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DIALOGUE-DRIVEN CHANGE IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

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DIALOGUE-DRIVEN CHANGE IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

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DIALOGUE-DRIVEN CHANGE IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE: AN INTRODUCTION

Cornelia Ilie¹

The *International Journal of Cross-cultural Studies and Environmental Communication* has decided to devote two special issues (Volume 2, Issue 2, 2013 and Volume 1, Issue 1, 2014) to selected papers presented at the 2nd ESTIDIA Conference, University of Bari “Aldo Moro”, Italy on 3-5 October 2013. These papers raise and discuss a significant range of current issues related to the theme of the conference “Dialogue-driven Change in the Public Sphere”.

The first of the two special issues (Volume 2, Issue 2, 2013) brings together 16 articles devoted to the following three topics: (1) Multi-voiced discourses in the changing European public sphere; (2) Changing strategies in gendering discourses; (3) The impact of digital environments on citizens’ empowerment.

The second of the two special issues (Volume 1, Issue 1, 2014) features 12 articles pertaining to the following two topics: (1) Socio-political change at the interface of tradition and modernity; (2) Intercultural approaches to educational change.

The articles in these two issues address the challenges involved by processes of change in context-specific dialogue practices and strategies from a wide range of disciplinary perspectives, crossing both geographical and methodological borders. The focus of these studies is on the traditions, principles, purposes and practices of interaction in the public sphere that are part of, and conducive to, societal change. Since language use is crucial in shaping individual and collective identity, social interaction and power patterns, the construction and use of discourse gives meaning to specific events, circumstances, attitudes and actions (Wodak and Meyer, 2009; Van Dijk, 2011). Discourses are used in everyday contexts for building power and knowledge, for regulation and normalization (Berger and Luckmann, 1966), for the development of new knowledge and power relations (Chilton, 2004), and for hegemony (excess influence or authority of one group or nation over another). Moreover, there is an increased awareness that changes at the societal level are closely intertwined with changes at organizational level (Seo and Creed, 2002; Scheuer, S. and Scheuer, J.D., 2008). A particular concern of the articles in these two issues is with the role of language in contemporary social, political and cultural change – for example, how do (changing) uses of language contribute to the multi-voiced discourses in the public sphere, to the changing structure of ‘information society’ (through the impact of digital environments), to the construction of regional, national, trans-national identities, or to effects of ‘globalisation’.

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Change, be it subtle or dramatic, is constantly an integral part of social life, bringing about significant alteration of social structure, behavior patterns and cultural values. Social change refers to variations over time in the ecological ordering of populations and communities, in patterns of roles and social interactions, in the structure and functioning of institutions, and in the cultures of societies. In recent times, two fallacies about social change have been intensively debated. According to the first fallacy, social change is simply a linear movement in time from a traditional past towards a modern future, while old values and institutions are regarded as impediments to changes and obstacles to modernization. The second fallacy is based on the assumption that there is an irreconcilable conflict between old and new traditions and structures, which leads to old traditions and structures being simply displaced by new ones. However, both fallacies have been proved wrong and consequently discarded by a large body of studies which provide alternative interpretations that challenge the assumptions of the traditional-modern polarization. In the dynamic and multi-dimensional reality that we experience daily, tradition and modernity are in fact mutually reinforcing, rather than being mutually exclusive systems. It is these two aspects, dialogue-driven continuity in discontinuity, and discontinuity in continuity, that are the topic focus for the conference presentations and discussions.

The various theories of social change range from those that explain specific factors that cause small-scale changes to abstract and broader theories which attempt to understand underlying trends in the evolution and transformation of human societies. While many societies are currently experiencing dramatic shifts in their political, economic and social structures, there are at least two dominant trends: the increasing democratization of political life, and the rise of complex bureaucratic institutions. The key factors of social change underlying these trends are globalization, technological developments, systemic upheavals, migration and the ensuing multiculturalism and multilingualism. But perhaps the most potentially powerful factors of social change are the people animated by a profound need to communicate and, through public dialogue, to craft a dynamic vision for a more just set of social arrangements in the pursuit of major goals in the service of the common good. The implementation of visionary ideas calls for critically discussing ideas and conceptualizations which take into account the continuously changing nature of societies and communities, and which aim at explicating the interdependence between individuals' interaction practices and the discursive construction of identities, on the one hand, and their access to full participation in society, on the other.

Some of the major issues of interest discussed in the articles included in these two special journal issues are the following: understanding and fostering the dialogue of tradition and innovation at the interface of the public and private spheres; scrutinising patterns of social and personal change at micro- and macro-discourse level; identifying divergence and convergence patterns in public narrative and dialogue; identifying new citizen-centred multicultural and social practices in Europe and beyond; analyzing empowering or disempowering paradigm shifts in gendering practices occurring in public and media discourses;

examining societal change articulated in public debate (e.g. media interviews, press conferences, political debates); evaluating bottom-up or top-down societal change (e.g. in processes of political transition, power transfer and empowerment, business outsourcing).

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I. MULTI-VOICED DISCOURSES IN THE CHANGING EUROPEAN PUBLIC SPHERE

UNDERGOING OR ENACTING CHANGE? SOCIETAL CHANGE AS DISCURSIVE PRACTICE

Cornelia Ilie¹

“Isn't it funny how day by day nothing changes, but when you look back, everything is different...” (C.S. Lewis)

Introduction

With changes occurring in all sectors of social and professional activity more regularly and more rapidly than ever before, we are faced with the constantly daunting task of trying to make sense of the sources, mechanisms and effects of these changes. In modern and postmodern socio-political thinking the notion of *change* has taken centre stage through identifying, analyzing, comparing, disputing different approaches to, or interpretations of change: major or minor changes, economic or political changes, long-term or short-term changes, deliberate or non-deliberate changes, peacefully or coercively implemented changes, successful or failed changes, to name but a few. In the realm of politics a landslide mandate for *change* occurred in the 2008 US election campaign during which the phrase “Change we can believe in” led to the victory of Barack Obama’s party and his election as President of the United States. And in Europe, François Hollande, challenging Nicolas Sarkozy, opened his 2012 official campaign as a socialist presidential candidate with the slogan “The time for change is now”.

Change has been a recurring buzzword in mainstream institutional discourses promoted at both micro- and macro-levels in the European public sphere during the past few decades. Due to its geopolitical, cultural and ethnic diversity, the EU, as an officially endorsed pan-European body, feels compelled to continuously legitimize its existence and policies both internally and externally. Its communication strategies have largely focused on branding its self-image as a diverse, interdependent and citizen-oriented entity, based on democratic and consensus-seeking principles. As a result, the notion of change has been embraced as a token of the progressive, exploratory and self-regenerating spirit characterising the cultural and geo-political entity represented by the EU. Since the meanings of facts and phenomena are socially co-constructed and communicatively conveyed through language, what matters are not only facts and phenomena in themselves, but how they are perceived and interpreted. Consequently, EU representatives have

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constantly endeavoured to achieve political influence by articulating carefully constructed meanings of the concept of *change* that Europeans are expected to respond favourably to.

Institutional discourse is the result of socio-discursive practices that are meant to establish and legitimize specific well-defined relations between concepts and their meanings. Such practices are generally associated with the notion of ‘soft power’, which was defined by Nye’s (2004) as ‘getting others to want the outcomes you want’ (p. 5) or to shape what others want, not by means of coercion, but by attraction. A frequently used rhetorical strategy of inducing change by attraction is the recourse to the use of *euphemisms*, which are meant to operate a semantic shift by turning a negative into a positive description, thus dissimulating potentially offensive, repulsive or hurtful expressions, and therefore face-threatening, with agreeable or less offensive expressions that are perceived as face-saving devices. Thereby harsh, unpleasant or negatively sounding words often get replaced with gentler, positive or neutral ones. For example, in many cultures, a doctor is expected and thus likely to say “*the patient passed away*” rather than “the patient died”. On social and human considerations, the word “unemployed” is increasingly changed with the euphemism “*between jobs*”. Political discourse in particular displays a great number of euphemisms used as substitutes for distasteful, unpopular or problematic vocabulary, which could alienate or cause offence to the audience or some third party. In order to attract and maintain public support, and ultimately power positions, politicians resort to rhetorical strategies of euphemistic manipulation of people’s minds: for example, instead of explaining the mechanisms of “economic decline” they try to mitigate its negative meaning by speaking about “*disinflation*” and “*negative growth*”; and instead of “dismissal from service” or “firing staff” they try to minimize their negative impact by speaking instead of “*downsizing*” or “*workforce adjustment*”.

How is change contextually instantiated in official discourses of EU institutions?

Endless examples of such semantically manipulated expressions are to be found in EU official documents. For the purposes of this study, a sizeable number of recent documents issued by the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council of the European Union have been examined. In order to avoid the negative connotations triggered by the implementation of changes in certain sectors of activity, several ‘watered down’ semantic alternatives are used to replace the straight forward notion of *change*, as illustrated in extract (1) below:

- (1) Now with the proposed package the main common objective of the proposal for the *amendment* of the Regulation and of the parallel proposal for *recast* of the Directive is to foster innovation and economic growth by making trade mark registration systems all over the EU more accessible and efficient for businesses in terms of

lower costs and complexity, increased speed, greater predictability and legal security. These *adjustments* dovetail with efforts to ensure coexistence and complementarity between the Union and national trade mark systems. (Comments by ICC – International Chamber of Commerce – on the European Commission Proposals for Reform of the EU Trade Mark System, 1 July, 2013, p. 2)

This official EU document was prepared by the Commission on Intellectualproperty and presents a package of initiatives aimed at making trade mark registrations systems in the European Union cheaper, quicker, more reliable and predictable. The largest part of the document (particularly sections 2 “Changes to the Regulation”, 3 “Changes to the Directive” and 4 “Changes to Fees”) is actually devoted to the application of changes (to the regulations and to the directives). One recurrent way of discursively conveying different types, extents and implications of change is simply to refer to this notion by means of other, partly synonymous, terms. In excerpt (1) above, three different euphemistic synonyms are used to substitute the word *change*, i.e. “amendment”, which is normally defined as a formal or official change made to a law, contract, constitution, or other legal document; “recast”, which is the result of anew form produced by recasting; and “adjustment”, which is a small change that improves something or makes it work better (cf. online Merriam Webster, Macmillan and Oxford dictionaries). The substitution of the word “change” with these three words contributes to conferring a more positive note on the whole passage by directing the reader’s attention to the positively connoted “innovation and economic growth” as outcomes of these changes.

Another way of discursively conveying the notion, extent and implications of change related to EU institutional discourse is to use the word “*change*” itself, while contextually emphasizing its positive or negative connotations. The rhetoric of change at institutional and inter-institutional levels is often used to legitimize or, on the contrary, to delegitimize planned or ongoing policies, new administrative practices, re-allocation of financial resources, to name but a few. In order to reach ordinary citizens and to obtain their support, various institutional rhetorics of change have been tailoring their appeals to popular concerns and interests. In EU discourses, whether referring to the recent past, the present or the future, *change* is one of the words most frequently used with regard to the phenomena pertaining to politics, social sciences, economics or ethics. Through its frequent occurrence, the use of the word “change” singles out an ongoing qualitative and paradigmatic shift in the very process of inducing, implementing and monitoring the very process of change.

Theoretical framework of analysis

Processes of change can take different forms and target different outcomes, but above all, they affect, and involve, all members of the respective communities. From a sociological and psychological perspective, a process of

change brings to the fore two main categories of agents enacting two basic roles: on the one hand, “change-takers”, who need to follow and adapt to changes determined or decided by other agents, and, on the other hand, “change-makers”, who are responsible for initiating and fostering change (Scheuer, S. and Scheuer, J. 2008). The latter are often acting from positions of power that give them legitimacy and authority to initiate change and persuade others – the “change-takers” – to follow. At the same time we should not lose sight of the fact that change may be more or less legitimate depending on the extent to which it resonates with jointly accepted institutional principles and a widely shared system of norms and beliefs. Moreover, there may be diametrically opposed perspectives on one and the same process of change, depending on the roles and goals of those involved: the same phenomenon or event may be perceived as a welcome change, or as unwanted change.

A relevant parallel to the two categories of agents – change-makers and change-takers – identified by Scheuer, S. and Scheuer, J. can be found in the framework of the semantic theory of semantic, or thematic, roles (Fillmore 1968, Carlson 1984, Jackendoff 1987) which was integrated into a pragma-semantic approach by Ilie (1998, 2005). These semantic roles represent large classes of participants in a communicative event in the sense that they specify who did what to whom. Such a role is associated with a particular participant in an event and it designates his/her relationship with other participants in the same event. This relationship is articulated through the intermediary of the predicate in the sentence reporting the event. Semantic roles are also called *participant roles*, because they can be viewed as the linguistic encoding of the parts participants play in an event. This is why the term participant role has been adopted in this study to refer to the pragma-semantic interface of the notion of role. The most basic participant roles are Agent (compatible with Change-maker) and Patient (compatible with Change-taker).

Defining change

What do we understand by *change*, or rather, how do we understand the notion and implications of *change* in a pragmatic and discourse-analytical perspective? No matter what focus or analytical goal we pursue, we are confronted with the basic issue of distinguishing between two linguistic instantiations: (*to*) *change* as a verb and *change* as a noun (cf. online dictionaries: Merriam Webster, Macmillan and Oxford dictionaries). For the present discussion it is further necessary to understand the nature of the verb “to change”, which is an ergative verb, i.e. a verb that can be used both transitively and intransitively. The following dictionary meanings have been selected for their salience regarding the present analysis:

To change – transitive verb

1

a : to make different in some particular way: alter <*never bothered to change the will*>

b : to make radically different: transform <*can't change human nature*>

c : to give a different position, course, or direction to

2

a : to replace with another <*let's change the subject*>

b : to make a shift from one to another: switch <*always changes sides in an argument*>

In the transitive meaning, the Agent (+/- animate, performing the action) is the subject of the verb and acts upon a Patient (+/-animate, undergoing the Agent's action), that undergoes the effects of the action, and is the direct object, as illustrated in (2) below:

(2) The history teacher (*Agent, subject*) **changed** her life (*Patient, direct object*).

To change – intransitive verb

1

to become different <*her mood changes every hour*>

2

to undergo transformation, transition or substitution <*winter changed to spring*>

3

to exchange, switch <*neither liked his seat so they changed with each other*>

In the intransitive meaning, the focus is on a self-empowered Patient role (+/-animate) that is usually placed in initial position and becomes the subject of the verb. There is no ascription of the Agent role in such cases. As a result, the Patient role becomes all important, by assuming the responsibility of achieving the outcome of the action performed by the verb, as illustrated in (3) below:

(3) She (*Patient, subject*) **changed** dramatically.

A significant difference between the transitive and the intransitive meanings can be identified at the pragma-semantic level: the transitive use lays the emphasis on the role of the Agent, whereas the intransitive use lays the emphasis on the process or outcome whereby the Patient is in focus. By ascribing the two roles – Agent and Patient – the transitive verb construction enables a more accurate accountability for the outcome than the intransitive verb which ascribes only the role of Patient. This difference between the transitive and intransitive uses emerges more clearly in particular context-specific usages. Whereas a semantic framework of analysis treats these participant roles as more or less static entities that are examined in isolated sentences, a pragmatic framework of analysis enables a contextualization of

participant roles both at micro-level, by investigating their word-specific features, and at macro-level, by analysing their dynamic correlation across passages of interconnected utterances. This is particularly relevant in institutional discourses, which display many-layered, collectively constructed messages addressed to multiple audiences, which share the rhetorical goal of inducing positive reactions, orgenuine belief, and ultimately persuading the audience to act in certain ways.

Shifting uses of the concept of *change*

Prototypical change-focused rhetorical strategies are noticeable in widely disseminated official EU documents where the concept of *change* tends to acquire shifting meanings in different discursive contexts. The present analysis is based on randomly selected documents issued by the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council of the European Union after the 2008 crisis that was followed by a series of institutionally introduced changes meant to operate in social, economic, political and cultural areas across EU member countries. The changes initiated and promoted in EU discourses have been widely discussed and debated, but considerable less attention has been paid to the very discourses recommending and reinforcing change in many EU documents. Whereas the *discourse of change*– in all its forms – has been continuously in the spotlight, the *change of discourse* has been mostly sidelined and overshadowed by the discussions and negotiations regarding the proposed changes. However, underlying those discussions are the actual struggles of competing discourses for assuming the control over the final outcome of master discourses defining, identifying and imposing change throughout the EU region. Eventually, inter-institutional, inter-cultural and inter-personal disputes and divergences had to be reasonably neutralized and euphemized. It is particularly symptomatic that institutional EU discourses about change exhibit changes indicating a gradual marginalization of institutional, as well as social, actors (= pragma-semantic Agents) through rhetorically manipulated discursive practices.

Change has been the default process underlying the evolution of EU institutions and organisations during the last tenyears. Thus, between 2005 and 2009, the balance between member states and the Commission was widely reported in the literature as having changed at the expense of the latter (Barbier, 2011). The Lisbon Treaty, which came into force in 2009, introduced institutional grounds for change with the entry into the arena of the new President of the European Council. Moreover, the balance between social and economic actors within the Commission itself (i.e. among Commissioners), as well as the balance between DGs, changed, not least because, with the arrival of Central European member states, centre-right governments were in a majority. In the aftermath of the financial crisis, the “Agenda for Change” (2011) was laboriously worked out and implemented by the European Commission with a view to reducing poverty in a rapidly changing world. A proliferation of the discourses of change has constantly occurred since 2013, when the preparation of the 2014 elections for the European Parliament started. On the whole, however, no specifically targeted changes are being

discussed: it is rather the concept of change itself that is being recycled over and over again, gradually gaining ground in the public sphere, as illustrated in the following excerpts:

(4)

As **times are changing, so are we**. Since the last European elections, **the rules of the game have changed**. The European Parliament now has more power, both to set the political direction of Europe and over the day-to-day decisions which affect us all. A more powerful European Parliament means more influence for everyone, more ability to deal with our problems, **more ability to change what needs changing, more assertiveness to conserve what we want to keep**. (European Parliament – Elections 2014, The power to decide what happens in Europe, 10-09-2013 - 11:39)

(5)

As times have changed, so has the European Parliament. (European Parliament – Elections 2014, Act React Impact, 10-09-2013 - 11:41)

By using the intransitive verb “to change”, the process of change in (4) and (5) is obviously interpreted in rather general terms, which makes the description sound vague since no Agent is identified. There is a noticeable absence of information about the cause(s) of change, the kinds of change and the tangible effects. Both people (*As times are changing, so are we*) and institutions (*As times have changed, so has the European Parliament*) are described as undergoing change, but the initiation of change is not ascribed to any Agent(s). The Agentlessness is supposed to signal that neither the people, nor the institutions can be held accountable for the respective ongoing changes. In other words, according to the authors of the document, neither the people, nor the European Parliament are treated as playing a significant role in the changes that they have been undergoing. Hence, the changes are ascribed to the indefinite and abstract concept of “times” (*times are changing; times have changed*). However, paradoxically, in (4) this manipulative Agentless use of change points in fact to a contradiction deriving from the juxtaposition of two statements expressing contrary messages about the actual direction taken by the European Parliament: on the one hand, (i) in favour of change – *“more ability to change what needs changing”*, and, on the other hand, (ii) against change – *“more assertiveness to conserve what we want to keep”*.

In more recently published reports (by the European Commission) on the new Horizon 2020 programme, the default EU discourse displays an updated rhetoric in a more interactive and dialogic perspective. There are fewer occurrences of instances describing vague, Agent-less “change” like the ones in (4) and (5). Although the verb “to change” is still often used intransitively, i.e. grammatically deprived of Agent, there are contextually explicit mentions of a responsible Agent, as illustrated in (6) below.

(6)

Since its creation, the European Union **has been constantly changing, shaped by European citizens**, and young people represent both its present and its future.

(Horizon 2020: Work Programme 2014-2015. Europe in a changing world: inclusive, innovative and reflective Societies. European Commission Decision C 2690 of 29 April 2014)

In (6) the verb “to change” is obviously used intransitively (“*the European Union has been constantly changing*”) and it emphasizes the process of change that the European Union has been undergoing, without ascribing it to any Agent. However, in the subsequent parenthetically introduced explanation (“*shaped by European citizens*”) an implicit correlation is established between the process of change and an explicitly identified multiple Agent (“*European citizens*”). Hence, the underlying message of the overall sentence is that the European Union has been shaped by European citizens through successive processes of change. Thereby the multi-level changes undergone by the European Union are **explicitly accounted** for by ascribing them to the agency of European citizens. In this instance, as well as in a few other instances, we can witness a transition of the emphasis in the rhetoric of change – from the process of (the European Union) undergoing change to the process of (European citizens) enacting change.

There are also several instances in EU documents where the verb “to change” is used transitively, thus providing a clearer and more nuanced description of the situation, as illustrated below:

(7)

Economic and monetary integration in Europe, underpinned by the creation of the euro, **has changed the landscape of international monetary relations** with far reaching impacts both for the EU and its external partners.

(Horizon 2020: Work Programme 2014-2015. Europe in a changing world: inclusive, innovative and reflective Societies. European Commission Decision C 2690 of 29 April 2014)

In excerpt (7) the verb “to change” is used transitively, which involves an emphasis on the causal relation between the Agent (“*Economic and monetary integration in Europe*”) and its corresponding Patient (“*the landscape of international monetary relations*”). Whenever the transitive, rather than the intransitive, use of the verb “to change” is selected, we are provided with a more transparent account and a many-sided picture of the process of change, due to the fact that the transitive verb is supposed to imply, and often to specify, the essential pragma-semantic relation between a change-enacting Agent and a change-undergoing Patient. The paradigm represented by the transition between the

transitive and the intransitive uses of the verb “to change” reflects, and at the same time, prompts discursive and rhetorical changes in the assumed value of change as the driving force of the joint effort towards the harmonization of cross-European social and economic co-construction.

It is apparent that the change-related discourses of EU documents are meant not only to describe changes, but also to evaluate these changes in terms of their causes, effects and feedback on those experiencing them. Consequently, an in-depth analysis of the discourses of change calls for a context-based approach that should not be limited to semantic analysis, but integrate a pragmatic and discourse-analytical framework. Moreover, since change is a diachronic phenomenon par excellence, its multi-layered functioning can most appropriately be explored in a historical perspective (Skinner, 1999; Kosseleck 2002). The shifting use of concepts has been examined in a rhetorical perspective by Skinner, who argued that “there cannot be a history of unit ideas as such, but only a history of the various uses to which they have been put by different agents at different times.” (1999: 62). If we take a closer look at the most frequent occurrences of the concept of *change*, we will notice that conceptual shifts occurring over time can reveal significant changes in thinking patterns and ways of approaching social phenomena.

An examination of varying uses of the concept of change (as a verb and as a noun) in several documents issued by EU organisations during the past few years reveals shifting meanings in terms of positive vs. negative evaluation. A significant example is the following:

(8)

The reputational **risks of not making a change** outweigh the **risks of making a change**.

(Council of the European Union, 14 October 2011, Impact Assessment Communication: EU Development Policy “Increasing the Impact of EU Development Policy: An Agenda for Change”. ST 15560 2011 ADD 1.)

In (8) an absolute dichotomy between making or not making a change can be seen as a parallel to the intrinsic distinction between the will to change and the wish to keep things unchanged in excerpt (4) above: “A more powerful European Parliament means more influence for everyone, more ability to deal with our problems, more ability to change what needs changing, more assertiveness to conserve what we want to keep”. The following two excerpts illustrate two viewpoints: a positive and a negative evaluation of the process of change:

(9)

At the same time, **the Bologna Process** attracted worldwide attention and **changed the image of European higher education** “*from being regarded as a (rather sclerotic?) collection of traditional but administratively hidebound institutions to being seen*

as more dynamic, composed of modern and potentially more entrepreneurial institutions” (Scott 2009a:7).

(European Parliament, Directorate-General for External Policies, 2013: Towards the Negotiation and Adoption of the Stockholm’s Programme’s Successor for the Period 2015-2019)

(10)

But even in countries where institutions still benefit from or had no reductions in publicfunding (e.g., Sweden), **there is a fear that the situation will change** in the future.

(European Parliament, Directorate-General for External Policies, 2013: Towards the Negotiation and Adoption of the Stockholm’s Programme’s Successor for the Period 2015-2019)

The positive perception of change in (9) is conveyed through the transitive use of the verb “to change” which requires the specification of an initiating Agent (“*the Bologna Process*”) and a concrete Patient that undergoes change (“*the image of European higher education*”): “*the Bologna Process [...] changed the image of European higher education*”. Typically, this positive meaning of change is further reinforced by adding concrete details that are intended to enhance the persuasive force of the statement. In (10) the negative perception of change is expressed through the intransitive use of the verb “to change” whose action is not ascribed to any Agent. Instead its meaning is associated with the co-occurring notion of “fear”, which expresses a negative but rather vague feeling of insecurity: “*there is a fear that the situation will change*”.

It is apparent from the discussion and illustrative examples above that the notion of change – whether conveyed by a noun or by a (transitive/intransitive) verb – has the potential to set the tone and impact the content of the recent and currently prevalent discourse in representative European institutions. Depending on the issues under debate, the historical moment, as well as the prevalence of divergent or convergent voices, the shifting discourse of choice in official EU documents can be perceived as both reflecting and shaping the social-political agendas of certain influential Agents of change.

Concluding remarks

The range of changes that have been taking place in the ongoing process of European integration is rooted in a complex system of shared beliefs, values and ideals, as well as of diverse perceptions, assumptions and expectations. Against such a complex social, cultural, and geo-political background, the notion of *change* has been at the heart of position-takings, debates and choices made by European citizens and their representative institutions. For obvious reasons, not all changes can be unanimously accepted, which makes the overall discussions on the pros and cons of proposals for change a constant and valuable feature that contributes to shaping EU institutional discourse at all levels.

The aim of this study has been to capture and explore the shifting interpretations of *change* as a socio-political paradigm and a discursive strategy in EU policy-making and policy-reviewing documents. The analysis has focused on identifying competing perspectives and representations of change as a positive vs. negative challenge (i.e. as a valuable opportunity or as a potential danger), as a randomly occurring Agentless process vs. a deliberately pursued institutional and popular goal. Methodologically, a major emphasis has been on the conceptualization of change articulated at the interface of semantic and pragmatic levels of discourse in terms of the interaction of participant roles. The use of a pragma-semantic approach to change as a phenomenon, process and goal, has made it possible to establish relevant correlations between the discourse of change and the change of discourse which have been manifest in a wide range of EU documents over the last ten years. A significant finding is that the change-related discourses of EU documents are often meant not only to describe changes, but also to evaluate these changes in terms of their causes, effects and feedback on those experiencing them.

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EU – FROM MEDIA DISCOURSE TO CITIZENS' INTERPERSONAL CONVERSATION AGENDAS

Oana Ștefăniță¹

Abstract: The paper addresses the role of media in the Europeanization process, in determining the transition from a Romanian public sphere to a Europeanized Romanian public sphere, by analyzing the influence of media coverage of European topics on people's discussions about the European Union. The Europeanization of media discourse is an essential step in the construction of a Europeanized public sphere (Koopmans & Erbe, 2003; Brüggemann & Königslöw, 2009), and a key element of the theoretical frame of the realist model that guides the analysis (de Vreese, 2007). However, a Europeanized media communication model does not necessarily ensure the interest of citizens or their involvement in discussions regarding EU topics. For an accurate analysis of the Europeanization process of the national public sphere, both levels should be considered. Therefore, the research consisted in a comparative approach between media coverage of the EU topics and their reflections on citizens' conversations and attitudes towards EU.

In order to analyze the Europeanization process at the level of media discourse a quantitative research[□] was conducted which consisted in a content analysis of a corpus of 6626 news from March 2013 on the two main online news portals in Romania, ziare.com and hotnews.ro (according to the ranking on trafic.ro). We aimed to see how visible and prominent are the news on EU topics as compared to other types of news in the online Romanian media; which are the most visible actors in the European news and whether the EU topics are presented from a European or a national perspective.

To analyze the short-term media effects, the transition of EU subjects and perspectives from media to citizens' interpersonal conversation agenda, 20 interviews were conducted at the end of March 2013 among Romanian master students to see how young and educated people relate to EU topics and get involved in discussions. The research questions that guided the analysis were: Which are the European topics that raised people's interest or determined them to enter discussions, and to what extent the topics match those covered in the media?; To what actors they refer mostly when discussing EU topics as compared to the most visible actors at the news level?; Which is the contextualization of the EU topics within discussions and to what extent it corresponds to the one prevailing in the news?

The results indicate a lack of real connectivity to the European Union as a whole both at the level of media coverage, and at the level of citizens' interest since the Europeanization of the national public sphere is in its early stages. The aspects that have a national impact or a direct relevance for personal activities are still the main ones that stimulate the interest in EU topics and the involvement in discussions.

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Keywords: public sphere; Europeanization; Europeanized national public spheres; media coverage; citizens' agenda; EU visibility; EU prominence; EU actors; contextualization; people's interest.

Theoretical background

The European Public Sphere – models and perspectives

The concept of European public sphere appeared as a necessity to favor the Europeanization process, the integration at all levels within the EU, from an economic to a political level. According to the “White Paper on a European Communication Policy”, there is a gap between the European Union and its citizens and the solution consists in using communication in the service of citizens. Thus, the paper emphasizes the need for a “European dimension”, for a “European public sphere” where the European debate can unfold.²

The concept of public sphere was defined by Jürgen Habermas as “a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body.”³ In the trans-national multi-lingual context, the concept of public sphere becomes very communication-centered⁴ and media have a central role in sustaining the communication flow.⁵ Furthermore, the classical theory of the public sphere as an area for the communicative generation of public opinion is linked to the concepts of nation-state and sovereign power, but in the context of interdependency among states, the concept of public sphere should be perceived as “discursive arenas that overflow the bounds of both nations and states”.⁶

Regarding the European public sphere, we can relate to three models – the utopian, the elitist and the realist models. In the *utopian* perspective, the European public sphere is perceived as a singular, supra-national, pan-European public sphere, a communicative space which requires a shared identity, a transnational media system and a common language.⁷ From the *elitist* perspective, we only relate

² *The White Paper on a European Communication Policy*. (2006) 3-5. Web, March. 2012. Available: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2006:0035:FIN:EN:PDF>.

³ Jürgen Habermas, *The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article* (1964) 49. Web, April. 2012. Available: [http://www.socpol.unimi.it/docenti/barisione/documenti/File/2008-09/Habermas%20\(1964\)%20-%20The%20Public%20Sphere.pdf](http://www.socpol.unimi.it/docenti/barisione/documenti/File/2008-09/Habermas%20(1964)%20-%20The%20Public%20Sphere.pdf).

⁴ Nancy Fraser, “Transnationalizing the Public Sphere. On the Legitimacy and Efficacy of Public Opinion in a Post-Westphalian World”, *Theory, Culture & Society* 24/4 (2007) 7.

⁵ John Crowley and Liana Giorgi, “Introduction: the political sociology of the European public sphere”, *Democracy in the European Union. Towards the emergence of a public sphere*, eds. Liana Giorgi, Ingmar von Homeyer, and Wayne Parsons (London/ New York: Routledge, 2006) 5.

⁶ Fraser 7.

⁷ Claes H. de Vreese, *The EU as a public sphere* (2007) 9. Web, April. 2012. Available: <http://europeangovernance.livingreviews.org/Articles/lreg-2007-3/download/lreg-2007-3Color.pdf>.

to segmented transnational public spheres, which are based on communicative spaces at national levels on a specific subject, determined by media with global or European outreach, and thus involving mainly elites in the politic or economic fields.⁸ The *realist* model relates to the Europeanization of the national public spheres and includes an increased coverage of European subjects and an evaluation of those issues that transcend the interests of one country.⁹

Therefore, a European, supra-national public sphere implies discussing the same themes, at the same time, at similar levels of attention across national public spheres and media; using similar frames of reference and patterns of interpretation, having a transnational community of communication, and citizens observing each other across national spaces, but perceiving EU as an issue of common concern for them.¹⁰ A European public sphere requires the same conditions as a national public sphere, a common language, a European-wide media system, citizens developing an increased interest in the EU issues and a feeling of European identity, simultaneous reporting and discussion of European issues seen in a European perspective and perceived within a shared frame of relevance.¹¹

However, the criteria for a European public sphere are mostly missing as there is no real common interest for EU issues, no political uniformity, no official common language, no common tradition or culture and no significant European media. Although the infrastructure of a general public sphere in EU is not completely missing and English can substitute the common language, it does not seem sufficient to determine a collective interest or a feeling of collective identity.¹² Furthermore, there is a lack of a real connection between institutional debates and a general public debate. The EU is even confronted with the lack of a European public as this is sectoral, socially highly selective and it might include actors that are not located within the EU official borders.¹³ Therefore, as the criteria for a European public are not yet achieved, more researchers turn to the process of Europeanization of the national public spheres also called the “realist model”¹⁴, and especially to the media-driven ways of supporting the Europeanization process, this being also the pattern that guided the present research. To support the Europeanization process, the media have to cover the EU topics from a European

⁸ *Idem.*

⁹ *Ibidem*, 10-11.

¹⁰ Thomas Risse and Marianne Van de Steeg, *An Emerging European Public Sphere? Empirical Evidence and Theoretical Clarifications* (2003) 2. Web, April. 2012. Available: http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~atasp/texte/030624_europeanpublicsphere.pdf.

¹¹ Jostein Gripsrud, “Television and the European Public Sphere”, *European Journal of Communication* 22/4 (2007) 483.

¹² Erik Oddvar Eriksen, “An Emerging European Public Sphere”, *European Journal of Social Theory* 8/3 (2005) 350.

¹³ Olivier Baisnée, “The European Public Sphere Does Not Exist (At Least It’s Worth Wondering . . .)”, *European Journal of Communication* 22/4 (2007) 495.

¹⁴ Claes H. de Vreese, *The EU as a public sphere* (2007) 10. Web, April. 2012. Available: <http://europeangovernance.livingreviews.org/Articles/lreg-2007-3/download/lreg-2007-3Color.pdf>.

view by asserting the European sources, perspectives and interests over the national or global ones.¹⁵

Overall, the Europeanization of the national public spheres can represent the solution in bridging the gap between the national level and the European level and reduce the democratic deficit of the EU. Media have a central role within the realist model and they can increase citizens' support and involvement in European debates through ensuring the informational basis for deliberation. Moreover, growing citizens' interest and spreading a European perspective when covering or debating European topics are also part of the conditions. The Europeanization of the national public spheres is an essential step for developing the political dimension of the Union and thus, for consolidating and developing the European project.

