

Italy: Old and New Territorial Claims*

DANIELE PETROSINO

University of Bari Aldo Moro

The question of sub-state nationalism in Italy assumes some peculiar characteristics because territorial fractures have existed since the birth of the Italian nation-state, and in recent decades new sub-state nationalist movements were born on the edge of these cleavages.

Although some sub-state nationalist groups are seeking apparently new declinations of the nationalist claim, the majority moves according with the traditional sub-nationalist ideology.

The devolvement of powers is one of the successful strategies to disempower the centrifugal pressures coming from ethno/regionalist/sub-state parties and movements and to accommodate ethno-regional claims. At the same time, it responds to a functional reorganization of the state. But, of course, autonomy is not independence and it does not imply any form of recognition of national identity.

On the one hand, there is a functional problem of governance and of optimal scale for policy decisions. On the other hand, there are the claims of identity/cultural type. When these two levels overlap it is highly likely that independence movements will emerge.

In border regions and islands, this overlap could have relied on fractures present for a long time and on the presence of sufficiently recognized and shared cultural markers; but at the same time, the specific institutional arrangements and accommodations have reduced the strength of the protests.

Conversely, in the case of the Northern League, the attempt to invent an ethno-cultural identity failed, leaving space first for pure territorial claims, which have had great success, and then for a transformation still underway from a territorial party into an anti-immigrant and antiEurope Italian party.

At the same time, all these strains point out the weakness of the Italian nation-state, both under the identity profile and the institutional one, and the need to define it in new terms.

Keywords: Italy, sub-state nationalism, regionalism.

Introduction

The Italian State, since the beginning of its making, has seen deep divisions with regard to both national identity and regional inequalities and disparities. To address these divisions, the Italian State initially responded with a statist and centralized model, and starting from the second post-war period, with a model that has progressively operated both in terms of identity recognition and territorial self-governance.

These two divisions are the key dimensions of the nationalist experiences, both in their sub-state forms and in the full condition of national independence recognition. The link between the territorial dimension and identity is the basis of nationalist aspirations, tending to constitute a territorial self-governing polity legitimized by a cultural identity.

The sub-state nationalist parties and movements do not have a homogeneous ideological inspiration and among them differences similar to those found in state political systems can be seen. There are significant thrusts, both in the direction of a profound transformation in the conception of the national claim and in the opposite direction toward the revival of the traditional nationalist model.

The question of sub-state nationalism in Italy assumes some peculiar characteristics because, relative to the traditional forms of these nationalisms, territorial fractures have existed – as in many other states – since the birth of the Italian nation-state, and in recent decades new sub-state nationalist movements were born on the edge of these cleavages.

Needless to say, the Scottish Referendum and the dynamics of the Catalan independence movement gave a renewed strength in recent

years to a secessionist discourse – which, however, is rooted in quite a long and significant tradition of clashes against the nation-state.

Although some sub-state nationalist groups are seeking apparently new declinations of the nationalist claim, the majority moves according with the traditional sub-nationalist ideology claiming a segmentation of the state (i.e. toward the acquisition of more or less extensive power) that reflects by this way the same model of state-nationalism.

The origins of territorial and national cleavages in Italy

Many of the problems of the Italian nation-state, as well as their possible solutions, come from the building of the state within the European nation-state system.¹ In the construction phase of the Italian nation-state, the European system of states constituted its boundaries, and in the post-war period it promoted a redefinition of states and relations within the territories contained therein.

As with other states, the building of the Italian nation-state faced the issue of defining its external and internal borders, and both these elements remain the main components of territorial questions today. The building of the Italian state was realized by contending over territories with two giants of the European system of states: France and the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Regarding the first, the resolution of border conflicts concerning the Savoy, the Aosta Valley and the French Riviera left few scars: a few small linguistic minorities, and the lacerations the boundaries caused healed over time. The conflicts on the northern and north-eastern Italian borders had solutions quite different from those on the west side. On the eastern and north-eastern borders, the separation and the unification processes profoundly affected the society and marked its memory. The

South Tyrol/Alto Atesina question, the Istria question, Trieste, and Gorizia are wounds not yet completely healed. Italian national historiography has transmitted for a long time the rhetoric of irredentism and reunification of the motherland that greatly contributed to the bloody events of the First and Second World Wars. This is precisely a paradigmatic example of a banal nationalism that does not see the wounds inflicted by the processes of national state building.

The problems arising from these boundaries were still present at the end of the Second World War and were one of the elements that led to the constitutional configuration of the Italian state, subsequently feeding secessionist movements and sub-state national claims throughout the post-Second World War period.²

The fixing of the external borders took place in conjunction with the dissolution of the internal borders. This process was not painless either. On the one hand, there was the great Roman question, on the other hand there was what would become the most relevant Italian territorial issue: The Southern Italy Question, that had (and still has) two different aspects: the social-economic dimension that involves the whole South and the insular specificities. Sicily was already a different world as it was seen in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies.³ Sardinia, which is completely distinct from the question of Southern Italy, was, in the nineteenth century, already experiencing one of the major outbreaks of sub-state claims and was the first territory where a sub-state nationalist party originated.⁴

The first stage of state building was warlike and was characterised by internal (civil) and external wars that found their culmination in the First World War. The second one was the nationalist step embodied by fascism which brought about the forced nationalization of Italy. And finally, the third phase, which we will talk about, is the democratic one in which the process of nation-state building breaks down, and the sub-

state claims find space as protagonists on the political scene and “sub-state parties” promote constitutional reforms.

It is, in fact, only after the Second World War that we can actually begin to talk about the presence of parties and sub-national state movements. In the previous period, there was only a clear sub-national-inspired party in Sardinia which, having sided against fascism, was suppressed during the dictatorship.⁵

The sub-state nationalist claims and their accommodation in a democratic state

The democratic post-Second World War Italian state deals with the territorial questions which emerged in previous periods by introducing into the unified and centralized framework of the state an almost federal compensation by the recognition of four autonomous regions with special status (i.e. Sicily, Sardinia, Trentino-South Tyrol, and the Aosta Valley), followed by a fifth region (Friuli-Venezia Giulia) many years later (Fig. 1).⁶ The constitutional accommodation followed a *de facto* situation already present in the last phase of the Second World War and was debated in the peace agreement that followed the end of the war.⁷

Moreover, the recognition of the Autonomous Region of Sardinia was a response to the growth of a Sardinian national party (PSd’Az) and posed a counterweight to Sicilian autonomy. A different story unfolded in the northern regions. Both the Aosta Valley and Trentino-South Tyrol were at the centre of international tensions and, on the one side France and on the other Austria strongly pressed for the recognition of special rights to territories inhabited by French- and German-speaking people. In both cases, together with the territorial aspects, there was a definite division of identity and language.



