least take up those elements of *meridionalismo* which implicitly or explicitly have fed the "ethnic discourses" in Italy. One of the most important questions which the *meridionalisti* posed themselves was that of the costs and the benefits of the unification of Italy. Even a moderate author such as Francesco Saverio Nitti of proven unitary faith and certainly not secessionist or nostalgic of the *ancien régime*, made it clear in his book *Nord e Sud*, edited in Rome in 1900, that the unification had simply exacerbated the gap between the South and the North where the latter got the great advantages of the formation of the new State. Nitti summarized this idea writing:

"Two things are by now no longer in doubt: the first is that the unitary regime, which has produced great benefits, has not done so equally in the North and in the South of Italy; the second is that the development of Northern Italy is not due solely to their efforts, but also to the huge sacrifices made by the South" (Nitti in Sterpa, 1978: 138).

The social-economic situation during the Bourbon *ancien régime* which could be defined, according to this author, as a "condition of stability in a situation of misery", was transformed after 1860 taking on the tones of a "back-to-front dynamic". Then it was the North which benefited from government aid and from the unification of the market by the extraction of capital and labor forces from the "conquered" lands. Those Southern regions such as Naples, Palermo and their respective hinterland, which had shown themselves to be embryonic areas of development under the Bourbons were also affected by this "back-to-front dynamic". In fact, from the 18th century onwards an industrial framework, albeit fragile, including factories of various types had emerged in some zones of the South. Any signs however of a process of modernization *in statu nascendi* really began to be thin on the ground shortly after the unity because of the very fierce competition of the North and the unfavorable economic policy on the part of the State which damaged the situation in the South by provoking stagnation, unemployment and mass emigration. But in this case the most important contribution of Nitti consists of having put under fire, on the basis of data which he together with prestigious economists such as Rodolfo Benini and Maffeo Pantaleoni had gathered, the fiscal system of the unitary State, guarantor of a colossal drainage of wealth from the South towards the North. To put the finger on the fiscal problem of the unitary State means mentioning one of the essential components in the construction of ethnicity and "ethnic discourses" in Italy, also of those more recently developed, even though as in these cases the terms are inverted in respect to those presented by Nitti. But it is just for this reason that it seems important to me to look at the central thesis of this author with which I

shall shortly deal.

In extreme opposition we find Guido Dorso supporter of a "radical *meridionalismo*". In fact his diagnosis of the new relationship between North and South which sprang out of the *Risorgimento* struggles and the process of unification is much harder and exceeds the narrow, economic sphere tackled by Nitti. His terminology is thus drastic as he speaks of the "ideal failure of the *Risorgimento*" incapable of recognizing the fact that there were big changes being made in Italian society and above all by the "royal conquest". Here below are quoted some passages which in spite of the old age of his book *La rivoluzione meridionale* published in the distant 1925 is still relevant to the present.

"The State wasn't formed in the hearts of the citizens, ... but it was extended from Piedmont to the other Italian regions, by way of a series of acts of avoidance, compromise and shrewdness... A gray, cold uniform conquest ensued which as it advanced left all the ideal data of the revolution unresolved: freedom, local autonomy and the relationship between the State and the church ..." (Dorso, 1972: 46).

"The royal conquest was possible between '48 and '70 because the Italian revolution was the work of minorities against and in the absence of the majorities" (Dorso, 1972: 50).

"Italy has been made for seventy years and nobody is thinking of unmaking it, its unity was strongly reinforced during the recent war which saw sons from all regions, fighting and dying side by side and this war leveled out the aspirations of all the citizen... But it is precisely these merits and these sacrifices which give today the right to those Southerners to demand the destruction of the old political-economic organism through which the oligarchy of the North has been able to create a true and proper dictatorship to the detriment of the South by bleeding them dry economically and not educating them politically" (Dorso, 1972: 218).

Between Nitti, moderate and painstaking on one side and Dorso, maximalist and impetuous on the other, are set, with rare exceptions, all

the great *meridionalisti*. But what leaps to the eye is that, in spite of the diversity of positions and language, all these authors have two themes in common: The unity of Italy has sharpened the social-economic gap between North and South unashamedly favoring the North to the detriment of the South.