Media discourse – from national to European

Media are an essential factor in the Europeanization process as they increase the level of understanding for the European issues by providing information and enhance the level of accessibility, by urging debates, by attracting the public support for the EU projects, and by raising citizens' interest and involvement. The main tools are the agenda setting and the coverage perspective whereby they can ensure the visibility of the European topics and provide a European perspective detrimental to the national interests and perspectives.

According to the media type and media involvement in the Europeanization process, three phenomena can occur: *the emergence of a supranational European public sphere* (this implies interaction among European institutions and actors on European topics through the means of a European-wide media); *vertical Europeanization* (implies communicative linkages between the European level and the national one); *horizontal Europeanization* (implies communicative linkages between different member states).¹⁶ By mixing the vertical and horizontal dimensions, four types of Europeanization resulted: *comprehensive Europeanization* – the vertical and horizontal levels of Europeanization are present; *segmented Europeanization* – the vertical level prevails, an increased attention is paid to EU as an entity, and not to member states; *Europeanization aloof from the EU* – the horizontal level prevails, the communicative exchanges among member-states; *a parochial public sphere* – neither a vertical, nor a horizontal Europeanization is present in the national media.¹⁷

¹⁵ John Downey and Thomas Koenig, "Is There a European Public Sphere? The Berlusconi & Schulz Case", *European Journal of Communication* 21/2 (2006) 167.

¹⁶ Ruud Koopmans and Jessica Erbe, *Towards a European Public Sphere? Vertical and Horizontal Dimensions of Europeanized Political Communication* (2004) 6-7. Web, April. 2012. Available: <http://europeangovernance.livingreviews.org/Articles/lreg-2007-3/download/lreg-2007-3Color.pdf>.

¹⁷ Michael Brüggemann and Katharina Kleinen-von Königslöw, "Let's Talk about Europe': Why Europeanization Shows a Different Face in Different Newspapers", *European Journal of Communication* 24/1 (2009) 29-30.

Therefore, the Europeanization process can be supported by an increased coverage of European topics in national media. Some indicators of an Europeanized communication can be that EU officials are starting to debate with protagonists from other places, different actors from EU member states take part in debates on common issues and agree upon solutions, similar topics are discussed simultaneously in the media of several EU states, EU protagonists from different states interact through national media inquiries, Brussels' policies are present on the media agenda from EU member states.¹⁸ However, by simply providing an increased visibility of the EU topics, we cannot speak about a Europeanized communication system or about a European public, especially if the messages remain attached to national viewpoints. A Europeanized communication implies spreading a European perspective on issues that transcend the national interests or the national impact.¹⁹ Another limit is given by the citizens' lack of interest in European topics, since a Europeanized public sphere implies the citizens' interest in EU issues caused by a frequent need for information.²⁰

In conclusion, a Europeanized media discourse serves to ensure information and knowledge so as to provide the necessary support for people to discuss, participate and form opinions. Media should grow the appetite and interest for EU topics beyond the national interests and the national impact of the EU issues by providing a European perspective. Thus, a Europeanized media discourse can make a major contribution in developing the Europeanization process and in accomplishing the steps that lead towards a Europeanized national public sphere through enabling an open deliberative communicative space.

Methodology

The research addresses the role of media in the Europeanization of the national public sphere by analyzing the influence of media coverage of European topics on people's discussions. Therefore, the approach consisted in a comparative approach between media coverage of the EU topics and their reflections at the level of citizens' interest and discussions.

The research questions guiding the analysis were:

RQ1: How visible and prominent are the European topics compared to other issues?

RQ2: Who are the most visible actors in the European topics and what is the prevailing coverage perspective (national or European)?

¹⁸ Marcel Machill, Markus Beiler, and Corinna Fischer, "Europe-Topics in Europe's Media. The Debate about the European Public Sphere: A Meta-Analysis of Media Content Analyses", *European Journal of Communication* 21/1 (2006), 63-64.

¹⁹ Marianne van de Steeg, "Rethinking the Conditions for a Public Sphere in the European Union", *European Journal of Social Theory* 5/4 (2002) 500.

²⁰ Marju Lauristin, "The European Public Sphere and the Social Imaginary of the 'New Europe'", *European Journal of Communication* 22/4 (2007) 401.

RQ3: Which are the European topics that raised people's interest or persuaded them to enter discussions, and to what extent did the topics match those covered in the media?

RQ4: To what actors do citizens refer mostly when discussing EU topics as compared to the most visible actors in the media?

RQ5: What is the contextualization of the EU topics in discussions and to what extent does it correspond to the one prevailing in the news?

In order to analyze the Europeanization process at the level of media discourse a quantitative research was conducted. The approach consisted in a content analysis of a corpus of 6626 articles from March 2013 and published on the two main online news portals in Romania, *ziare.com* and *hotnews.ro*.²¹ The analyzed period included important events for EU such as the rejection of the 2014-2020 EU budget; the severe crisis in Cyprus; discussions on the UK's proposal to leave EU as a reaction to the imposed bonus regime; and the rejection of Romania's and Bulgaria's request to join the Schengen area at the JHA Council.

To analyze the short-term media effects, the transition of EU topics and perspectives from media to citizens' interpersonal conversation agenda, 20 interviews were conducted at the end of March 2013 among Romanian master students to see how young and educated people relate to EU topics and get involved in discussions. The students were asked about the European topics that raised their interest or persuaded them to engage in discussions about aspects related to media consumption, about their perspective on the most visible actors in the media and about those they refer to in conversations, and about the contextualization of EU topics in discussions. To determine the influence of media coverage of European topics on people's interest and discussions about the European Union we compared the content analysis data with the data from the interviews.

Findings

The visibility and prominence of the European topics

The content analysis included 6626 news published on March 2013, 64.7% on *ziare.com* and 35.3% on *hotnews.ro*. In terms of visibility, the EU issues represented only 12.9%. Considering the data resulted from previous research, the visibility level from March 2013 is still under the European level, which is around 20%.²² The most visible EU topics were the Euro crisis – 27.7%, Romania and Bulgaria's adhesion to the Schengen area – 25.6%, and subjects related to society 18.8%.

²¹ The portals are on the sixth position - *ziare.com* and eleventh position - *hotnews.ro* at the news section, the other ranks being held by the online versions of newspapers, according to the ranking published by *trafic.ro*. March, 2013.

²² Andreas R.T. Schuck et. all, "Party contestation and Europe on the news agenda: The 2009 European Parliamentary Elections", (2011), 46. Web, May, 2012. Available at: <http://home.medewerker.uva.nl/a.r.t.schuck/bestanden/Schuck%20et%20al.%202011.pdf>, accessed on

In what concerns the visibility progress of the European topics, two visibility peaks were registered. On 3-6 March with the highest visibility peak on 4 March since in this period Romania and Bulgaria's request to join the Schengen area was rejected at the JHA Council. Following the declaration of the German minister for internal affairs in which he announced Germany's opposition regarding the admission of the two countries, several European leaders and Romanian politicians started heated discussions over the issue. The second visibility peak was on 25-26 March and concerned the crisis in Cyprus, the consequences of the euro crisis and the discussions over the possibility that Cyprus might leave the eurozone. The consequences of the crisis were also felt in Romania through the closing of some Cypriot banks in our country. Therefore, the high visibility of the topics was also due to the national impact.

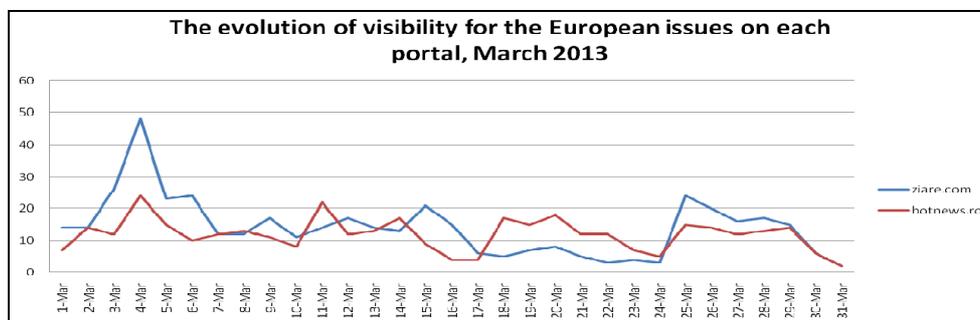


Fig. 1 - The evolution of visibility for the European issues on each portal, March 2013

Overall, regarding the visibility of European issues, we cannot state that media have allocated an important number of articles and editorials to cover these topics. Additionally, even the most important EU issues were covered from a national perspective with references to the local context and to internal economic consequences, or with references to other member states and to their actions, but not to EU as a single entity.

The analysis on the prominence of European topics shows the number of registered views in favor of European issues as compared to other topics, and the number of comments. The number of views and comments are variables that can offer information regarding the citizens' interest and their availability to get involved in debates with other online readers. The average number of views for the European topics is 4142.7, while the average for the other topics is 2754.6. In what concerns the number of comments, the average for the European topics is 14.0, while for other topics is 7.0. The European topics were mostly from the political field and this area attracts a large number of comments. Furthermore, the events that took place in March 2013 as the rejection of Romania and Bulgaria's adhesion to the Schengen area, the crisis in Cyprus that lead to the closing of some bank subsidiaries in Romania had a national impact.

Therefore, the most commented topics and the most visualized ones were about the Schengen case, respectively the rejection of Romania and Bulgaria's

adhesion so the citizens' interest and involvement in discussions was given by the national impact. Furthermore, the perspective from which these subjects were covered was a national one and the most visible actors were the national ones as well.

The coverage perspective and the presence of actors in the European topics

Regarding the analysis of the actors, we aimed at identifying the types of actors that are present in the European topics, to see if the most visible ones are European actors, national ones, European institutions or the leaders of the member states. The most visible actors are the countries – 51.8%, the national actors – 15.3% and European institutions 8.7%. There are no major differences between the two portals, but hotnews.ro focuses more on European institutions and actors from EU member states, while ziare.com on countries and national actors.

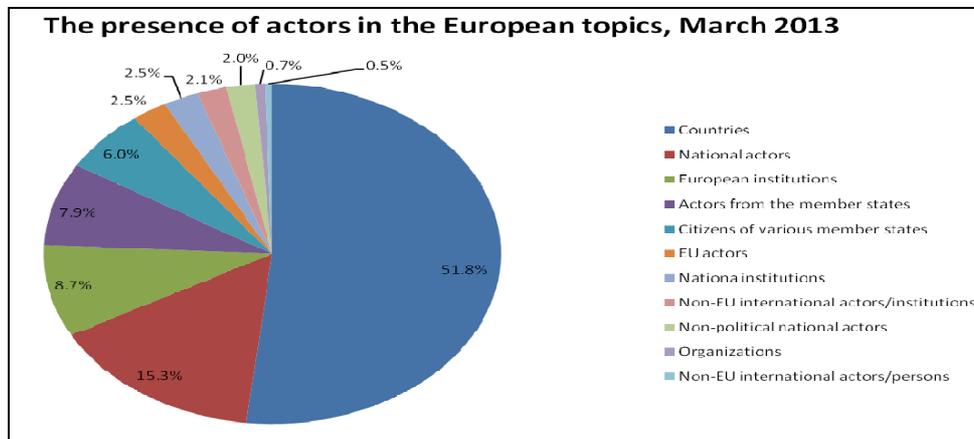


Fig. 2 - The presence of actors in the European topics, March 2013

For a better representation of the actors, we grouped them into national actors, European actors and non-EU international actors. The European actors represented only 56.6% of the actors mentioned in the European topics. By grouping the actors in countries, institutions and persons, we could observe that the countries are the most prominent – 51.7%. Considering the distribution of the actors featuring in the European topics, the EU actors prevail, although they are represented mostly by countries and the difference between them and the national actors is reduced.

In what concerns the contextualization of the European topics, the approach angle is the internal one – 55.4%, followed by the European perspective – 41.6% and the non-EU international perspective 3.0%. Since the prevailing perspective is the national one, the Europeanization process is not effectively supported by the media discourse. Media still focus on the issues that affect the national level, that have a direct impact on Romania. The Europeanization of the national public sphere is an obstructed process if there is no real interest for EU as a whole, for the effects of the events at the European level, and not only at the national level.

The European topics at the level of citizens' conversation agendas

To analyze the media effects, the transition of the EU topics and perspectives from media to the citizens, we conducted 20 interviews with Romanian master students to see how young, educated students relate to the EU issues. Regarding the interest for European topics, the interviewees are interested in what happens at the EU level, but especially concerning the national effects of the European issues (9 out of 20) and the important events that are highly visible in the media or have an impact on their work (7 out of 20). Four interviewees are not interested in the European topics.

“I am not particularly interested, but if there is an important and interesting issue that is internationally or nationally debated and it has an echo in the media, then yes.” (O.D., 24)

„I don't watch EU topics or look at talk-shows on the EU issues; they don't represent a point of interest for me.” (C.U., 24)

If we relate to March 2013, only 8 out of 20 respondents watched EU topics in this period either to keep up to date with the EU events and decisions, or to look for useful information in their working field. The interviewees watched and remembered mostly subjects related to the euro crisis, especially the crisis in Cyprus (9 out of 20), and the rejection of Romania and Bulgaria's adhesion to the Schengen area (6 out of 20).

Regarding the citizens' discussions on EU topics, most interviewees discuss very little (8 out of 20) and only if there is something important and very visible in the media or if the issue has a great influence on Romania or on their lives. Seven interviewees do not discuss at all on EU topics, while five try to discuss especially with persons from whom they might learn something.

“(I discuss) Only if it seems to have an impact on us (on the country), on me, if it could potentially influence my future.” (I.M., 24)

“I don't discuss at all on topics related to EU and I don't comment in general. They don't constitute the topic of my discussions with my friends or my family.” (C.U., 24)

In what concerns the actors mentioned by the interviewees as being the most present in the European topics, the most visible was the German chancellor Angela Merkel (15 out of 20). On a second level were the national actors especially the president Traian Băsescu (10 out of 20) and the premier Victor Ponta (8 out of 20) followed by other ministers and politicians. The other mentioned topics regarded the member states, mostly Germany, Cyprus, France and Greece and the European institutions, especially the European Parliament and the European Commission. Comparing the interviewees' responses to the media analysis for March 2013, the classification is very similar to the observation that at the news level, the countries are the most prominent.

Regarding the perceived contextualization in the media, the interviewees clearly indicated the national perspective, the national impact approach (18 out of 20). Only two said that the European perspective prevails when presenting the EU related issues. When discussing about European topics, the interviewees opt for the same perspectives as the ones perceived in the media so the national approach prevails.

“National (perspective), clearly. For the general view, there is the tendency to explain and show the effects, the impact of the European actions on us. In the end, this is what interests us. If some prices rise in Europe, they will rise here for sure too, and not the other way around. The national impact seems very important to me.” (O.D., 24)

“The national impact. How it is for us, how it affects us and that’s it. I rarely happen to see an article that also talks about something else.” (O.A., 23)

Overall, people’s interests and involvement in discussions about the EU are influenced by the subjects approached in the media as they relate and discuss on the most visible media topics. The citizens take up the most prominent issues and actors in their discussions about EU topics and they use the prevailing media perspectives in evaluating the European issues. However, the citizens’ interest in the EU is mostly related to issues that might affect the country or their work and not to subjects that concern the EU as a whole.

Discussions and conclusion

In the context of the European crisis and considering the deficits of democracy and legitimacy, the European Union needs an increased communication with its citizens. Without taking into account the citizens’ voice, without the Europeanization of the national public spheres, without a sense of affiliation to a European identity, the EU cannot develop its political dimensions to become a federation.

Media have an essential role in sustaining the Europeanization process so they can bridge the gap between the EU and its citizens and can increase the general involvement and the cohesion among member states. Therefore, to analyze the influence of media coverage of European topics on people’s discussions, we conducted a comparative research between the media visibility and prominence of the European issues and their reflections on citizens’ perspectives.

Considering the visibility of the EU topics, in March 2013 only 12.9% of the articles were on European subjects so the media coverage of EU issues is still under the European average. Furthermore, the visibility peaks for EU topics regarded the rejection of Romania and Bulgaria’s accession to the Schengen area and the crisis in Cyprus along with the possible withdrawal of the country from the eurozone. Both issues had national implications as the first case determined some heated discussions among the national politicians, while in the second case, the

severe crisis led also to the closure of some Cypriot bank subsidiaries in Romania. Therefore, the most visible subjects had national implications and their main coverage perspective was a national one.

In what regards the prominence of the EU topics, the most commented issues and the most visualized ones were about the Schengen case, respectively the rejection of Romania and Bulgaria's' adhesion. Therefore, the citizens' interest and involvement in discussions was given by the national impact. Furthermore, the national actors had a high presence in the European topics. In what concerns the contextualization of the European topics, the predominant perspective is still the national one so we could say that the Europeanization process is not effectively supported by the media discourse.

If we consider the most visible and prominent EU topics, and the issues mentioned by the citizens as points of interest and discussions, we can see that the two plans are almost similar. The issues that are highly visible in the media and those that may affect the national plan or their work, are those that capture the citizens' interest. Media influences their agenda as well as their perspectives. The actors they mention the most are those that were visible in the news. However, they refer mostly to leaders of the other member states and to national actors, this indicating that the Europeanization process is reduced and it has more elements of horizontal Europeanization than elements of the vertical dimension. Furthermore, the citizens are interested in topics that approach the national consequences and not in issues that regard the EU as a single entity. The prevailing contextualization both in the media and in citizens' discussion is the national one. Without a European perspective, the Europeanization process is practically obstructed.

Overall, the citizens' interest in European topics is either related to the most visible topics in the media, or to those issues that affect the national plan or their activities. Moreover, they discuss very little about European issues and their conversations agenda contains topics with high level of media visibility or with a direct impact on their personal plan. Therefore, the Europeanization process requires more support at the level of media discourse through increased media coverage of EU topics and a European perspective.

In conclusion, the Europeanization of the national public sphere is a shy process as debate is almost missing and the media coverage of EU topics still does not succeed in transcending the national interests and perspectives. National media should commit to developing a comprehensive Europeanization process through a Europeanized discourse since so far they favored the Europeanization aloof the EU. Since information is the base for involvement and debate, a Europeanized communication will increase the interest of the citizens without which a Europeanized public sphere is not possible.

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POLITICAL SATIRE ON TELEVISION: HOW POLITICAL SATIRE ENCOURAGES CRITICAL AWARENESS OF POLITICAL ISSUES AND CONTRIBUTES TO THE FORMATION OF A CIVIC CULTURE

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Abstract: This study examines the nature of political satire on UK and Italian Television, starting from the phenomenon of popular politics. It takes a new approach to the concept of political activity that needs to be revised to fit with our continuously evolving culture, the one dominated by popular media. Political satire, in particular, plays an important role in the “New Political Television” providing a level of truthfulness that cannot be accessed by traditional news programs (Jones, 2005).

Keywords: satire; politics; citizenship; pop politics; television; democracy; active citizen; information; political awareness; civic culture.

1. Introduction

The aim of this study is to examine the nature of political satire on UK and Italian Television. It is not easy to define this concept in the two national contexts: first of all, there is a limited amount of relevant material on this topic, secondly the concept of political satire is so very complex as a result of its long and diverse history. Therefore, to carry on the investigation, it will be necessary to take into consideration the international studies which have been carried out in this sector and in particular in the U.S.A.

I will contextualize political satire within the phenomenon of popular politics, drawing on the work of earlier international scholars, such as Postman, Kellner and Putnam, as well as recent ones, such as Van Zoonen, Jones and Holbert. I will then analyze the phenomenon of political satire on television as has been appraised by those scholars who have discussed the existent relationship between politics, television and audience, in terms of democratic citizenship. In particular, I will use the research conducted by Jones and Gray on some American TV programs.

Through the analysis of the satirical English program “Yes, Prime Minister” and the Italian one “Italioland”, the questions I will ask are: how does political satire – in particular, irony and jokes – encourage critical awareness of political issues? To what extent does satire contribute to the formation of a civic awareness?

This research work allows an understanding of a fascinating and highly topical area of interest that has been overlooked for a long time. Existing sociological and political studies have focused for a long time on the direct forms

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of political communication and have seen the media as the cause of passive citizenship.

The following section of this paper is developed in different stages, in order to investigate to which extent political satire on TV, is a new form of democracy. In particular political satire is contextualized within the wider phenomenon of pop politics and therefore it is considered in its connection with politics. Moreover the genre will be defined in relation to the television context and the audience.

2. Definitions of pop politics

What is the meaning of pop politics? How does it act on the audience?

First of all, it is necessary to give a definition to the concept of “Pop Politics”.

Baym believes that in the last few years it has been possible to observe:

“A wider turn toward discursive integration: the emergence of a media environment defined by the collapse of previous distinctions among once-differentiated genres, social practices, and discursive fields. In this environment, politics and popular culture, information and entertainment, laughter and argument, the real and the surreal have become deeply inseparable, fluidly interlaced in differing discursive blends on a nightly basis.”²

In particular according to Mazzoleni, Pop Politics “means that events and personalities, stories and words that belong to the political environment become, thanks to the media and in particular to television, arguments of interest, discussion and entertainment.”³

For many scholars who study the phenomena, democracy is in decline in America. The primary threat is not any particular administration or political platform. The most serious threat, insidious because of its banality, comes from the modern media and in particular from television. Several books that have dealt with this subject – such as “Amusing Ourselves to Death” by Neil Postman⁴, “Television and the Crisis of Democracy” by Douglas Kellner⁵ and “Bowling Alone” by Robert Putnam⁶ - criticize the impact that media have on the civic culture and on the public sphere.

² Baym, Geoffrey. “Representation and the politics of play: Stephen Colbert’s better know a district”. *Political Communication*, 24.4 (2007): 359-376. Web. 23 February 2013.

³ Mazzoleni, Gianpietro, Sfardini, Anna. *Pop Politics: da “Porta a Porta” a “L’Isola dei famosi”*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2009. Print.

⁴ Postman, Neil. *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*. USA: Penguin, 1985. Print.

⁵ Kellner, Douglas. *Television and the Crisis of Democracy*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990. Print.

⁶ Putnam, Robert. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and the Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002. Print.

These authors collectively argue that television has transformed the United States from an active, engaged and informed country, into a nation of passive, noncritical pseudo-citizens, increasingly cynical and easily manipulated by media and political elites. However the perspective of this group of authors is quite dated.

Instead of blaming the TV and the other modern media, academics like Van Zoonen⁷ and Jones⁸ try to find possible democratic moments within political entertainment. Their intent is just to find positive, active, thoughtful, democratic moments in contemporary media.⁹

In particular, Van Zoonenin “Entertaining the Citizen” tries to demonstrate how entertainment can provide a context to contemplate the concept of citizenship and how it becomes the environment in which citizenship can flourish.¹⁰

According to the author, pop politics means both pop representation of political events and of its protagonists and the use of pop codes by the politic actors.

Van Zoonen insists on the positive influence of the convergence between politics and popular culture, which she believes strengthens democratic awareness and political citizenship. And television, in this process, is considered as the main source of popular culture because it provides more entertainment to the audience than any other medium.

Jones in “Entertaining Politics” focuses his attention on what he calls *new political television*: television that uses satire, humor and common sense arguments to analyze current political topics, specifically “Politically Incorrect” with Bill Maher, “The Daily Show” with Jon Stewart and “Dennis Miller Live”.

Like Van Zoonen, Jones wonders if what she referred to as the *modernist* ideal of citizenship is no longer the norm, or if it ever was. Perhaps the problem is not that television and popular culture are turning us into vapid, disengaged pseudo-citizens, but that the model of the rational, engaged, fully informed citizen does not take into consideration new ways in which citizens can actually participate in politics.

Jones demonstrates that the new political television encourages an active civic participation in political activity, as is confirmed by analyzing audience engagement for “Politically Incorrect”. The audience members view the show as more representative of their political fears and apprehension that are not currently being addressed by political and media elites.

Thus, according to Jones, new political television provides interesting and relevant reasons to think and talk about politics.

⁷ Van Zoonen, Liesbet. *Entertaining the Citizen. When Politics and Popular Culture Converge*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005. Print.

⁸ Cf. Jones, Jeffry, 2005.

⁹ Warner, Jamie. Rev. of “Entertaining Politics: New Political Television and Civic Culture”. *Popular Communication: The International Journal of Media and Culture*, 4.1 (2006): 67-69. Web 18 February 2013

¹⁰ Cf. Van Zoonen, Liesbet, 2005, p.4.

Also Holbert¹¹ has similar perspectives in his article “A typology for the study of entertainment television and politics”. His empirical reveals that audience members actively engage the sociopolitical messages offered via entertainment content thanks to the individual-level of selectivity and they ultimately interpret it in a political context.

The next section will therefore analyse political satire in more depth and particularly in relation to how it acts on citizens.

3. Political satire on television

3.1. The definition of political satire

This section focuses on the importance of political satire as a form of pop politics. It aims to understand what makes satire a politically important form of critique, and how it is distinguished from other comedic forms.

As a form of political discourse, two of the most important components of this definition are the verbal *attack* that in some way passes *judgment* on the object of the attack. So it is the ability to attack power and pass judgment on the powerful that makes satire a particularly potent form of political communication.¹²

Therefore satirists see their job as helping “to distinguish right from wrong in society and willing to attack the wrong without reservation.”¹³

3.2. An underused genre

In “Satire TV: Politics and Comedy in the Post-Network Era”¹⁴, Gray and Jones want to underline the relationship between television comedy, politicians and political process. According to these authors television satire is flourishing in the post-network era.

Thus, whereas news more often presents politics as something to learn, satire not only offers meaningful political critiques, but also encourages viewers to play with politics, to examine it, test it and question it rather than simply consume it as information or *truth*. Satire TV offers viewers a means for playful engagement with politics that has been sorely missing¹⁵.

3.3 Satire, television and audience

While satire has no requirement to be funny, television networks and producers generally expect it to be, seeing it as another form of ‘comedy’, “that

¹¹Holbert, Lance. “A typology for the study of entertainment television and politics”. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 49.3 (2005):436-453. Web. 20 February 2013.

¹² Gray, Jonathan, and Jones, Jeffrey. P. *Satire Tv: politics and comedy in the post-network era*. New York: New York University Press, 2009. Print.

¹³ Hight, G. Quoted in *Drawn to Extremes: The Use and Abuse of Editorial Cartoons* by Chris Lamb. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004. Print.

¹⁴ Cf. Gray, Jonathan, and Jones, Jeffrey.P., 2009.

¹⁵ Cf. Gray, Jonathan and Jones Jeffrey P., 2009.

should be comprised of the same textual features and produce the same audience reactions as a sitcom or variety show.”¹⁶

But satire is a much more complicated process that:

“Asks that its audience engage in a dialogue of a special kind. In addition to making associations, the audience is expected to assimilate the special mixture of aggression, play, laughter, and judgment that is set before it.”¹⁷

Furthermore, satire tends to require a heightened state of awareness and mental participation in its audience that network television infrequently demands. It provides important narrative critiques that enable democratic discourse and deliberation, rather than news that for years theorists have tended to emphasize.¹⁸

Satire is something that entertains, makes us think critically, something that comes from us as an audience looking for a laugh, as citizens desiring meaningful engagement with public life. Gradually, satire TV has crept up on the news as one of the preeminent genres used to understand varied political realities in the early twenty-first century.

Satire has been, for a long time, an underused genre. It has been criticized, along with television, to make spectators passive citizens uninvolved in political life. However, new American studies, demonstrate how this genre is actually a new tool of democracy, able to turn the audience into an active maker of political contents.

In spite of that, the studies of political satire and its effect on the audience, are still presenting some shortfalls in empirical research. Particularly in Italy and in the UK, none of the scholars investigated the subject in such a deep way as did Jones in the US. Therefore this research tries to remedy these gaps in the field of proof to which extent effectively satire can be considered as a new tool of democracy within the two national contexts.

4. Italy and the uk: two different perspectives on democracy

After a deep understanding of the American scenario, it has been interesting to compare it with the results of my research conducted in Italy and the UK. With this work I want to prove how the “new political television”¹⁹ creates a new political awareness among the audience. In particular my research is developed in the attempt to answer to two main researchable questions:

- How does political satire – in particular, irony and jokes – encourage critical awareness of political issues?

¹⁶ Cf. Gray, Jonathan and Jones Jeffrey P., 2009, p. 13.

¹⁷ Test, George. A. *Satire: Spirit and Art*. Tampa: University of South Florida Press, 1991, p.131. Print.

¹⁸ Cf. Jones, Jeffrey P., 2005

¹⁹ Cf. Jones, Jeffrey P., 2005.

- To what extent does satire contribute to the formation of a civic awareness?

Therefore it can be said that this kind of research is focused on the qualitative aspect rather than on the quantitative one.

This work is developed on the focus group methodology, a good way to ask members about their perceptions and opinions towards the viewing of the chosen program. It allows to direct observation of to what extent the members of the group believe that political satire is an important tool of democracy.

After the projection of a satirical program and through the questions that the moderator asked, the members were encouraged to discuss and compare their opinions with the other members.

Therefore it was possible to verify how the sample reacted to the satirical programs and establish to what extent the initial hypothesis of my research has been justified or contradicted.

4.1 Focus Group Structure

On the day of the data collection, the program chosen for the discussion was presented to the participants. In particular I showed an episode of "Italialand" to the Italian group and one of "Yes, Prime Minister" to the English one.

The focus groups, composed of 6 people, started with a dichotomous questionnaire where the participants were asked to answer the political issues later presented in the episode shown. The members of the two focus groups were asked to put a tick on one of the two possible responses: "true" or "false", in order to have a general idea of the initial preparation of the participants on the topics to be discussed, and afterwards check the new level of preparation they achieved at the end of the discussion.

After the questionnaire, the Italian and the English samples were shown to an episode of the two shows chosen for the research, in order to open, at a later stage, the discussion.

4.2 The discussion

The first part of the investigation addressed general topics such as the existing relationship between politics, television and satire on the one hand and the role of the viewers considered as active citizens on the other.

The second session of the focus group included more specific questions inherent in the episode and the political issues developed during the program. Thanks to the discussion it was possible to observe which were the points that influenced more the members, how their awareness on specific subjects was changed and how the interaction and the discussion made them feel an active part in the political process.

Political satire can be considered as a mirror of society, it represents what people are, what they think, how they behave. Therefore the outcomes that emerged from the research are very disparate from one country to the other, as they reflect the *civic culture* of each place.

4.3 Italian group

Italy is clearly facing a deep crisis, that is not just economic, but it is also concerning the political leadership and, indeed, the idea of democracy. A program like “Italialand” by Maurizio Crozza, represents exactly the *new political television* that Jones describes. In fact, after the viewing of the show, the sample of people involved in the focus group increased its awareness on political and economic issues.

The transmission of Maurizio Crozza, can be considered a hybrid between entertainment and satirical one-man show. It is one of the few cases in Italy, even more if you consider that is transmitted from a theater and not from a television studio.

The comedian, with a strong charisma, conducts the entire show with a great capacity of entertainment and satirical invective directed at politicians in office. He successfully entertains the audience, encouraging their laughter with sharp jokes and imitations. Crozza simulates the politicians, taking on their physical appearances and behavior with great versatility and creating paradoxical gags.

Crozza, therefore, with his incredible mime, creates a show that can entertain, but at the same time criticize and ridicule the political protagonists of Italy.

Moreover, from the dichotomous questionnaire, it emerged that the episode was also really useful to improve the knowledge of the spectators about political issues.

Below is a chart with the answers given in the dichotomous questionnaire before and after the projection of the episode of “Italialand”.

As can be observed from the table, after the viewing the participants had considerably increased their knowledge. At the end of the program all members gave the right answers to the questionnaire. It means that the program really helped them to improve their political awareness regarding Italian politics.

One of the participants said: “This program is even better than our TV news” and another continued: “Yes, I agree. TV news is fictional, fake, it’s made to support the politicians, whereas this program is authentic. It shows the scandals that are behind the power”. Another one said: “This comedian represents the Italians, our distrust in the institutions, our desire to change”. In other words, as Gray and Jones would affirm, this program is clearly an important tool of democracy. The use of the pop codes becomes an important form of political communication: the audience feels represented in its ideas and in its needs, the political satire leads to an active civic participation.

Therefore, politics is not addressed to be discussed and analyzed in its contents, but it is itself the object of mockery with its forms and its protagonists.

| | BEFORE THE PROJECTION | | AFTER THE PROJECTION | | | |
|--|-----------------------|-------|----------------------|-------|------------|----------------|
| | TRUE | FALSE | TRUE | FALSE | DON'T KNOW | CORRECT ANSWER |
| 1) Italy is involved in the economic crisis. | 6 | 0 | 6 | 0 | | TRUE |
| 2) The Lega Party used public money for personal interests. | 4 | 2 | 6 | 0 | | TRUE |
| 3) Italy has the highest corruption in Europe. | 1 | 5 | 6 | 0 | | TRUE |
| 4) Article 18 of the Constitution hasn't been changed. | 3 | 3 | 0 | 6 | | FALSE |
| 5) In Italy there is an increasing number of people that are evading taxes. | 5 | 1 | 6 | 0 | | TRUE |
| 6) The new political party "5 Stelle" took 10% of votes at the last political elections. | 3 | 3 | 6 | 0 | | TRUE |
| 7) The "Lega" Party won the last political elections. | 2 | 4 | 6 | 0 | | FALSE |
| 8) Italy has the higher debt in the EU. | 4 | 2 | 0 | 6 | | FALSE |
| 9) Italians pay 150 million Euros each year for the life annuity of the Members of the Parliament. | 1 | 5 | 6 | 0 | | TRUE |
| 10) The Minister Giovanardi suggests anti-homosexuality policy. | 2 | 4 | 6 | 0 | | TRUE |
| 11) The Italian public debt doesn't exceed the allowed threshold. | 1 | 5 | 0 | 6 | | FALSE |

Figure 1

4.4 English group

On the other side there is English satire. Unlike the Italian satirical programs, the English ones are more moderate: they don't attack directly the corrupted system, but they make fun of the politicians in a moderate way. English sarcasm is always masked, caustic but never offensive, humorous but not satirical.