Fig. 1: Italian Regions with Special Status

Source: [Daygum](#)

The fascist regime tried to impose a ‘forced Italianization’ on these territories, but their linguistic identities were not affected by this attempt, although the demographic Italianization due to a significant Italian immigration, especially in Trentino-South Tyrol, was a menace for those linguistic minorities.

Therefore, for the post-fascist republican state the first problem was to solve the border disputes and the second was to oppose the protests coming from there and strengthen the consensus toward the national government. An important step was the creation of autonomous regions with a special status, but this choice was not without contradictions and conflicts as well.

In the Trentino-South Tyrol region, the German-speaking population, the majority of which lived in South Tyrol, became a minority within the region after it had been granted a special status. This situation caused a strong reaction both from the international standpoint and the internal one. In fact, in the decades following the end of the Second World War a secessionist movement developed that also followed the path of armed struggle.⁸ The South Tyrolean secessionists wanted separation from Italy and a unification with Austria that would have allowed for the unification of Tyrol. During the 1960s there were a series of attacks. The Italian government responded to South Tyrolean secessionism on the one hand with repression, and on the other with the creation of two autonomous provinces within the region; the approval of the so-called South Tyrol package, definitively applied in 1992, ended the contest that Austria had opened at the UN.⁹

In the Aosta Valley, the establishment of the autonomous region and the recognition of its cultural distinctiveness resolved all tensions with the Italian State, and the French-speaking party (U.V.) gained a majority role, usually giving its support to the Italian government.¹⁰

Both in South Tyrol and in the Aosta Valley, there were (and are) regional parties representing the linguistic minorities (which are majorities in their respective territories) that negotiated with the Italian government to achieve the most favourable political and economic conditions possible. The difference is that in South Tyrol there was (and is) also a more radical movement clearly devoted to a secessionist goal.

In Sicily and Sardinia there was no more than a generic recognition of a certain cultural distinctiveness at the end of the Second World War. The Sicilian language was not regarded as a genuine language. Meanwhile, Sardinian languages had already had important scientific recognition and a wide popular diffusion but only found official recognition very late (after the nationalist mobilisation of the 1980s).¹¹

In Sardinia, the *Partito Sardo D'Azione* (PSd'Az), although weakened by internal divisions, was a recognised political force which the effort towards the construction of a democratic party system had to contend with. However, during the 1980s many alternative and more radical movements were also born.¹²

The Sicilian situation however was different. The Sicilian independence movement had no political history as important as the Sardinian one, but in the final stages of the Second World War, the *Movimento Indipendentista Siciliano* (MIS) of Finocchiaro Aprile (supported by the American army)¹³ appeared on the Sicilian political scene and gained a large consensus around the claim for independence.¹⁴ The granting of autonomy and special status depowered the independence claims to the point of eliminating them (at least until the most recent years). Sicily, moreover, was among the regions with a special status, the one that has earned the highest institutional status, and the Sicilian assembly can be considered the third constitutionally relevant representative chamber.¹⁵ Claims for independence were reabsorbed, and until the twenty-first century, the Sicilian claims would be represented within the traditional political parties.¹⁶

The framework of the regions with a special status was completed in 1963, with the establishment of the Friuli-Venezia-Giulia (FVG) autonomous region.¹⁷ FVG was in the heart of the irredentist lands and it faced some bitter conflicts with the nearby Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). During and at the end of the Second World War, these

territories witnessed dramatic events: the expulsion of Italians and the massacres of Foibe on the one hand, and the assimilation and massacres of the Slavs and Communists on the other. In short, the types of events that are common in situations of nationalisation in border areas.¹⁸ The ideological dimension and the Cold War exacerbated the conflicts and made their resolution even more complex. The FVG border was the boundary with the rising communist regimes of Eastern Europe, and the Yugoslav army not only attempted the annexation of all the territories with a Slav population, but also the affirmation of a different political and social system. In the case of FVG, the establishment of the autonomous region was itself a reason for conflict and although it was included among the regions with a special status, regional autonomy was suspended and became effective only in 1963 when the break between the Titoist regime and the Soviets lessened the pressure on the north-east border.¹⁹

The Osimo Treaty formally resolved the Istria question²⁰. In Trieste, there was a very small minority movement for the independence of Trieste from both the Italian and the Yugoslavian states. At the present time, the presence of a Slovenian-speaking minority is recognized, and it has gained rights as a linguistic minority.²¹

The three northern regions have, however, a complex ethno-cultural configuration²² that induced the Constituent Fathers to recognize the rights of linguistic minorities regardless of the recognition of the regions (Fig. 2).²³ The most important territorial problem however that the Italian state faced at the end of the Second World War – and still does – is the cleavage dividing the South from the rest of Italy. Italy was and is dramatically unequal in terms of resources, level of development, and quality of life, and this division reflects an unfinished process of unification.²⁴



Fig. 2: Linguistic Minorities in Italy

Source:

http://www.albanologia.unical.it/SportelloLinguistico/CZ/minoranze_linguistiche.htm

After 1945, *La Questione Meridionale* was tackled with the instruments of the interventionist state, i.e. investments and an independent body to manage them.²⁵

Beyond the constitutional arrangement, there was also a strategy of elite inclusion to support the Christian Democrat government, and of resource redistribution to alleviate the problems of the disadvantaged territories and gain popular consensus (especially, but not only, in the South of Italy).²⁶

In the decades following the Second World War the Italian territorial and ethnic questions cooled down, leaving only those in South Tyrol at the front of the stage; the patterns of organization and the flow of resources had defeated any possibility of conflict.