The unitary State which, as Dorso says, founds "each and every time ... its hopes of conservation on the personal ability of the Prime Ministers" (Dorso, 1972: 49), doesn't have the capability or the will to manage that lack of balance, thus making itself an accomplice of the status quo. But it would be precisely these two leitmotiv that later became the two main arguments used also by the Southern Italian separatist movements founded on ethnicity. However it would only be after the Second World War that *meridionalismo* would have a concrete political confirmation i.e. when the Italian State would pass the agrarian reform and the "special intervention" with the aim of redressing the situation.

I certainly don't wish to approach here the hoary problem of the failure of the development policy in the South. However it is as well to remember that the agrarian reform, which, even though it settled the backwards system of large landowners, didn't manage to create a modern type of agriculture able, at least in part, to put the brake on emigration. On their part the "industrial poles" turned out to be more than catastrophic with the much awaited multiplying effect having failed to appear. Moreover these giants of heavy industry, which in certain ways are reminiscent of the complexes which came into being from the planned economy of real socialism, have with time turned into rusty "cathedrals in the desert" with the foreseeable and extremely important negative consequences for the environment. Admitting this setback around the beginning of the seventies, the government changed track by re-dimensioning the extremely costly mechanism of the "special intervention" and by introducing a policy of convenience based on *assistenzialismo*.

It was just from this moment or, more precisely, from the oil crisis in October 1973, that the terms of the relationship between North and South were reversed and the *questione*

meridionale changed, almost imperceptibly into the "Northern question". In fact *assistenzialismo*, whose essential mainstay is the personalized, clientelistic and non-productive allocation of subsidies, contributions, pensions etc., is founded on the drainage of resources from the North towards the South. This new reality has been highlighted in the book *La redistribuzione assistenziale* edited in 1978 which unfortunately sank somewhat into oblivion, even though it represented, in my opinion, an obligatory point of literature for those who would like know the current terms of Northern-Southern antagonism. The author Francesco Forte and his team, who certainly can't be suspected of anti-unitary tendencies, well highlighted the novelty of the problem i.e. that there are regions which pay fiscally more than others and that

"the two Italy are kept together on an economic terrain, by the strength of the contributors of the industrial triangle, which is often not the 'well off' class but the working masses and that part of the middle class who, having a fixed income or companies or firms which are fiscally assessed and checked, are entirely exposed to the bite of a harsh, parafiscal and fiscal pressure besides that of inflation" (Forte *et al.*, 1978: 4 *et seq.*).

By the use of very precise surveys Francesco Forte and his students were able to show that the fiscal system "carries out a decanting of resources from rich regions in favor of the poor" (Forte *et al.*, 1978: 116) and

"carries out a good activity of redistribution between the North and the South; in particular, by subtracting around 14% of the income from the rich regions... is able to increase the income of the poor regions somewhere in the order of 21%. Therefore public finance, by imposing on the rich regions of the North a 'sacrifice' equal to 14% of their income, manages to make up to the poor regions a 'benefit' which is equal to 21% of their income: This means in the last analysis that one can affirm that a 'sacrifice' equal to 1 on the part of the wealthiest corresponds to a 'benefit' equal to 1.5 for the poorest" (Forte *et al.*, 1978: 114 *et seq.*).

But the validity of this apparent fiscal "truth" is obscured by the fact that the "benefit" which is distributed is purely of a welfare and not a productive type. This shift however has had the effect of a "safety valve" as the palpable increase in the standard of living has at the same time considerably eased the social tensions which ran through the South in the first one hundred years of the unitary history. Francesco Forte in his book pointed out that in respect to the times of Nitti and Dorso, there had been an inversion of tendencies for which reason it was no longer the North which got rich at the expense of the South but since the seventies the South had drawn "benefit" from the "sacrifice" of the North. Against this state of things the North or at least a part of it has notoriously reacted with strategies of dissociation founded more and more frequently on "ethnic discourses" exactly as certain regions of the South had done quite a few years before: The *questione meridionale* thus became the "Northern question".

Sicilianismo, Leghismo and Ethnicity: From the "Royal Conquest" to Roma ladrona

I state in advance that I will make use of a moderately "constructivist" concept of ethnicity. Ethnicity is thus understood as a movement or process which has the aim of creating an "imagined" or "invented" political community (ethnos, nation) founded on "conceived" ethnic criteria which are: common origin, descent, culture, language, tradition, history and, last but not least, common territory (Giordano, 1996: 281). Now, if we discuss *sicilianismo* we realize that it has tried to construct the *specificità siciliana* by its recourse to some of the above mentioned criteria. As the historian Giuseppe Carlo Marino rightly pointed out the idea of the "Sicilian nation" already appeared amongst the island's intellectuals towards the end of the 18th century when they began to discuss the common origins of the Sicilians who, according to the most accredited hypotheses of that time, date back to Cyclops or refer to those "simple men far away from those sins which were introduced by abuse of social life" (Di Blasi, 1844: vol.