"Yes, Prime Minister" is a satirical sitcom where all the characters are fictional and they just evoke the real leaders. It is a series of political satire that had been broadcast since 1980 on BBC 2 and more recently this year a new series. Each episode is about some of the main political and economic issues that affect the UK, but they are presented in a fictional context.

However, instead of what happened in Italy, this program didn't have such a strong impact on the political knowledge of the spectators. In fact the chart below shows how the political awareness of each participant didn't improve significantly after the episode.

As it can be observed, after the projection the participants had increased their knowledge just in a small part. Only one member changed her opinion on statement eight, ten and eleven during the course of the projection. However the general improvement is really low if considering the number of the participants and the number of questions.

Hence, this initial result seems to show that the thesis of Jones, Van Zoonen and Holbert failed: apparently the new political television has lost, in the UK, its capacity to present us with innovative ways to be politically engaged.

As one of the participant of the focus group said: "these satirical programs are entertaining, but they're definitely not new tools of democracy. They make me laugh, but they don't improve my political knowledge!". Referring to this sample, TV is still interesting just because of the news programs or because of the political debates. However they consider the new media as the new democratic tools that make them active citizen, active makers of contents.

Another member of the group explains: "anything that stimulates some degree of political interest, I think, is a good idea. [...] The general public don't know what the politicians [...] are up to and an interest in political issues is good, but if you are not in possession of all of facts, then you can only be scratching the surface and this is in the best in the interest of politicians and the establishment, and for you to not understand.

However satirical programs make you laugh, they sensitize you in a way [...]. They stimulate the interest because they are humorous, but actually they don't help you to bring your investigation much further!".

Therefore, according to the English, the idea of the *new political television* is dated. They consider satirical programs as pure entertainment, amusement, the democracy of the citizens is somewhere else.

| | BEFORE THE PROJECTION | | AFTER THE PROJECTION | | | |
|--|-----------------------|-------|----------------------|-------|------------|----------------|
| | TRUE | FALSE | TRUE | FALSE | DON'T KNOW | CORRECT ANSWER |
| 1) The UK is involved in the economic crisis. | 6 | 0 | 6 | 0 | | TRUE |
| 2) The UK is a member of the EU. | 6 | 0 | 6 | 0 | | TRUE |
| 3) The UK is a member of the EMU. | 1 | 5 | 1 | 5 | | FALSE |
| 4) The European Council and the Council of the European Union are the same thing. | 0 | 6 | 0 | 6 | | FALSE |
| 5) The Belgian Prime Minister has the presidency of the European council. | 2 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 1 | TRUE |
| 6) The Belgian Prime Minister has the presidency of the Council of the European Union. | 2 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 1 | FALSE |
| 7) The Council of the European Union is led by individual leaders. | 2 | 4 | 2 | 4 | | FALSE |
| 8) The Presidency of the European Council and the Council of the European Union have the same duration | 2 | 4 | 1 | 5 | | FALSE |
| 9) Europe is run by the president of the European Commission | 1 | 5 | 1 | 5 | | FALSE |
| 10) Turkey is a member of the EU | 1 | 5 | 0 | 6 | | FALSE |
| 11) Turkey is a member of the EMU | 1 | 5 | 0 | 6 | | FALSE |

Figure 2

5. Conclusion

This research has allowed to investigate a field of interest quite new in England and in Italy, that led to compare the findings within the two national contexts, with the International ones.

The aim of my work was to understand how political satire encourages a critical awareness of political issues and how it contributes to the formation of a civic culture.

According to Livingstone²⁰, the citizen should be observed by its prospective of spectators, “Being a member of the media audience is starting to be an essential way to perceive the public life.”²¹ From this point of view, according to Mazzoleni²², pop politics can be considered as a civic resource, able to reconcile the spectator with the politics and to put political information in the social network.

Satire is therefore an important component of pop politics that adapts itself and has been adapted to television’s needs. In other words, satire can be considered as an essential tool that informs about political and social issues.

From the qualitative analysis I conducted on the two samples, it emerged a clear difference between the Italian and the English role of satire. On the one hand the Italian findings confirmed the international studies to which I referred, on the other hand, on a first sight, it looked like the English findings were in contrast with my initial thesis.

In Italy, even if satire had a lot of restrictions – due to the control of the politicians –it seems that the genre remains an important tool to fight the abuse of power. In fact the Italian public has shown a preference for the personification of an idea or a political speech rather than abstract representations. Leaders with their personality traits, their manners and idiosyncrasies, their tics and weaknesses, have become the privileged object of media interest, which make it the target of good-natured irony or biting satire, sometimes up to excess.

Therefore the programs of political satire are perhaps the ones more allowed to go overboard with the emphatic representation of politicians and of their deeds.

Contrary to the Italian point of view, English people declared to find political satire an old tool of democracy, that has been important, but now it is just a form of entertaining. Maybe this change can be blamed on the public broadcast services, that, in order to compete with the private networks, have deprived satire of its original contents. Therefore satire could have lost its depth, maintaining just a humorous form. The English spectators wouldn’t find any answers to their political uncertainties; neither would they increase their political awareness. In other words the model of a new political television²³ wouldn’t exist.

²⁰ Livingstone, Sonia. “Audience research at the crossroad.The ‘imperial audience’ in media and cultural theory.” *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol.I, II (1998).

²¹ Cf. Livingstone, Sonia (1998), pp. 34-35.

²² Cf. Mazzoleni, Gianpietro, Sfardini, Anna, 2009.

²³ Cf. Jones, Jeffry P. 2005.

However, at this point, it is interesting to show how, on the other side, the behavior of the participants of the English group were almost opposite to what they affirmed.

The program of political satire showed, stimulated a great discussion among the participants. They often referred to what was mentioned in the episode and they frequently changed their opinions about relevant political issues.

In conclusion my research demonstrated how, in any case, satirical programs make the spectators active citizens, involved in the political issues, even though they seem to be not conscious about that. The reason of this discrepancy maybe lies in the differences existing between English and Italian satire.

Anyway satire, in both contexts, despite the cultural peculiarities, not only offers meaningful political critiques, but also encourages viewers to play with politics, to examine it, test it and question it rather than simply consume it as information or “truth”.²⁴

5.1 Recommendations for further study

This investigation has left a wide opening for further research. First of all, in order to improve the study and achieve a deeper comprehension of political satire within the UK and Italian television context, it should be repeated taking into account a wider sample of satirical programs broadcasted on the national channels. This quantitative research could be useful to check to what extent political satire programs have a relevant role in the national schedules.

Furthermore it would be interesting to choose some of the most representative satirical programs in the UK and Italian schedules and analyze them in order to consider the different formats they adopt and to examine the differing impacts they have on viewers.

Finally the study could be conducted on a younger audience in order to investigate if young people still consider political satire as an important tool of democracy, bearing in mind the increasing use of social media.

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²⁴ Cf. Gray, Jonathan and Jones, Jeffrey P. 2009.

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EUROPEAN IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE: A CASE STUDY ON THE NARRATIVES OF EUROPE

Gemma Scalise¹

Abstract: This article forms part of the scientific debate on European identity and develops the argument in respect of the problem of a deficit of democratic legitimacy in the European Union. The results of a case study bring to the fore the importance of the European public sphere in constructing a sense of belonging shared by Europeans.

Keywords: social identity; European identity; European public sphere; media discourse; European integration; Europeanization; narratives; meanings of Europe; participation; European citizenship.

1. The social construction of European identity

Following the major political and economic metamorphosis faced by Europe during the last sixty years, it can be said that the very identity of Europeans has changed. The social and cultural life of EU citizens is no longer necessarily linked to a specific place and the removal of borders, thanks to the processes of Europeanisation and globalisation, is giving way to an institutionalised “post-national condition”² on a political, economic and social level³.

Despite these profound changes, a number of empirical studies show that a healthy majority of European citizens state that they still identify themselves primarily with their own country, even though a large percentage of them refer to themselves in certain circumstances as “European” and the social category of European is not a contested one⁴. These results highlight a general difficulty with embracing the social construction of identity in contemporary Europe and understanding the social consequences stemming from the process of Europeanisation. This problem arising certainly from the difficulty of studying a complex phenomenon such as social belonging, is also linked to the fact that

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² Habermas, Jürgen. *The Post-National Constellation*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001. Print.

³ Recchi, Ettore, and Adrian Favell. *Pioneers of European integration*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2009. Print.

⁴ For more information on empirical studies see Bruter, Michael. *Citizens of Europe? The emergence of a mass European identity*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. Print; Citrin, Jack, and John Sides. *More than Nationals: How Identity Choice Matters in the New Europe*, in Herrmann, Richard, Thomas Risse, and Marilyn Bremen. *Transnational identities: becoming European in the EU*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004. Print; Karolewski, Ireneusz Pawel, and Viktoria Kaina. *European Identity. Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Insights*. Berlin: LIT Verlage, 2006. Print; Petithomme, Mathieu. “Is there a European Identity? National Attitudes and Social Identification toward the European Union”. *Journal of Identity and Migration Studies*, 2008 2, 1:15-36. Print.

within the scientific debate on identity the issue is still often understood and studied within its national and essentialist definition. Thus it tends to be fixed and a given, territorially bound and understood as an immutable common feeling that is typical of early modernity. A concept of this type, that ignores the activities of processing and reflection inherent in social belonging in contemporary life, is ineffective in defining the sense of belonging to Europe by EU citizens who live in the dynamic and transnational dimension of late modernity. Any discussion on the subject of the sense of belonging in contemporary Europe involves starting from a different standpoint, one that sees belonging as an identity "in the making"⁵ and that imagines it to be "deterritorialised" and set in a transnational dimension⁶.

The construction of identity within Europe can thus be investigated, both in its individual and collective dimensions, by considering the configurations that it has taken on as a result of changes in the organisational structure of society following the process of European integration. This can also be done by adopting micro- and meso-social analyses that consider social practices and the mechanisms governing communicative intermediation, the spread of consciousness and the construction of meanings that individuals use to refer to the concept of Europe and that give a sense to the link with Europe itself⁷. These levels of investigation allow us to go beyond the concept that sees how the state, culture and civil society correspond to one another, something that is typical of societies within nation states, and permit us to trace the origin instead of a society that still perpetuates itself in the social practices at play that are active in the transnational space. This analytical ability enables us to pinpoint the discursive construction of Europe through the public sphere, civil society and European citizens, all functionally interwoven with each other and which, by defining the involvement of citizens in the process of integration, reinforce and promote a European identity⁸.

⁵ Beck, Ulrich, and Edgar Grande. *Cosmopolitan Europe*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007. Print.

⁶ Shore, Chris. "Whither European Citizenship?: Eros and Civilization Revisited". *European Journal of Social Theory* 2004, 7, 1: 27-44. Print.

⁷ Eder, Klaus. "A theory of collective identity: Making sense of debate on a "European identity". *European Journal of Social Theory* 2009, 2, 4: 427-447. Print.

⁸ The concept of European citizenship is among the most controversial and hotly debated in scientific literature on this question. In some cases it is considered to be an institution that is symbolic rather than having any practical value due to the "elements of deficit" that define it. These include attribution on the basis of nationality that excludes some categories of immigrant citizens; the distance and poor representation of citizens due to a lack of actual powers on the part of the European Parliament; the absence of rights and social protections despite that fact that the concept of social citizenship has not been completely excluded from the project of integration. At the same time, this debate has generated interest in the role of citizens in the EU and participatory aspects leading to questioning about the existence of a European public sphere and the possibility of developing a sense of belonging through participation in European public life. For more on the debate, refer to Eriksen, Erik Oddvan. "An Emerging European Public Sphere". *European Journal of Social Theory*, 8, 4, 2005. Print.; Rumford, Chris. *The EU: a political sociology*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2002. Print; Trenz, Hans-Jörg. "Elements of sociology of European integration". *Arena Centre for European Studies, Working Paper*, 2008, 11. Print.

The means of communication play a central role in the construction of European society and in promoting EU legitimacy. In a non-hierarchical and multi-level governing system, negotiation and consensus depend and build themselves on a horizontal means of communication between institutions and society. The European public sphere is the structure of functional intermediation that generates cohesion, participation and a sense of belonging to Europe and where this fails to develop, it negatively affects the process of democratisation within the EU⁹.

The public sphere and civil society are dynamic elements of the bottom-up construction of European society; they are driving forces of the process of Europeanisation, driven forward by those who themselves feel in some way involved at a supranational government level. Public debate and civil participation are also fundamental elements of a narrative construction of European society because the narratives of Europe that circulate in the public sphere make EU citizens "feel united", linking them to events in the past and allowing for reciprocal recognition. By creating such a link between Europeans, the narratives enable the development of a sense of belonging: a European collective identity¹⁰.

If we assume that a public sphere is emerging in Europe, it becomes necessary to ask ourselves how this is influencing the ways in which ideas spread, how national and European public spheres interlink, what meanings and information are transmitted and between which social categories. In addition, it is important to understand how the public debate is evolving on various territorial levels as well as the role this plays within the processes of identification and with respect to the conceptualisation of Europe.

2. Media and conceptualisations of Europe: Findings from a case study

In order to look more closely at the relationship between the public sphere and the construction of a sense of belonging within Europe, I detail below some results from a research project designed to investigate the construction of European identity in a local context. The study concentrates on meso- and micro-levels and investigates shared narratives of Europe that are constructed through interaction and daily social practices and that circulate in networks of social relationships between "ordinary" Europeans¹¹.

⁹ Eriksen, Erik Oddvan. "An Emerging European Public Sphere". *European Journal of Social Theory*, 8, 4, 2005. Print.

¹⁰ Eder, Klaus. "A theory of collective identity: Making sense of debate on a "European identity". *European Journal of Social Theory* 2009, 2, 4: 427-447. Print.

¹¹ The research project developed out of the theory of "narrative identity" of the German sociologist Klaus Eder, according to whom the construction of European identity can happen by means of sharing the narratives in Europe that emerge, grow and circulate within the space of European communication. For further information, see Eder, Klaus. "A theory of collective identity: Making sense of debate on a "European identity". *European Journal of Social Theory* 2009, 2, 4: 427-447. Print.

In a case study, four different networks of social relations – joining secondary school teachers, pupils and their parents – have been selected. The networks were located in Tuscany, an Italian region that has traditionally been involved and active in European affairs. Two diverse local contexts have been chosen: Florence¹² and Prato¹³. These Tuscan cities are in close geographical proximity but very different in their economic organisation, cultural and political tradition, local history and social composition.

Between March and June 2012 forty individual interviews with teachers, students and parents were carried out in four schools – two *licei* [high schools] and two technical institutes chosen from different socio-economic and cultural strata. In addition, eight focus groups were organised within the classes. The number of students per class for the focus groups varied between ten and fifteen, involving a total of one hundred and twenty two in all, aged between fifteen and twenty.

The analysis of the narratives of Europe that circulate within these networks has enabled me to analyse how the conceptualisation of Europe has come about and understand how local and European identities coexist and communicate with one another and the role played by the public sphere in these processes.

2.1. Different imaginations of Europe

Europe has accumulated an immense narrative heritage. The many stories and unconscious assumptions within Europe circulate in the public sphere and among social networks, both physical and virtual, on a local, national and transnational level. The narratives allow us to order and understand the experience, and the sharing of stories is necessary in order to live in a multicultural and transnational context such as Europe and to contribute to the development of a feeling of identity.

“Europe” means something completely different depending on various contexts and circumstances as well as individual characteristics and experiences: it

¹²Florence is the capital city of the region and it is a prestigious tourist and university center. The city, governed by a left-wing mayor, is a major national cultural and economic center and the venue of annual EU cultural events like the “Festival of Europe”. Regional institutions as well as European and international organizations are located in the city, such as the European University Institute. Florence is influenced by transnational flows of people, cultures and meanings that shape everyday social practices and relations.

¹³Prato is an industrial district specialized in textile production. It is the Tuscany's second largest city, which experienced significant internal and external immigration. The second largest Chinese immigrant community in Italy is located in Prato. The formation of a Chinese ethnic economy operating inside the industrial district and the textile industry economic crisis, started from the 1980s, generated a demographic and socio-economic change of the city, a critical situation related to immigrants integration and to a high level of unemployment. The conjunction of all these factors led to a political change in 2009 with the election, for the first time since 1949, of a right-wing major. Prato's local system has been extensively studied (see Becattini, Giacomo, et. al. *From Industrial Districts to Local Development*. Edward Elgar Publishing: Cheltenham, 2003. Print; Trigilia, Carlo. *Small-firm development and political subcultures in Italy*. E. Goodman, J. Bamford (eds). *Small firms and industrial districts in Italy*, London: Routledge, 1989. Print.).

can embody images of modernity, cosmopolitan ideals, just as it can be seen as one of the “evils” of globalisation or simply synonymous with the EU.

Responses to the question "what does the word Europe make you think of?" were very different:

«When I think of Europe, I think of the different people who have crossed it over time and followed on from each another. I can't accept the idea of excluding anyone who has spent any time in Europe. For example the period of Medieval history when the Arabs were in Spain, or the cosmopolitan world of the Enlightenment – these are concepts I like to think about when I talk about Europe [...] that melting pot, that vocation to contain so many differences that Europe must be able to provide [...]. There are some powerful ideas nevertheless that make Europe stand out: a strong sense of democracy and the rule of law»¹⁴.

As mentioned earlier, not all Europeans perceive Europe in the same way:

«The images that spring to mind are Italy, the crisis, the Euro and the German Chancellor! Because ultimately, and especially in the papers and on television, when talking about Europe she's always there because there's a crisis and she is becoming the leader [...]. The history of Europe is that we have a crisis and this crisis brings us all together!»¹⁵.

Gathering and putting together different stories of Europe and investigating their origins is one way of illustrating which factors influence the construction of the citizens' link with Europe and the various elements that determine this. These include the milieu in which people live, the distribution of economic, social and cultural resources, different life experiences, varying educational achievements, different professions and the networks of social relations underpinning them. These are all characteristics that affect the conceptualisation of Europe and explain why people have such different ideas of Europe that lead to their having different links and senses of identity with it too.

2.2. The weight of media on the ideas of Europe

The media participate in the construction and spread of ideas, values, interests and opinions on Europe and the European Union¹⁶, which in turn affect the social construction of a European identity. The interpretations and salience attributed by the media to news influence public perception and varying “uses” of means of communication and of information that lead to the construction of different meanings associated with Europe.

The question “how did this idea of Europe emerge?” highlighted this fact:

«Reading, studying, finding out about things from the radio, newspapers, books. And on the internet, as well, I sometimes look for information on these

¹⁴ Italian and Latin teacher, High school, Florence, female, 48 years old.

¹⁵ Parent, Technical institute, Prato, male, 45 years old, factory worker.

¹⁶ In the narratives that were garnered, the terms "Europe" and the "EU" tend to overlap and be used interchangeably reflecting how Europe is used in communication within the public sphere, in national and supranational institutional speeches, in news reported by the media, in public debates and in informal discussions in everyday conversations.

questions [...]. My husband belongs to Attac, the international organisation, and he communicates with other activists from different countries and takes part in their activities so of course I have to admit that this influences our idea of Europe a great deal. More generally, I have signed up to lots of mailing lists so I receive information on international initiatives and recently I've also signed lots of online petitions, some of which are EU-related, and it seems a good thing to me to add my voice to these popular initiatives»¹⁷.

Some of the interviewees receive and go in search of a large quantity of in-depth information about European issues, through a number of media sources, some of them international, and chiefly by way of the radio, newspapers, specialised magazines and journals and internet. They belong to a group of individuals who have a specific interest in questions concerning Europe and who, for various reasons, often professional ones, surf institutional websites and take advantage of the possibilities offered by internet. They are often people with an international background and of mixed heritage and who have travelled or lived abroad. Knowing several languages allows them to study issues more in depth through the international press and foreign websites.

Interactive participation such as that offered by the internet, being able to link via social networks, mailing lists, blogs and online forums, all aid participation in the public sphere and in civil society organisations on a European and transnational scale. These media tools bring them into contact with people of different nationalities and backgrounds with whom they can share their ideas, opinions and narratives of Europe and the EU. And this has real influence not only on the conceptualisation of Europe but also on the construction of a social link between Europeans.

The internet is also the tool used to take part in forms of direct democracy, online debates and public consultations that enable new types of solidarity to spring up between individuals who share interests and values, that is to say Europeans who join together to express themselves and ensure their voices are heard. The actual sharing that stems from taking part in transnational networks affects their awareness of belonging to a social group called Europeans.

Most of the parents and pupils interviewed, on the contrary, stated that they do not try to find out about Europe via media, nor are they interested. Despite this the influence of the media in formulating their opinions and their behaviour towards Europe is evident. Interviewed pupils and parents share meanings associated with Europe that stem from being exposed to messages generated on national media, whether through watching television news or reading online newspapers, both of which are frequently described as ways of getting to know Europe and which, for many people, is the link to it.

«These meanings come from the mass media, watching TV, going online, indeed all these means of communication, it's a huge melting pot! I don't read newspapers chiefly due to lack of time [...] so I just limit myself to watching TV basically ... and going online, you get the same news as you hear on the TV, so you

¹⁷ Literature teacher, High school, Florence, female, 47 year old.

could say that my main source is the TV news but I have to admit that it's not something that I find that interesting»¹⁸.

The students who participated in group discussions in class share the ideas about Europe that are circulating on their own networks and reflect the image of Europe itself broadcast by other means of communication:

«We hear about Europe through the media, it's impossible to avoid comment on something that's happening, see an image of what's going on, the media bombard us with information and so you form an idea of Europe. What I read in the Italian press is that Europe is there to impose laws that Italy doesn't respect and so if we are to make ourselves fit into this Europe, which after all is something of an abstract body, we have to make sacrifices and our new Prime Minister raps us over the knuckles if we step out of line. However, I've never heard talk about Europeans, whether on the news, or on TV, there's never been any discussion on Europe, on who Europeans really are, perhaps because we're second class citizens in Europe as far as politics and the economy are concerned and perhaps because at the end of the day people aren't that interested in Europe»¹⁹.

2.3. A cosmopolitan European identity

Exposure to mass media and the content of messages they broadcast has a direct effect on tendencies towards Europe and contributes to the process of social construction of a European identity. Those who gave weight to positive narratives of Europe and who share favourable meanings vis-à-vis Europe stated that they use several media sources, including international ones, and that they look out for news about Europe because they are personally interested. Positive news items on the EU are also spread by those who appear to have more open and cosmopolitan identities. A Europe-oriented identity can be seen in those who have greater knowledge and familiarity with it and a better chance of fulfilling their needs by visiting other countries. These are individuals who are familiar with international cultural resources and participate in a public, transnational sphere and European, civil-society organisations.

«Being European is a tradition involving civilisation and culture; it's about the values of openness, freedom, democracy that have evolved over time. The European is ready to accept others, clearly upholding basic tenets such as the refusal of the death penalty. I feel proud to belong to this wonderful reality because there are marvellous things there, from a natural as well as artistic-cultural point of view. Proud of belonging to this part of the world that has produced so many beautiful things. From music, to culture, to shows, philosophy, art. For me, Europe is constantly part of my life because my points of reference and the way I think and do things are never just Italian, but at the very least European»²⁰.

Just by considering Europe as a daily fact, something that is simply part of one's everyday reality makes identities more open towards Europe. Awareness of

¹⁸ Parent, Technical institute, Prato, woman, 53 years old, unemployed.

¹⁹ Pupil, Technical institute, Florence, 17 year old.

²⁰ Parent, High school, Florence, male, 55 years old, head of photography.

the existence of European institutions on the home territory where we live combined with the fact that Europe is involved in all our lives, that our way of living is also regulated at a European level and not just locally and nationally, are all elements that help us build a strong identity with it.

«The first ideas we have of Europe stem from school, at primary school we start talking about Europe. Today the Europe I observe means all the many things that have become easier in my everyday life, if I think back to how I used to travel before the Treaties that opened up the borders and all the things I had to do, or if I remember life before the Euro, when you had to change your currency. And then there are all the food safety standards that we implement [...], all the non-Italian products that you find on sale when you go shopping, the public works that are carried out in towns and cities, structurally and on an ecological level, I am seeing so many changes, thanks to Europe, as well as getting to know people better. And I suppose it's the same for other Europeans»²¹.

2.4. A functional and localistic European identity

On the other hand, there are those who have emphasised all the endless media news stories on the negative connotations of the EU and who show a complete lack of interest in Europe and talk of their indifference or antagonism towards the EU project. These individuals have a weak European identity and confirm the hypothesis that such information tends to distance them from having any interest in a European dimension. An analysis of different socio-economic realities highlights that these differences are also linked to cultural and material factors such as a low knowledge base of activities and opportunities offered by the EU and are due in addition to a sense of exclusion from European practices and experiences.

«When I see the word Europe, I find myself feeling confused. In the sense that right now.... crisis, problems... between various EU countries... and the sense that we aren't so united, that we don't have a clear economic and political programme. We are less united than the United States of America. In the end, the Euro, which is something that brings us together, have made us collapse! [...]. Europe could be seen as an opportunity perhaps, but unfortunately we either are unable to or don't succeed in taking up these opportunities [...]. The problem is Italy. Here what we're experiencing of Europe is the crisis»²².

In the face of such narratives of inequalities, of a "two-speed" Europe, that talk of a sense of exclusion from European society, people react by closing themselves off and through identity-based "reterritorialisation"²³ that gives rise to an emotive rootedness with one's place of origin which is familiar and offers security.

«Europe interferes in our lives! There are specific matters that only we Italians know how to solve, not Europe, all this policy of sacrifice, it's the Italian

²¹ Parent, High school, Prato, female, 49 years old, public sector employee.

²² Pupil, Technical institute, Prato, 18 years old.

²³ Bauman, Zygmunt. *Liquid modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000. Print.

government that knows where to go to find money and not the EU. From my perspective the countries that are stronger than us have forced us to make choices that have not helped us. The weight of nations can oblige smaller countries, Italy included, to submit to the policies of the larger countries. I don't see why anyone must feel French, English, German or European when we aren't!»²⁴.

In these instances a more exclusive identity emerges in which the sense of belonging, linked to one's homeland, and the strong involvement in the local economic and social realities, together with the lack of trust in the national and European political institutions lead to a concept of a European identity as an extremely abstract condition. The perceived distance from international-based, social relationships influences the sense of closure towards Europe²⁵. The knowledge of the global market and the use of internet give people a “global awareness”; however, this does not mean they are automatically able to feel they are global citizens²⁶.

3. Conclusions

Different narratives of Europe are shared among Europeans: stories related to the cultural and historical roots of the continent, institutional and “official” narratives of the EU, biographical stories weaved together with collective memories. Multi-level stories, a mixture of values and references coming from the local and national heritage and linked to the European postnational plot.

In the broad range of the narratives which have emerged, the influence of the local context, where the stories originate, can always be identified. The stories of Europe are embedded in the regional territories. They are composed by elements coming from the political, economic, cultural and institutional local context and are developed in a European perspective.

The results of the case study underline the relevance of the local dimension on the meanings associated to Europe, which are built and explained using local resources. There is a dynamic relation between the local, national, supranational and transnational dimensions. These levels interact in the European identity construction process.

Europeanization is not just a matter of political and economic regulation, but also of social relations, expectations and normative values which overlap and are transnationally interconnected. The local dimension is part of these processes and the regional cultures, values and identities can be commended and conciliated in the European dimension.

From the narratives of Europe we can see shared criticisms of the Italian media as well as expressions of disapproval of the way in which the EU is represented through these means of communication, especially by television. The

²⁴ Parent, Technical institute, Prato, 59 years old, shopkeeper.

²⁵ Leonardi, Laura. *La società europea in costruzione*. Firenze: Firenze University Press, 2012. Print.

²⁶ Geertz, Clifford. *Mondo globale, mondi locali*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 1999. Print.

criticism concerns the absence of an international dimension to the news, the sparse and superficial media coverage of topics and events with a European dimension, often only given coverage in specialised journals and on special-interest internet sites. The general absence of any analysis of European policies by the mainstream national media is especially clear to those people who use and understand international media. Those who are more informed and interested in a European dimension are aware of the pertinence of information provided and the objectiveness or lack of it on the part of the means of communication.

«There are so many things involved: the redistribution of resources, employment, education. There are countries that have good ideas, in Europe, but these are not discussed in Italy. Here we are still talking about the same old things, about politics and national news. In Italy you know if Armani has held a new fashion show because all the TV news run five minute bulletins on it, but there is no five minute slot on Europe. You only know about things concerning Europe if you look for them. There are no jobs, there is no money to pay for education, the retirement age is rising and there's no work for the young. We need to talk about it because it's our future!»²⁷.

In translating European policies and in explaining, on a national level, EU notifications, an important role is played by the political class and the national media because it is they that mould the national public attitude towards Europe. Indeed, the political class and the national media act as filters for EU communications and this go-between role does not always favour the link or the sense of inclusion with Europe.

And yet the question of inclusion for European citizens and the closeness of European institutions to the countries themselves both play a large part in the crisis of legitimacy in the EU and in the political crisis that stems from the spread of Euroscepticism.

The public discourse on Europe is a central element in constructing a European society and the building of spaces for communication between Europeans is part of the political project of the EU. The European institutions can sustain this process, already underway, by including ever more citizens in the European public sphere, reinforcing the system of means of communication for European matters and creating a European public dimension. The European public sphere already exists but does not involve everyone as it is fragmented and divided. There is a strong component, the intellectual and political élite who actively participate, there is an intermediate public sphere made up of organised civil society, and then there is civil society in the full sense of the word, that represents a “weak” public space²⁸.

Those who do not have access to the European public sphere are limited to the debate on a national level. The European institutions have the task of bringing themselves closer to those who perceive Europe in a more distant fashion and who

²⁷ Parent, High school, Firenze, female, German national, 52 years old, doctor.

²⁸ Eriksen, Erik Oddvan. “An Emerging European Public Sphere”. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 8, 4, 2005. Print.

often belong to the lowest strata of society and they need to do so by getting closer to the realities of these people.

Linguistic plurality among European citizens is one of the biggest obstacles in constructing a transnational discursive space. Even if the spread of languages grows and involves all social and cultural strata, the public sphere and European media cannot reproduce the characteristics of a national public sphere, yet need to penetrate the existing national and local public spheres and so they must adapt themselves to a multi-level and plurilinguistic model²⁹.

European institutions can moreover promote other places where Europeans can meet and exchange views, such as transnational spaces for participation and communication (European associations, virtual communities, transnational movements) and thereby support the concept of European citizenship that is not just formal but actually based on social practices that involve active participation in public activities, that is to say a citizenship that understands how to conciliate the differences between the various ideas of Europe and its many identities and cultures spread across the European area³⁰. This would facilitate the democratic legitimacy of Europe by spreading a narrative of European citizenship that is not only an institutional narrative but also a narrative of belonging.

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²⁹ Linguistic and cultural plurality could be tackled by promoting it, highlighting the many differences within Europe, placing a higher value, for example, on translations, and not dumbing down to a *lingua franca* because "one language" is also a legacy of the nation state.

³⁰ Eder, Klaus, and Bernhard Giesen. *European Citizenship between National Legacies and Postnational Projects*. Blackwell: Oxford University Press, 2001. Print.

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THE FUNCTIONS OF RHETORIC IN THE BULGARIAN PUBLIC SPHERE

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Abstract: Political rhetoric in Bulgaria after 1989 has changed as a result of political, cultural, technological, social, philological, and media factors. The participants in the protests use social networks as virtual tribunes; Bulgarian citizens broadcast their civil demands in front of virtual audiences. Civil rhetoric is an instrument to involve the citizens in the political activities, to present the requests and suggestions of the Bulgarian citizens in front of the state institutions.

Keywords: Bulgaria; rhetoric; public sphere; dialogue; institutions; citizens; protests.

Introduction

The oratory of Bulgarian politicians plays a key role during the processes of transition from socialism to democracy, from a mono-party to a multi-party system; from passive behaviour to active citizen behaviour; from recipients of public speeches to participants in the different formats of virtual communication on political topics.

The hypothesis is that the Bulgarian political rhetoric after 1990 has undergone different transformations as a result of technical, technological, social and physiological factors. In addition, the traditional rhetorical matrix *orator-speech-audience* is transformed, virtual communication includes verbal and visual elements and the civil oratory displays new manifestations simultaneously with traditional public speaking.

Theoretical background

The definition given in Book I, Chapter 2 of Aristotle's Rhetoric states that "Rhetoric may be defined as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" (Aristotle 2004). We do agree with this basic notion but the actualization of specialized terminology is of crucial importance for the contemporary scientific knowledge. The constant observation of new articles and practices in the field shows that there is a growing diversity of rhetoric's applications in the modern world. Internet is one of the places where rhetoric is widely applied. **The Internet influences and changes the functions of rhetorical communication and Mavrodieva investigate.....???**

The traditional rhetorical genres *speech, report, lecture, address* etc. have stable positions in the contemporary public political speaking. More institutions, party leaders and NGO's are interested in traditional dialogical formats *conference, discussion, debate, seminar* and *press-conference*.

At the same time it is reasonable to designate new manifestations and some of new terms. Mavrodieva (2010) introduces the term *virtual rhetoric* in her book and she (2012) uses the terms *virtual political rhetoric* and *visual political rhetoric* (223-279). New genres on the Internet are *video-conference*, *webinar*, *virtual forums*, and *posts*. The Bulgarian state institutions prefer to inform citizens in an official manner and they avoid participating in virtual communication. The protesters take part in virtual forums and many of them publish posts in social networks. The posts are *verbal*, *visual* (pictures, photos, caricatures, video clips, parody of official public speaking, paraphrased words delivered by politicians etc.) or a *mixture of verbal and visual elements*. The multimodality is a feature of these short messages and some of them consist of animation effects, sound etc. The asynchronous virtual communication is networks mediated because the Bulgarian citizens use social networks to express their appeals and to share their positions. The traditional rhetorical matrix *orator–speech–audience* is transformed; everybody can be a sender and more protesters avoid accepting themselves only as receivers of political messages. Consequently, the political rhetoric in the virtual space has new manifestations and the virtual forums, posts and asynchronous dialogues after e-messages are some of them. The posts have common characteristics and one of them is brevity, some of the posts are original messages but others are shared with the virtual audience of active Bulgarian netizens.

The terms presented above are used in the article as the basis for my investigation of traditional and new rhetorical genres. The subject of the research demands an interdisciplinary approach including rhetorical analysis and visual rhetorical analysis.