The ethnic revival and reform of the state

The Italian constitution established five autonomous regions with special status, but it contains a more general recognition of the regional institutions for the territorial government. The ordinary regional governments began to take effect in the 1970s. In the beginning, the regional governments were not very effective, but they gained substantial power in the ensuing years.²⁷ At the same time, at the end of the 1970 there was also a revival of ethnic nationalist/sub-state movements in Italy that began to put national issues on the political stage, as other movements of the same kind were doing around the world.²⁸ The main feature of these movements was that they conflated identity and cultural claims with demands for self-determination. The declination of these two main axes of claims shapes the ideological and programmatic continuum of these movements, from the demand of recognition of the language, to the establishment of full bilingualism, to a preference for the minority language, and moving from the demand of political autonomy within the state to secession.

The ethnic revival of the 1980s moved along the same cleavages that were present in the early days of Italian nation-state building, but some movements – such as the Sardinian ones – introduced new and more current claims.

The different features of those questions resulted from border and insularity conditions, but what could be considered the most explosive and potentially disruptive phenomenon for the Italian state arose during the 1980s: the transformation of the Southern Question into the Northern Question. The Italian unification left the Southern Italy question unresolved, or rather, according to some scholars and writers, created a Southern Italy question that does not seem to have made any steps toward a solution in a century and a half²⁹.

Without examining the substance of the debate, we can say that the so-called Southern Question had found its accommodation through an integration of the Southern ruling political classes within the Italian elite and, until the 1980s, through a distribution of resources, in part used to support the ruling classes³⁰.

The 1980s saw a big change of this accommodation, in part because the compromise that gave resources to the South, without subtracting them from other territorial areas of Italy, was no longer sustainable. Moreover, the Italian economic and social system was involved in a deep and substantial restructuring that would have led to a deep crisis and transformation, even in the most developed areas.

The biggest change of the decade was the emergence of conflictive tension in the regions of Northern Italy, first in Veneto, and then in Lombardy and Piedmont, which amounted to more than the revival of traditional ethno-national claims in border or insular regions.

The Veneto Region was the first region where an ethnic revival of the traditional type arose.³¹ But it was the federation of *Liga Veneta* with the Lombard League and the creation of the Northern League that allowed for immense transformations in the Italian party system during the end of the 1980s and 90s.³² Using all the rhetorical strategies and arguments of the new nationalist movements, the Northern League was able to organize the resentment against the state bureaucracy, the fiscal pressure, the corruption of the traditional political elite, the protest against immigration, and social and economic stagnation. It invented a cultural and territorial identity and pursued the development of greater self-government in the Northern regions and a different distribution of Italian resources in favour of said regions.³³ These claims were underpinned by ethno-nationalist claims, including the invention of a new territory, the Padania (Fig. 3), that would have been the new state of Northern Italy.³⁴

Surprisingly, many people (journalists and opinion makers alike) gave some credit to this invention. But the substance remained; the process of rescaling the Italian state and giving more powers to the region produced an increase in the demand for power from the rising regional political elites.

What united these various movements was the discomfort of the North about 'Rome', the Italian state's 'southern' policies, and migration. The revolt of the richest against the different forms of redistribution (known as the 'St. Matthew effect') arose in Italy as in many other countries of the Western World.

Therefore, the overturning of the Southern question was the real novelty of these years, and it affected the particular northern interpretation of the (ethno)-sub-state political discourse.



Fig. 3: The “Padania”, according to The Northern League
Source: Fabio Visconti, Creative Commons

The unresolved Southern Italy question disappears from the political scene through an inversion of terms.³⁵ It was the North that claimed to be exploited and that rebelled against the centralist power (and the South). The push underlying a revision of the institutional system in the 1980s associated economic and tax claims with identities (i.e. xenophobic ones) but remained basically in the minority. It was during the 1990s that an explicit request for self-government arose, and this process found its culmination in the ‘federalist’ reform of the Italian constitution.³⁶

The fundamental moment of change, not only for Italy, was the fall of the Berlin Wall and its consequences for the world geopolitical balance. The

compromise on which the democratic Italian state was founded had worked well until then, as Italy was a vital piece in the global jigsaw puzzle, due to it being the most important boundary with respect to the Soviet area, as well as the main Mediterranean base of NATO.

There are three elements that were decisive in the changing of the world balance that were relevant to what would happen during the 1990s onward. Italy lost its essential geopolitical position, and this had an impact both on the international and domestic levels. The internal political balance, even with the difficulties that since the 1970s had tormented Italy, had found in the international position the exoskeleton for its survival. The 1990s were the years of the unravelling of the Italian political system with the crisis of its old guard, most notably those who had previously governed Italy. The crisis created a new scenario in which it was possible for new actors to become holders of interests and claims that before had rested within the old parties.

The second element is the greater permeability of boundaries following the collapse of the wall. Italy, for the first time, became a target of mass migration from Eastern Europe and other continents. Beyond the discussions surrounding the question of immigration, certainly the influx of migrants has had an impact on some areas of Italy, in particular in the regions of the north, and especially the northeast. And, as in many other parts of the world, there have been and continue to be political entrepreneurs who use anti-immigration sentiment as a political weapon.

Finally, the collapse of the wall was a decisive push for the unification of the world market, with all its consequences (e.g. competition with lower priced goods, relocation, etc.) which produced a substantial restructuring of the Italian economy (both the market of labour and of goods), affecting mainly traditional and low capital-intensive production. In fact, on the one side it forced Italian small- and medium-

sized industries to restructure and de-localize their production, thus generating a profound crisis in Italy's industrial regions, and on the other side it reduced the importance of Southern Italy as a market for goods and a labour force exporter.³⁷

Consequently, in this context, the main Italian territorial fracture reappeared with all its strength in the 1990s.

The Northern League organized protests and gained a prominent position in Italian politics, rapidly becoming the kingmaker of the Italian government. The influence of the League was significant, becoming the diffuser of territorial claims and assuming a role that no other ethno-regionalist party had ever had in Italy.³⁸ At the centre of the claims are regional autonomy, a federal reform of the Italian state, the efforts to stop foreign immigration, and the elimination of any state economic 'aid' to the South; these claims were supported by a growing part of the population in the regions of the north and centre.