1, 46). During the whole of the nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth century *sicilianismo* would be enriched by new elements and by new "theories" but would essentially remain a debate between intellectuals without great political implications and ambitions. Nevertheless it was during this period that the idea of Sicily as a "defrauded and scorned nation" developed. The question which troubled the learned island spirits of that time was then, how on earth could a people, in the Herderian sense of *Volk*, who had mythological origins and whose ethic, moral and cultural supremacy was beyond discussion, find themselves in such a state of destitution and marginalization? The "Sicilianist" response to such a question was simple and, a posteriori, politically effective. The responsibility for the negative aspects of Sicily was firstly given to the so-called "Neapolitan supremacy" and then, after the unification of Italy, to the "bad Roman government" and the "hegemony of Piedmont". It was for this reason the "irruption of the Northern populations inspiring in Italy a greed for conquest" (Bettoni, quoted in Marino, 1971: 61) made a "foggy night" fall on the island. This piece doesn't clarify who the "Northerners" are but, as Marino rightly adds, the "Northern" notion in all its varying possibilities, presupposes in the "Sicilianist" discourse a condition, a way of being, an identity which is indomitably opposed to that which characterizes the "Sicilian insularity".

Sicilianismo transformed into a political movement only after the Italian military defeat during the Second World War and after the fall of Fascism. And it was just between 1943 and 1947 with the swift spread of the *Movimento Indipendentista Siciliano* (MIS) that *sicilianismo* assumed more and more evident "ethnic" tones. Today we can say that Sicilian separatism represents, maybe together with *leghismo*, the unitary State's hardest challenge which the Italy that was born from the *Risorgimento* has known up to now. But what were the ideological pillars and the bases of the "ethnic discourse" proposed by the separatist *sicilianismo*? First of all it would be as well to state that the MIS was clearly favored by the institutional collapse of the Italian State of that moment and

its success was for the most part propitiated by the charismatic qualities of a leader like Andrea Finocchiaro Aprile. In his discourses and above all in his famous intervention of 13th February 1944 Finocchiaro Aprile parted from the postulate, considered so obvious as to be discussed no further, that the Sicilians together with the Sardinians, Calabrians and Lucans belong to a "racial stock, apart and different from the rest of Italy" (Finocchiaro Aprile, 1966: 66). However neither Finocchiaro Aprile nor the MIS ever clarified the characteristics of this "racial stock". They underlined rather the "historical right, founded on the myth of the *Vespro*", on the independence of the Sicilian population. The rhetoric and semantic model of this argumentation can be found in the letter of Finocchiaro Aprile of July 1943 to General Alexander, the then military Governor of Sicily, and in the memorandum which was given out at the conference of San Francisco in 1945. Here are the two quotes in question:

"In all epochs, from the remotest antiquity until the dominion of the Bourbons, Sicily was a State, more or less free, more or less independent, but a State in itself with particular political, economic and social systems which conformed to the peculiar characteristics of the Sicilian people" (Finocchiaro Aprile quoted in Marino, 1979: 19).

"But in every era Sicily yearned for its own independence and for this reason fought its greatest battles, the most famous of which was that of the *Vespro* which was in the Middle Ages, the most important popular rising in favor of freedom" (Finocchiaro Aprile, 1966: 116).

In spite of these specifications the "ethnic discourse" of Sicilian separatism remains fragmentary and ambiguous also because the concept of a "Sicilian people" has never really been gone into in depth. Finocchiaro Aprile is then a leader of decidedly populist tones, but he is above all a Sicilian gentleman who expresses himself exclusively in a very elaborate Italian and who, in his discourses, doesn't object to erudite quotations, not even those of Giosuè