The political speaking in Bulgaria after 1989 is characterised by its heterogeneity. The political rhetoric includes speeches delivered during street meetings, demonstrations and protests, state-political discourse, official statements, international negotiations, events and (Karasimeonov 10-112); press-conferences, politician's interviews and presentations posted on the Internet (Krasteva 79-102). Bulgarian political orators use verbal tools and non-verbal techniques but some speakers prefer to include visual elements presenting political ideas, slogans, appeals, and messages. Politicians appraise rhetoric as an instrument to create a personal political image and publicity and to legitimate new ideas in the civil society in Bulgaria. Only some political speeches have features of the best models of contemporary political speeches and most of them follow the model of routine public speaking (Mavrodieva 99-125). Bulgarian political rhetoric is also interpreted as a function of the state institutions, political parties and NGOs.

Civil rhetoric during the protests and demonstrations (1989-1990, 1996-1997, 2010-2013) has been transformed too and Bulgarian citizens present their demands more categorically. The participants in the protests use social networks such as Facebook and Twitter which they perceive as virtual tribunes; Bulgarian citizens broadcast the speeches, appeals, programs, and civil demands in front of virtual audiences. Krasteva (2013) uses the term "digital citizen" and she researches transformations in the society, party system and institutions determined by a new model of citizenship which includes using social networks (99-117).

Ildiko Otava investigates the eco-mobilizations in the contemporary Bulgarian civil society off-line and on-line (147-161). Mavrodieva (2013) focuses on the new manifestations of the civil oratory during the street demonstrations and virtual rhetoric in the social networks as part of the 'Bulgarian spring' (248-267).

Bulgarian politicians and citizens accept the Internet as a tool for mobilisation, they post information and use Facebook as an instrument for citizen activation and acceleration of the protests but they cannot combine effectively the digital literacy and political activities. Ivaylo Dichev analyses the new attitudes of the young Bulgarian citizens during the demonstrations on topics such as ecology, human rights etc. (14-44). Todorova (2013) investigates the Internet mobilisations and particularly the attitudes of the generations and the different kinds of participations in the protest using social networks (161-172). The brief observation presents a steady scientific interest in investigating the changes of contemporary Bulgarian society and the focus is on the manifestations, factors, communication channels and effects of using the Internet in political events, actions and processes.

State-political discourse, institutional rhetoric and party oratory

From a rhetorical point of view more Bulgarian politicians present political speaking in a boring manner; they re-present messages and appeals pre-prepared and announced. Politicians avoid real, media and virtual dialogues with Bulgarian citizens; they do not favour negotiations on the current and strategic topics with the representatives and leaders of the protests. The institutional political rhetoric is formal and banal and it plays an informative function, the persuasive function of the state-political discourse is reduced and it is subdued to a secondary place.

The theoretical approach includes publications concerning parliamentary rhetoric. Ilie (2003) investigated parliamentary debates in the United Kingdom (House of Commons), concluding that these debates are organized following, as well as breaking, parliamentary rules and that the spatial and temporal variables are specific features of institutional dialogue (Ilie, 2003: 269-291). She argues that parliamentary discourse is distinguishable for its agonistic features (25-53). We agree with the positions presented by Ilie and we would like to add that the parliamentary debates have established solid traditions in the National Assembly and in the contemporary Bulgarian state.

The debates in the National Assembly are agonistic dialogues and they play the role to present pre-prepared, co-ordinated and approved positions and the persuasive function has been reduced during the past decade. The effective dialogue has decreased as a result of the conformism to the party policy; political polarization has created opportunities for verbal aggression but not for consensus and effective dialogue in the legislative institutions in Bulgaria. The temporary conflicts or 'colds wars' between the Presidential institution and the National Assembly, between the Presidential institution and the Council of Ministers has established barriers to making decisions in favour of Bulgarian citizens.

The connection between oratory, politicians and ethos has been investigated by Zaleska (2012) and the results are presented in Chapter Two named "Rhetorical

Patterns of Constructing the Politician's Ethos" from her book "Rhetoric and Politics. Central/Eastern European Perspectives" (2012: 29-50). We completely agree with the positions presented by Zaleska that ethos is connected with credibility; ethos is a factor in identifying both the orator and the audience (2012: 29-50). The investigation of the oratory in the state institutions and political parties in Bulgaria demonstrates that the power of political speaking is changeable and the influences of public utterances under the Bulgarian citizens gradually decrease. The disappointments removed the attitudes of the Bulgarian citizens and frustration remains as a permanent manner of civil behaviour. Citizens are gradually losing interest in the state institutions, public speaking, media participation. Politicians regard themselves as political elite but they do not play a role of responsible and competent statesmen and strategic decision-makers. Fair play is substituted for personal, party and corporate interests. As a result their political utterances stop performing a function as a tool in the effective public dialogue.

The state-political discourse and party oratory have a pragmatic function, the ministers and political leaders deliver speeches presenting ideas, platforms, and programs. At the same time the rhetoric in the state institutions is determined by rules and norms, standards and constrains. These speeches, reports, utterances are delivered during parliamentary debates, meetings of the Council of Ministers, discussions initiated by the Presidency. The Bulgarian state-political rhetoric has its own traditions and specific features in the different institutions.

Party oratory is an inseparable part of congresses, conferences and election campaigns. Most political leaders prefer to deliver monologues (speeches, utterances, reports) and the main function of the political speaking is to inform the members of party but not to persuade the political opponents. The model *orator-speech-audience* has permanent attendance. The main figure is an orator who delivers a speech in front of the public. The members of this public are receivers of the messages and they send the signals of feedback to the political speaker. The model has several enlargements and variants, for example:

- 1 assigning a task to a politician – orator – speech – audience;
- 2 assigning a task to a politician – advice given by experts from different scientific fields (political sciences, philology, philosophy, history, European studies, anthropology etc.) – orator – speech – audience;
- 3 assigning a task to a politician – preparing of the utterance by a speech-writer and coaching of the orator by a trainer or a team of specialists – delivering the speech in front of an audience.

It is obvious that the traditional monologue is combined with the hierarchical decisions and the way from the initiation to the delivery is a long one.

Oral and virtual civil rhetoric

Civil rhetoric has started to be an instrument of involving citizens in political activities and process, of presenting the requests, proposals and suggestions of the Bulgarian citizens in front of the state institutions. The result of the analysis confirms the position presented by Christian Kock and Lisa Villadsen: "We see

rhetorical citizenship is a conceptual frame that emphasizes the fact that legal rights, privileges and material conditions are not the only constituents of citizenship; discourse that takes place between citizens is arguably the basis of what it means to be a citizen.” (Kock and Villadsen 2013). The civil oratory plays a role in convincing Bulgarian citizens that active positioning and rhetorical citizenship is a relevant tool in the civil society.

The rhetorical situation is changed; the messages are sent and shared on the horizontal level among the participants independently of the environments: social networks or streets. The hierarchical communication, instructions and strict control and party coordination are not typical features of the civil oratory and virtual communication. Dialogue and interaction are specific features of social networks; the political speaker is replaced by the e-communicator. Assigning the tasks is changed by citizen’s initiations and self-organization. The traditional channels are substituted by social networks; the simple verbal messages are changed by visual elements and multimodal products. The messages created online aid Bulgarian citizens in organizing the protests off-line, they re-organise the locations of the groups on-line. The actions, events, activities organized off-line are presented on-line as posts, photos, video clips in the Facebook groups established in favour of the protests. Some of them started in February named

„Occupy Bulgaria”, <<http://www.facebook.com/occupybulgarianstreets>>, <http://forum.4at.info/index.php?top>;
<https://www.facebook.com/events/424843110925585/>.

During the summer protests e-citizens started to use hash tag # and some of this groups are #Оставка (#Retirement), #протест (#protest), #България (#Bulgaria), #Идвайте (#Come along). It is obvious that social networks support civil rhetoric and that the Internet is an instrument of mobilisation and organisation and a specific PR and media channel to re-present messages, events and activities. The civil oratory includes clear words, short sentences and the leaders of the protests avoid sophisticated verbal style and metaphorical language. The protesters include new terms in their messages, they are anonymous authors, and they prefer participation in the street parades but not personalization and leadership. Probably it is a result of their behaviour as netizens (net plus citizens) in the social networks when more representatives of the Net generation avoid a demonstration of domination; they are members in the dialogical virtual formats. It is very important to specify that their messages are relatively new and unique manifestations because they are delivered orally in the streets during the demonstrations and simultaneously they are written on the posters as part of the performances. These are some of the protesters’ slogans: *civil quota, civil control, civil board, civil participation in the decision making process, institutionalization of the civil participation, civil control over state institutions, national protest, international investigation, electoral code, equal access to media during election campaigns, new organization of the elections, new voter lists or electoral rolls, transparency with regard to the connection between parties, institutions and corporations; abort state support for political parties, two mandates as a member of the Parliament, new Constitution, etc.* These words are not part of the ideological language but

they are a proof of a process of growing maturity of the civil society in Bulgaria. Most of these words are created spontaneously, they are written on the posters; in the slogans and delivered during the public speaking in front of the protesters. Most protest leaders don't have any experience as political orators but institutional leaders are good manipulators. The civil oral speaking is a tool of organizing the protesters, unfortunately, it is not an effective instrument of dialogue especially during political negotiations.

Virtual rhetorical analysis of the dialogue between the institutions and the Bulgarian citizens

This part of the article includes the results of the investigation organized on the basis of the rhetorical model presented by the researchers Jos van den Broek, Willam Koetsenruijter, Jaap de Jong, Letitia Smit in the book „Visual Language. Perspectives for both Makers and Users” (110-111). The model of rhetorical image analysis is reconstructed on the basis of the rhetorical canons and principles. The model includes 6 phases: the first one is named “0” and it includes analysis of the communication situation, of who the sender of the image is; what the medium is, etc. Phase 1 is named “Inventio” and it determines the choice of what is portrayed. Phase 2 includes the next rhetorical cannon (Dispositio) and it determines the formal arrangements of the image. Phase 3 (Elocutio) determines the devices that stand out. Phase 4 includes ethos, pathos, logos and it determines to what extend these three devices of persuasion are applied. The last one, phase 5 is the stage of final assessment and the question and research aim is: “What does this image aim to persuade you of, and how effectively are the chosen devices applied?” (Broek et al 2012: 110-111).

This article is a first attempt to investigate this topic in the Bulgarian rhetorical scientific tradition but the period of 23 years and the complicated subject do not permit us to research in-depth.

The corpus includes 300 photos, video clips, publications in the social networks and online media, especially Facebook, Twitter etc. The genres and materials are posts, video clips, caricatures, photos, appeals, messages, speeches, utterances, etc. The aim is to create a representative corpus including verbal and visual elements.

The communicative situation during the protests develops on three levels:

- oral political speaking, political and state-political discourse;
- communication during demonstrations;
- virtual communication in the social networks.

Strating from the first one is named “0” we can say that the communication situation is unique if we want to identify who the senders of the images are Bulgarian citizens who take part in the protests but not Bulgarian political leaders. The second interesting fact is that the medium is not only one. Some visual messages are created online and they are published as a post in the social network Facebook and after that they have a “second” life off-line. The creator does not write the name and the sender use as a medium a common virtual space when the

Bulgarian citizens accept themselves as citizens and at the same time as netizens, etc.

As mentioned above phase 1 is named “Inventio”; it is very interesting phase from visual rhetorical point of view because the protesters choose the parody and paraphrase but not official portrayal. This choice is reasonable because they express negative emotions and expressions follow this way, the members of the Council of Ministry and party leaders are described ironically.

Phase 2 (Dispositio) include arrangement of visual elements and the observation permit to summarize that more posters include two, three or four politicians and it is reasonable because the protesters express their disappointment in the Bulgarian political elite and in absent of mural of the current coalition including representative of the Bulgarian Socialist Party and the Movement for Rights and Freedom, supported by the nationalistic party “Ataka”. The clear and simple background is relevant because everybody can read the text and understand the message.

The results of the analysis in phase 3 (Elocutio) are presented below. Bulgarian citizens prefer to write appeals, messages and calls on the white background of the posters. The appeals are created very fast and they consist of rhetorical figures ellipsis, zeugma; slogans sound clearly and they are acceptable for most citizens who avoid verbosity and politically sophisticated utterances.

Phase 4 includes ethos, pathos, logos and from a rhetorical point of view the short and pathetic appeals are preferable because long phrases create communication barriers. As tension in the streets increases intricate explanations are not relevant. A telegraphic style is appropriate during the protests because civil communication avoids elaborate figurative language, verbosity and allegorical words. Written slogans are presented in front of hundreds of people and in front of journalists and cameras.

Phase 5 includes the final assessment and we can say that the visual appeals persuade real and virtual audience including the protesters but not the political decision makers. Short sentences and visual expression are typical features of the appeals; they consist of negative connotations, polar assessments and evaluations of the state institutions, political leaders, big corporations which are monopolists in Bulgarian business spheres and market.

Some of the reasons are completely different attitudes and manners of expression comparing Bulgarian citizens and Bulgarian politicians.

Politicians prefer clichés and an amorphous style, but the citizens’ expectations are to hear clear political messages. Politicians speak about *political system, security, stability, responsibilities, crisis, democracy, civil society, patriotism, dialogues, discussion* etc. The sense of appropriateness is absent from most political speeches and official institutional utterances.

The citizens write direct appeals and slogans on the posters and placards and they articulate orally the same appeals: „*You are not sufficiently intelligent to manage us*”, „*Mafia out*”, „*No mafia*”, „*People against mafia*”, „*Citizens Strike Back*”, „*2013: Oligarchy – forbidden*”, „*Oligarchy – out*”, „*March! Out!*”, „*After the „Borissov plan” and the „Oresharski” plan comes the “March All!”*”. Other

slogans are „*National protest: Retirement of the Oresharski cabinet*” „*Go voluntarily! You have a choice at present! After that we will use force!*”.” The appeal “*Retirement!*” is used very often. It is clear that the words „march”, „mafia”, „oligarchy” „out”, „go out” are also frequently used. These messages are shared very rapidly across social networks as texts and as photos from the street protests.

The effective dialogue between the institutions, party leaders and citizens is actually absent. The members of the street demonstrations initiate spontaneous performances, which consist of creative elements but they have not experience to take part in complicate and long political negotiations in a business like way. The requirements of the Bulgarian citizens are refused and the tension increases permanently. The representatives of the state institutions avoid a participation in a constructive dialogue with the members of the protests. The political elite is capsulated and the citizens prefer to establish a new virtual tribune. Most of the protesters have profiles in social networks, so they create virtual groups. Digital Bulgarian citizens publish posts, photos, video clips; they share and broadcast them across the social networks. The dialogue is on three different levels: real, virtual and a combination between the two. For example, an expert in philology who is a member of the Bulgarian Socialist Party evaluates the e-citizens as ‘*internet vagabonds*’, ‘*internet lumpens*’. This rhetorical approach, which is named argumentum ad hominem, activates the protesters who write on the posters and on the wall of the social network Facebook the following slogans: “*I am not an Internet lumpen!*” and they include emoticons, smiles and positive visual images, bright colours and multi-coloured slogans.

The active participants in the protests give answers while politicians follow in a passive manner, they send trivial messages and express institutional positions using traditional means. Citizenship is manifested on the Internet, the protesters send answers and slogans using the social network Facebook and more rarely Twitter. They have established a site named “*Dance with me!*”, which has expanded very fast and now has a Facebook group and hash tag. The protesters add further elements such as “Smile” against the passive official position. The virtual tribune is used effectively by politically active Bulgarian citizens who have digital skills: #**ДАHCwithme** – Smile. This hash tag is a special virtual tribune, it updates its content permanently, the creators of the content and appeals being dozens of people.

Some politicians accuse the protesters that they receive money and that some party pays them, that they have no ideas, ideals and that this is not a spontaneously organized action, that they play the role of small actors in the big political scenario written by politicians or by groups and foundations from abroad. The members of the demonstrations write immediately on the posters and on the walls: “*I am here free of charge!*”; “*I am not paid!*”, “*I am here gratis!*”, “*I hate you free of charge*”, “*I hate you gratis*”.

The next reproach is that the more active leaders are paid by “The Open Society” and that George Soros has given grants to several members of various NGOs. The argumentum ad hominem is “*sorosoid*” and the answers in virtual space are photos of Sergey Stanishev as a leader of the Bulgarian Socialist Party

featuring next to Soros. The easy and fast access to the information from the Internet helps the protesters to verify the facts and to prepare, send and share new information immediately. Most young participants in the demonstrations prefer transparency, at the same time they avoid an aggressive approach during the dialogues in virtual forums. Some Bulgarian citizens take part in brief dialogues, the protesters as e-communicators prefer to write emotional appeals on their own Facebook walls; they appreciate this social network as a personal virtual tribune. The protesters do not have a long and solid experience as virtual debaters; they are members of political virtual forums and they express clearly their positions, they argue the official political messages presenting verbal and visual arguments selected predominately from the Internet. The members of protest groups improve gradually their skills in argumentation in Internet political discussions (the term was introduced by Marcin Lewinski in his book "Internet Political Discussion Forums as an Argumentative Activity Type" (Lewinski 2010).

The parody and caricatures, the variants of humour is another preferred approach. In the social networks, the protesters publish caricatures presenting the prime-minister, the leader of the „Ataka” party, the leader of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms as winners of the Olympiad of the deaf people. The visual elements and the humour express the political refusal to hear citizens’ demands.

The protesters in Bulgaria have written in a poster “*A one-way ticket to Mars! The red planet for the government!*” The figurative language draws a parallel between the government being retired and sent into exile on the planet Mars. The metaphor establishes meaning associations meant to emphasise the negative evaluations of the political elite.

The slogan “*One way ticket. You go out. We stay here!*” is part of the photos featuring two young people (a boy and a girl) who are carrying a poster with the same slogan. The visual image has a positive connotation and at the same time it makes a reference to socialism when the ticket to any country outside the socialist camp metaphorically and literally was a method or mode to immigrate. The other contextual sense is the need to establish a new order. Boney M’s song “*One way ticket*” of is now applied to a different political context.

Some of the slogans on the posters are written using different colours and as a mix between two alphabets – Cyrillic and Latin - and between two languages: Bulgarian and English. On the one hand, it is a creative invention; on the other hand, it is a manifestation of the positive visual messages sent by protesters.

Bulgarian citizens combine words with a negative connotation from different languages and this specific combination is a way to present their disappointments. The message is “*Shame! Schemed! Срамом! Vergenza! Honte! Позор! Vergonga! Срам! No More!*”

Young Bulgarians who are not burdened with memories dating back to socialist times and who have a sense of the freedom of speech, digital literacy, and political culture use the English language to present their position more clearly – namely that they do not tolerate political parties and they prefer instead to change the political system and the practices of political management in favour of the Bulgarian citizens and they write the slogan ‘*It’s not about Right vs. Left! It’s about Right vs. Wrong!*’

The protests in Bulgaria are heterogeneous as requirements and appeals. At the beginning, Bulgarian citizens created negative slogans. Gradually the messages have changed and the demands are presented more clearly and in a more structured way. They talk about *new rules during the election campaigns; equal access to media; transparency concerning decisions and budget, European projects and financial support; new Constitution, etc.*

The rhetoric is manifested on a visual level. Parody and paraphrase are preferable approaches because visualisation is impressive and powerful and encoding it is very easy and fast. The posters are also represented in the Facebook groups. One of them imitates the official poster of the new version of the movie “*Les miserables*”. The faces of the main heroes and characters are replaced by political faces – those of the leaders Stanishev, Siderov, Mestan and prime-minister Oresharski. The text (*Проклетниците – wicked men*) is paraphrased with *Bulgarian words of cursed (клетва- проклетник - проклетници)* but not of the “*клетник*” (miserable) and the sense is not miserable but accursed by Bulgarian citizens.

The parody and the paraphrase are basic visual and verbal elements of the poster with the faces of Stanishev, Siderov, Mestan in the place of Marx, Engels, and Lenin on one the most popular posters during the socialist era. The verbal slogan is “*They were born by the red flag*”; the red colour and the red flag being the symbols of communism. The synchronisation between verbal and visual elements establishes good opportunities for easy encoding.

Parody is the main element of the posters presenting the waltz dance between the political leaders Stanishev and Siderov and between Stanishev and Mestan. The political context is that the lobbyism, lacking in transparency and coulisse negotiations and stipulations make the dialogue between politicians and citizens difficult. The visual image is enlarged and the poster presents the civil demands as a dance with all parties: „*Dance with me to the end of BSP, MRF, Ataka, CEDB*”, “*Dancing Stars! Dance with me!*” The hats as visual elements consist of symbols: the first one is typical of a soldier of the Soviet Army and Sergey Stanishev as leader of the Bulgarian Socialistic Party is wearing it, Volen Siderov as a leader of the nationalistic party is wearing a hat typical of Nazi soldiers and Lyutvi Mestan as a leader of the ethnic party of the Turkish minority has a red fez.

Visual rhetoric is manifested during street art and performances. The remarkable celebrated picture “*Liberty Leading the People*” painted by Eugene Delacroix was presented as a performance on 14 July. It was young people who took part in this performance and they demonstrated a creative approach, drawing parallels between political processes.

The public speaking of the protesters and the official political rhetoric do not reach a common ground. The emotional appeals of the Bulgarian citizens and born political and state discourse do not have cross points. These factors establish irrelevant opportunities for dialogue between citizens and legislative institution (the National Assembly), Council of Ministers, and political leaders. The messages

sent by protesters to politicians sound in another surface and space; communication channels, words, visual elements are the part of another parallel level.

Conclusion

The state-political discourse and party oratory has the pragmatic orientation, the normativisation and regulation are features of the institutional rhetoric in Bulgaria after 1990. Parliamentary debates, meetings at the Council of ministers, public discussions (between politicians, NGOs and citizens) initiated by the state institutions are organised in accordance with the rules and norms, traditions and stereotypes. The utterances, speeches, reports are prepared beforehand and only some of them are delivered spontaneously by political leaders and statesmen. The main function of the speeches in front of members of the parties during conferences, congresses are informative. The utterances during the election campaigns present proposals on the basis of their political platforms and programs. Unfortunately, the public debates in the contemporary Bulgarian society do not carry out; the dialogue between the institutions and the citizens is not accomplished. The monological utterances dominate, the media carries out the representative functions. Political rhetoric makes popular political leaders, political ideas and concepts. During the last two decades after 1990 the oratory has become generally known of Bulgarian political class and political elite.

The citizens make use of an oratory and in particular verbal and visual elements during oral communication and street protests and in the virtual environments. The participants in the protests use brief sentences; they avoid verbosity, ornateness, abstract words, clichés. Most Bulgarian protesters are e-communicators, they are citizens and at the same time they are e-citizens who accept virtual communication as a place when they discuss the topics initiated by them. From their point of view social networks and virtual forums are a virtual tribune and virtual agora. The freedom of speech and new technological circumstances determine a new model of behaviour, new attitudes to write, prepare, design, share and broadcast very easy and fast the information across the social networks. Web 2.0 and new technical devices and apparatuses (I-phones, smart phones, tablets, etc.) provide opportunities for easy and fast re-location in the streets of Bulgarian towns, for mobilization and for self-organization. The participants in the protests are creators of the content in the virtual space across social networks. They are not passive receivers of messages or viewers in front of their TV sets. The active members of the virtual forums and groups create and send the appeals permanently avoiding hierarchy and coordination with the party structures and political management. The initiators of the civil protest are active in the social networks and they use them as a virtual megaphone – using figurative language – to inform about the protests and about the results of the events every day and permanently all day long. The new model of behaviour of e-citizens is completely different from the traditional hierarchical model of political institutions and this is one of the reasons for not being able to organize and conduct the dialogue between Bulgarian state institutions and Bulgarian citizens over the past

five years. The citizens prefer informative and not too abstract words, real plans and not concepts, correct proposals and not empty promises; they have stopped believing in pseudo-elites and leaders who do not follow the model of moral and ethical leaders and statesmen.

Bulgarian citizens and Bulgarian politicians use the Bulgarian language on two different levels. Some leaders of opinions in the virtual space are active citizens, but unfortunately online communication does not succeed in influencing off-line civil communication and the political dialogue. Traditional political rhetoric and civil communication in the street protests have not cross-topic, the oral political discourse and social networks are two parallel realities and they accelerate new communicative problems. On the one hand, politicians could develop a way of speaking correctly and effectively as party leaders, ministers and members of the Bulgarian Parliament. On the other hand, Bulgarian citizens could develop and improve their rhetorical skills and attitudes to take part in the complicated political negotiations for the general benefit. The civil participation, civil control and open door to interactive political communication is one of the ways to start, conduct and finish successfully the public dialogue between state institutions, political parties and citizens.

In conclusion, it is reasonable to say that political rhetoric and civil oratory have parallel manifestations in the contemporary Bulgarian society, they play a key role in the public space but an effective dialogue between the state institutions and citizens has not been established.

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ENDORSING CHANGE FROM A CONSERVATIVE PERSPECTIVE? THE CASE OF A NEW ROMANIAN RIGHT-WING PARTY

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Abstract: This study aims to investigate how the attitude towards change is expressed in the discourse of a Romanian right wing political organization, Noua Republică (The New Republic) which was legally recognized as a party in January 2013. The corpus consists of the texts of five infobulletins mailed by the organization during February and March 2013. The topics covered in the selected texts concern the party's identity and its attitude towards the health reform and towards Romania's foreign affairs policy. The research draws mainly on critical discourse analysis methods, employing van Leeuwen's (e.g. 2008) theory on the representation of social actors. The results show that the party's identity is constructed on a real but also on a symbolic level as an in-group opposed to the group represented by the government parties.

Keywords: legitimation, social actors, political discourse, Romania, right wing, identity, othering.

Introduction

Political change is a defining feature of democratic societies, where the alternation of different political parties to the government allows all political groups – and therefore all the electors – the possibility to have their interests represented by the governing structures. This study aims to investigate the case of the Romanian party Noua Republică (The New Republic- NR). This opposition party claims to represent a valid alternative to the governing parties and employs various discursive strategies in order to legitimate the necessity of such a major political change. Its discourse addressed to the possible electors focuses mainly on a marked polarized representation of the main political actors represented by the governing and the opposition parties.

There are several reasons for this investigation. At present, there are some important studies on Romanian political communication² but this topic still

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² Ilie, Cornelia. Managing dissent and interpersonal relations in the Romanian parliamentary discourse. In Ilie, Cornelia ed. *European Parliaments under Scrutiny. Discourse strategies and interaction practices*. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2010; Chelaru-Murăruș, Oana. *Style and Rhetorical Strategies in the Discourse of a Romanian Nationalistic Party. A Case Study: Corneliu Vadim Tudor's Parliamentary Speeches*. In Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu, Liliana, Melania Roibu and Mihaela-Viorica Constantinescu eds. *Parliamentary Discourses across Cultures. Interdisciplinary Approaches*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2012: 151-172; Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu, Liliana. *The Historicity of Democracy*. In Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu, Liliana,

deserves further analysis within the field of disciplines like pragmatics, discourse analysis or rhetoric. Another reason regards the fact that the discourse of right-wing organizations in contemporary Romania also deserves further investigation, especially from a comparative perspective. First, it should be compared to the discourse of extremist organizations in pre-communist Romania and thus be placed in a historical continuum. Second, comparisons with the discourse of other European right wing parties may also provide useful findings. One last reason for this research regards the medium used for getting the political messages to the electors. Computer-mediated communication tends today to become a significant alternative to traditional media and this is also the case for political communication. The use of direct e-mails in order to get the political messages across to the electors represents an original technique in the Romanian public sphere.

Romanian political life before and after communism

The two major political forces in 19th century Romania were the Liberals and the Conservatives. The first party represented the interests of the middle class while the second one was sustained especially by the landowners, the rich members of the upper class aiming to preserve their large estates. The Conservatives insisted on the preservation of the traditions and of the differences between social classes. In time, the Conservative Party weakened considerably so that in the interwar period the Liberal Party remained the strongest political force in Romania followed by ‘Partidul Național Țărănesc’ (The Peasants’ National Party). Extremist organizations also gained force in the first half of the 20th century. The Communist Party was founded in 1921 but it was declared as illegal soon afterwards, in 1924, and remained prohibited by law until 1944. As a reaction to the communist organization, the extreme right-wing group ‘Legiunea Arhanghelului Mihail’ (‘The Legion of the Archangel Michael’) was founded in 1927. Members of this organization participated in the successive governments formed in 1940 but, in order to obtain the complete control of the state, the organization started an anarchic movement known as the ‘legionnaire rebellion’, consisting in thefts and massacres throughout the country. This rebellion was stopped in January 1941 through the intervention of the army and Ion Antonescu, the President of the Council of Ministers, took complete control of the government.

‘Legiunea Arhanghelului Mihail’ sustained an ideology which was profoundly religious and based on a moral evaluation of the members of other political parties and the chosen name is suggestive for its doctrine. The word *legiune* alludes to the Roman origin of the Romanian people as the party members

Melania Roibu and Mihaela-Viorica Constantinescu eds. Parliamentary Discourses across Cultures. Interdisciplinary Approaches. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012: 197-208; Zafiu, Rodica. The Epideictic Discourse in a Deliberative Context: Political Statements in the Romanian Parliament. In Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu, Liliana, Melania Roibu and Mihaela-Viorica Constantinescu eds. Parliamentary Discourses across Cultures. Interdisciplinary Approaches. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2012: 133-150.

viewed themselves as descendants of the legionnaires of the Roman Empire. The reference to the Archangel Michael is also connected to the idea of war and army. According to the Romanian Orthodox religious beliefs, Michael is the warrior archangel, the one leading the army of angels in the great battle against the demons. His name literally means 'who is like God' and it is his God-like character that enables him to bring justice everywhere in the world. In Romanian popular culture, Michael was associated with Death and represented as the Angel of Death, one of his responsibilities being to ascertain that the spirit of the dead received the deserved reward or punishment. The figure of the Archangel Michael signifies the triumph of the Good over the Evil but also the idea of final inexorable judgment both at a cosmic and a personal level.

One of the first consequences of the coming to power of the communist forces was the dissolution of all other political forces around 1950. Between 1948 and 1965, the unique political party was 'Partidul Muncitoresc Român' (the Romanian Labourers' Party), which afterwards changed its name to 'Partidul Comunist Român' (the Romanian Communist Party). The revolution in December 1989 marked the end of the totalitarian regime and the beginning of the transition towards a capitalist society. Leftist forces have still been represented in the Parliament and formed various governments in post-communist Romania. However, one of the major goals of all post-revolutionary governments and parties was to distance themselves from the communist doctrine and to enforce their democratic orientation.

How far, how right?

According to the data available on the party's website, NR was founded in June 2012 and entered into an alliance with other parties ('The Electoral Center-Right Alliance') which allowed it to run in the elections held in December 2012 and to obtain one senator position in the Romanian Parliament. The status of NR as a political party was officially acknowledged at the end of January 2013 and the party became a member of the Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists (AECR) at the end of 2013.

Being a new party, one of the main challenges that NR faces involves distinguishing itself from other previous Romanian parties. It needs to construct a coherent collective identity and also to find specific discursive topics in order to legitimate its presence and actions in the public sphere and to delegitimize those of the competitors.

The party status explains NR ideology as a combination between classical liberalism, Christian democracy and modern conservatism. The mainstream parties which are closest to this positioning in the Romanian political sphere are Partidul Democrat Liberal (PDL, the Democrat Liberal Party) and Partidul Național Liberal (PNL, the National Liberal Party), both positioned as moderate right parties. However, NR's discourse in the first stage of its existence indicated support for PDL and opposition towards PNL. This choice is grounded above all in the values openly assumed by PDL, whose key topics include anti-communism and

‘realization of justice’ (*înfăptuirea justiției*)³. NR disagrees openly with the positioning of PNL as a right wing party because of their decision to form an alliance with the Leftist force represented by Partidul Social Democrat (PSD, the Social Democrat Party) which allowed them to become members in the recent government.

NR’s economic policies support free-market economy and competition alongside with a reduced role of the State. As Green⁴ notes, the determination of the role of the State represents a major issue for conservative politics throughout the 20th century. The politics led by the British conservatives in the last decades starting with Enoch Powell and Margaret Thatcher show a growing orientation towards libertarian principles instead of paternalist ones⁵. NR adopts such principles not only because of its explicit inspiration from Anglo-American conservative models but also because laissez-faire policies and anti-statism are opposed to the ideology of the former communist regime.

The asserted orientation towards conservatism and especially towards Christian democracy distinguishes NR from other contemporary Romanian parties. The ideology grounded in Christian democracy is more frequently sustained by parties in some West European states like France, Germany, Belgium or Italy and it derived from the increasing preoccupation shown by the Catholic Church for the social and political situation at the beginning of the 20th century⁶. In pre-communist Romania, the development of a political ideology influenced by Christian values was characteristic for the National Peasants’ Party, with whom NR attempts to create a symbolic affiliation. Furthermore, this choice also links NR with other prominent Western right wing parties such as the German CDU (Christlich Demokratische Union).

By choosing this ideological position, NR also runs the risk of being associated by the voters with the former ‘Legion’ and thus be perceived as a radical instead of a moderate right wing party. The party status and the texts analyzed show that the authors of the messages are aware of such risks and state their rejection of extremism. However, the question arising at this point would be how to define precisely the ‘extreme right’ and whether NR shows signs of such a potential radicalization.

In the last two decades, a few Romanian parties have taken an explicit radical stance, with little success in the long term. One of these parties, ‘Partidul Noua Generație’ (New Generation Party), founded in 2000, appeared to have

³ The Status of PDL, art.4, paragraph 1. n.d. Web. 9 January 2014. <<http://www.pdl.org.ro/statut>>

⁴ Green, E.H.H. Ideologies of Conservatism. Conservative Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century. Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2002: 140.

⁵ Green, E.H.H. Ideologies of Conservatism. Conservative Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century. Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2002: 247-248.