Contrary to what one might expect, protests against the unitary state had grown in the most developed and wealthiest territories. There, a political force that was not one of the traditional ethno-nationalist party/movements had questioned with considerable energy the institutional form and had promoted a radical revision of the distribution of resources and powers in the Italian state. This was possible exactly because it has gone beyond the regional borders and had been able to collect a more universal consensus on the one side and, on the other, was able to maximize its relevance to ensure a parliamentary majority in the Italian government. The other ethno-nationalist political parties/movements proposed only questions relating to their own situations, and they acted in an institutional context where there already was a substantial devolvement of state powers.

The reform of Title V of the Italian constitution represented a turning point for the Italian institutional system and promoted a further push of territorial claims.³⁹ The 'Ordinary Region' that had so far remained largely subordinate assumed a prominent position, becoming the true articulation of the governmental system. It was not only an Italian process and responded both to claims that moved from below, and to a demand for a different structure of the levels of government in society.⁴⁰ The state lost some of its prerogatives in favour of supranational entities, and this process simultaneously required the creation of intermediate levels of government. Which ones were the most functional is still being debated. In Italy, a nation-state that was never completely finished, this triggered the critical process of potential dissolution.

The ethno-territorial claims in Twenty-First Century Italy

In the twenty-first century, many centrifugal political forces have renewed their strength and have reactivated issues never entirely dormant. Sardinia, South Tyrol, Friuli, and Sicily are again inflamed by separatist tensions. Conversely, the secessionist/separatism facets of the Northern League are subsiding, transforming the League into a 'National' Italian Party, parallel to the strictly territorial claims in the historical region that gave birth to the *Lega*: Veneto and Lombardy.⁴¹ The territorial divide remains and is exacerbated by the crisis that affected all the world, and Southern Italy went through one of the worst periods of its economic, social, and political history.⁴²

In this context, one wonders why a more explicit and stronger Southern separatism giving expression to the dissatisfaction of these regions has not emerged. All forms of Southern separatism seem little more than folkloric expressions.⁴³ A true capacity to connect and promote an

alliance of Southern regions, as the Northern League was able to do in the northern regions, has never been realized.⁴⁴

In summary, the claims that re-emerge in twenty-first century Italy can be classified as:

- Unresolved border issues which have left residual grievances
- Nascent internal minorities deriving from ripening national claims
- Territorial questions related to development models.

These various questions, while they reiterate issues which are firmly rooted in the building process of the Italian state, find new nourishment in the new institutional frameworks of the Italian state and the European Union, but they also feel the push to redefine themselves. In particular, on the one hand the progressive construction of the European Union tends to deprive and reduce the powers of the component states (favouring sub-state aggregations).⁴⁵ On the other hand it constitutes an extremely significant constraint to any process of redefining the state composition, as the case of Scotland reminds us.

South Tyrol and Istria were, for a long time, unresolved issues. Despite the fact that South Tyrol has acquired many privileges in the Italian state, separatist movements and parties (*Südtiroler Heimatbund*) have been active. They have been linked to the history of South-Tyrolean secessionism, which has never achieved a majority consensus of the population.⁴⁶ Only in recent years, on the wave of a general political legitimation of secessionism, have the openly secessionist parties (*Freiheit Freies Bündnis für Tirol* and *Bürger Union für Tyrol*) gained greater consensus among the population.⁴⁷ In the last election, a secessionist claim appeared with greater force and consensus (see the informal consultation of 2014 when 61,000 people over 380,000 eligible

voters participated in the referendum and 56,000 – 14.7% of the Tyrolean eligible voters – voted for the unification of Tyrol).⁴⁸

Although support for the secessionist proposition is always in the minority, it has found new life. On the one hand, there is the traditional claim of Tyrolean unionism, and on the other hand there has been a growing reaction against the Italian situation; the exit is proposed as an option in a state that seems unable to overcome the economic crisis that over the last ten years has been afflicting Italy (and Europe).⁴⁹

The Northern League also sponsored a movement for self-determination and proposed a referendum for self-determination of the entire region and the two provinces, which they finalized in an attempt to renegotiate the terms of its autonomy within the Italian state.⁵⁰ But even the main ethno-regionalist party, the SVP, is against this proposal. In addition to Italy's opposition to the claims, there is also the opposition of Austria, which considers the South Tyrolean question resolved.⁵¹

To summarize, in South Tyrol there are two main nationalist parties: one, the SVP, is only a regional party trying to obtain the maximum advantages from Italy, the other is a truly ethno-nationalist party and advocates for the secession of Tyrol and its reunification with Austria. This second party, although it has found some success in recent years, is still in the minority and posits the terms of the national debate in traditional terms: ethno-cultural exclusive identity and reunification with the other part of Tyrol.

In Friuli, claims were mainly based on recognition of the fact that autonomy and language recognition, while formally obtained, still had to find effective implementation.⁵² The secessionist forces are predominantly imitative and mostly concerned with relations within the region.⁵³

Both for Trentino South Tyrol and for FVG, there exist simultaneously a conflict with the Italian state and a division within the region between South Tyrol and Trentino, and among Friuli, Venezia Giulia and Trieste.

In Sardinia the claims for independence, as we have said, have a long history and the movements and parties that propose these claims have experienced changing fortunes.⁵⁴

Even if the political parties and movements which are clearly 'nationalist' have never gained the majority in the island's elections, 'Sardismo' permeates the entire Sardinian political system and has, perhaps, the greatest variety of expressions and internal political differences, ranging from radical left to centrist positions. In the last regional elections, there were decidedly Sardinian parties in each coalition, and in recent years, alongside the traditional Sardinian party (PSd'Az), more radical movements and parties have gained strength.⁵⁵ Despite this, an actual separatist push has remained firmly in the minority.