Carducci, one of the most "patriotic" Italian poet of the 19th and 20th century and therefore the least inclined to view anti-unitary tendencies with sympathy. Beyond a presumed, but ill-defined ethno-cultural specificity of the "Sicilian people" and the "historic right" to independence, other reasons to legitimize the secession of the island from the rest of Italy also enters the separatist "ethnic discourse". And these reasons, which in my opinion have been the real propeller of the separatist struggle, send us right back to that social-historic framework which I have spoken about in the preceding chapters. Finocchiaro Aprile and his supporters, who at the height of the revolt against the unitary State, even resorted to armed conflict creating *EVIS (Esercito Volontario per l'Indipendenza della Sicilia)* and promoting wartime actions half-way between guerrilla warfare and the classic island banditry, never stopped indicating how the "royal conquest" which was realized by the Piedmontese, signaled the beginning of an unfortunate time for Sicily. The "independentist" proclamations and discourses literally brimmed over with sentences and expressions such as "Savoia treachery", "ill-fated union with Italy", "unhappy experiment of union with Italy", "subjected to wrongs, violence, acts of abuse from 1860 onwards", "totalitarian concept of the State imposed by the Italian unitary policy". One finds in these documents, including heart-breaking missives to the "great men of the world" or that moment from Winston Churchill to Charles de Gaulle, from Pio XII to Eleanor Roosevelt and Anthony Eden, the rhetoric and semantic of Sicily "defrauded and scorned" by the "Northerners" who were impersonated from time to time by Roman political power and by the economic power of the Po plain, from Piedmont to Veneto. But let's allow Finocchiaro Aprile to speak directly, his language being so symptomatic as to need no further comments. We'll begin with some historic evaluations of the first eighty years of political union taken from his most famous discourses and from the already mentioned Memorandum:

"In 83 years of unity we were made to observe thousands and thousands of times that Sicily

was the Cinderella of the Italian regions. Here nothing fell but the crumbs from the lavish banquet which the work of the Sicilians had contributed to set up to the inexorable greed of the so-called brothers of the North" (Finocchiaro Aprile, 1966: 44 *et seq.*).

"I remember what was needed to obtain the construction of the first regional railways ... But nobody ever thought of suspending the running of the hugely passive railways in Lombardy, Piedmont or particularly of Veneto ... All the greatest benefits were always reserved for the North; All the industries were made to rise up outside of the island and those which with difficulty and by overcoming obstacles of every type, were established here, in brief had to perish, suffocated by the unfair, continental, private competition, protected by the complicity of the central authorities" (Finocchiaro Aprile, 1966: 45 *et seq.*).

"Italian unity has been harmful for us. We have got nothing from the unity except neglect, exploitation and contempt. When one repeats that Sicily was not considered as anything except a colony, one is saying less than the truth. ... There was a moment that Adis Adeba had more care and interest from the Italian government than that which any one of our cities or territories ever had: we were, in short, even less than a colony" (Finocchiaro Aprile, 1966: 62).

"In 1860, to the great misfortune of Sicily, it ... became part of Italy. Thus began the implementation of the system of exploitation, oppression and slavery which lasted for a good 85 years ... Sicily was not considered except as a colony and was always excluded from the advantages of the progress made by civilization. The widespread smoldering hatred ... against Sicily, the complete disinterest in it on the part of all governments; the condition of offensive inferiority in which the island was always kept; its systematic exclusion from benefits which were given out to other territories; the exaggerated fiscal pressure which was imposed on it; the continual absorption of its every economic, financial, agricultural, mineral resource; the obstruction of every industrial initiative in favor

of the capitalism of the North, and a hundred other causes determined a state of things which can no longer continue. The union of Sicily to Italy was the first origin of our misfortune ..." (Finocchiaro Aprile, 1966: 116 *et seq.*).

According to Finocchiaro Aprile there would be a bright future for the independent Sicily which, in his opinion, would be able to count on its immense social-economic potentiality.

"Our balance is excellent as exportation exceeds importation by far ... If we could only, as our enemies of Lombardy and Piedmont have so far impeded us from doing, give life to our alimentary industries with raw materials produced by ourselves, we would be able to give a good respite to our wealth and consolidate in an enviable way the Sicilian economy and finances" (Finocchiaro Aprile, 1966: 63).

"Up to now we have already given too much to the North ... Now, that's enough. We have men of singular talents and abilities; we have resources which constitute the bases of privileges, known to everyone, lavished by nature ..." (Finocchiaro Aprile, 1966: 78).