⁶ Scoppola, Pietro. La democrazia nel pensiero cattolico del Novecento. In Storia delle idee politiche, economiche e sociali, diretta da Luigi Firpo. Volume sesto. Il secolo ventesimo. [1972]. Seconda edizione riveduta e accresciuta. Torino: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 1979: 113-123.

maintained some elements from the doctrine of the 'legionari'. The only political party which still legally exists is 'Partidul România Mare' (PRM, Greater Romania Party), founded in 1991, though it has not received enough votes at the last elections in order to gain Parliamentary representation. PRM is centered around the charismatic figure of the party founder and leader, Corneliu Vadim Tudor, who is actually the most prominent figure of the organization⁷. In comparison to this strategy, Mihail Neamțu, the president of NR, has chosen a more discrete approach. One of the analyzed texts shows the emphasis placed on the connection between the party founders, members, supporters and electors and on the creation of a community of views. Furthermore, the PRM leader constructs his discourse by highlighting national values and rejecting ethnic, religious and sexual minorities. Such a stance is not explicitly adopted in the NR corpus analyzed. Yet, the discourse of the infobulletins issued after the period selected for research shows recurrent topics like national identity and values and even some rigid views, as for example the rejection of same-sex marriage.

As the analysis of the selected texts shows, NR's identity is not far from right wing populism because of its constant criticism towards the political elites. According to Jaschke⁸, populist right parties claim to plead for the interests of the citizens against the corrupt elites and thus address directly to 'the people' as a coherent community instead of targeting specific classes or groups of voters. Populism is also one of the conceptions characterizing right wing extremism in the model developed by Harrison and Bruter (2011). The model encompasses two ideological dimensions, authoritarianism and negative identity, each one with two possible ideological conceptions: a reactionary and a repressive one for the authoritarian dimension, and a xenophobic and a populist one for the negative identity dimension⁹. However, the authors note that populism may be a durable or a temporary characteristic of a party's discourse¹⁰. Though populism characterizes other extreme right wing parties such as the Front National in France, there are also specific topics of such discourse that are not addressed in the NR discourse. The immigration issue, a common topic for West European parties¹¹, does not represent a problem in present Romania. Instead, the xenophobic dimension may take the

⁷ Adamson, Kevin, Sergiu Florean and Tom Thieme. Extremismus in Rumänien. In Jesse, Eckhard and Tom Thieme. Hrsg. Extremismus in den EU-Staaten. Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2011: 318-323.

⁸ Jaschke, Hans-Gerd. Rechtsextremismus und Fremdenfeindlichkeit. Begriffe, Positionen, Praxisfelder. [1994]. Zweite Auflage. Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 2001: 31.

⁹ Harrison, Sarah and Michael Bruter. Mapping Extreme Right Ideology. An Empirical Geography of the European Extreme Right. Basingstoke-New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

¹⁰ Harrison, Sarah and Michael Bruter. Mapping Extreme Right Ideology. An Empirical Geography of the European Extreme Right. Basingstoke-New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p.42.

¹¹ Ivarsflaten, Elisabeth. "What Unites Right-Wing Populists in Western Europe? Re-Examining Grievance Mobilization Models in Seven Successful Cases". *Comparative Political Studies*, 41: 3-23, 2008.

form of a violent discourse against ethnic minorities, but no references about – either pro or against – minorities were found in the corpus. On the whole, its discourse shows that NR attempts to appear as a party composed of members with modern views, excluding extremism and, at the same time, related to former Romanian parties and politicians famous for their opposition against communism.

Corpus and characteristics

The corpus consists of the texts of five unsolicited e-mails which I have received during February and March 2013. The sender of the messages was labelled as ‘Noua Republică’. The messages were selected from a larger array of e-mails for two reasons. One reason regarded the topic discussed, which was, in all cases, clearly connected to the concept of social and political change. Another reason for the selection regarded the period when the messages had been issued. As NR’s status as a political party was acknowledged by the Romanian State at the end of January 2013, the messages issued in the following weeks appeared to be very relevant for understanding the party’s doctrine and standpoint. The research questions are: (1) how are the in-group and out-group defined in the party’s messages and (2) how does NR legitimate the need for a government change.

Each message sent has the form of a brief newspaper article, but the content differs. The texts ‘Vrem domnia legii într-o Românie bogată!’ (‘We want the law to rule in a rich Romania’ - DL) and ‘Noua Republică merge mai departe’ (‘The New Republic goes on’-NR) focus on the presentation of the party’s identity. The other three texts present the stance taken by the party on a specific issue, as indicated by the headline: ‘Acordul transatlantic: o oportunitate pentru antreprenorii români’ (‘The transatlantic agreement: an opportunity for the Romanian entrepreneurs’ – AT), ‘Reforma Sănătății: protagoniști vechi și soluții la fel de vechi’ (‘The Health Reform: old actors and just as old solutions’ – RS), ‘O Nouă Constituție pentru o Nouă Românie’ (‘A New Constitution for a New Romania’ – NC). The text ‘Noua Republică merge mai departe’ (‘The New Republic goes on’) is the only one which does not represent an autonomous article. It contains only an excerpt from the speech held by Mihail Neamțu, the founder and the president of NR during the National Meeting of the NR party members, and a link to the party’s website for accessing the entire speech. For the purposes of the analysis, this link was accessed in order to retrieve the entire speech and to avoid drawing conclusions based on a single excerpt taken out of the context.

The choice of computer-mediated communication in order to convey messages for the electors is not uncommon for Romanian politics as, for example many politicians and parties – if not all of them - have webpages, personal blogs or social media accounts. The innovation lies in the technique used by NR, the direct e-mailing, which is usually exploited by corporate advertising. As Wodak notes, political life tends increasingly to be organized according to marketing principles. Contemporary media tend to present political activities and politicians in a ‘fictionalized’ manner and, at the same time, political communication involves a wide range of genres apart from the traditional political speeches, some of them

involving advertising techniques¹². A possible explanation for the choice of this technique is that at the beginning of 2013, NR had less access to ‘traditional’ media like the television or the print media than the leading political parties. As a consequence, they found less conventional means of communication – like the electronic and the social media – in order to get their messages across to the audience.

It is still difficult to assess whether the messages fulfilled the party’s objectives or not. They may have contributed to informing the audience about the existence of the party and its constructed identity. However, when direct mailing is used, the sender has little control upon the composition of the audience reached by the message and it is likely that the receivers of the NR mails were varied and had different political views, opinions and education. The content of the messages reveals that the text producers attempted to avoid such drawbacks by appealing to what may be called ‘standard common ground’, in other words a system of values and beliefs which had the least chances of being rejected.

Theoretical framework

Political communication tends currently to be equated with the use of language with persuasive or manipulative goals¹³. Such a view derives from the ideas advanced by Berger and Luckmann regarding the role played by language in the construction of reality. It is not surprising, therefore, that the importance of language appears to be only tacitly acknowledged in the field of political studies¹⁴. However, the use of language in the political domain represents a major research direction for critical discourse analysis, because of its contribution to ‘the enactment, reproduction and legitimization of power and domination’ in society¹⁵. Power and legitimation are key concepts for understanding the structure and functions of contemporary political discourse.

A common characteristic for CDA research is the interest in the social and not the (inter)personal dimension of power which is generally defined in terms of asymmetry and dominance though with some variations. For example, the social dimension of power is highlighted by Reisigl and Wodak¹⁶, who advance a general

¹² Wodak, Ruth. *The Discourse of Politics in Action. Politics as Usual*. Hampshire-New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011: 3.

¹³ Wilson, John. *Political Discourse*. In Schiffrin, Deborah, Deborah Tannen and Heidi E. Hamilton eds. *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. Malden, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers. 2001: 409.

¹⁴ Chilton, Paul. *Analysing Political Discourse. Theory and practice*. London, New York: Routledge, 2004: 3-4.

¹⁵ Van Dijk, Teun A. *Critical Discourse Analysis*. In Schiffrin, Deborah, Deborah Tannen and Heidi E. Hamilton eds. *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. Malden, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers. 2001: 360.

¹⁶ Reisigl, Martin, and Ruth Wodak. *The discourse-historical approach*. In Wodak, Ruth, Michael Meyer eds. *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*. London, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2009: 89.

view of power relationships as being ‘asymmetric’ and occurring between social actors ‘who assume different social positions or belong to different social groups’. A cognitive approach is preferred by Van Dijk¹⁷, who explains social power as the ability to exercise control over ‘the acts and minds’ of other groups or of the members of other groups.

Another recurrent point in CDA is the preoccupation for the distinction between various forms in which power may be exerted in society. Fowler¹⁸ distinguishes between two types of linguistic processes intended to the achievement of social control: directive practices and constitutive practices. According to him, social control is gained especially through constitutive practices which contribute to “the construction of institutions, roles, statuses that preserve the hierarchic structure of society”¹⁹. A similar opinion is advanced by Fairclough who observes that a mark of contemporary societies appears to be the trend to exercise power through consent instead of coercion²⁰. This appears to be the case of the majority of political discourse, issued either by governing parties or by opposition groups. The state is traditionally viewed in CDA as the most significant among the institutions aiming to enforce their domination in the society especially because the state has the largest array of resources at its disposal in order to create social consent²¹. However, attention should likewise be paid to the discourses which attempt to challenge the dominant perspective and offer an alternate representation of the reality. The new representation may be different from the one preferred by the elites, nevertheless just as subjective. NR discourse illustrates this idea as the messages construct a reductive and polarized representation of the society in order to persuade their audience. Similar to all other actors on the political scene, NR attempts to project its “practices as universal and ‘common sense’”²².

The framework chosen for the data analysis is van Leeuwen’s theory of social practice²³. Based on the Foucauldian view, discourse is defined as ‘a socially

¹⁷ Van Dijk, Teun A. Critical Discourse Analysis. In Schiffrin, Deborah, Deborah Tannen and Heidi E. Hamilton eds. *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. Malden, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers. 2001: 354-355.

¹⁸ Fowler, Roger. Power. In Van Dijk, Teun A., ed. *Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. Vol. 4. *Discourse Analysis in Society*. 1985.

¹⁹ Fowler, Roger. Power. In Van Dijk, Teun A., ed. *Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. Vol. 4. *Discourse Analysis in Society*. 1985: 64.

²⁰ Fairclough, Norman. *Language and Power*. [1989] 2nd ed. Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 2001: 27-28.

²¹ Fairclough, Norman. *Language and Power*. [1989] 2nd ed. Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 2001.

²² Fairclough, Norman. *Language and Power*. [1989] 2nd ed. Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 2001: 27.

²³ Van Leeuwen, Theo. *Discourse and Practice. New Tools for Critical Discourse Analysis*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008; Van Leeuwen, Theo. Discourse as the recontextualization of social practice: a guide. In Wodak, Ruth, Michael Meyer eds. *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*. London- Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2009: 144-161.

constructed knowledge of some social practice²⁴. Social practices are ‘socially regulated ways’ of action that include: participants with specifically ascribed roles, a specific set of actions, performance modes, presentation styles, times, locations, resources and eligibility conditions that need to be fulfilled²⁵. The analysis focuses on the representation of the social actors in the given discourse and on the legitimation of the social action, aiming to identify some of the most frequent strategies employed.

Discussion of the results

The main aim of the study is to investigate the manner in which a new and small right wing party as NR attempts to construe its identity discursively in the communication with the mass of electors. The selection of the texts forming the corpus does not, however, imply that all messages issued by NR since its foundation belong only to the infobulletin /news article genre. During 2013, NR has become more visible in the print and visual media, for example through the interviews given by the party president. In addition, its relationship to the supporters and voters is not limited to the use of the media, but also consists in direct meetings. Thus, the communicative strategies at the disposal of the party are broader than those representing the focus of this analysis. A larger corpus would have been more difficult to investigate, first, because of reasons of space. Second, it is important to remember that political parties also undergo a process of development and adjust their programmes and communicational strategies in response to the evolution of the national and international context. Last, but not least, it is also possible that the party’s messages to its electors vary according to the targeted number of voters. At the beginning of its existence, a political party is more likely to choose ‘safe topics’ in order to attract as many supporters as possible and radicalize its programme only in the maturity phase. The following analysis of the five texts issued by NR does not claim to be representative for the entire political communication of the party throughout its existence so far, but for the views expressed in the first stage, after its foundation. In order to answer the two research questions, the analysis will first focus on the means of construing the speaker’s identity and the ‘othering’ strategies related to it. In the second section, the four legitimation categories identified by van Leeuwen will be introduced in order to assess the signification ascribed by NR to political and social change in the Romanian society. Besides, both sections will try to examine the NR messages taking into account the populist dimension pervading the ideology of contemporary right wing parties (though not exclusively right wing) as discussed above.

²⁴ Van Leeuwen, Theo. *Discourse and Practice. New Tools for Critical Discourse Analysis*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008: 6.

²⁵ Van Leeuwen, Theo. *Discourse and Practice. New Tools for Critical Discourse Analysis*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008: 6 sqq.

Social actors as culprits and rescuers

The main social actors represented in the examined corpus are: the party NR, the opposing political groups and the Romanian citizens. The aims of the messages are to differentiate NR from the other political parties and to create a relation of solidarity with the citizens who form the audience of the messages. The differentiation from the other parties is realized through a marked relation of antagonism, leading to the construction of an in-group identity positioned versus an out-group.

The most common strategies used in the NR discourse are differentiation and appraisal. While the first strategy constructs the differences between the in- and the out-group, the second one implies the use of evaluative lexis, labelling social actors as good or bad²⁶. Through the use of these strategies, NR constructs its identity at two levels. At the concrete level, it states its political views as a new actor on the political stage. At a deeper level, it also constructs a symbolic identity, by depicting the opposition between NR and the other parties as a struggle between good and evil.

This is a recurrent feature in the discursive creation of in- and out-groups, which ‘necessarily implies the use of *strategies of positive self-presentation and the negative presentation of others*. [italics in original]’²⁷. The opposition between identity and alterity in the political domain is extensively discussed by Connolly, who pays attention to the philosophical dimension of this relationship. He identifies two ‘problems of evil’ on the political level, concerning the attempt to create and preserve a hegemonic identity, which can be done only by defining what is different as evil. In order to maintain the created identity, it is necessary also to define an ‘other’, opposed to it²⁸. It should be noted that Connolly’s observations apply both to the sphere of international and national politics. In the last case, the enemy is not represented by another state, but by a political organization whose views and courses of action are perceived as different and menacing to the identity of the organization or political actor in question. Here, Connolly points out an interesting paradox: it is necessary to live in a democracy in order for difference to ‘establish space for itself as alter-identity’. At the same time, the democratic society allows the legitimation of a dogmatized identity²⁹. This observation applies well to the case of NR discourse: the party rejects the government parties labelling them as totalitarian, but it would have been impossible for any party to exist and take such a stance, had it not been a democratic environment.

²⁶ Van Leeuwen, Theo. *Discourse and Practice. New Tools for Critical Discourse Analysis*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008: 45.

²⁷ Wodak, Ruth. *The Discourse of Politics in Action. Politics as Usual*. Hampshire-New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011: 40.

²⁸ Connolly, William. *Identity/Difference. Democratic negotiations of the political paradox*. [1991]. Expanded edition. Minneapolis-London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002: .ix-x.

²⁹ Connolly, William. *Identity/Difference. Democratic negotiations of the political paradox*. [1991]. Expanded edition. Minneapolis-London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002: .x.

The in-group is first represented by the party NR. Such references occur in all the five texts analyzed, usually in order to assert the party's standpoint on specific issues. The nomination of NR as a social actor is realized through the use of the name (*Noua Republică*), through the first-person plural pronoun 'we' (*noi*) and corresponding verb forms or through constructions with the corresponding possessive adjective (*partidul nostru*/'our party'). The use of the party's name creates the impression of objectivity and at the same time, represents the party as a monolithic force. No persons are individualized within this group, a strategy which creates the impression of solidarity and coherence:

'The New Republic sustains a real constitutional reform.' ('*Noua Republică susține o adevărată reformă constituțională.*' (NC).

Occurrences of the 'we' pronoun and/or the corresponding verb forms were found in four of the five texts examined and they fulfilled more complex functions. The first-person plural pronoun mitigates the impersonal character of the e-mailed messages as a mass communication technique and adds to the value of personalization. 'We' is frequently used in the corpus as a synonym for NR, suggesting the idea that the political organization is not represented as a mere abstract entity, but as a group of people:

'Our party defends the two fundamental axes of democracy and of the rule of law: economic freedom and independent justice. We want money for the Romanians and a justice that is honestly done!'³⁰

In the example above, the party fulfills the role of the Agent, while the 'Romanians' have the position of Beneficiary. This is an instance where the 'we' pronoun is used with an exclusive meaning. The receiver of the messages is often cast in the role of the witness, assimilated in the large category of 'Romanian people'. Similar to all political parties, NR highlights its desire and ability of defending the interests of the common people and, in order to sustain these ideas, NR presents itself not only as a leading political actor but also as a representative party. It is likely that at the beginning of 2013, NR had less members than other political parties. However, the party discourse attempts to avoid the representation of NR as an isolated political organization. By emphasizing the existence of common values and beliefs, the NR discourse extends the in-group until it virtually incorporates all Romanian citizens:

'We are born to talk to the millions of citizens who stay at home, disgusted. Millions of righteous and honest citizens have grown tired of the torment of surviving from day to day, of the scarce money and of an

³⁰ 'Partidul nostru apără cele două axe fundamentale ale democrației și statului de drept: libertatea economică și justiția independentă. Vrem bani pentru români și o dreptate cinstit împărțită! (DL)

undignified life. Millions of hard-working Romanians feel defied by the class of the newly rich people, by the flashiness of the nomenclature emerged in our eternal transition.³¹

This excerpt illustrates how the representative character of the party and its connection to the citizens are expressed by means of the aggregation strategy, which includes the use of quantifiers (van Leeuwen 2008: 38). The quantifier *milioane* ('millions') accompanies here the nouns *cețățeni* ('citizens') and *români* ('Romanians') and marks the antagonism between social actors also in terms of numbers: 'we', 'the citizens' are many, 'they', 'the rich people', are only a few. In this example, the aggregation strategy is combined with the positive evaluation of the in-group and the negative evaluation of the out-group.

The writer of the mails does not address the receivers directly. The only occurrences of second-person pronouns were found in the speech delivered by the president of the party at the national meeting of the party members and supporters. The speech highlights the existence of an in-group that comprises the current party members and supporters:

'While you, Ladies and Gentlemen, you didn't only complain, didn't only think about, didn't only talk, didn't only write letters waiting for the news. You, brave people, reliable men and women, energetic young people and wise seniors, from Valahia and Moldavia, from Banat and Transylvania, you, unlike the others, you rolled up your sleeves, gave up comfort, started working and in one year and a half, you perfected a new party, born and not made – a living, bold and clean party, a party of freedom, nurtured with few resources but animated by great values.'³²

The relation with the audience is marked through the repeated use of the Romanian honorific pronoun *dumneavoastră* (a polite version of the second person pronoun 'you') which is commonly used for expressing the distance between speaker and addressees. Here, the honorific functions as a marker of respect and even contributes to creating an inclusive, not an exclusive relationship as the speaker praises the audience and evaluates their actions as positive. Instead of foregrounding his role in the creation of the party, the speaker presents it as a

³¹ 'Ne-am născut pentru a le vorbi milioanelor de cețățeni care stau acasă dezgustați. Milioane de români drepti și cinstiți s-au săturat de chinul supraviețuirii de pe o zi pe alta, de bani puțini și o viață nedemnă. Milioane de români gospodari se simt sfidați de clasa parveniților, de ostentația nomenclaturii formate în veșnica noastră tranziție.' (DL)

³² 'Dumneavoastră, însă, Doamnelor și Domnilor, nu doar v-ați plâns, nu doar v-ați gândit, nu doar ați vorbit, nu doar ați scris răvașe în așteptarea noutății. Dumneavoastră, ca niște oameni curajoși, bărbați și femei de caracter, tineri energici și vârstnici înțelepți, regățeni și moldoveni, bănățeni și ardeleni, Dumneavoastră așadar, spre deosebire de ceilalți, v-ați suflecat mânecile, ați renunțat la confort, ați trecut la treabă și, într-un an și jumătate, ați desăvârșit un partid nou, născut, iar nu făcut – un partid viu, curajos și curat, un partid al libertății, hrănit cu resurse puține dar animat de valori mărețe.'

collective work. The representative character of the party is suggested by the description of its founding members, comprising virtually all categories of age, gender, and also geographical origin. Throughout Mihail Neamțu's discourse, the group represented by 'us' is often distinguished from other groups, which are either referred to by indefinite pronouns as *unii* (some) or *mulți* (many) or by nouns or noun phrases, especially in relation to other political parties, as will be discussed below.

The examples introduced above show a clear tendency of constructing a marked positive identity of the party as in-group. In addition to that, the 'people' are also represented as a secondary social actor, in a highly idealized manner. The Romanian citizens are depicted as being honest and hard-working (having only qualities), but also poor (as victims of the context and, more precisely, of contemporary politicians). They are represented as being threatened by the political elites at present but as certain beneficiaries of the NR policies in the future. It should be noted that the idealized representation of the 'citizens' is also very homogenous: they are all Romanians and come from all historical regions of Romania, but no word is mentioned about the ethnic or religious minorities living in Romania. In spite of the fact that the corpus contains no explicit rejection of minorities, the references to the category of party supporters as being 'Romanians' may represent a form of implicit suppression of the minorities, thereby excluding them from the public sphere.

An interesting characteristic is the extensive depiction of the villified Other in all the analyzed texts. Though the main purpose of the e-mails should have been the construction of NR's identity as a political party, this goal is never fulfilled independently of the depiction of the Other. The positive presentation of the party NR is achieved through the parallel construction of an out-group that encompasses various negative traits. The e-mails have therefore a mixed character, juxtaposing the presentations of both social actors. In contrast to the few nomination strategies used to designate the in-group, references to the out-group comprise a wide array of nomination strategies.

First, the out-group is represented by the contemporary political parties and NR's differentiation from these parties is made through 'ideologically contested' terms³³ like 'socialist' or 'communist'. In the case of NR discourse, the antagonism is intensified by the fact that the right wing party is in opposition while the left wing alliance forms the current government. In the following excerpt, the repetition of the term 'socialist' enforces the negative connotation and underrates the alliance formed by the governing parties:

□The regime installed after the misappropriation of the Revolution in December 1989 by a group of important members of the former Romanian Communist Party was an authoritarian one. [...] The partial democratization between 1996 and 2000 had no consequences for the long

³³ Fairclough, Norman. *Language and Power*. [1989]. 2nd ed. Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 2001.

term. The elections remained corrupt. The dirty money remained at the politicians' disposal. The local administration and the Justice have remained in a state of disorganization.

The Socialist Alliance (USL) pretends now that they want to revise the current Constitution. This action is of a rarely seen hypocrisy, even for the miserable standards introduced by the Ponta regime.⁷

We remind [you] that the same Socialist Alliance (USL) organized a coup d'état during 3 – 6 July 2012 that frightened the civilized Europe, being condemned by the European Union and the Venice Commission as a menace against the state.³⁴

The real name of the alliance appears only between parentheses, as the acronym 'USL' which stands for 'Uniunea Social-Liberală' ('the Social – Liberal Union'), formed by a left-wing party, the Social – Democrat Party together with the National Liberal and the Conservative Party. The adjective *social* might have had positive connotation for the large public as it is frequently used in structures like *măsurile sociale* ('social measures') or *protecție socială* ('social protection'). The writer replaces this term with *socialist* which is more likely to have negative connotations for many Romanian electors, reminding them of the abuses of the communist dictatorship.

The critique directed against the contemporary politicians is embedded in a more extensive frame which appeals to the collective memory of the audience by giving a particular interpretation of recent history. According to this perspective, the last two decades in Romania's history represent only a period of stagnation. In the example discussed above, one of the lexico-grammatical means of expressing this idea is the repetition of the verb *a rămâne* ('to remain') in three parallel structures. Besides, what NR states is that the Romanian governments after 1989 have not been different from the dictatorial communist government. Even if some political leaders of today were not members of the government after 1989, a negative judgment is cast upon all of them by the mere association with the Romanian Communist Party. The members of the first post-revolutionary government are not nominated here, but, instead, they are referred to by means of functionalization, as *activiști ai fostului Partid Comunist Român* ('important members of the former Romanian Communist Party'). The NR discourse thus

³⁴ Regimul instaurat după deturmarea Revoluției din Decembrie 1989 de către un grup de activiști ai fostului Partid Comunist Român a fost unul de tip autoritar. (...) Democratizarea parțială din perioada 1996-2000 nu a avut urmări de durată. Alegerile au rămas corupte. Bani murdari au rămas la dispoziția politicienilor. Administrația locală și Justiția au rămas într-o stare de dezorganizare.

Alianța Socialistă (USL) pretinde acum că dorește să revizuiască actuala Constituție. Acesta este un gest de o ipocrizie rar întâlnită chiar în raport cu standardele lamentabile introduse de regimul Ponta. Amintim că tot Alianța Socialistă (USL) a organizat o lovitură de stat în perioada 3-6 iulie 2012 care a speriat Europa civilizată, fiind condamnată de Uniunea Europeană și de Comisia de la Veneția ca un atentat la statul de drept.

assimilates the class of actual political leaders to the former communist elites, responsible for countless abuses towards Romanian people and violations of human rights.

The villification of the Other is frequently performed by means of assimilation. This strategy implies the reference to a social actor as a group³⁵ and as a consequence it allows no place for differences within this group. According to the view advanced by NR, all political actors are equally bad. This is a strategy which directly enforces the uniqueness of NR as being the sole political force that truly serves the citizens' interests:

'Every day, the actors of the political life seem to distance themselves more and more from the Romanians' expectations. The socialist power buries the country in bankruptcy. Putting an end to poverty and driving away injustice seem to be vain promises.'³⁶

In this fragment, the ideological antagonism is associated with a polarized social relation, viewed in terms of a class struggle. This representation additionally activates the powerful rhetorical topos of threat, drawing attention to what the behaviour of the political elite, depicted as contrary to the citizens' welfare.

The negative representation of the Other is connected to a negative depiction of the current economic and social situation of Romania and the out-group is depicted as a culprit and held responsible for the current state of affairs. In addition, the collective identity of NR is constructed through the recourse to a symbolic frame, aiming to make the party stand out among the other Romanian parties. This dimension was particularly salient in two of the texts analyzed, one presenting the party's perspective on Romanian politics in general and another one including the speech held by the president of the NR party in February 2013.

The symbolic representation of social actors is realized especially through metaphors that carry highly affective evaluations. For instance, the out-group is sometimes represented through metaphors of illness and death. The last excerpt included the verb *a îngropa* ('to bury') used in order to represent the activity of the government parties. In the speech delivered in front of the party supporters, Mihail Neamțu refers to the out-group in terms of physical illness, especially cancer. All such references appeal to a powerful script, regarding the attack on a human body by an insidious and evil enemy.

'The New Republic appears today in the life of the Romanians from everywhere as continuing an older project of a country, but also as a work

³⁵ Van Leeuwen, Theo. *Discourse and Practice. New Tools for Critical Discourse Analysis*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008: 37.

³⁶ 'În fiecare zi, actorii vieții politice se îndepărtează parcă tot mai mult de așteptările românilor. Puterea socialistă îngroapă țara în faliment. Ieșirea din sărăcie și alungarea nedreptății par niște promisiuni deșarte.' (DL)

of healing the open wounds in the body of our nation, a work of exorcising an endemic evil and an attempt to stop a cancerous metastasis.³⁷

Following this argumentative thread of the speech, the identity of NR is constructed by means of symbolic references to life. Not only is the party represented as being able to ‘heal’, but the discursive construction of the party’s identity undergoes a process of anthropomorphization, NR being presented as a person. The texts examined include references to the ‘birth’ of the party and Mihail Neamțu even speaks of the party’s identity card. A further characteristic of the NR discourse is that the party even acquires Messianic traits. For instance, NR is depicted through an apparently ambiguous construction in the following excerpt of the party president’s speech. The expression *născut, iar nu făcut* (‘born, and not made’) appears in the Orthodox prayer *Crezul* (‘Credo or the symbol of faith’) referring to Jesus Christ and his miraculous birth.

‘you perfected a new party, born and not made – a live, bold and clean party, a party of freedom, nurtured with few resources but animated by great values.’³⁸

Another connection to the figure of Messiah occurs in the depiction of the three major hardships that the party founders had to overcome, according to Mihail Neamțu. What stands out here is the number of three and the reference to the second impediment as the ‘second temptation blown away’. The lexical choices allude to the three temptations which, according to the Christian religion, the devil presented to Jesus while he was praying in the desert. This representation casts the political struggle into a more complex frame, not only of Good versus Evil, but the fight led by Christ against the devil:

‘First, we defeated the apathy of an abused people. [...] The second temptation blown away by the New Republic was the struggle against the kaffian bureaucracy of an oversize State. [...] Finally, the New Republic survived the fight against the USL propaganda and upheaval machine.’³⁹

The appeal to ideas stemming from the Christian theology is not random. It functions as another means of differentiating the party from the communist doctrine, which dissuaded religious beliefs, labelling them as ‘mysticism’. The

³⁷ ‘Noua Republică apare astăzi în viața românilor de pretutindeni ca o prelungire a unui mai vechi proiect de țară, dar și ca o operă de tămăduire a rănilor deschise în trupul națiunii noastre, o operă de exorcizare a unui rău endemic și-o încercare de stopare a unei metastaze canceroase.’ (NR)

³⁸ ‘ați desăvârșit un partid nou, născut, iar nu făcut – un partid viu, curajos și curat, un partid al libertății, hrănit cu resurse puține dar animat de valori mărețe.’

³⁹ ‘Mai întâi, am înfrânt pasivitatea unui popor dezabuzat. [...] A doua ispită spulberată de Noua Republică a fost lupta cu birocrăția kaffiană a unui Stat obez. [...] În sfârșit, Noua Republică a supraviețuit luptei cu mașinăria de agitație și propagandă a USL.’

presence of Christian elements in the NR discourse links its ideology with that of the Romanian 'legionari'.

The construction of in-group identity is based on shared opinions about the current state of affairs. Generally speaking, criticizing somebody implies holding a sort of authority over the targeted persons, the ability to notice their errors and the advantage of being in a position to judge them. As NR is not a party represented in the Parliament, the construction of such critical messages addressed to the large public is one of the few ways available in order to assume for itself a special type of authority. The asymmetric power relationship existing between governing and opposition parties is thus inverted at least on the discursive level, if not in real life. By means of the dichotomic representation of the social actors, NR assumes a political but, even more important, a moral authority. The negative values connected with the advanced representation of the 'political Other' are: lack of democracy, lack of transparency, an authoritarian regime, even lack of civilization. The NR party presents itself as immune to corruption and to compromises and as the only party that understands the dissatisfaction of the 'common people'.

Legitimizing change

The discursive legitimation of social actions concerns the act of providing reasons for a specific practice. In the case of political discourse, legitimation regards the practice of the elections: voters must be persuaded that they should vote for a specific party or person instead of for another. Legitimation is an important dimension of NR messages, as NR needs not only to persuade as many citizens as possible to vote for it, but also to financially support the party. Further, NR needs to show that the change of the current government is necessary and that NR is the only reliable actor in the political sphere.

Van Leeuwen identifies four categories of legitimation strategies: authorization, moral evaluation, rationalization and mythopoesis. All categories are represented in the corpus which indicates the importance of the discursive legitimation for the party. The most frequent category is that of moral evaluation, deeply connected with the positive presentation of the in-group and the negative presentation of the out-group. The critique is expressed in terms of moral values: the out-group is portrayed as corrupt, deceitful and lacking the knowledge and the abilities required to govern a state. At the lexico-semantic level, most texts (4 out of 5) show a strong tendency towards overlexicalization in the depiction of reality, towards the accumulation of lexical items with strong negative meanings, like 'poverty', 'bankruptcy', 'injustice' or 'blackmail'.

The negative evaluation of the out-group (especially of contemporary politicians) is connected to one of the main ideas stated in the NR e-mails: the need for justice. As one of the examples above showed, NR doctrine includes two key points: an economic one, regarding the free market, and a legal one, referring to the need of making justice.

'The New Republic [party] exists in order to question the rusty patterns and the hypocrite appearances of the politics deployed along the banks of the Dâmbovița river. Romania needs radical, not conventional solutions; we want a

New Republic led by brave leaders and not by persons who can be blackmailed or who are corrupt.’⁴⁰

Moreover, what seems to be another characteristic of NR discourse is the tendency to impose moral evaluation upon time. In other words, specific segments in time are evaluated as being good or bad. The words associated with the current state of affairs have negative meanings or connotations, while the words associated with the future change and with NR imply positive judgments. This classification scheme holds whether the subject is punctual (the health system, the economic development) or general (Romanian political life as a whole). A negative depiction of a present situation represents an important step in the argumentation in favour of change. By presenting the present as entirely negative and the alternative future as entirely positive, the writer manages to naturalize the need for change, making it appear as a natural consequence of the given premises.

This evaluation is manifest in the semantic relation of antonymy which recurred in the texts analyzed. The relation is established between the semantic fields of ‘new’ and ‘old’ which acquire positive, respectively negative meanings. For instance, the headline ‘Reforma Sănătății: protagoniști vechi și soluții la fel de vechi’ (‘The Health Reform: old actors and just as old solutions’) is based on the opposed meanings of the terms within. The term *reformă* (‘reform’) implies the idea of renewal, while the adjective *vechi* (‘old’), used twice, acquires a negative meaning in this context and it is used in order to contradict the reader’s expectations. The positive meaning assigned to the adjective *nou* (‘new’) is visible in headlines such as ‘O Nouă Constituție pentru o Nouă Românie’ (‘A new Constitution for a new Romania’) and in the party’s name, ‘Noua Republică’. The name already shows the positive meaning attributed to change, which, in this case, equals renewal: what is new is good as it is necessary. The name also includes an ambiguity, because, from a strictly legal point of view, Romania is a republic and has been so since the last king abdicated the throne and the communist party took the power. The choice of the party’s name indicates that the party does not view the present statal organization as truly respecting democratic principles.

The strategy of rationalization is less frequent in the corpus, being employed especially in the texts following a news article genre, where financial or diplomatic issues are discussed. Still, this is the main strategy used in the text ‘Reforma Sănătății: protagoniști vechi și soluții la fel de vechi’ (‘The Health Reform: old actors and just as old solutions’) whose main claim regards the inefficient use of public money in the health system. The writer appeals to numbers, statistics and official documents in order to sustain the critical stance, but also to the repetition of some negative words. For example, the term *risipă* (‘waste’) is used four times, twice marked, once by an adjectival determiner, *risipă suplimentară* (‘additional waste’) and another time by capitalisation. Another word with a similar meaning is

⁴⁰ ‘Noua Republică există pentru a contesta tiparele ruginite și aparențele ipocrite ale politichiei dâmbovițene. România are nevoie de soluții radicale, nu convenționale; vrem o Nouă Republică condusă de lideri curajoși, iar nu de persoane șantajabile sau venale.’

the adjective inutil ('useless'), which is also repeated in the text: *bunuri inutile* ('useless goods'), *cantități inutile de produse* ('useless product supplies').