The peculiarity of Sardinian nationalism is that, with the exclusion of 'Sardo-Fascismo', it never had rightist or fascist sympathies and had, since its origins, a peculiarly cosmopolitan and European orientation. From this point of view, it was and is much more similar to new movements than the other nationalist parties. And since the beginning (or at least since the immediate post-Second World War period) there were different positions vis-à-vis independence, ranging from autonomy to self-determination. The peculiarity of Sardinian nationalism rises from its ideological inspiration, and this allows it to maintain the claim of cultural identity recognition with independence within a universalistic and inclusive conception of citizenship. It makes Sardinian nationalism very similar to Catalan or Scottish nationalism, albeit without the same strength.

The Sicilian situation is quite different. The claims for independence of MIS were reabsorbed just a few years after the end of the Second World War, and until the twenty-first century the Sicilian political system was composed of only traditional political parties. It was only in 2004 that the Sicilian independence movement gained a little more strength and reappeared on the political scene. Together with the new MIS, many autonomist and independence movements are present on the Sicilian political scene.⁵⁶ The main demand remains the same: independence and the full application of the Statute of Autonomy. But it is evident that these claims are often confused with the protests against the central government (and the political caste) that is now widespread in much of the country.

The national claims that we have seen so far fall into the category of classic peripheral sub-state nationalism linked to issues of borders and insularity, and they seem unable to deal with the redefinition of nationalist discourse and with the changing realities of the world. Also, the attempt to renovate the Sardinian discourse made by the new movements/electoral coalitions like the 'Murgia coalition', proved unsuccessful.⁵⁷

The most dramatic phenomenon in Italian sub-nationalism was the Northern League and the changes it has undergone during the last decade that affect its policy setting in a most profound way. The party of the Northern League has increasingly adopted the profile of a national-populist party of the Lepenist type, riding the opposition to the Euro and the protests against immigration. It has increasingly shifted toward a rightist position (as the alliance with *Fratelli d'Italia* shows), although always inside a frame of territorial autonomy, but that no longer has the secessionist and sub-national profile that characterized it in the previous decade. This new profile marked the passage from the first generation of League leaders to the younger ones. It seems the Northern League is

attempting to become a state-nationalist party, emphasizing the rightist and xenophobic profile it had during the past decades.⁵⁸

Only in Veneto a stronger secessionist and ethnic component has remained. In fact, it is not accidental that a consultative referendum on the independence of the Veneto Region was promoted, and it found a significant consensus in the population.⁵⁹ Moreover, in Lombardy and Veneto the current regional government proclaimed a new consultative referendum claiming the status of autonomy (as with the five Special Status Regions) for 22 October 2017.

As in other European countries, within the various expressions of sub-state nationalism different ideological positions emerge that cut across the sub-national spectrum. There are the oldest movements with a strong cultural identity that present inclusive and post-modern positions, and new territorial parties (together with the most radical South-Tyrolean movements) that present exclusive and traditional claims (for example, against immigration and European Union).

These differences, which should be analysed in greater detail, are based on the different political cultures in which the sub-nationalist movements have immersed. Meanwhile, Sardinian sub-nationalism was much more similar – notwithstanding the oscillating positions of PSD'Az – to the radical leftist culture, while Northern or South Tyrolean sub-nationalism was born of a centre-right political culture.

Rescaling the state and reloading the nation

In 2001, the Italian constitution was amended in a federalist sense, granting the regions legislative power in regard to significant issues such as health and education. But the reform, although much debated, has not yet been fully accomplished, and more than ten years later there is great

critical attention toward the failures of regional governments (especially in the South of Italy), and proposals to recentralize some functions of the state and to redefine territorial aggregations are under discussion.⁶⁰

The strengthening of the regions was certainly helped by the policies of the European Union and by the increasing centrality of the regions in funding allocation, overshadowing the role of central governments. But the main push was given by the strategic relevance of the Northern League during the 1990s and later.

As we have seen, the devolvement of powers is one of the successful strategies to disempower the centrifugal pressures coming from ethno/regionalist/sub-state parties and movements and to accommodate ethno-regional claims. At the same time, it responds to a functional reorganization of the state. But, of course, autonomy is not independence and it does not imply any form of recognition of national identity.

These two issues, which should be kept distinct, are mixed in the claims and in discussions on these matters. On the one hand, there is a functional problem of governance and of optimal scale for policy decisions. On the other hand, there are the claims of identity/cultural type. When these two levels overlap it is highly likely that independence movements will emerge, but the reinforcement of one cleavage with the other is a political operation that may or may not succeed.

In border regions and islands, this overlap could have relied on fractures present for a long time and on the presence of sufficiently recognized and shared cultural markers; but at the same time, the specific institutional arrangements and accommodations have reduced the strength of the protests.

Conversely, in the case of the Northern League, the attempt to invent an ethno-cultural identity failed, leaving space first for pure territorial claims, which have had great success, and then for a transformation still underway from a territorial party into an anti-immigrant and anti-Europe Italian party.

Except in cases like the 'Murgia Coalition', nationalist and sub-state nationalist claims seem to be prisoners of the old nineteenth-century vision of the state and of sovereignty.

Either they are concerned with regions or, as in the case of Northern League, they are moving toward state representation, they are obsessed with the bond between territory, political legitimacy and sovereignty, and they try to give new life to a kind of nation-state that is no longer present, and, overall, could not respond to the contemporary problems of political representation.

At the same time, all these strains point out the weakness of the Italian nation-state, both under the identity profile and the institutional one, and the need to define it in new terms.

Endnotes

* This article was first accepted in 2016 but due to technical failures the journal had to postpone its publication. It is part of the themed section based on the 2015 NISE workshop titled *Reloading the Nation? Alternative concepts of sovereignty and citizenship in national movements (1960-2014)*.

¹ M. Keating, *State and Regional Nationalism: Territorial Politics and the European State* (New York, 1988).

² D. H. Kaplan, 'Political accommodation and functional interaction along the northern Italian borderlands', in: *Geografiska Annaler*, 83/3 (2001), 131-139.

³ J. Agnew, 'Italy's Other Island: Sicily's History in the Modern Italian Body Politic', in: *Emergences: Journal for the Study of Media & Composite Cultures*, 10/2 (2010), 301-311.

⁴ L. Del Piano, *Le origini dell'idea autonomistica in Sardegna (1861-1916)* (Cagliari, 1975); S. Cubeddu, *Sardisti. "Viaggio nel Partito Sardo d'Azione tra cronaca e storia 1919-1948."* (Cagliari, 1993).