As one sees from these passages, and many others could also be quoted, the anti-State polemic, which puts the legitimacy of legal power clearly in doubt, and the anti-Northern polemic, which presents the social-economic gap between North and South in terms of "internal colonialism" represents two fixed points of primary importance on the inside of the independentist "ethnic discourse" in Sicily. The idea of separation was made popular by just these two arguments, by forcing the Italian government which was very worried by the events, to take important measures such as the concession of regional autonomy and agrarian reform.

It is well known that Sicilian separatism rapidly came to an end, but, contrary to the dominant opinion orchestrated by the intellectuals near to the Communist Party (PCI), the separatist movement was much more than a reactionary conspiracy between barons and bandits and between Mafia and politicians. This was, if only for a brief period, a mass

movement which involved all the social strata of the island and which put in jeopardy the integrity of the national State. Sicilian separatism must be restudied above all in the light of the current parameters which have given new connotations to the more than secular "Italian crisis". It thus seems evident that a comparison with *leghismo* becomes necessary (D'Amato & Schieder, 1997: 273 *et seq.*).

It doesn't seem to me that here is the place to make a chronicle of the last years of *leghismo* as the "performances" of this movement, above all of its leader Umberto Bossi, are almost too well known even abroad. It seems interesting to me, however, to compare, despite the evident structural and ideological differences, some important elements of continuity between these two movements, both of which draw, at least in principle, their *raison d'être* from ethnicity.

Leghismo, as well as *sicilianismo*, is built up around a charismatic personality. Charismatic power being, however, a transitory event one can't exclude that *leghismo*, as we are taught by the experience of Sicilian separatism, is tentatively a phenomenon of short duration which after having reached a peak of popularity rapidly declines. Nevertheless the difference between Andrea Finocchiaro Aprile and Umberto Bossi is, from a formal point of view, beyond measure: Cultured, aristocratic, refined and intellectual the first, deliberately coarse, low class, blatant and demonstratively anti-intellectual the second. Here are two antithetic, but structurally analogous forms of building up and managing their own charisma.

Sicilianismo and *leghismo* in their "ethnic discourses" both have made recourse to an "historic right" i.e. to a presumed independentist tradition rooted in a past which is reputed to be better than the present. To give value to an "historic right" also means, however, to bring up to date one or more events of the past which have been considered exemplary. Both *sicilianismo* and *leghismo* have thus reinterpreted facts of the Middle Ages with the aim of justifying their own "historic right". On one side we have the revolt of the Vespro and parliamentary tradition and on the other the oath of Pontida, the battle of Legnano against Frederick Barbarossa and finally communal tradition. Para-

doxically all these events were brought up to date and revised albeit in a different way already during the *Risorgimento* in a unitary and anti-Austrian key. It's enough to think of some poetic works of the 19. century and the operas of Verdi to realize the reality of this. The exemplariness of these facts is thus more a nineteenth century product than a "demonstrated" historic reality. The Vespro was probably the expression of a power struggle between "factions"; the Sicilian parliament proved to be a litigious assembly of arrogant barons, jealous of their own privileges; the importance of the struggle of the Lombardy communes against the Germanic Emperor was magnified; the battle of Legnano was a Pyrrhus victory, while the "municipalism" was an ephemeral phenomenon, constantly threatened by fierce rivalry between restricted local oligarchies. That the *Risorgimento*, *sicilianismo* and *leghismo* had recourse to such an "actualization of the past" is understandable as it is only the Middle Ages which provides, even though facts are manipulated, some kind of element to fabricate the Italian, Sicilian or Lombardy-Po Valley "exemplariness" in the framework of the political culture.

Sicilianismo and *leghismo*, albeit with a different emphasis, take for granted the existence of a "Sicilian people" and a "Padanian people" understood in the Herderian meaning of *Volk*. Nevertheless *sicilianismo* has never leant too much on this ethnic argument but rather on the tacit evidence of the *sicilianità* expressed territorially in insularity. *Leghismo* on the other hand has been "ethnicised" by passing from federalism to secessionism in a way that was only recently declared i.e. during and after the march which culminated in the meeting of Venice of the 15th September 1996. From this moment the "ethnic" tones of the Lega became much more vehement, if less and less coherent. In fact it is rather difficult to give a plausible definition of a *nazione Padana*: Are we dealing with one "nation" or, as some documents of the Lega say, with more *popoli della Padania*? But then if *Padania* comes into being, will this be a mono-ethnic or a pluri-ethnic political organism? Still more difficult however is a credible delimitation of the "Padianian" territoriality, given that Bossi, on the contrary to Finocchiaro