The strategy of authorization is more clearly manifest in Mihail Neamțu's speech which acknowledges the recent formation of the party and, at the same time, presents it as continuing a former doctrine, that of the opponents of communism. Authorization serves here to avoid the risk of NR being considered a new and minor party; instead, it is linked to the more prestigious Peasants' National Party (Partidul Național Țărănesc), which existed before the communist dictatorship. NR does not construct its identity as merely opposed to communism but it legitimates its existence and its standpoint through an appeal to the collective memory. An important model brought into discussion is the Romanian politician Corneliu Coposu. Because he was a member in the Peasants' National Party, he was accused and sent to prison by the communist authorities; still, he managed to survive and lived to see the fall of the communist regime.

'Many of those who joined the New Republic loved Corneliu Coposu in their youth because the Senior wanted not only for him, but mostly for the descendants, a free, dignified and prospering Romanian nation. [...] Humbly taking up this historical mandate, the New Republic translates optimism into political action and makes boldness a cardinal virtue.'⁴¹

The figure of Corneliu Coposu embodies values such as resistance to communism, tenacity and courage. The reference to this politician also contributes to the creation of a common ground between the speaker Mihail Neamțu and the public: the in-group encompasses also people who reject communism because they or their relatives have suffered in communist prisons. This type of legitimation adds value to the political programme of the party. Its actions signify more than the will to replace the actual government, namely the desire to do justice and to restore the 'normal' democratic state of affairs, which prevailed before the communist regime.

According to van Leeuwen's framework, the strategy of mythopoesis is achieved through storytelling. The speaker inserts a myth, in fact a story, that suggests the legitimate course of action. Mythopoesis is employed in all the instances when NR discourse represents the party as a divine figure fighting against the evil. Moreover, the reiteration of the myth of genesis is visible in Mihail Neamțu's speech. Creation myths represent a significant element in all cultures and it is not a coincidence that the party president transforms the official acknowledgement of NR into a symbolic event. Talking about the acknowledgement, Mihail Neamțu creates the image of an anarchic world, which allowed the existence of a reversed set of values.

⁴¹ Mulți dintre cei care au venit la Noua Republică l-au iubit în tinerețe pe Corneliu Coposu pentru că Seniorul și-a dorit nu doar pentru el, ci mai ales pentru urmași, o națiune română liberă, demnă și prosperă. [...] Preluând cu umilință acest mandat istoric, Noua Republică traduce optimismul în acțiune politică și face din îndrăzneală o virtute cardinală.'

‘On January 29, 1990 [...]. People were booing a lot and insulting without restriction. Broken windows, broken doors, mutilated objects, wounded bodies and dead souls.

The disciple of the late Iuliu Maniu (who died at Sighet sixty years before) [...] was threatened, humiliated and chased like a wild beast. Why? Because the great Corneliu Coposu wished another Romania, because he was dreaming, like so many other former political prisoners, of a clean and worthy country.

January 29, 1990 remains a dark day in the calendar of Romanian democracy.

January 29, 2013 represents, on the contrary, the equinox of hope – the moment of the passage to the zodiac sign of freedom and responsibility.’⁴²

This speech establishes a connection with a specific past event, the street protests that took place in Bucharest at the beginning of 1990. Such intense social events are considered to be linked to the concept of ‘political crisis’ and also imply a mobilization of values⁴³. The insistence on this specific past moment acquires a symbolic function when it is linked with the foundation of the NR party. Its legal acknowledgement is thus transformed in a mythical Genesis, the time of order and creation comes after chaos. The birth of the right-wing party comes after the disorder created and preserved by communists, in a manner similar to God’s creation of the world. This overdetermination based on references to Christian beliefs makes the NR party stand out and it is sustained in the party founder’s speech by various further references to Christian religion.

Conclusions

The characteristics discussed above show that social actors are represented in the NR discourse in a dichotomic manner. The in-group formed by the party and its supporters is depicted in a positive, even idealized way, while the out-group is formed by the contemporary **governing** parties and negatively represented. The two representations are juxtaposed in the messages issued by NR, still the negative representation of the Other is sometimes so extensive that it becomes the core of the article, leaving the party’s identity and standpoint in the background. The representation of the social actors on the level of reality is accompanied by a representation on a symbolic level, with the party NR in a Messianic role, while the

⁴² ‘În 29 ianuarie 1990 [...] Se huiduia abundant și se proferau calomniile fără opreliști. Geamuri sparte, uși rupte, obiecte desfigurată, trupuri rănite și suflete moarte.

Ucenicul răposatului Iuliu Maniu (mort la Sighet acum 60 de ani), [...] era, așadar, amenințat, umilit și hăituit ca o fiară. De ce? Pentru că marele Corneliu Coposu își dorea o altă Românie, pentru că visa și el, ca atâția alți foști deținuți politici, la o țară curată și demnă.

29 ianuarie 1990 rămâne o zi neagră în calendarul democrației românești.

29 ianuarie 2013 reprezintă, în schimb, echinocliul speranței – momentul trecerii către zodia libertății și a responsabilității.’

⁴³ Wodak, Ruth. *The Discourse of Politics in Action. Politics as Usual*. Hampshire, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011:18.

governing parties incarnate a villified and demonic Other. Such polarized representations cannot exist without an important legitimation strategy, that of the moral evaluation of the social actors. This strategy serves here to legitimize the existence of NR as a social and political actor and the necessity to replace the current government. It is not clear, however, how this change could be accomplished, as the e-mailed messages include more or less ambiguous formulations, such as the reference to 'radical solutions' for example, but also to the democratic practice of elections. The role of the religious references and the marked deontic dimension evoke the discourse of the former extremist organization 'Legiunea Arhanghelului Mihail'. A possible direction of research would therefore need to focus on the comparison between more texts issued by the two political formations.

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FOR A BORDER-DIALOGUE IN 'FORTRESS EUROPE': THE REAPPROPRIATION OF MEDITERAN ROUTES

Luigi Cazzato¹

Abstract: Contemporary Europe is again haunted by the old stereotypes of corrupted southerners and virtuous northerners, lazy Mediteraneans and vigorous Teutons. This paper aims to survey these tropes among current academic and public debates, from postcolonial and southern studies perspectives. These labels and views have to do with discursive formations such as orientalism and meridianism, and stretch back to the Mediterranean colonial history dominated by northern modernity. Terms like "change", "innovation", "modernity" on one hand, and "immobility", "tradition", "backwardness" on the other, can be easily and predictably attributed to the two geo-cultural spaces. Nevertheless, our task is less attributing the right category to the right side than disrupting the whole paradigm, under the pressure of the migrations from the South.

Keywords: Border-dialogue; Fortress Europe; PIGS; Mediterranean, orientalism; meridianism; southern thought; modernity; modernization; tradition.

Fallacies

Two of the fallacies regarding social change usually are: social change is a linear movement in time from a traditional past towards a modern future; the assumed irreconcilable conflict between old and new structures. In fact, these two fallacies have been profoundly challenged, at least within the academic context, by postcolonial and southern studies. Above all, these studies have contributed to the diffusion of a critical spatial consciousness. Nevertheless, there is a third fallacy to be challenged. The opposition past/tradition vs. present/modernity, according to European mainstream thought, has a precise geography, a precise map. As a result, this fallacy reads: change and modernity is northern, immobility and tradition is southern (or, if preferred, Mediterranean). This fallacy is as old as Modernity, that is to say as old as Enlightenment.

Brave New North vs. Timorous Old South

Though modern liberal society was born in England at the time of the so-called *Bloodless Revolution* in 1689, it is to France we should turn for a moment, to listen to one of the fathers of constitutionalism, Charles-Louis de Secondat, notably known as Montesquieu. In *L'Esprit des Loïs*, he memorably claims:

¹ University of Bari "Aldo Moro".

Les peuples des pays chauds sont timides comme les vieillards le sont; ceux des pays froids sont courageux comme le sont les jeunes gens ... Vous trouverez dans les climats du nord des peuples qui ont peu de vices, assez de vertus, beaucoup de sincérité et de franchise. Approchez des pays du midi vous croirez vous éloigner de la morale même...²

According to Montesquieu, then, vice and virtue have a precise climate and geography: the north is young and virtuous, the south old and immoral. These are sentences written almost three centuries ago which, however, would bring a knowing smile of recognition to the lips of the Euro-American technocrats of econometrics. Half a century later, still following the climatic hermeneutic tool, Hegel claims that in the extreme zones cold and heat are too powerful to allow Spirit to build up a world for itself.

The true theatre of History is ... the [European] temperate zone; or rather, its northern half, because the earth there presents itself in a continental form, and has a broad breast, as the Greeks say. In the south, on the contrary, it divides itself, and runs out into many points.³

To the German philosopher, the real theatre of world history is the more homogeneous and compact region of continental Europe, since Mediterranean Europe is too heterogeneous and fragmented to form coherent nations and civilizations.

Euro-Mediterranean PIGS

If this is so, we have found the roots of modern-day technocrats' moralist economics, according to which the Mediterranean countries are to be called "PIGS", an acronym that would gather together the countries of Portugal, Italy, Greece, Spain (of course Italian conservative politicians maintain that the "I" stands for Ireland rather than for Italy).

Contemporary Europe, therefore, is still haunted by the old stereotypes of corrupt southerners and virtuous northerners, indolent Mediterraneans and vigorous Teutons. According to Agence France Press, PIGS has been used as an abbreviation for Euro-Mediterranean countries since 1999, when these countries and eight more countries decided to adopt the euro as a common currency. However, the phenomenon started earlier, when the Schengen Treaty for the

²Charles de Secondat, Montesquieu, *L'Esprit des Lois*, 1748, XIV, chap. II (trans: « inhabitants of warm countries are, like old men, timorous; the people in cold countries are, like young men, brave ... If we travel towards the north, we meet with people who have few vices, many virtues, and a great share of frankness and sincerity. If we draw near the south, we fancy ourselves entirely removed from the verge of morality... »), Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989. Print.

³G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. John Sibree, Charleston: Nabu Press, 2010, p. 80. Print.

abolition of borders was signed and a fear of border trespassing was felt. Although champagne was offered at Milan and Rome airports to mark Italy's full membership of Schengen, *The Economist* wrote the following: "Other Schengen countries – including Austria ... – remain highly dubious about Italy's apparently lax controls over illegal immigrants, many of whom move on to other EU countries."⁴

At this point one might reason that this is so because a journalist was speaking. What about serious scholars? Let us consider Niall Ferguson, the British Professor of History at Harvard University named as one of the 100 most influential people in the world by *Time* magazine in 2004. This is the incipit of his semi-humorous article in *The Wall Street Journal*, in which he envisages the future of Europe: "Welcome to Europe, 2021. Ten years have elapsed since the great crisis of 2010-11, which claimed the scalps of no fewer than 10 governments, including Spain and France. Some things have stayed the same, but a lot has changed".⁵ An amusing map shows Scandinavia and Germany hypertrophically enlarged, while the Mediterranean countries are shrunk to a Lilliputian size. It reminds us how southern continents were truly represented in the 19th century, with Africa much smaller than the real Africa and Europe the opposite. One might argue that Ferguson is a neocon and has contributed as an editor for Bloomberg TV and, on top of that, has also been an advisor to Republican U.S. presidential campaigns. However, the problem is that his views are shared by a wider audience, larger than the conservatives. In northern countries, it has become common sense: the story goes that the Greeks are lazy, the Italians corrupt, the Spaniards unreliable... they are only good as beach attendants or gardeners, as the newspaper's map shows. The "natural" consequence is that they are not able to have a stable economy. Economy becomes a moral fact.

Here, the adjective "natural" is not accidental. There is someone who has connected intelligence to genetics and history. It is hard to believe, but Richard Lynn, British Professor Emeritus of Psychology at the University of Ulster, has conducted research under the title: "In Italy, north-south differences in IQ predict differences in income, education, infant mortality, stature, and literacy". It is even harder to listen to his conclusions. Why is the IQ of southerners lower?

The diffusion of genes from the Near East and North Africa may explain why the populations of southern Italy have IQs in the range of 89–92, intermediate between those of northern Italy and central and northern Europe (about 100) and those of the Near East and North Africa (in the range of 80–84).⁶

⁴ "Those fuzzy frontiers", *The Economist*, 11 December: 1997. Print.

⁵ N. Ferguson, "2021: The New Europe", *The Wall Street Journal*, 19 November: 2011. Web.

⁶ R. Lynn, "In Italy, north-south differences in IQ predict differences in income, education, infant mortality, stature, and literacy", *Intelligence*, Vol. 38, Issue 1, January-February 2010: 99. Web.

According to his *unbiased* result: “IQs decline steadily with more southerly latitude”⁷. In other words, the more southern the worse, the more northern the better. Once more, in this case as far as intelligence is concerned, geography is a destiny, as much as genetics is. Since over the course of history there has been considerable immigration by peoples from South-East, “the north–south gradient of intelligence in Italy has a genetic basis going back many centuries, and hence predicts the social and economic differences documented in the nineteenth century up to the present day.”⁸ We have come then to the core problem: the Mediterranean is not simply but dangerously the sea between the lands. Southern Europe is too close to Africa and Asia. Hence its imperfection.

From Orientalism to Meridionism

But a step back. Let us read for a moment a passage from Said’s *Orientalism*:

Oriental or Arabs are ... shown to be gullible, “devoid of energy and initiative”, much given to “fulsome flattery”, intrigue, cunning, and unkindness to animals; Orientals cannot walk on either a road or a pavement (their disordered minds fail to understand what the clever European grasps immediately, that roads and pavements are made for walking); Orientals are inveterate liars, they are “lethargic and suspicious”, and in everything oppose the clarity, directness, and nobility of the Anglo-Saxon race.⁹

I am sure that for many of us reading these words raised the thought: these are not Arabs, they are southerners, Italians, Mediterraneans. Southerners cannot properly use a pavement either, nor are they modern and open to change and innovation. Tradition, backwardness, immutability are their dimensions, as the stereotypical discursive formation would have it. Apparently, according to the north-Eurocentric perspective, East and South share the same destiny. According to that historical perspective, indeed, progress has apparently followed the route of the sun (Voltaire)¹⁰, from East to West, that is to say, from despotism towards freedom (Montesquieu)¹¹. Once this path has been identified, the next step is to turn progress into a teleology. Hegel, who claims that “the history of the world is none other than the progress of the consciousness of freedom”¹², also claims, after the *Philosophes*, that it “travels from East to West, for Europe is absolutely the end

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Op. cit., p. 100.

⁹ E. Said, *Orientalism*, London: Penguin, 2003: pp. 39-40. Print.

¹⁰ Voltaire, *Essais sur les Moeurs et l'esprit des Nations*, vol. I, Paris: Antoine-Augustin Renouard, 1773: p. 377. Print.

¹¹ Charles de Secondat, Montesquieu, op. cit.

¹² G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. John Sibree, Charleston: Nabu Press, 2010: p. 19. Print.

of history, Asia the beginning”¹³. It goes without saying that “Africa is the unhistorical, undeveloped spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature”.¹⁴ No wonder that Mediterranean began to be disregarded and, at the end of the 18th century, the northerners began to look for the exact European border where History stopped; to look for the threshold through which one passed from progress to backwardness, from civilization to barbarism, in short, from proper Europe to the first glimmers of African continent. As a consequence, Europe has constituted itself not only against the Orient but also against its South, which has been the “constitutive outside”, to quote Judith Butler,¹⁵ even though it was and is *inside* Europe. I have elsewhere called this discursive formation “meridionism”, which is brother to orientalism but not overlapping with it¹⁶. If orientalism was born as a cultural tool for the implementation of European colonialism, meridionism was born as a cultural tool for the foundation of modern European identity.

Modernization or Modesty and Moderation?

Indeed, it is time to ask what is modernity. First of all, we may distinguish modernity from modernization. If modernity refers, as Jean and John Commaroff point out, to “a vision of history as a progressive, man-made construction, to an ideology of improvement through the accumulation of knowledge and technical skills...”¹⁷, in short, after Arjun Appadurai, if modernity is a *fact*, modernization is a (western) *theory*.¹⁸ Or, still through Commaroff’s words, modernization is a theory that “posits a strong normative teleology, a unilinear trajectory toward the future ... to which all humanity ought to aspire.”¹⁹ Once you have accepted this distinction, you realize that every people and every region of the world may have their own “vernacular” modernities which contrasts with their traditions. Appadurai disagrees with modernization theory’s identification of societies as modern vs. traditional, urban vs. rural, and so on, for he sees irregularities within both so-called modern and traditional societies. For instance, such modern metropolitan cities as Sao Paulo or Cairo experience modernity and tradition simultaneously. The same is true of Europe or any other part of the world in which both traditional and modern ways of life are experienced at the same time.

¹³ Hegel, op. cit., p. 103.

¹⁴ Hegel, op. cit., p. 99.

¹⁵ “... the subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abjected outside, which is, after all, ‘inside’ the subject as its own founding repudiation” (J. Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, London: Routledge, 1993: p. 3. Print.

¹⁶ Cf. L. Cazzato, “Oriente within, Nord without: il meridionismo e i romantici inglesi”, *Altre Modernità*, N. 8, 2012. Web.

¹⁷ J. and J. Commaroff, *Theory from the South: Or, How Euro-America is Evolving Toward Africa*, Boulder/London: Paradigm Publishers, 2012: p. 9. Print.

¹⁸ A. Appadurai, *Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis: Minnesota U.P., 1996: p. 2. Print.

¹⁹ J. and J. Commaroff, op. cit., p. 9.

This being said, we may take, for instance, the problem of Islamic traditional culture and the awkward, and for sure uncomfortable, question of *jijab* (the veil). The interesting thing about it, for instance, is that Islamic feminisms tackle the issue of the veil and gender equality not through Occidental modernity but through a re-reading of Oriental traditional, that is to say, through Oriental modernity. We are talking about a new interpretation of the Koran that denounces the patriarchal contradiction with the assertion of equality of all believers *vis-à-vis* God. Furthermore, not only do Islamic feminisms put into question androcentric Islam, they may also interrogate Western culture.²⁰ The Moroccan Fatema Mernissi denounces the patronising misogynist Islamic culture, but at the same time also lays bare the patronising Western male view of “liberated” women, through what she calls “the tyranny of the ‘size 6’”. Indeed, after realising that in a big Paris store there was no skirt for her, Mernissi sarcastically concludes: “I am so happy that the conservative male elite does not know about it. Imagine the fundamentalists switching from the veil to forcing women to fit size 6”.²¹ The interesting thing here is also the discovery that the Westerners impose their own *jijab* on women too.

So, as Franco Cassano puts it, provided *modesty* is not imposed by males but freely chosen by women, the East can teach the West the revolutionary potential of opacity.

Modesty is not only a repressive cage that those who seek emancipation must escape. It is also a grammar of the relationship between bodies that incites pride and builds opaqueness in a world of windows and shops. Modesty has often been an interdiction decreed by the powerful, a claim of dominion over the body of another; but it can also be a tassel of individual freedom, an interdiction that protects the individual from the temptations and the omnivorous pretenses of the market, the safe-keep for a private space rescued from universal commercialization, which forces the latter to wait outside the door.²²

²⁰ Actually, and astonishingly, in the early 18th century Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (the wife of the British ambassador to Ottoman Turkey) examined western culture through what she could see and experience in Istanbul. According to her direct experience, contrary to “extreme stupidity of all writers” that have given accounts of Turkish women, they have more liberty than the English have: “This perpetual masquerade gives them entire liberty of following their inclinations without danger of discovery ... Upon the whole, I look upon the Turkish women as the only free people in the empire” (*The Selected Letters of Lady Mary Montagu*, ed. Robert Halsband, London: Longman, 1970, p. 96). These statements are more astonishing if compared to Montesquieu’s ones about the servitude of oriental women connected with oriental political despotism.

²¹ F. Mernissi, *Scheherazade Goes West: Different Cultures, Different Harems*, New York: Washington Square, 2001: p. 219. Print.

²² F. Cassano, *Southern Thought*, New York: Fordham U.P., 2012, p. 150.

This is a way in which Eastern “modesty” interrupts the perception of Western love manners, revealing, at the same time, other possible (and forgotten) manners. It is as if the conquest of the ‘new’ can be performed through the re-appropriation of the apparent ‘old’ of the other. We are not expected to look to the past in a nostalgic mood... ‘the good old things’, to feed the essentialist idea of a South made of Blood, Land and Tradition. Of course, in what we call “tradition” or “past” there are a lot things to be thrown away... cruel superstitions, silent subordinations and fierce exploitations. But there may be also something precious which points to the future. If we do not adopt this ‘ecological’ attitude towards our past, or towards what we consider belonging to an outdated world, our present loses something crucial, and its neurotic run towards the future is unrestrained. *Moderation*, indeed, is another key word for southern thought²³, which may counter the totalizing drive of modernization.

Furthermore, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak speaks about two kinds of communities: the responsibility-based communities, like Islamic society, where human individual rights are neglected, and rights-based communities, such as North-Western ones, where on the contrary what is neglected is the sense of social responsibility. Therefore, the epistemological lesson to be learned by the so-called non-modern communities, as the Bengalese scholar would have it, can be that “another antonym of *right* is *responsibility*.”²⁴ Of course, the opposite is also the case in point, as Spivak does not fail to remind us. She is not “suggesting that they [responsibility-based communities] are better, just that they are different, and this radically different pair - rights and responsibility – need to relate in the hobbled relationship of supplementation.”²⁵

Roots, Routes and Mongrel Europe

Similarly, and ultimately, the outlook of the *others* may be a chance for *us* to consider so-called “tradition” in a non-traditional way. It is a chance for *us* to supplement our view through the *others*’ eyes. We are quite far from the hierarchical if not racist views of Ferguson, Lynn and company. The “diffusion of genes from the Near East and North Africa”, to speak Lynn’s words, may be a blessing for Europe and its idea of community as a Fortress. It may be a blessing for the West and its Faustian idea of civilization as linear endless progress to be imposed on everyone on the planet. Either Europe recognizes its Mediterranean *roots* (backgrounds) and *routes* (paths) or it is nothing. Identity, if you should choose one, is not a stable pure condition. If we can turn to botany, identity is a not a carrot (a single root) but a potato intertwined to other potatoes (a rhizome). There is no root-identity, only rhizome or relation-identity, as the Caribbean poet

²³ Cf. F. Cassano, *op. cit.*, pp. xlix-liv.

²⁴ G. C. Spivak, ‘Righting Wrongs’ *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 103, n. 2/3, Spring/Summer 2004: p. 534.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

Édouard Glissant puts it: “La racine unique est celle qui tue autour d’elle alors que le rhizome est la racine qui s’étend à la rencontre d’autres racines.”²⁶

Finally, the proposal is, then, of a *border-dialogue*, as the Mediterranean waters have taught us for centuries. Far from being a negative contamination, as the Schengen Treaty and its supporters would have it, the “intrusion” of the global South into Europe may be a chance for the continent to be *supplemented* and, for Southern Europe, a chance to be seen as no longer a periphery, but the center of a new creolizing world, in which the Mediterranean may retrieve its ancient role of cultural and economic crossroads.

Paradoxically, thanks to the traffic of human beings towards Europe, the Northern Mediterranean (that sort of imperfect Europe), finally has the chance to re-experience its *pluriverse*. The many people of the Mediterranean are incurable mongrels: their identity is full of alterity. Cassano utters the ultimate words here again:

Mediterranean today means putting the border, that line of division and contact between people and civilizations, center stage ... We do not go to the Mediterranean to seek the fullness of our origins but to experience our contingency. The Mediterranean shows us the limits of Europe and of the West.²⁷

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²⁶ E. Glissant, *Introduction à une poétique du Divers*, Paris, Gallimard, 1996, p. 59 (my trans.: “The single root is the one that kills everything around itself whereas the rhizome is the root that stretches towards other roots”)

²⁷ F. Cassano, *Southern Thought*, 2012, p. xlvi.

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II. CHANGING STRATEGIES IN GENDERING DISCOURSES

THE CURRENT WORLD CRISIS AND THE THEMATIC CHANGES IN MEDIA DISCOURSE: AN ILLUSTRATION OF MASCULINIZATION OF POLITICAL JOURNALISTS' DISCOURSE

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Abstract: This paper proposes an analysis of journalistic discourse in two media events. The current world crisis produced economic and social changes which triggered alterations of the priorities on the journalists' and politicians' agendas. Through the analysis of thematic structures in the political journalists' discourses, we aim to reveal these alterations that we associate with the masculinization of political and journalistic discourse.

Keywords: economic crisis; political journalism; televised presidential debates; debate moderators; debate management; topic control; thematic structure; salient debate issues; feminine discourse; masculine discourse.

Introduction

This study aims to reveal the way in which, during electoral campaigns, the media echo the social changes triggered by the present-day economic crisis. In recent televised electoral debates, for instance, this critical situation has been discursively translated into a range of recurrent topics related to the economic and social difficulties that have lately affected people's lives. We equally propose a gendered interpretation of the thematic changes that have marked political journalists' discourse.

Like all journalists, the TV journalists' who "conduct" televised debates aspire to fulfill their professional mission of serving the public, as responsibly and ethically as Habermas (1985) thought they ought to do. They should prove that they do voice the voters' concerns, that they know the public agenda better than the candidates themselves and represent public interest as legitimate spokespersons (Boicu 2013). Electoral televised debates provide the ideal context for debate moderators to substantiate Charaudeau's thesis (2005) according to which journalists stand for the link between the politicians and the citizens, in the societal triangular relation that unites these three poles.

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In practice, the TV journalists who moderate presidential debates manage this political show through three main professional functions, those of controlling the observance of the themes under discussion, of controlling the candidates' turn taking and of controlling the interaction time devoted to each candidate on each theme.

For this research, we selected two famous French presidential confrontations, the one between Ségolène Royal and Nicolas Sarkozy that took place in 2007, namely, before the economic crisis, and the debate between François Hollande and Nicolas Sarkozy, broadcast in 2012, in times of crisis. More specifically, we focused on the comparison between the sets of themes announced by the journalists at the beginning of the debates and the time treatment of these themes, in the two above mentioned televised electoral debates.

The first objective of this study is to assess the salience of each theme in the journalists' agenda, in order to prove the high share of the topics that refer to the economic crisis and to its social consequences in the case of the 2012 debate, as compared to the 2007 debate.

To this end, we used two quantitative content analyses, relying on the statistics of the key words used by the moderators in relation to the themes of the two debates. In order to check the results, we measured the respective time spans allotted for discussing the issues associated with these key words, out of the total time of the two TV shows.

The data that resulted after these quantitative analyses showed that, in the 2012 presidential debate, the journalists' insisted on the tough solutions and the austerity measures imposed in order to cope with the critical problems that appeared during the crisis. This led us to the second objective of the present research, that consists in interpreting this thematic change in terms of masculinization of media discourse.

As hypothesized, the economic crisis triggered a significant change in the journalists' agenda, an emphasis on economic problems at the expense of the social issues and the so-called issues of society (*sujets de société*) such as education, culture, research, etc. that had a greater relevance in 2007, before the crisis and that are perceived as feminine issues.

1. Values and functions of tv debate journalists

The journalists' mission is implied in a communication contract that Charaudeau explained, from various angles, in more than one works. He wrote about the double finality of the journalists' communication contract, an ethical one, consisting in the transmission of information according to democratic values and a commercial one, meant to conquer the greatest audience possible in order to sell the media product (Charaudeau 2005: 71-73). According to Charaudeau (2006: 5), in an electoral debate: "les principes de distance et de neutralité sont encore plus

difficiles à tenir, car c'est le journaliste qui procède [...] à la distribution des paroles et c'est lui qui par ses questions impose des cadres de questionnement"².

Since in the French format, unlike the classic American format, the public is not physically present at the debate, it is the journalists that moderate the TV show who ask questions on behalf of the electorate. Moreover, it is the moderators who create the thematic structure to be debated, through a thorough selection of the most urgent problems of the moment.

Their responsibility is all the greater as their professional competences may be judged by the largest possible national audiences. In the specialized literature published in the United States and in France, where there are long and respected traditions in turning the electoral/ presidential confrontations into popular TV shows, designed both to inform and to entertain the public, the televised presidential debate is unanimously considered the climax of an electoral campaign (Boicu 2012a).

One of the first definitions of the televised electoral/ presidential debate was offered by Auer (1962: 146) *apud* Trent and Friedenberg (2004: 267). This definition may be read as a set of five features, three of them referring to the main professional functions of the debate moderators. Actually, the debate is:

- (1) a confrontation,
- (2) in equal and adequate time,
- (3) of matched contestants,
- (4) *on a stated proposition*,
- (5) to gain an audience decision.

Firstly, by defining the debate as a confrontation (1), Auer implies that the politicians are invited by the moderators to speak in turns. Through turn control, the moderators give their guests the opportunity of taking the floor alternatively and of benefiting of an equal number of turns.

Secondly, as mentioned in this definition, each candidate should have the same amount of time at her/ his disposal (2), which indicates that the moderator is also in charge of time control. If the broadcast editor/ director negotiates with the politicians' teams that the answers to the questions should not exceed 2 to 5 minutes, or more, it is the journalist's function to interrupt the interventions that exceed the time limit.

Thirdly, it devolves on the debate moderators to launch questions / issues about the most stringent problems in society, economy, foreign affairs, etc. In most cases, it is the moderators who choose the content and the form of these questions (Sandré 2009) and who exert topic control (3), urging all the candidates to answer all the questions.

² "the principles of neutrality and distance are more difficult to maintain because it is the journalist who monitors [...] the distribution of turns and it is he who, by his questions, maps questioning frames". [our translation]

Topic launching and control represent the essential functions in our present research, although they could not be studied independently from the other two types of control. That is why, the management of a presidential debate is a difficult professional task that only reputed TV journalists are invited to do. For the two French debates under discussion, the moderators were chosen from among the most successful TV journalists: Arlette Chabot and Patrick Poivre d'Arvor in 2007; Laurence Ferrari and David Pujadas in 2012.

2. Feminine and masculine topics

In politics, feminine topics are stereotypically associated with the promotion of policies that address improvements of women's life and representation in society. More specifically, in civic organizations as well as in politics, women militate for the eradication of domestic violence, for women's safety at work, for equal chances to education of disabled children, etc. (Boicu 2012b). In cultural studies literature, as seen in Hofstede, Hofstede G. J. and Minkov (2010), the concern for domestic problems and the caring for children led to the notorious distinction between feminine and masculine national cultures, in which these sociologists assimilate competition, force, self-assertion and selfishness to masculine societies and the caring for the weak, health protection, education, social services, social security, environment protection, equal chances, love for nature and beauty to feminine cultures.

Feminine issues are closely related to the typical left wing claims such as better life conditions and more respect for the retired, improved work conditions for the employees, etc. that come into contradiction with the neo-liberal policies and with the austerity measures that most governments have adopted during the current world crisis. The governments' "austerity drive, which attempts to garner public support for the reduction or withdrawal of welfare entitlements through appeals to frugality, self-sufficiency and fiscal prudence [...] is argued to present a particular challenge to the financial security and autonomy of women, signalling the end of the process of modernizing the welfare system" (MacLeavy 2011: 255). The welfare state system that stood for the epitome of the third wave feminist aspirations, since "women [were] the majority of recipients of many social welfare benefits" (Sarvasy 1999: 329), is presently seen as a pre-crisis project. "Jane Jenson [1999]³ recently used "neo-liberal" [the reassertion of market forces, according to Larner (2000: 10)] as a general descriptor for post-welfare state citizenship regimes" (Larner 2000: 5).

Analysts are aware that, more than suspending a project, the present-day crisis menaces to suspend the progress that women benefited from before 2008. "Widespread economic recessions and protracted financial crises have been documented as setting back gender equality and other development goals in the past. In the midst of the current global crisis – often referred to as "the Great

³ Jenson, Jane. "Who Cares? Gender And Welfare Regimes". *Social Politics* 4 (2) 1997: 182-187. Web. 13 Dec. 2011. <doi: 10.1093/sp/4.2.182>

Recession” – there is grave concern that progress made in poverty reduction and women’s equality will be reversed” (Antonopoulos 2009, Abstract).⁴

Likewise, in the texts compared in this paper, we noticed that the political journalists’ discourses in 2012 are marked by the changes in governance priorities, as a consequence of the crisis. Since women are biased on a social ideology, as Van Dijk (2006) confirms, social issues are perceived to be *feminine*, while foreign policy, for instance, is perceived to be *masculine* (Murray 2008: 488).⁵ More specifically, “female politicians are described as having a special preference for the social domain which corresponds to an incapacity of managing the prestigious fields: economy and international relations” (Olivesi 2009: 75 *apud* Boicu 2011: 143). Since feminine discourse is made up of soft issues, women politicians are assigned *soft portfolios* (Walsh 2001: 6).

3. Corpus and methodology

In order to compare the moderators’ discourse in terms of the thematic structures used in two electoral debates, we analyzed the transcript versions of the presidential debates that took place in France, in May 2007, between Ségolène Royal and Nicolas Sarkozy, moderated by Patrick Poivre d’Arvor (TF1) and Arlette Chabot (France 2) and in May 2012, between Nicolas Sarkozy and François Hollande, moderated by Laurence Ferrari (TF1) and David Pujadas (France 2). The former text has 71 pages (Source: (La Tribune.fr www.latribune.fr) and the latter covers 74 pages (Source:<http://discours.viepublique.fr/notices/123000884.html>). In spite of the difference of three pages, the total duration of each show was of 2 hours and 40 minutes.

Since our first objective was to evaluate the relative salience of each theme that the moderators launched for discussion, we used two statistical approaches:

- we counted the occurrences of the most recurrent key words that the moderators uttered in relation to the themes that they announced in their opening interventions. In principle, we retained the first 3 most salient key words for further interpretation.
- we checked the results of the first statistics through the calculation of the amount of time devoted to the candidates’ debating on each theme (or thematic area); this calculation consisted in transforming the number of pages that contained the discussion of one theme into minutes (taking into account that both the total number of the pages in the transcripts and the total number of minutes were known.