⁵ The relationship between Sardinianism and fascism was more complex, since in the first phase a part of the Sardinian movement sought an agreement with fascism. See Fondazione Sardinia, *Il Sardo-Fascismo*, (Cagliari, 1993).

⁶ G. Nevola, *Altre Italie. Identità nazionale e regioni a statuto speciale* (Roma, 2003).

⁷ A. Pizzorusso, 'Regioni Speciali: Motivazioni Storiche Ed Esigenze Attuali', in: *Quaderni Regionali*, 4 (1989), 1025-1046; E. Rotelli, *L'avvento della regione in Italia. Dalla caduta del regime fascista alla costituzione repubblicana (1943 - 1947)* (Milano, 1967).

⁸ G. Bianco, *La Guerra Dei Tralicci* (Rovereto, 1963); G. Flamini, *Brennero connection. Alle radici del terrorismo italiano* (Roma, 2003).

⁹ A. E. Alcock, *The History of the South Tyrol Question* (London, 1970); S. Wolff, 'Cases of Asymmetrical Territorial Autonomy', in: M. Weller and K. Nobbs (eds.), *Asymmetric Autonomy and the Settlement of Ethnic Conflicts* Edited (PENN, 2010), 17-47; J. Woelk, J. Marko, and F. Palermo, *Tolerance Through Law: Self Governance and Group Rights in South Tyrol* (Leiden, Boston, 2007).

¹⁰ E. Rotelli, and E. Vitta, *L'autonomia regionale della Valle d'Aosta: Profili storici e giuridici* (Torino, 1973); M. Vacchina, *L'Autonomia della Valle d'Aosta: origini, sviluppo, prospettive costituzionali* (Saint-Christophe (AO), 1986); G. Sandri, 'Ethno-linguistic Identity and Party Politics in the Aosta Valley', in: *Ethnopolitics*, 3 (2012), 287-317.

¹¹ D. Petrosino, 'La costruzione dell'identità etnica: il caso della Sardegna e del Veneto', in: *Studi di Sociologia*, 26/1 (1988), 75-86.

¹² From the 1980s until now, there has been an incredible flourishing of cultural and political movements along the entire spectrum of Sardinian nationalism, from the extreme left to some new types of civic parties (i.e. *Sardinna e Llibertade*, *Partidu Sardu Indipendentista*, *Indipendentzia Republica de Sardigna*,

Sardigna Natzione, ProgREs, see C. Pala, *Idee di Sardegna*, (Roma, 2016); and also D. Petrosino, *I movimenti etnici in Veneto e Sardegna*, unpublished PhD thesis (Catania 1986).

¹³ M. Patti. *La Sicilia e gli Alleati* (Roma, 2013).

¹⁴ A. Finocchiaro-Aprile, *Il movimento indipendentista siciliano* (Palermo, 1966); F. Renda, *Storia della Sicilia dal 1860 al 1970* (Palermo, 2000).

¹⁵ F. Renda, 'I caratteri speciali di uno statuto speciale: considerazioni sulle origini e la natura dell'autonomia siciliana,' in G. Alessi et al. (ed.), 'L'Autonomia regionale siciliana tra regole e storia: per il XLV anniversario della prima seduta dell'Assemblea regionale siciliana', 25 Maggio 1947 in: *Quaderni (Assemblea Regionale Siciliana)* 30 (1993), 329-368.

¹⁶ M. Aymard, and G. Giarrizzo, *Storia d'Italia. Le regioni dall'Unità ad oggi: 5* (Torino, 1997).

¹⁷ Constitutional Law n°1 1963, Camera dei Deputati 31, January 1963.

¹⁸ M. Cattaruzza (ed.), *Nazionalismi di frontiera. Identità contrapposte sull'Adriatico nord-orientale, 1850-1950* (Soveria Mannelli, 2003); M. Verginella, *Il confine degli altri. La questione giuliana e la memoria slovena* (Roma, 2008); R. Wörsdörfer, *Il confine orientale. Italia e Jugoslavia dal 1915 al 1955* (Bologna, 2009); G. Valdevit, *Foibe, il peso del passato, Venezia Giulia 1943-1945* (Venezia, 1997); G. Oliva, *Le stragi negate degli italiani della Venezia Giulia e dell'Istria* (Milano, 2002); R. Pupo, and R. Spazzali, *Foibe* (Milano, 2003).

¹⁹ M. Cattaruzza, *L'Italia e il confine orientale, 1866-2006* (Bologna, 2007); G. Sluga, *The Problem of Trieste and the Italo-Yugoslav Border: Difference, Identity, and Sovereignty in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Albany, NY, 2001).

²⁰ At the end of the Second World War, the FTT (Free Territory of Trieste) was divided into two zones: A under the control of the winning powers, included the province of Trieste, and B under the control of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, included a part of the Istrian territory including Capod'Istria. With the treaty of Osimo the two zones pass respectively: A under the sovereignty of the Italian state and B under the sovereignty of the SFRY

²¹ M. Kacin Wohinz, and J. Pirjevec, *Storia degli sloveni in Italia, 1866-1998* (Venezia, 1988); R. Finzi, C. Magris and G. Miccoli (eds.), *Storia d'Italia dall'Unità ad oggi. Le regioni. Il Friuli-Venezia Giulia*, (Torino, 2002), v. 1-2; A. Agnelli, 'I

molteplici "diversi" del Friuli-Venezia Giulia', in: *Il Mulino*, 28/263 (1979), 387-399.

²² In fact, some other linguistic minorities are present in these regions from Ladins, to Walser and Occitan-speaking peoples. See the fundamental work of T. De Mauro, *Storia linguistica dell'Italia unita*, (Roma-Bari, 2017); id. (ed.) *CITTÀ E REGIONE*, «Le dodici Italie». 6/3 (June 1980), and among the 'militant' researches: S. Salvi, *Le lingue tagliate*, (Milano, 1975)

23 Art. 6 of the Italian constitution acknowledges the protection of linguistic minorities, but the specific law was emanated only in 1999 (Law 482, 1999. <http://www.camera.it/parlam/leggi/99482l.htm>). The protected languages are Albanian, Catalan, German, Greek, Slovenian, Croatian, French, Provençal, Friulan, Ladin, Occitan, and Sardinian (art. 2).