Aprile, can't appeal to an argument which is just as convincing as that of insularity. Finally the "ethnification" of *leghismo* has not led to the creation of "strong symbols": a banal flag which doesn't evoke enthusiasm and pathetic marches along the Po or ascents on Monviso which appeared more like a Sunday outing than a solemn act of the foundation of a nation. Wisely *sicilianismo* doesn't lean too heavily on ethnic rhetoric while *leghismo* by underlining the *padanità* has lost credibility and charisma in this last years. This I was personally able to observe during the already mentioned demonstration in Venice in which I participated by chance, finding myself *in loco*. Even then I was struck by the total absence of that kind of "charismatic atmosphere" which is needed to obtain the net impression that *le moment*, to use the expression of the French historian Jules Michelet, of a revolution or of an epoch making change, etc. is about to arrive. Drowsy, tired and maybe bored, green shirted demonstrators patrolled the city without conviction while only a handful of supporters – attentive but unenthusiastic – were around the stage listening to the speeches which followed, one after another, slowly and tediously.

Only in isolated cases have *sicilianismo* and *leghismo* resorted to the "linguistic right". This could appear strange, especially if one thinks that in Europe, with the exception of Switzerland "où on s'entend bien parce qu'on se comprend mal", the linguistic argument has been and without doubt still is one of the most used to legitimize the existence of a nation and to claim independence, secession, separations, autonomy, etc. Apart from the use of proverbs, isolated expressions, names of associations etc. to which one could add the poetic expressions of Bossi, the official political activities and documents have Italian as their linguistic base. This fact is understandable enough as I would like to see Bossi and his political fellows getting to grips with the creation of the *lingua padana*. It is however the *Lega dei Ticinesi*, the Swiss-Italian version of *leghismo* which is expressed a little more pronouncedly in the local dialects. As far as *sicilianismo* is concerned, I believe that Finocchiaro Aprile and his aristocratic friends had only a very rough knowledge of

Sicilian, an idiom used by poets and writers of the calibre of Giovanni Meli and Luigi Pirandello.

One thing that *sicilianismo* and *leghismo* have in common is a strong resentment towards the State which is saddled with all the responsibility for the indispositions and bad things which afflict the respective "peoples" and "nations". Personified by Rome, legal power is considered arbitrary and therefore non-legitimate as it is substantially an instrument of "violence" and "fraud" as it says in the separatist *Memorandum*. *Leghismo*, on the other hand, in the Declaration of Independence and Sovereignty of the Po Valley, which was published in the first issue of the *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Padania* on the 15th September 1996, uses analagous tones when it speaks of "colonial oppression", "economic exploitation", "moral violence, "dishonest, clientelistic, welfaristic and criminal politics", "applications of iniquitous laws by way of a magistrature selected with racial criteria" etc. But the fracture between legality and legitimacy already spoken of in this document was clearly expressed by Bossi exactly a year later with the statement "now there is a double legality". Just as common to *sicilianismo* as to *leghismo* is the perception of the social-economic gap between North and South as a result of the exploitation on the part of one by the other and vice versa. One could discuss *leghista* anti-Southernism for a long time but here I will limit myself to observing that it is "symmetrical" to the "Sicilianist" anti-Northernism.

Conclusion

By analyzing *sicilianismo* and comparing it with *leghismo* i.e. by comparing those two movements with an "ethnic" background which more than all others have threatened and are threatening the integrity of the Italian national State, one realizes that there are common lines in the conception of "ethnicity" which go far beyond a short term conjuncture. One is struck by the fact that the anti-State attitude and the interpretation of the gap between North and South, which are fortified by the construction of an "historic right", are, much more than the typi-

cally "ethnic" and "linguistic" rhetoric, the real "strong arguments" which give popularity and votes to these separatist and secessionist movements. The conclusion one can draw from this analysis is that there is a national identity in Italy which, although somewhat fragile, is quite "fixed" for which reason the pure and simple recourse to a presumed "ethnic difference" has only the temporary possibility of obtaining a certain popularity. It is however the State which essentially remains a 19th century apparatus of a centralist stamp and in reality it has proved to be inadequate from the very first. Therefore on the threshold of the third millennium we should maybe invert the well known formula of Massimo D'Azeglio and say "The Italians have been made, but Italy hasn't".

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