⁴ Antonopoulos, Rania. “The current economic and financial crisis: a gender perspective”. *Working papers // The Levy Economics Institute*, No. 562, 2009. Web. 22 Dec. 2012. <<http://hdl.handle.net/10419/31580>>

⁵ Murray, Rainbow. “Is the Mere Presence of a Strong Female Candidate Enough to Increase the Substantive Representation of Women?”. *Parliamentary Affairs* 61/3, 2008: 476-489. Print.

4.1. The 2007 Debates Themes

4.1.1. Key words

In keeping with the format of the French presidential debate, the moderators announced the topics at the beginning of the show, after greeting the candidates and asking them whether they felt comfortable and ready to start the confrontation. The candidates were supposed to discuss four thematic chapters within fairly equal periods of time. The first chapter concerned the candidates' views on power and the institutions, the second covered the economic and social problems, the third, the so-called issues of society (education, family, research, culture, environment ...) and the fourth, the international relations, with Europe included (4).⁶

Throughout their 27 interventions (out of which 8 were just reminders of the themes to be insisted on) that followed, the debate moderators, Chabot and Poivre d'Arvor, used the following key words: *institutions* (4 times) and *power* (twice), on pages 2-12 and 65-67 of the debate transcript. Within the second thematic chapter, they used the words: *taxation* (twice), *jobs* (twice), *debt* (twice), *retirement* (twice), *social security* (once), etc., on pages 13-35. The next set of key words concerned the issues of society: *family* (twice), *environment* (twice), *education* (twice), *culture* (once), etc., on pages 36-55, while the last set included two key words: *Europe* (twice) and *immigration* (twice), on pages 56-69.

4.1.2. Durations of the issue debates

The time shares of the thematic groups are presented in Table 1:

Table 1

Durations of themes discussing in the 2007 debate

| No. | Thematic Chapters | Durations in minutes |
|-----|---|----------------------|
| 1. | The candidates' views on power and the institutions | 33 |
| 2. | The economic and social problems | 48 |
| 3. | The issues of society (education, family, research, culture, environment ...) | 42 |
| 4. | The international relations, with Europe included | 31 |
| 5. | Others □ | 6 |

□ *Others* corresponds to the themes included in the opening interventions (welcoming) and the closing interventions (the candidates' address to the nation and leave taking).

⁶« quatre grands chapitres de durée à peu près égale : la conception du pouvoir et des institutions, les problèmes économiques et sociaux, les problèmes dits de société (éducation, famille, recherche, culture, environnement...), les relations internationales avec l'Europe comprise ». (La Tribune.fr www.latribune.fr)

4.2. The 2012 Debated Themes

4.2.1. Key words

The moderators, Ferrari and Pujadas, decided to tackle the economic issues first. As they mentioned, this thematic category includes growth, employment, purchasing power, public accounts - that is to say, the deficit, debt, taxes. Then, there was the category of the major issues that had been often discussed during the 2012 campaign, such as housing, education and immigration. The category that was next announced contained political issues, including the rules of democracy. And in the end, the two candidates, Nicolas Sarkozy and François Hollande, were to discuss international issues.⁷

Actually, the candidates did not approach all the announced themes, because the moderators were not able to control the adversarial exchanges, although they had 127 interventions (as against 27, in the 2007 debate) meant to dictate thematic and turn change. What resulted is the following thematic list and the key words associated to the areas under debate:

- economic issues: growth, employment, purchasing power, public accounts - that is to say, the deficit, debt, taxes (key words: *economic* – mentioned 6 times, *the debt* – mentioned 5 times, *public accounts* – mentioned 4 times, *the Euro-zone crisis* – 4 times, *jobs* – 3 times, *deficit* – 3 times, *the stability pact* – 3 times, *unemployment* – 2 times, *taxes* – 2 times, etc.), on pages 4-39;
- issues of society: (economic) immigration (key words: *the immigrants' voting rights* – 3 times, *flows of immigrants* – 2 times, *holding centers* for the immigrants – 2 times, etc.), on pages 39-53;
- *nuclear power plants* – mentioned 6 times, on pages 53-61;
- *political life*, *public life rules*, *presidential style* (each mentioned twice), on pages 62-69;
- *foreign policy* (mentioned twice) and *the terrorist threat* (mentioned twice), *the hostages* (mentioned twice), on pages 69-71.

4.2.2. Durations of issue debates

In Table 2, we included the durations of the themes that were discussed in the 2012 presidential debate.

⁷ « Nous avons décidé d'abord d'aborder les thèmes économiques : la croissance, l'emploi, le pouvoir d'achat, les comptes publics – c'est-à-dire le déficit, la dette, les impôts. Ensuite nous parlerons de quelques-uns des grands sujets qui ont été souvent débattus durant cette campagne, du logement à l'éducation en passant par l'immigration. Nous évoquerons ensuite des sujets plus politiques et notamment les règles de la vie démocratique. Et puis nous évoquerons les sujets internationaux ».
(Source: <http://discours.viepublique.fr/notices/123000884.html>)

Table 2

Durations of themes discussing in the 2012 debate

| No. | Thematic Chapters | Durations in minutes |
|-----|---|----------------------|
| 1. | Economic issues: growth, employment, purchasing power, public accounts - that is to say, the deficit, debt, taxes | 78 |
| 2. | Immigration | 31 |
| 3. | Nuclear power plants | 18 |
| 4. | Political life, public life rules, presidential style | 16 |
| 5. | Foreign policy | 11 |
| 6. | Others □ | 6 |

□ Others corresponds to the themes included in the opening interventions (welcoming) and the closing interventions (the candidates' address to the nation and leave taking).

Conclusions

The first statistical analysis shows that, in the 2007 debate, the most salient key words correspond to the themes announced by the moderators. *Institution and power* are the exact words that defined the first thematic chapter. The number of occurrences of the key words associated to economic and social issues prove that the economic field and the social one have a balanced representation in the discussions (*taxation, jobs, debt* counterbalance *retirement, social security, health issues*). The key words in the category of issues of society are numerous and equally salient (2 occurrences each). They are: *family, environment, education and culture*, while in the foreign affairs category, the key words *Europe* and *immigration* have an even distribution too (each is mentioned twice). In relation to immigration, the candidates insisted on the regularization of the illegal residents (*le reglement des sans papiers*), which confirms that, before the crisis, the French politicians were willing to integrate the immigrants.

In the 2012 debate, the most salient key words have an uneven distribution within the same thematic category or across the categories. Moreover, there is no distinct category of social issues. Both the moderators and the presidential candidates, Sarkozy and Hollande, insist on the economic issues at the expense of the other themes announced at the beginning of the debate. Thus, the key words: *economic, the debt, public accounts, the Euro zone crisis, jobs, deficit, stability pact* are mentioned at least 4 times each by the moderators; the theme of *immigration* is

included in the category of issues of society, but is actually treated as an economic problem whose key words are: *the immigrants' voting rights and the holding centers*, as a step before the immigrants' expulsion. Nuclear power plants, the theme and the key words, stand for the unique environment issue proposed and

discussed, and treated as an economic issue as well. In foreign policy issues, all key words are mentioned twice and they show the French concern with *terrorism* and *hostages*. The foreign policy category is comparable to the public, political and presidential rules, since these words are also mentioned twice each.

The economic issues are prevailing, there are new key words that appear in the moderators' interventions that were not initially announced, such as the oil price, the VAT, etc.

The results of the second statistics are categorical: while in 2007, every thematic group is discussed between 31 and 48 minutes, in 2012, almost half of the show time (78 minutes) is allotted to the debate of the economic issues.

Considering the data supplied by both statistics, we can conclude that the typical feminine issues, such as the social ones, are almost inexistent in the discourse of the moderators of the 2012 presidential debate, in times of crisis. In 2007, with Ségolène Royal as the first woman candidate who reached the second round of the presidential elections in France, women could feel that their needs were represented in her discourse. Likewise, influenced by the stable situation in 2007, the debate moderators proposed and imposed a balanced approach to all the main thematic categories. Order and balance are perceived as feminine values.

In exchange, the tough solutions and austerity measures proposed for discussion to the 2012 debaters are characteristic of masculine discourse. It marked both an ideological and an economic defeat for French women; the economic and social crisis is synonymous to *the crisis of care*.⁸

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GENDER IN BLACKNESS: STEREOTYPING IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE, MEDIA AND POLITICAL DISCOURSE

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Abstract: This paper features the strategies of gender stereotyping enacted by hegemonic groups in the sphere of institutional 'dialogue' and advertising discourse. The sequence of themes interfaces diachronic variation and cross-cultural differences (Italy, UK and USA). The stigma imposed on blackness in the Western world started with the translation of the Song of Songs, as perpetuated by the Latin translation Nigra Sum Sed Formosa, whereas the original gave: 'I am black AND beautiful'.

Keywords: gender; stereotyping; racism; black; ethnicity; translation; parody; institutional clash; advertising; colonialism.

1. Cross-cultural dialogue and institutional clash

This paper is partly inspired by the tragic deaths of four hundred African refugees and asylum seekers in the Mediterranean (Island of Lampedusa, October 2013). The deplorable episodes of intolerance flared at institutional level, before and after the tragic events, well account for the need to understand the dynamics of the process of racist stereotyping. These are examined with specific reference to gender and ethnicity in media and advertising.³

The Naomi Campbell versus Cadbury case (June 2011) in the British press was globally resonant and received massive coverage in the press and on the web. The latter highlighted the power of group and consumers' associations in the UK and US endangering and boycotting the launch of a new product. The event became 'news', and a case for Naomi's *furor* at being likened to a chocolate bar.⁴

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³ According to Roger Fowler "A stereotype is a socially-constructed mental pigeon-hole into which events and materials can be sorted...The formation of news events, and the formation of news values, is in fact a reciprocal, dialectical process in which the stereotypes are the currency of negotiation. The occurrence of a striking event will reinforce a stereotype, and reciprocally, the firmer the stereotype, the more likely are relevant events to become news" (Fowler, 1991: 17).

⁴ "Britain's advertising watchdog has dismissed a complaint by an anti-racism charity that an ad for a new Cadbury's product, which referred to supermodel Naomi Campbell as a 'diva', was racist in content. (<http://www.thejournal.ie/cadburys-ad-ruled-not-racist-despite-apology-to-naomi-campbell-159893-Jun2011/>). The 'Move Over Naomi there's a new Diva in Town' advertising a new chocolate bar, 'Bliss', was launched in Europe, but then immediately withdrawn. (Last access 24 May, 2013).

It involved the Advertising Standards Association (ASA) in UK and the Operation Black Vote (OBV). When a glamour icon reacts against racism, visibility is viral and pervasive.⁵

These facts are better understood when examining texts and materials featuring the causes and factors underpinning the development of stereotyping in the institutional domain and media discourse. The items are sequentially drawn from mixed corpora, i.e. literary texts, children literature, and mainly advertising.

2. Blackness and Gender bias

Gender plus blackness have been negatively targeted connoting a full spectrum of caricatures and abusive representations.⁶ Zoomorphic metaphors evidenciate that this is recurrent in literature, whether derogatory or complimentary. It happened to the Queen of Sheba (goat-feet), Cleopatra (crocodile), and to women achieving a high status. The infamous ape-like simile plaguing the Italian media (Summer 2013) epitomized an attitude of intolerance masked as jocular ‘humour’. This occurred even at parliamentary level. It came from a former Minister, Mr. Calderoli, as he referred to a female Minister, Cécile Kyenge. It seems not to have subsided while presently taking a threatening turn.

The mandatory formal apologies from Mr Calderoli, the sequel of vignettes and caricatures, plus a flurry of incandescent telephone calls to radio stations have heated up the debate from the institutional domain to social networks. Negative coverage came also from European and international press, highlighting Italy’s colonial past and racist present:

“The events of the last few weeks have proved, beyond doubt, that Italy has a serious problem. Bananas have been thrown at Cécile Kyenge, Italy's first black government minister. A (female) councillor for the Northern League has said she should be raped. A Northern League senator has likened her to an orangutan.”⁷

⁵ Erving Goffmann in *Gender Advertisements* (1976) does not have any reference to Blacks. Guy Cook’s *The Discourse of Advertising* (1992), Judith Williamson’s *De-coding Advertisements* (1978) or Mark Tungate’s *Adland: Global History of Advertising* do not cover such themes. In Twitchell’s *The Twenty Ads that Shook the World*, Michael Jordan is a successful celebration of body power: “Michael Jordan stayed in the air with his legs apart for the last ten seconds of the commercial [...].fusing spectators who had never been to a basketball game with the abiding fantasy of athletic virtuosity and escape.” (2000:207).

⁶ On exploitation of Black women in the media in US, see also Erin Chapman (2012).

⁷ Tobias Jones, ‘Why is Italy still so racist’, *The Guardian*, 30 July 2013. Online article. (Last access: 18 August, 2013). The gross and offensive language was unmistakably gender-connoted. The effects in this case seem to transgress the paradigm of ‘discourse and gender’ as posited by Deborah Tannen and Shari Kendall in their contribution (2001: 548-567), stretching over to racism and discourse, as in Ruth Wodak and Martin Reisigl (2001: 372-397).

All these facts enlarge the debate to historicity and colonialism, when the “specifics of discursive and historical colonialism, imply a relation of structural domination” as observed in Laura Donaldson’s *Decolonizing Feminism*:

“Like the relationship of colonizer to colonized, Western culture has defined women as different in kind from men and has often used *animal imagery* to dramatize this difference.” (Donaldson 1992:5; emphasis ours).

Ethnic bias and negative stereotyping have developed not only within institutional and ideological frameworks. They also proliferate through literary canons and popular prejudice. Parody and mimicry are reciprocally interdependent, and cover a spectrum ranging from simply funny to the bleak gender hatred or sexual bias, and gross prejudice. What is generally dismissed as harmless parody if coming from institutional referents can dangerously strengthen hierarchies and social marginalization.⁸

The selection of visuals and corpora presented in the following section focus the manipulation and distortions of Black identity based on gender. These are then indexed in terms of gender and evolving stereotypes. Consequently, we have tried to feature Europe and Italy, and its correlation where necessary to UK and USA. Reactions are slightly different: whereas in UK and USA there is a frightening threat to sabotage the market heralded by civil rights associations,⁹ this is hardly unlikely for the Italian market as yet. This type of ethnic marking and negative stereotyping, however, has deep roots in the cultural and historic past of Europe. What follows is a brief introduction to instances of ethnic bias in literary traditions, aesthetic canons, and popular tradition.

The *Song of Songs* also known as the *Song of Solomon* has been recognized by many as the epitome of erotic poetry and has largely influenced literature through translations and adaptations. And yet, this beauty (female beauty) is somehow flawed as it starts with stigma imposed on blackness. At least this occurs in the translation of the original Aramaic *Šir hašširim*, as perpetuated by the Latin version by St. Jerome (540 d.C): ‘Nigra Sum Sed Formosa’ (Black am I and Beautiful) and the following ‘Nolite me considerare quod fusca sum/quia decoloravit me sol’(Do not consider me that I am brown, because the sun hath altered my colour). Being dark of skin is cause by the sun-tan. Whereas the Greek version translates: ‘I am black and beautiful’ (1:5). In the Hebrew text it simply is a question of the conjunction /and/ which has an extended polysemy in the original

⁸ In *Language and Gender*, Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet define the approach on stereotyping, as ‘the relation between stereotypes and language providing us with crucial information about the ideological landscape in which language unfolds’ (2013: 59).

⁹ Kerstin Brückweh (2011) refers to the ‘political public sphere’. Citizen consumers have two voices in the public sphere, one constructed by associations and movements, the other by opinion polls and market research.

Aramaic, fading also into restricted /but/.¹⁰ The Greek version known as the Alexandrine *Septuaginta* version had ‘*melaina eimi kai kalé*’ ‘black am I and beautiful’.

Consequently, in the Latin version more commonly known as the *Vetus Latina*, /black/ has been used as a construct opposed to /white/.

Furthermore: the ‘black...but beautiful’ female is sometimes erroneously identified as the Queen of Sheba. The Queen of Sheba, on the contrary, in the Ethiopian tradition she is praised for her wisdom as in sacred text of the *Kebra Neghast* (Glory of Kings). This adds a negative connotation to traditions describing her as having goat-like feet.¹¹ Kate Lowe notes the choice of /but/ as adversative, in the *Song of Songs*:

“The adoption of this model, first in Latin, and then in the major European vernacular languages, had a detrimental effect on how sub-Saharan Africans were viewed in the period 1440-1650, enshrining negative expectations about what black skin signified.”¹² (Lowe 2012:544)

This did affect the Western canon of aesthetics and imagination as Shakespeare followed suit with his sun-tanned Cleopatra: “with Phoebus’ amorous pinches black and wrinkled deep in time” (*Antony and Cleopatra*, V:33-34).¹³

3. Stereotyping in children’s literature

The downgrading of blackness is likewise reinforced especially in English popular proverbs dating to Middle English, as well as in colonial and postcolonial vignettes and caricatures.¹⁴ Little moors were featured on shop sign-boards advertising colonial products and anything connected to blackness since the seventeenth century in England (Heal 1988) and Europe, reinforcing the ambivalent logos of and/but ‘beautiful’(Fig. 1). The tradition of chocolate has a long history in terms of Blacks being used as puppets or caricatures. The language of metaphors ranging from ‘sun-tanned’, ‘ink’, ‘coal’, to ‘chocolate’ as colour or as merchandise is patronizingly connoted at its best. And, it was a ‘chocolate’

¹⁰ For /black/ the Hebrew has *sehora* (1:5) dark, followed by *šeharhoret* → /brunette/. The original Aramaic *shehovrah ani v’navah*. Literally it is ‘Black I and comely’. The whole question relies on the construction of /and/ /v/ (the letter /vav/) (Zatelli 2012: 76-77; Beretta 1991:26-27; Ravasi 1992).

¹¹ Caprine features are part of the iconography of demons and satanic creatures.

¹² In various European languages this ‘black’ is translated with different connotations and meanings. It is translated as ‘soot’ in the Northumberland dialect of colliers of the *Song* (Tomei 2013).

¹³ In the Renaissance, *nigredo* or blackness refers to alchemic phases of transmutations (*rubedo*, *albedo*) as may be symbolized in Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*. (Rosini Masiola, 1988: 134-138).

¹⁴ ‘Those that eat a black pudding will dream of the devil’ (Apperson 1993: 52) or with reference to sexual stereotyping ‘black men are pearls in beauteous ladies’ eyes’ (Shakespeare, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, V, ii, 11).

explicit reference on packaging connoting the ‘Diva’ (Fig. 2), against which British Jamaican top-model Naomi Campbell reacted.¹⁵

Gender and race stereotyping is also present in children’s books and illustrations. There are countless examples of use of black caricatures. The following example is from a small children book, as it contains illustrations and very little writing, imitating the comic-strip style, for children who cannot read. The author is Grete Meuche (Leipzig, 1921). The book has had notoriety in Italy and featured several editions. The first Italian edition dates to 1944 and was approved by fascist Minculpop, Ministry for Popular Culture (ex-‘Ministero per la Stampa e la Propaganda’). The original title was *Mampampebuche* and in Italian it is known as *La storia di Pik Padaluk*. Pik Badaluk’s mother is a caricature inspired by the American fat Mamie, dressed in blue checkered calico. All the family members are intentional caricatures. The idea of blacks used as puppets used to amuse a white audience is a total contradiction in terms of cross-cultural pedagogy.¹⁶ The mantra stereotype is always ‘chocolate’.

Illustrations feature the caricature of the black boy, his family and tribe members. Pik is alternatively called ‘piccolo moro’, ‘moretto’ and qualified as: “buono come il più buon cioccolato, nero alla pari d’un carboncello” (“good as the most goodie chocolate, and black as a small piece of coal”). The opening lines are: “C’era una volta un piccolo moro, che si chiamava Pik Badaluk” (“Once upon a time there was a little moor whose name was Pik Badaluk”). The characters bear similarity to other Black children as portrayed in European literature, in Germany and in Britain, notably to *Little Black Sambo* (1899).¹⁷

Although Pik Padaluk’s characters are themselves derived from ethnic stylization of caricatures, other caricatures are in turn derived. The prototype is famous Aunt Jemima featured in packaging (Quaker Oats) for waffles and pancakes (Fig. 3). Jemima was actually the model for the Hollywood ‘Mamie’ (Figs. 4 and 5). Pik’s mother (Fig. 6) generated in turn other family caricatures, as

¹⁵ President Berlusconi used ‘tan’ as an interjectional remark (‘ed è pure abbronzato’--> ‘and he is even tanned’) intended to be a compliment to the looks of President Obama. Former Minister Roberto Calderoli iterated the remark publicly referring to Italian-Palestinian anchor woman, Rula Jebreal. He meant to be offensive and deliberately manipulated the metaphor, as he also added ‘camels and the desert’.

¹⁶ The first Italian edition did not mention the author, and attributed it to a ‘Mago Cif’ (Wizard Cif). There were further editions in 1974, 1994, 1998 and 2010. Today it is also downloadable in its Italian version in many reprints. In recent times it has been adapted into ‘favola in musica’, where caricature is even more marked. Adaptation is by Marina Allegri, and director Maurizio Bercini, Gattatico (Reggio Emilia). In their words “*Ci è piaciuta l’idea di proporre ai bambini delle scuole materne ed ai loro educatori questo sguardo ingenuo sull’Africa per riscoprire lo stupore verso un popolo ed un paese lontano ed assai differente,...*” (“We really liked the idea of presenting to the children of primary schools and their educators this naive perspective on Africa to discover anew the sense of wonder towards a people and a country so far and so diverse”...). See <http://www.caluogodarte.com/spettacoli> (Last access 25 March 2013).

¹⁷ *Sambo* is a censored book in the US (Notini 2006: 164).

seen in billboard advertisement for cigarette paper (Modiano, Trieste 1930 ca) featuring a monkey-like kid stealing cigarettes from his father's pockets (Fig. 7). The father is dressed in circus attire, typical of the black staff taking care of in charge of lions and elephants. Assumption may be reasonable as both book and ad were printed in Trieste.

4. Spreading racial and gender discrimination in advertising

A domain often exploited for fun was that of the Circus and American vaudeville: favourite black characters were often real clowns (i.e. Rastus) or toys (the British Gollywog). Using emancipated blacks in distinctive attire was aimed to warrant genuine products from the plantation complex. Most of this paraphernalia is now longer used as market brands, or has been 'gentrified' like the new Mamie, yet there are still examples which can be found in shop-windows and on display, from Chinese gollywogs dolls sold in Hong Kong to the Mamie mascots advertising chocolates in Italy (2012). But what is interesting here is the development and markedness in stereotyping.

Blackness has been branded as a product for the Western world, something to be 'commodified', branded and globalized, evolving from the stereotype of the black savage and criminal, to deformed clown, down to the present day where emphasis is essentially on physical power and body (Perilli 2012). The film industry and commercials featured taglines and cartoons where 'stunted' language became even more prominent in the dubbed versions. Conversely, today a black body (female) is displayed as 'silent' or voiceless 'showcase' for luxury items. This may be seen in the display ads from glossy magazines featuring a naked body, or part of a body with no facial features (Fig. 11-12). Here black bodies are merely used as holders for the advertised object, usually a jewel or gold, with reference to a condition of slavery and subjection. It seems then that global beauty is thriving on black bodies and physical beauty (Jones 2012). Conversely, identity and any cultural or intellectual feature is annihilated and rendered 'invisible', recalling Ralph Waldo Ellison's *The Invisible Man* (1952), only that it is not America in the fifties: it is display ad for the launch of jewel design in Italy (2007).¹⁸

The same stereotyping of the Black Mamie as a good house servant as a clumsy or a very fat lady with big eyes has been featuring endless chocolate packaging and cooking products (Goings 1994; Manning 1998). A contribution came also from the Hollywood industry with the stunted accents and voices of Blacks, and the matrix of stereotyping in film-making was with 'Mamie' in *Gone With the Wind* (see Figs. 3 and 4). There is a circular intertextuality in terms of

¹⁸ Agency Armando Testa (2007) for Pasquale Bruni Jewels Collection 'Anima e Cuore' (Body and Soul). Black display ads are no longer accessible online, and have been presumably withdrawn since 2011. Testa is one of the leading Italian advertising agencies.

Black stereotyping, where a musical vaudeville character inspires packaging, packaging inspires films, and in turn films inspire packaging and commercials.¹⁹

Examples of negative stereotyping in advertising are equally found in European countries such as the UK, Germany, France and Italy.²⁰ Packaging and gadgets were still very common in the sixties and even if more rare, there are still mascots to be seen in Italy advertising chocolates either with Mamie and her ‘funny’ and big smiling faces with big red lips (Figs. 8-9) or more sad and realistic, reminiscent of plantation and slavery (Fig.10).

Our last example is an Italian cult commercial featuring a Mamie (see Appendix), where intratextual references denote a binary ethnic opposition, where Blacks are subservient to the patronizing ‘master’ class, albeit in a jocular way.²¹ For sure what seemed innocent in the fifties is perceived today as markedly racist and offensive.²²

This last Italian Mamie adaptation is from a famous tv commercial, aired in Italy in the sixties featuring a house servant, ‘Matilda’, played by singer Edith Peters of the ‘Peters Sisters Trio’. The perception today is that of maximization of ethnic and cultural clash, albeit totally unperceived as such at the time.²³ It is

¹⁹ Actress Hattie McDaniel was awarded the Oscar (1940). She was the first Black American woman to sing on the radio. Yet, even more surprisingly, one of the many Aunt Jemimas on stage was played by an singer of Italian origins, Therese ‘Tess’ Gardella (1894-1950). Another case of a member of a minority community with a caricatured black mask the Jewish singer Al Jolson (1886-1950), famous for his song ‘Mamie’. It seemed that prevailing taste was to have minority groups performing as Black Africans (or even Indians in films).

²⁰ See exhibit *Négripub. L’image des Noirs dans la publicité depuis un siècle*. Bibliothèque Forney, Paris, 1987. See also Rapisarda (2013) for packaging and ads related to Abyssinian and Ethiopian campaigns (www.rivistacharta.it/2013/05/nigrizia/. Last access May 24, 2013).

²¹ As the commercial cannot be shown, there is a segmentation of the single items and a multimodal analysis (multimodality) following Vasta (2002) and Baldry and Thibault (2006). See also Gunter Kress and Theo van Leeuwen and their much-cited *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (1996) illustrating paradigms to decode visual advertisements.

²² The commercial advertising olive oil Sasso was broadcast in 1965 and directed by Corrado Farina, (Studio Testa Agency) Male actor is Mimmo Craig. Edith Peters is made to speak in Venetian dialect, to mark subordination to her ‘white master’ who gives her orders: “Cossa ghé xe paròn?” (Whassop Mastah?), mimicking the silliness of house servants of the ‘commedia dell’arte’ typical of Carlo Goldoni’s (1750). ‘Matilde’ and represents daily routine and grim reality to an alluring and elusive blonde appearing in a dream. It is divided into two parts, ‘dream’ and ‘awakening’ (see Appendix). The music chosen for the dream is Edvard Grieg’s famous ‘Awakening’ from *Peer Gynt* (1875). The black and white television enhanced the effects.

²³ As noted by Ron Scollon: “Any attempt to work out how discourse representation is accomplished in advertising is frustrated by the fact that rarely are there any real speakers or writers communicating to a real audience. That is to say, the discourse representation of advertising is among fictional players in constructed scenarios, not between the producers of the discourse and those players.” (Scollon 2004: 163).

worthwhile noting that very sadly, Edith Peters (1926-2000) was a sophisticated Afro-American singer, performing repertoires in Ella Fitzgerald's style, such as *A tisket of tasket* or *A rainy day* (1947). A juxtaposition of two images may do justice to her (see Appendix image and Fig. 13). These were the fifties and sixties in Italy, in institutionalized broadcast commercials (one and only channel) as television was under governmental and party control.

Again the words of Naomi Campbell may well stigmatize the perception of the black community when connoted as chocolate in the Cadbury's Dairy Milk Bliss campaign:

"I am shocked ...It's upsetting today to be described as chocolate, not just for me, but for all black women and black people. I do not find any humour in this. It is insulting and hurtful".²⁴

Then, in terms of marketing and management she was even more abrasive: "They should avoid causing offence in the first place, which is best achieved by having greater diversity at board and senior management level".

5. Conclusions: dialogue and identity

Michael Cronin in his *Translation and Identity* prophetically noted that:

"The danger is that culture is simply perceived as politics without the pain. It is easier, in other words, to promote upbeat images of cultural diversity and deal with racial violence on a piecemeal basis than to address the structuring effects of racism on national societies. The emergence of multiculturalism, interculturalism and cultural diversity as issues for many societies in recent decades is to do with the increased scale of migration attendant on economic and political developments and demographic changes but the prevalence of the debate on these topics is also linked to the implications of living in a world of global connectedness" (Cronin 2006: 49).

Multi-integrationalism should perhaps be the key issue for the future, following the Australian example. Italy today hosts many different Black ethnicities. Such communities are multi-lectal and multi-lingual. Solutions and cultural assets rely on implementing all resources enhancing multi-integrationalism.²⁵

Yet the question of cyclic emergence of racism and nationalism calls for a re-appraisal of the significance of gender and 'black'. Africa and the Euro-

²⁴ Campbell sent a written statement to CNN (online, accessed July 2013). Extracts are reported also in *The Independent*, "Naomi Race Row: Leave our Sweets Alone".

²⁵ In terms of Black semantics, the distinctions exist in the press and the media. Subtly, constellations of meaning depend also on spelling. As for the 'Orangutan' injurious similitude as well as the American and British 'chocolate' terms for Blacks is strongly offensive. In her listing of African-American terms which have impacted on American English, Geneva Smitherman notes the difference between 'nigga' defiant in attitude, to 'the nigger', compliant and eager to please the institutional system. (Smitherman, 2006: 49). See also recent *Articulate While Black*, on language and race in the US (Alimi and Smitherman 2012).

Mediterranean area are the actors in dialogic and heteroglossic construction of new identities, fluidity and multiple identities, in full respect of female subjectivity.²⁶ With regard to actual facts, the African Holocaust has presumably totalled one hundred and sixty millions victims, while the African Diaspora to the Mediterranean reached thirty-five thousand in only fifteen years.

A dialogue-driven change in the public and private sphere has been long overdue, and to put it in the very clear words of Naomi Campbell's mother: "Do these people think they can insult black people and we just take it? This is the twenty-first century, not the fifties...".

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Fig. 1 - Black and/but Beautiful – Colonial Packaging by Samuel and Henry Harris (London 1850). <http://www.stgite.org.uk/goodmansfields3.html>

²⁶ In her view, Carole Boyce Davies focuses on the problem of intellectual and physical migrant subjectivity. "Employing a variety of meanings of subjectivity, I want to pursue the understanding of the resisting subject and apply it in different ways to the diasporic elsewhere of a radical Black diasporic subjectivity" (21994: 37). Two decades ago this was a virtuoso furthering in Black gender studies and 'female subjectivity'. Today the real challenge is African women and their often fatal journeys towards Europe.

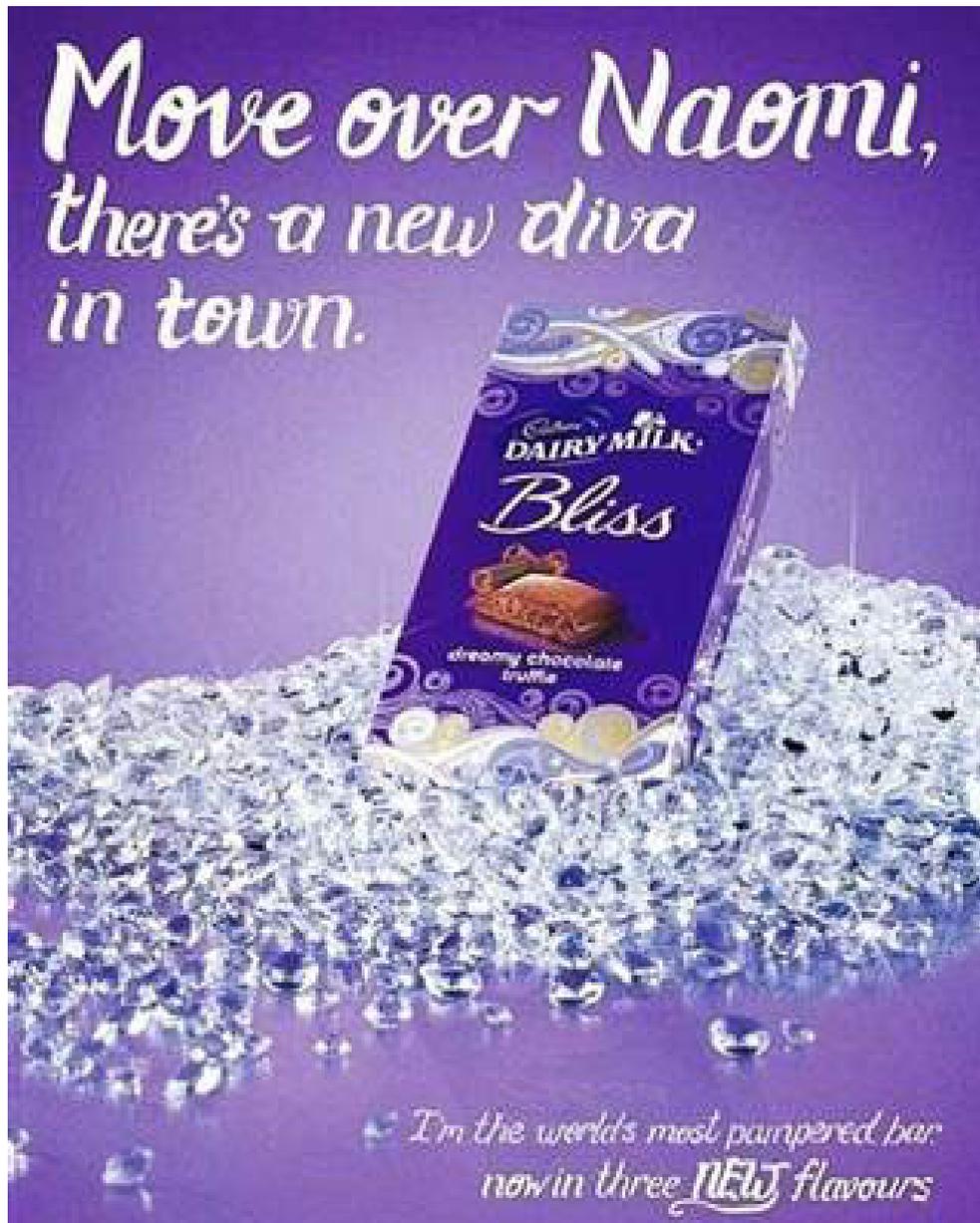


Fig. 2 - Cadbury's Packaging (London, 2011). (<http://jezebel.com/5806989/naomi-campbell-declares-chocolate-ad-racist-threatens-to-sue>).