²⁴ D. Petrosino and O. Romano (eds.), *Buonanotte Mezzogiorno* (Roma, 2016).

²⁵ The bibliography is too large to be referenced, so we indicate only a few references: F. Barbagallo *Mezzogiorno e questione meridionale (1860-1980)* (Napoli, 1980); and id., *La questione italiana* (Bari, 2013); L. De Rosa, *La provincia subordinata. Saggio sulla questione meridionale* (Bari 2004); G. Fortunato, *Il mezzogiorno e lo stato italiano* (Firenze, 1973); A. Gramsci, *La questione meridionale* (Roma, 1966); C. Perrotta and C. Sunna, *L'arretratezza del Mezzogiorno, - Le idee, l'economia, la storia* (Milano, 2012); J. Schneider (ed.), *Italy's "Southern Question"* (Oxford, 1998); E. Felice, *Perché il Sud è rimasto indietro* (Bologna, 2013); and id., *Ascesa e declino. Storia economica d'Italia*, (Bologna, 2015).

26 A. Pizzorno, 'I ceti medi nei meccanismi del consenso', in: F.L. Gavazza and S. R. Graubard, *Il caso italiano* (Milano, 1974) vol. II, 315-338; S. Tarrow, *Between Center and Periphery: Grassroots Politicians in Italy*, (New Haven, 1977).

27 M. Keating, *State and Regional Nationalism*; M. Keating, and A. B. Wilson, 'Reforming Italy: Institutional Change and the Federal Option', in: *SSRN Scholarly Paper* (October 13, 2010).

28 A. Melucci, and M. Diani, *Nazioni senza stato* (Torino, 1983); D. Petrosino, 'Is it possible to invent ethnic Identity: some reflections on ethnic and territorial politics in Italy', in: J. C. Beramendi, R. Mainz, X. M. Nunez (eds.), *Nationalism in Europe Past and Present* (Santiago de Compostela, 1994) vol. II, 609-644. A list of the main ethno-national/regionalist/sub-state parties in Italy can be found in

F. Tronconi, *I partiti etnoregionalisti: La politica dell'identità territoriale in Europa occidentale* (Bologna, 2011).

29 F. Cassano, *Tre modi di vedere il Sud* (Bologna, 2009); M. Petruszewicz, *Come il Meridione divenne una Questione. Rappresentazioni del Sud prima e dopo il Quarantotto* (Sovenia Mannelli, 1998); L. Riall, 'Which Road to the South? Revisionists Revisit the Mezzogiorno', in: *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 5/1 (2000), 89-100.

30 C. Trigilia, *Sviluppo senza autonomia* (Bologna, 1992).

³¹ D. Petrosino, *La costruzione dell'identità etnica: i movimenti etnici in Sardegna ed in Veneto* (PhD diss., University of Catania, 1986).

32 I. Diamanti, *La Lega* (Roma, 1993); A. Cento Bull, and M. Gilbert, *The Lega Nord and the Northern Question in Italian Politics* (New York, 2001); M. Gilbert, 'Warriors of the New Pontida: The Challenge of the Lega Nord to the Italian Party System', in: *The Political Quarterly* 64/1 (1993), 99-106.

33 J. Agnew, 'The Rhetoric of Regionalism: The Northern League in Italian Politics, 1983-94', in: *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 20/2 (1995), 156-172; D. Woods, 'The Crisis of Center-Periphery Integration in Italy and the Rise of Regional Populism: The Lombard League', in: *Comparative Politics* 27/2 (1995), 187-203.

34 B. Giordano, 'A Place Called Padania? The Lega Nord and the Political Representation of Northern Italy', in: *European Urban and Regional Studies* 6/3 (1999), 215-230; id., 'The Contrasting Geographies of "Padania": The Case of the Lega Nord in Northern Italy', in: *Area* (2001,) 27-37; M. Cachafeiro Gómez-Reino, *Ethnicity and Nationalism in Italian Politics: Inventing the Padania: Lega Nord and the Northern Question* (Famham, 2002).

35 G. Berta (ed.), *La questione settentrionale. Economia e società in trasformazione* (Milano, 2007).

36 M. Keating and A. Wilson, 'Federalism ...'; F. Palermo and A. Wilson, 'The Dynamics of Decentralization in Italy: Towards a Federal Solution?', in: *European Diversity and Autonomy Papers* (Bolzano, 2013); S. Mangiameli (ed.), *Italian Regionalism: Between Unitary Traditions and Federal Processes* (Cham, 2014).

37 The effect of economic restructuring on the rising of the northern protest has been analysed in S. Wild, 'The Northern League: The Self-Representation of Industrial Districts in their Search for Regional Power', in: *Politics* 17/2 (1997), 95–100; H. Beirich, D. Woods, 'Globalisation, Workers and the Northern League', in: *West European Politics* 23/1 (2000), 130–43.

38 It gained 8,65% in the 1992 Political Election, 8,36% in 1994, 10,07% in 1996, and in 1994 participated in the government with *Forza Italia*; also, during the twenties it was in an organic alliance with a center-rightist party called *Casa delle Libertà*. See R. Biorcio, *La rivincita del Nord. La Lega dalla contestazione al Governo* (Roma-Bari, 2010); P. Corbetta and M. S. Piretti, *Atlante storico-elettorale d'Italia 1861-2008* (Bologna, 2009).

39 S. Mangiameli, *Lecture sul regionalismo italiano. Il titolo V tra attuazione e riforma della riforma* (Torino, 2011); T. B. di Caravita *La Costituzione dopo la riforma del titolo V. Stato, regioni e autonomie fra Repubblica e Unione Europea* (Torino, 2002).

40 M. Keating, *Rescaling the European State: The Making of Territory and the Rise of the Meso* (Oxford, 2013); N. Brenner, 'Open Questions on State Rescaling', in: *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society* 2/1 (2009), 123–139.

41 On October 22, 2017, there will be a consultative referendum convoked by the Regional Government of Lombardy and Veneto to request special status—as with the five regions acknowledged in the Constitution—for Lombardy and Veneto. This double strategy, regional on one side and national on the other, evidences a lively debate inside the Northern League.

42 D. Petrosino, O. Romano (eds.), *Buonanotte....*

43 N. Zitara. 'Sinteticamente le ragioni del separatismo', in: <http://www.eleaml.org/nicola/politica/ragioni.html>; G. De Crescenzo, *Noi, i neoborbonici! Storie di orgoglio meridionale* (Milano, 2016). Some writers and journalists were much more influential, but they never built a political movement; see the works of P. Aprile, i.e. the last one, *Carnefici*, (Segrate, 2016); L. Patruno, *Fuoco del Sud: la ribollente galassia dei movimenti meridionali*, (Soveria Mannelli, 2011).

44 An intellectual revision of the 'Questione Meridionale' put in a critical way the condition of South, but even if sometimes it was able to influence the political discourse, it never produced a political organization of Southern people (there

were only a few attempts, which nevertheless failed, to associate the President of the Southern Regions). One of the most influential critical thoughts was that of F. Cassano, *Il Pensiero Meridiano* (Bari, 1996).

45 M. Keating, *Rescaling the European State*.

46 G. Pallaver, 'I Partiti Politici in Alto-Adige Dal 1945 Al 2005', in: G. Ferrandi, and G. Pallaver (eds.), *La Regione Trentino-Alto Adige/Sudtirolo Nel XX Secolo. I. Politica e Istituzioni* (Trient, 2007), 561-600.

47 M. Scantamburlo, 'Partiti e autodeterminazione in Südtirol/Alto adige: competizione etnica e strategie dei partiti tra autonomia e secessione' in: *Nazioni e Regioni* 7 (2016), 47-70; M. Scantamburlo, and G. Pallaver, 'The 2013 South Tyrolean Election: The End of SVP Hegemony', in: *Regional & Federal Studies*, 24/4 (2014), 493-503; id., 'Between Secession and "Full Autonomy": Party Competition over Self-determination in South Tyrol', in: *EvoNat Research Brief* 3 (2015).

48 Among others: 'Sud-Tirolo referendum sulla secessione. dall'Italia:il 92%vuole-unirsi-all'Austria', <http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2014/01/13/sud-tirolo-referendum-sulla-secessione-dallitalia-il-92-vuole-unirsi-allaustria/841823/>; South-Tyrol-freedom-emerging-europes-next-winning-separatist-movement', <http://www.occupy.com/article/south-tyrol-freedom-emerging-europes-next-winning-separatist-movement#sthash.CUdiYOGb.dpbs>.

49 News, BBC 'Euro Crisis Turns German-speaking Italians Against Rome.' BBC News, 2016 <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-19813284>.

⁵⁰ Consiglio Regionale del Trentino-Alto Adige, Autodeterminazione del Trentino-Alto Adige/Sudtirolo, presented by Maurizio Fugatti on 10 February 2015, *XV legislatura- anno 2015, disegni di legge e relazioni n. 26*

⁵¹ M. Di Blas, 'Secessione Del Sudtirolo_ Gelo Da Vienna' Austria Vicina, <http://diblas-udine.blogautore.repubblica.it/2014/07/06/secessione-del-sudtirolo-gelo-da-vienna/>

⁵² P. Coluzzi, 'Minority Language Planning and Micronationalism in Italy: The Cases of Lombardy and Friuli', in: *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 27/6 (2006), 457-71.

53 S. Guglielmi, 'Minoranza linguistica, identità territoriale ed etnonazionalismo: il caso friulano', in: *Polis*, 2 (2010), 225-256; M. Stolfo, C. Cressati, *Cercare Il Friuli e trovare l'Europa* (Udine, 2016).

54 E. Hepburn, 'Explaining Failure: The Highs and Lows of Sardinian Nationalism', in: *Regional & Federal Studies* 19/4-5 (2009), 595-618.

55 A. Bomboi, *L'indipendentismo sardo*, (Condaghes, 2014); C. Pala, *Idee*.

56 F. Cantarella, *L'indipendentismo siciliano tra mito e realtà* (Catania, 2015).

⁵⁷ The Cappellacci coalition (center-right) obtained 39.65% of the vote, the Pigliaru coalition (center-left) obtained 42.5% and the Murgia coalition obtained 10.30%.

58 D. Woods, 'The Many Faces of Populism in Italy: The Northern League and Berlusconiism', in: D. Woods and B. Wejnert (eds.), *The Many Faces of Populism: Current Perspectives* (Bingley, 2014), 27-51; G. Passarelli, 'Extreme Right Parties in Western Europe: The Case of the Italian Northern League', in: *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 18/1 (2013), 53-71; T. Perlmutter, 'A Narrowing Gyre? The Lega Nord and the Shifting Balance of Italian Immigration Policy', in: *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38/8 (2015) 1339-46; M. Huysseune, 'A Eurosceptic Vision in a Europhile Country: The Case of the Lega Nord', in: *Modern Italy* 15/1 (2010), 63-75; R. Biorcio, and T. Vitale, 'Culture, Values and Social Basis of Northern Italian Centrifugal Regionalism. A Contextual Political Analysis of the Lega Nord', in: *Contemporary Centrifugal Regionalism: Comparing Flanders and Northern Italy*, (Brussels 2011), 171-199; J. Bartlett, J. Birdwell, and D. McDonnell 'Populism in Europe: Lega Nord', 2012. <http://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/26214>; 'Populist Rhetoric: Lega Nord' http://counterpoint.uk.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/lega_nord_final-.pdf; A. Cento Bull, 'Lega Nord: A Case of Simulative Politics?', in: *South European Society and Politics* 14/2 (2009), 129-46.

59 See Demos, 'Il referendum per l'indipendenza del Veneto', <http://www.demos.it/a00970.php>, I. Diamanti, 'L'indipendenza del Veneto non è uno scherzo. Bocciato lo stato centrale, no alla politica locale', in: *La Repubblica* (24 March 2014).

60 B. Dente, 'End of an Era? The Monti Government Approach to Central-Local Relations', in: *LIEPP Working Paper* 6 (2012).