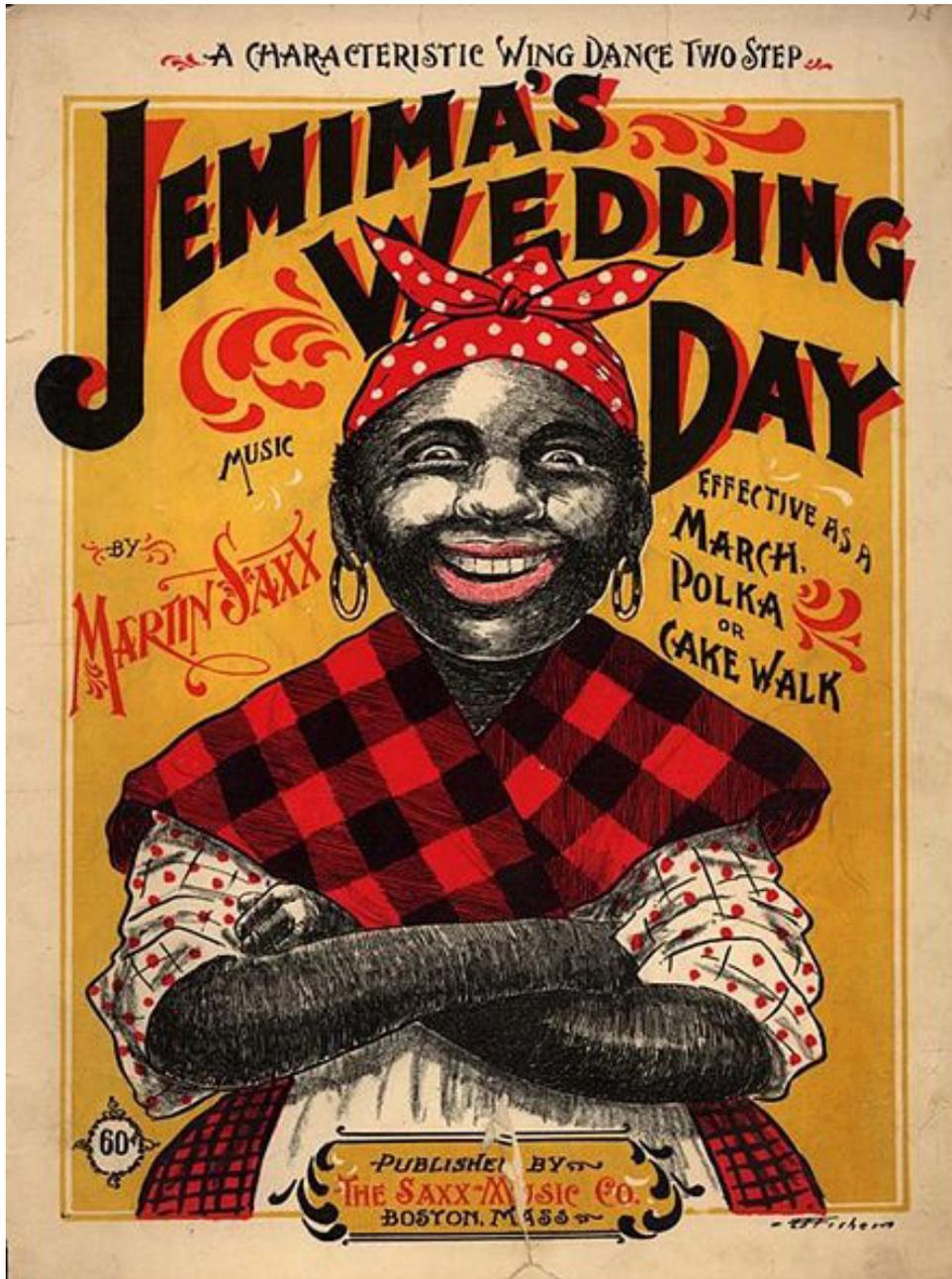


Fig. 3 - Vaudeville Aunt Jemima. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page.)



Fig. 4 and 5 - Actress Hattie McDaniel Mamie in *Gone With the Wind* (1939).
<http://oldhollywood.net/the-beginning-of-the-end/>.



Fig. 6 - Pik Badaluk's Mother (1921) (photo credits: authors' collection).

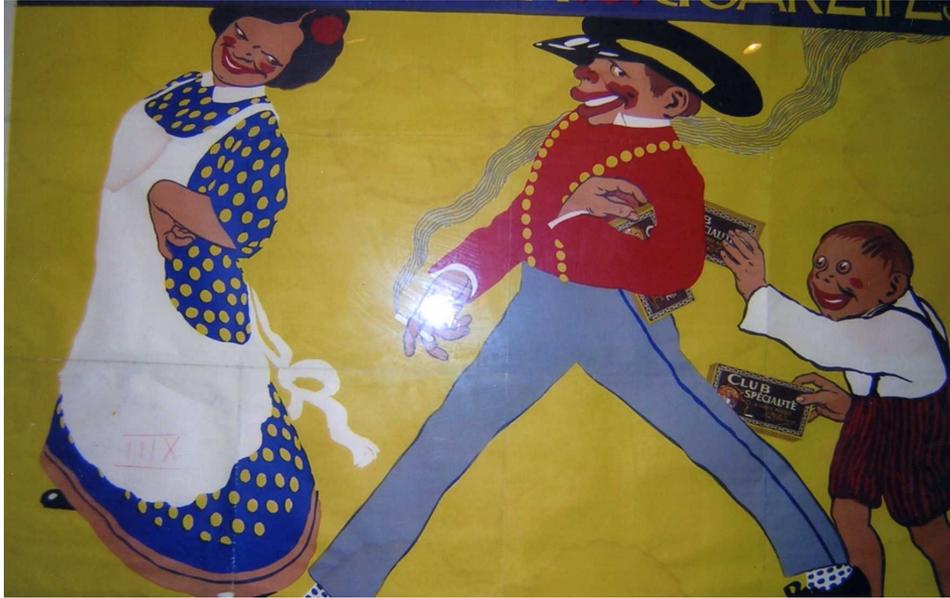


Fig. 7 - Modiano Cigarette Billoboard, Trieste, Italy (1930) (photo credits: authors' collection).



Fig. 8 - Venchi Nougatine Chocolate Mascot, Porcelain Statue, Italy (2011) (photo credits: authors' collection).

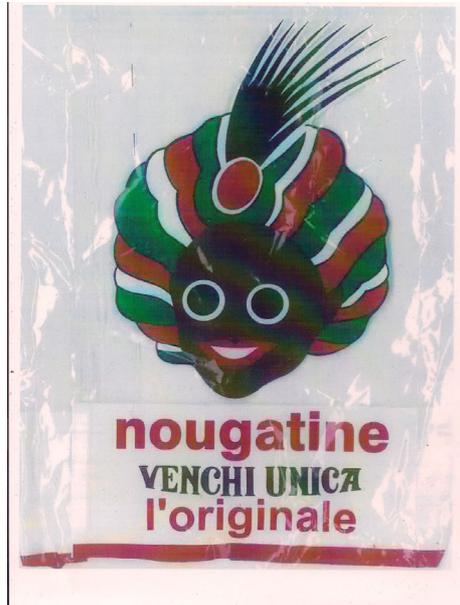


Fig. 9 - Venchi Chocolate Paper, Italy (2013) (photo credits: authors' collection).

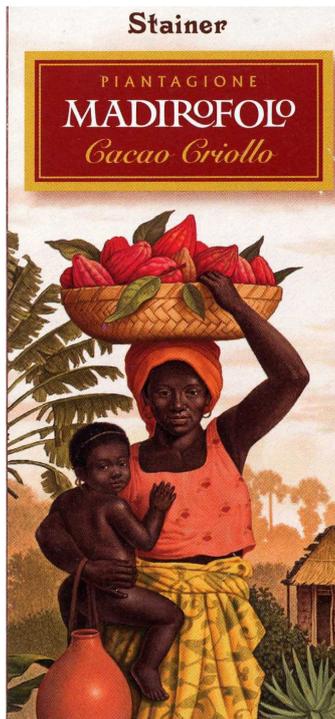


Fig. 10 - Stainer Chocolate Packaging, Italy (2011) (photo credits: authors' collection).



Figs. 11-12 - Pasquale Bruni Jewels, 'Anima e Corpo' Series, Display Ads Studio Testa, 2007 (credits: authors' collection).



Figs. 13. Edith Peters, singer and actress. <http://heyse-online.de/spencerhilldb/darsteller.php?darsteller=64>.

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LOST IN A MEN'S WORLD: WOMEN IN ROMANIAN LOCAL POLITICS

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to present, in a descriptive perspective, the women's participation in Romanian politics, with a closer attention to local government. The starting point of this article is the low number of women politicians which represents a feature of the post-communist Romanian political system. In this political system women are an exception rather than a rule. As an exception a woman can announce her intention to run for the Presidency of Romania, however, it is better not to carry out the mind and withdraw, leaving the place for a man. As an exception a woman can be president of the equality committee of Parliament, but as a rule she must be content with the less important role of witness and moral support of the great male enterprises. Using quantitative data we will emphasize the persistence of women's discrimination in Romanian local politics, not as isolated cases but as features of Romanian politics.

Keywords: women politicians, local politics, discrimination, gender equality.

The Universal Declaration of Democracy, adopted in September 1997, in Cairo, by the *Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)* states that:

The achievement of democracy presupposes a genuine partnership between men and women in the conduct of the affairs of society in which they work in equality and complementarily, drawing mutual enrichment from their differences.

Despite this worldwide adopted principle, the discrimination against women political participation persists, even if hidden by the guise of an egalitarian discourse; all over the world men outnumber women in parliaments²⁸ and in governments; the progress of women's representation in parliaments is stalling; and the parity between men and women in local politics remain only a northern European achievement²⁹.

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²⁸ With the exception of Rwanda where women represent 63,5% of the Lower House, but only 38,5% of the Upper House (according to www.ipu.org, Women in National Parliaments Project, last update 24th November 2013); and Andorra where the balance is even 50% women, 50% men (out of 28 members of the Andorra Parliament)

²⁹ According with the final report of *European Network: Sister Cities Going Gender* (2005) supported by 5th Community Action Program for Equality between Men and Women of the European Union: *In the City of Stockholm, for example, there is parity between male and female representatives in both the municipal government and municipal assembly (...). In comparison, the average proportion of women in municipal councils and assemblies in the Netherlands is 26,5%, in Germany 24,7% and in Italy 9.8%* www.sister-cities-going-gender.org, last update 24th November 2013.

Unless women and men are equally involved in politics, at all levels (national as well as local) and all fields (e.g. social protection as well as defense), democracy is just another big but meaningless word. If more than a half of the population is underrepresented, one cannot talk about democracy in the full sense of the word.

The aim of this paper is to present, in a descriptive perspective, the participation of women in Romanian politics, with an emphasis on local government. We believe that local government is/ can be a breaking point for women's entrance into politics, due to relative reduced competition, low campaign costs that are involved and, last but not least, because of the issues concerned. Moreover, local politics provides training grounds for women who want to prove themselves and to reach higher levels of elected or appointed office in national politics; also women's participation in local politics will accustom citizens (both males and females) with the idea of women politicians and change the community perspective over the presence of women in politics.

Women in post-communist Romanian politics

After almost 25 years of democracy, based on the separation of powers and equal citizens participation (in spirit but not in fact), In Romania, politics is still a *boy's club*. From the patriarchal communist system, Romanian society has only abolished communism, consistently maintaining the patriarchal component. Conservatism is masked by liberal democratic appearances resulting from a collision between political discourses and everyday practices. Any egalitarian discourse is viewed with reluctance and any action in this regard is labeled as nostalgic. The widespread misogyny in Romanian society has suppressed the presences of women in power spheres, which resulted in subsequent reduction of feminist claims. The changes brought about by the Romanian revolution acted in fact, not in spirit, against women's political participation. The *pro-women implication discourse* was labeled as communist residue and any attempt of imposing some balance between women and men politicians became trite.

The low number of women-politicians represents a feature of the post-communist Romanian political system, labelled by both scientists and politicians as "the terrible Romanian phallocracy" or «the gender asymmetry of Romanian democracy»³⁰: Only one woman (from 61 candidates) ran for the Presidency in 23 years of democracy; no woman prime-minister in the same period; no vice-prime-minister either; less than 10% women ministers (27 out of 367). Even if the situation is slowly improving (see the percentage of women in the 2012's Parliament, for the first time over 10%), women are still banned from political decision.

These numbers, however small, do not represents entirely the low importance of women in Romanian politics. Women and men do not share the political power equally. Women politicians are employed in 'soft areas' (health,

³⁰ Liliana Popescu, 2004, p. 298.

education, etc.) and at the bottom of the political hierarchy. Women's position in society has practically remained the same nowadays. Only the settings and the political scene have changed from the private sector to the public one.

Only after the elections in December 2012, the percentage of women in Parliament reached the symbolic threshold of 10%. It should be noted, however, that this situation is based on a substantial increase in the percentage of women in the lower house of parliament. In the Senate, the situation remains the same as in previous mandates: only 13 out of the 176 senators are women but none of them is in the leadership of their political group or the Permanent Bureau of the Senate. Only 3 out of the 18 standing committees of the Senate are headed by women and 7 are true *boys-club* sites. In Romania in 2012, public administration, defense, finance and foreign affairs are still managed by male politicians. In the committee dealing with equal opportunities, there is only one woman, SilistruDoina (PSD³¹), a clear sign that, in Romania, equality is not for women. In the Chamber of Deputies the gender balance of power is also unbalanced. Only two women are committee chairs, and these are Health and Family and equality between men and women. At the governmental level, in the last 10 years we note an improvement in the presence of women ministers and also an attempt to impose the idea that a woman can lead a ministry associate with masculinity values (ex. The ministry of Transport is led by Ramona Manescu, PNL³²).

In 23 years, only one woman, Daniela Popa, was, for a brief period, the formal leader of parliamentary political party (PC³³). Since 2012, one parliamentary party has a woman leader³⁴ but this entire party is built around a man, Dan Diaconescu, a popular and controversial television show-man. Only one party (the social-democrats) has more than 1 female vice-president (3 out of 15).

In the majors parties (PSD, PNL and PD-L³⁵) there are women's organizations whose agenda

is "the Romanian women's agenda, so that we can solve inequalities in society and to meet the needs that women have" (Rovana Plumb, 19.01.2013, at the *National Executive Committee of the Social Democratic Women*). In fact, these organizations have reduced power within the political parties repre-



Picture 2: male speakers at a women's political meeting. www.pnl.ro, last update 24th November

³¹ Social Democratic Party

³² National Liberal Party

³³ Conservatory Party

³⁴ Simona Man, People's Party-Dan Diaconescu

³⁵ Democrat-Liberal Party

senting a platform for male leaders. They organize *8th of March parties* where the only men allowed are the top political male leaders; their virility is on display³⁶ been the center of the celebration. At the women's organization conference, the speakers are male, as in picture 1 beside.

The website of the Social-democrats women's organization has been under construction since 2011, but the organization's Facebook page one can see a particular concern for celebrating the birthday of Mihai Eminescu (Romanian national poet, born 163 years), ignoring – as well as other similar organizations – Gigi Becali's sexist statements about women's involvement in politics or the fact that Romania was rocked in early 2013 by a sexual harassment scandal involving a policewoman.

There is an extensive literature about women in Romanian politics. The studies³⁷ conclude that the poor representation of women at the top of politics as well as the fact that women and men are treated differently, and women are portrayed negatively and stereotypically. In this context, we try to find out if the *glass-ceiling model* is reproduced in the deep layers of local politics.

Women in Romanian local politics

The local politics deals with daily issues and influences daily lives. As Laura van Assendelft argues (in O'Connor K. eds, 2010, p.123), local politics develops policies and implements a wide range of programs and services influencing everything from public safety and schools, to recreation and environmental protection. Local politics is also more accessible for participation than any other level of government.

In Romania, the local government has a two-headed management: on the one hand there are prefectures, led by prefect and two sub-prefects, senior civil servants, and territorial government representatives appointed by the Prime Minister, on the other hand county council, whose members and chairman, are elected by the people through direct vote. In 2012, in 4 of the 42 counties (including Bucharest) the Government is represented by a woman, other 8 women are sub-prefects. Following the 2012' elections, no woman has been elected to lead a county council and only 7 women (from 82, 2 in each county) were designated by the county councilors' vote to fill the position of Vice President of the County Council. A stronger female presence is reflected in the county secretaries: 15 out of a total of 37.

³⁶ After all, they have to face so many women!

³⁷ To name the most representatives: Laura Grunberg, Daniela Roventa-Frumusani Doina Pasca Harsanyi; Mihaela Miroiu, Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, Liliana Popescu, Irina Moroianu-Zlatescu, Oana Baluta, Ionela Baluta, etc.

Table 1

Women mayors and deputy mayors in Romania

| Type of political-administrative structure, by size | Mayors | Women mayors | % women mayors | Deputy mayors | Women deputy mayors | % women vice-mayors |
|---|--------|--------------|----------------|---------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| village | 2593 | 112 | 4,14 | 1874 | 98 | 5,22 |
| Very small town, less than 10.000 inhabitants | 77 | 2 | 2,5 | 43 | 5 | 11,62 |
| Small town, between 10.001 and 50.000 inhabitants | 107 | 2 | 1,83 | 72 | 3 | 4,16 |
| Medium town, between 50.001 and 100.000 inhabitants | 22 | 0 | 0 | 28 | 3 | 10,71 |
| Large town, between 100.001 and 500.000 inhabitants | 30 | 1 | 3,33 | 42 | 5 | 11,90 |
| Very large town, more than 500.000 inhabitants | 1 | 0 | - | 2 | 0 | - |

Only 4% of elected mayors in Romania, in June 2012, are women, most of them in rural areas, as shown in the table above. In five counties and in Bucharest (there are 7 mayors in Bucharest) there is no woman mayor. Of the 1684 localities for which we have complete data (mayor, deputy mayor, secretary), 3 (0.17%) are driven only by women, while 713 (42.33%) are run only by men. Other municipalities 828 (49.16%) are headed by a mayor and a deputy mayor man and a woman secretary, this being the most common pattern. In the case of very small cities (under 10,000 inhabitants) the dominant leadership model is the same: mayor- man, deputy mayor-man, secretary- woman (in 58.13% of cases).

The situation is changing in large cities where the dominant model is strictly male (63.60% of cases). The reason for this shift lies in the attributes of the secretary: in a large city, the secretary of the town-hall has a great power (symbolic and economic as well), which is not the case in small cities or in the countryside.

If elected functions are dominated by men, in executive functions (civil servants, access is based on competition) there are mostly women, as shown in table 2 below:

Table 2

Women secretaries in Romanian local administration

| Tip of political-administrative structure, by size | Secretary | Women secretary | % women secretary |
|---|------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| village | 2479 | 1307 | 52,72 |
| Very small town, less than 10.000 inhabitants | 70 | 39 | 55,71 |
| Small town, between 10.001 and 50.000 inhabitants | 104 | 52 | 50 |
| Medium town, between 50.001 and 100.000 inhabitants | 23 | 8 | 34,78 |
| Large town, between 100.001 and 500.000 inhabitants | 27 | 8 | 29,62 |
| Very large town, more than 500.000 inhabitants | 1 | 0 | - |

It is worth noting that, as the number of inhabitants in administrative-territorial unit managed grows, the percentage of women employed in this position gets lower.

Possible explanations of women's exclusion from local politics

Feminist literature identifies a number of weak points that maintain this disparity of representation of women in the public sphere:

1. Willingness and ability to enter the political game is lower among women than among men. Many women underestimate their potential or are too preoccupied with the daily struggle to be willing to engage in politics. The gender discrimination in terms of time available (woman's double burden don't to give them time for political action and violence of Romanian public space are barriers to women's access.

2. To this, one must add the quasi- absence of female models. The most known woman politician in Romania is Elena Udrea, with a hyper-sexualised public image, a model of politician which become dominant in Romanian politics, at any level, crossing parties' boundaries. In order to remain in public eyes, women politicians resort to cancan which leads to a quasi-exclusion of women from serious political debate or (perverse effect) causes women to resort to

alternative strategies to capture attention (pseudo events focused on femininity and not on competence, glossy photographic presence). This distorted pattern of the woman politician but compatible with the collective mind tend to generalize and cannibalize the other models, which rule out the women who do not fit into the model and reinforce the gender stereotypes.

Using some confidential data and participative observation procedures, we found out that women do not miss from political life, but from the political decision sphere. At the bottom of the political party structure, women exceed men; at the top, the situation is reversed, as in table 3 below:

Table 3

Women in party structures

| Party | Vice-presidents | | Secretary | | Other national lidars | | Local lidars | |
|-------|-----------------|-------|-----------|-------|-----------------------|-------|--------------|-------|
| | total | women | total | women | total | women | total | women |
| PSD | 15 | 3 | 9 | 2 | 99 | 13 | 35 | 1 |
| PNL | 13 | 1 | 10 | 2 | 17 | 4 | 46 | 0 |
| PDL | 4 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| PC | 12 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 43 | 1 |

Overcoming filters preceding application of candidature, especially in the absence of regulations on egalitarian representation based on percentages. The main barrier that women have to overcome previous to the announcement of the candidature is the persistence of traditional social roles and attitudes of discouraging women leadership skills. Also, the competence to succeed as woman among a political class with rules established in time to a world fundamentally male machismo and violence marked the symbolic represent a possible hindrance. Women do not get often on the electoral list; when it happens, they are placed at the bottom, where the elections chances are close to none. Using 2012 election data, we found out that only a low percentage of women were designated by their party to run for a county or town council mandate, as can be seen in table 4 below.

3. Supporting voters and their reluctance to vote for women running for management positions. According to gender barometer 2000, for 45% of voters, candidates' gender is important when have to vote a member of the Parliament. The percentage rises to 55% for mayor and 73% for the president. Moreover, 54% of respondents believe that men are better political leaders than women.

Table 4

Overall candidatures for county and local councils, in 2012

| People designated by different parties to run for: | men | women | % women |
|--|-------|-------|---------|
| County council | 15669 | 1202 | 7,12 |
| Local council | 11975 | 3656 | 23,39 |

Conclusions of the study

The changes brought about by the Romanian revolution acted in fact, not in spirit, against women's political participation. The pro-women implication discourse was labeled as communist residue and any attempt at imposing some balance between women and men politicians become trite. The patriarchal discourse, natural for the majority, has imposed over the modern one; the latest was left for official meetings at European level and did not produce any real, important, effect.

In Romanian politics, women are an exception rather than the rule. As an exception a woman can announce her intention to run for the Presidency of Romania, however, is better not to carry out the mind and withdraw, leaving the place for a man. As an exception a woman can be a mayor or a prefect or a member of the equality committee of Parliament. As a rule, she can be secretary of the commission, the municipality or county council. This scarce representation of women in the areas of decision reduces the chances of fair representation of women (who represent nearly 52% of the electorate) and reinforces the stereotypical image of second-class citizens with fewer rights but more obligations.

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GENDER ISSUES IN THE INTERACTIONS OF ITALIAN POLITICIANS ON TWITTER: IDENTITY, REPRESENTATION AND FLOWS OF CONVERSATION

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Abstract: Twitter is emerging as a medium where users negotiate and maintain relationships and identities. How do political actors use Twitter? In a gender perspective, this study aims to shed light on their interactions on Twitter, which can be considered a window on how women and men represent and construct their gender and political identities within conversational flows.

Keywords: social networks; computer-mediated communication; Twitter; dialogue; gender; identity; social interactions; conversation; political discourse.

1. Introduction

Twitter, the social network that enables users to post messages of up to one hundred and forty characters, recently reached almost five million active users in Italy, with an increase of fifty percent in the last year. The first tweet by an Italian politician dates back to mid-2007; after six years, most Italian Members of Parliament have a Twitter account and use it to communicate with their followers. Bentivegna (2006)³ points out that, during the 2006 election campaign, the use of Internet by Italian politicians was overall unable to exploit its full potential, in terms of networking, self-promotion and conversationality.

In this study, we investigate how politicians use Twitter today, with a specific emphasis on two different themes, deeply related to Internet and more specifically social network communication: conversationality and identity construction.

2. Background and research questions

One of the emerging discursive features of Twitter is its conversationality: unlike older media, like television, Twitter is based on interactions among users. Interactions on Twitter can be described as short, public conversations that share a

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³ Bentivegna, Sara. Campagne elettorali in rete. Bari: Laterza, 2006. Print

double audience (Herring, Honeycutt 2009)⁴: a general audience of followers, and a specific one, selected through the use of mentions (a username preceded by "@"). In example (1), a politician (@Idvstaff) addresses his tweet to a specific user (@santovasta), who asked him a question, and at the same time to the general audience of his followers.

(1)

@Idvstaff il governo con la scusa di far quadrare i conti vuole licenziare migliaia di dipendenti pubblici ma i partiti dove siete?

(@Idvstaff the government with the excuse of making ends meet wants to lay off thousands of public employees but where are you, the parties?)

@santovasta noi siamo a fare opposizione da più di un anno a questo governo, ma hanno una maggioranza bulgara...

(@santovasta we have been opposing this government for more than a year, but they have a Bulgarian majority...)

Previous research on the use of Twitter by Italian politicians suggested that women and men have different attitudes in their approach to dialogue and in their use of conversational features (Spina 2012)⁵.

On the side of identity construction, social networks can be used to affirm users' multiple identities. Identity can be defined as the display of or ascription to membership of some feature-rich category (Antaki, Widdicombe 2008)⁶. As such, identity work is in the hands of participants and it is an endemic feature of discourse.

Twitter users can define themselves through interaction, as it occurs in every type of interaction, but they can also explicitly design self-presentations in the "profile" slot. The profile can be analyzed - this is our interpretation - as an invariable part of discourse, such as greetings or question-answer pairs. Its use (or its absence) can be interpreted as a "signal" that plays against the expectations of the readers. People use descriptive categories and apply membership criteria to perform various kinds of discursive actions, and if categories (such as age, profession etc.) are not merely factual, the analytic work is to find if and for what they may have relevance.

⁴ Herring, Susan and Courtenay Honeycutt. "Beyond Microblogging: Conversation and Collaboration via Twitter". Proceedings of the Forty-Second Hawai'i International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS-42). Los Alamitos, CA: IEEE Press, 2009: 1-10. Print.

⁵ Spina, Stefania. *Openpolitica. Il discorso dei politici italiani nell'era di Twitter*. Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2012. Print.

⁶ Antaki, Charles and Susan Widdicombe. "Identity as an achievement and as a tool". In *Identities in talk*, Antaki, C., Widdicombe, S. (Eds.). London: Sage, 2008: 1-14. Print.

In the study of the different ways in which men and women construct their identities of male and female within Twitter interactions, different perspectives need to be considered, connected with political and computer-mediated discourse. From the political discourse perspective, according to Chilton (2004)⁷, political discourse serves the double function of: representing oneself as a politician, and therefore as someone who has credibility, in order to be accepted in the political arena; and interacting, with all the participants in the political process. In this perspective, Twitter is the place where political actors can spread a positive representation of their multiple identities (Wodak 2003)⁸, while interacting with their multiple audience. From the computer-mediated discourse perspective (Herring 2001)⁹, it is well known that, after the age of broadcasting, in which communication is vertical, unidirectional and one-to-many, social media brought a radical change and established a new paradigm of interaction, in which people share horizontally dynamic flows of conversations that create new forms of interpersonal relationships.

Despite the restriction to one hundred and forty characters per tweet, users on Twitter perform different communicative actions on multiple dimensions, and dynamically reshape context (Auer 1996)¹⁰ through the use of five main “contextualization cues” (Gumperz 1982)¹¹:

- @ = addressing
- http = redirecting to other texts
- RT = redistributing (with an implicit evaluation)
- # = indexing and aggregating people around key themes or values
- profile = self-defining

Twitter then can be considered a multi-referential discourse system (Dang-Anh 2013)¹²: through the systematic use of these functions users perform complex communicative activities, based on multiple referentiality, intertextuality, interdiscursivity.

⁷ Chilton, Paul A. *Analysing political discourse: theory and practice*. London: Routledge, 2004. Print.

⁸ Wodak, Ruth. “Multiple Identities: The Roles of Female Parliamentarians in the EU Parliament”. In J. Holmes, M. Meyerhoff. (Eds.). *The Handbook of Language and Gender*. Malden: Blackwell, 2003: 671-698. Print.

⁹ Herring, Susan. “Computer-Mediated Discourse”. In D. Schiffrin, D. Tannen, & H. E. Hamilton (Eds.). *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001: 612-634. Print.

¹⁰ Auer, Peter “From Context to Contextualization”. *Links and Letters*, 3 (1996): 11-21. Print.

¹¹ Gumperz, John. *Discourse strategies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982. Print.

¹² Dang-Anh, Mark. “Conceptualising Twitter as a discourse system: Discursive practices in political online communication”. Paper presented at the conference “Twitter and Microblogging: Political, Professional and Personal Practices”, Lancaster University, April 2013. Oral presentation.

In this broader context, the focus of our investigation will be the role of gender. As gender is continually realized in interactional form (Wodak 1997:13)¹³, does it affect

1. the way politicians perform multi-referentiality and participate in the flow of conversations?
2. self-presentations in profiles?

3. Methodology and data

In order to answer these questions, we have collected a balanced corpus of the tweets produced by one hundred and eighty Italian politicians (ninety male and ninety female) in a time-frame of six months (from January to June 2013). The selected politicians are all members of the current Parliament and are equally distributed into five age groups (25-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59 and over 60).

The result is a corpus of 86.841 tweets (36.780 written by men, 50.061 written by women), for 1.460.000 total words.

In this study we will present and discuss some preliminary data extracted from this corpus, which are relative to:

1. the distribution of mentions;
2. the distribution of replies (responses to other tweets);
3. the distribution of selected conversational features.

As for the identity construction in profiles, the analysis is focused on the resources politicians use in producing self descriptions, and more specifically on the use of categories/features of categories made relevant by people in self-presentations.

The analysis takes into account:

- if participants use self-description;
- which categories and features they use in profiles.

Four analytic groups have been created, according to the following partitioning:

1. Personal or Biographical Data, such as Place of birth, residence; age; religion; interests.
2. Professional Data such as Job; civil charges or political roles; other relevant remarks.
3. Political Role, to describe the current political position.
4. Involvement Features, which include Aphorisms (quotes or visions) or Contact Data (Personal websites, Blogs, mentions, hashtags).

Personal data are contrasted with Professional and Political data. An Involvement group summarizes information aimed at engaging the audience, such as quotes, personal annotations or contact information. Each group is split into subgroups, to control gender effects in more depth.

The assumptions in this analysis are that each choice of categories is aimed at offering an image of self and that each Category implies some values: the use of

¹³ Wodak, Ruth. "Some important issues in the research on gender and discourse". In Wodak, Ruth (Ed.), *Gender and Discourse*. London: Sage, 1997: 1-20. Print.

avvocato (lawyer) may imply a series of values in terms of skills, attitudes, beliefs etc..

What follows are the preliminary results and the discussion of these results.

3. Results

As far as conversationality is concerned, 70.1% of tweets written by women contain a mention, against only 57.7% of tweets written by men, as shown in fig. 1.

In addition, 22.4% of women's tweets (against 14.8%) are a reply to a tweet written by someone else.

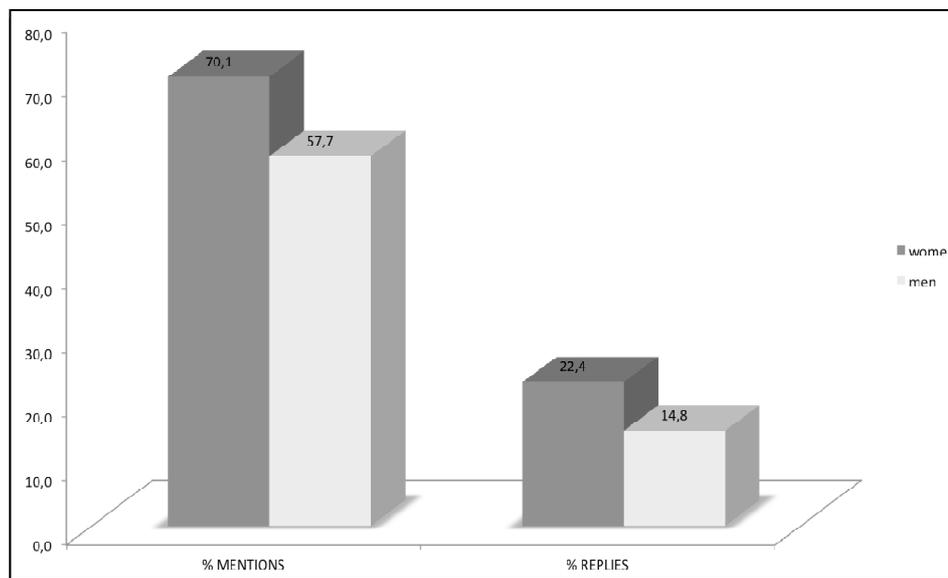


Fig. 1 - The use of mentions and replies by women and men politicians

Following previous literature on gender patterns in computer-mediated discourse (Baron 2008)¹⁴, we have also measured and analyzed a number of selected linguistic and discursive features traditionally associated with dialogic interactions, in order to find evidence of gendered attitudes in the way politicians manage social relations with their followers and participate in the flow of conversations on Twitter. A few examples of these linguistic features are emoticons, second person pronouns and a list of discourse markers. In general, the data replicates previous findings on online and offline gender patterns: women use significantly more conversational features (emoticons for example are almost twice as frequent as in men's tweets, as shown in fig. 2), and they use them especially when they reply to other tweets.

¹⁴ Baron, Naomi. S. *Always on: Language in an Online and Mobile World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. Print.

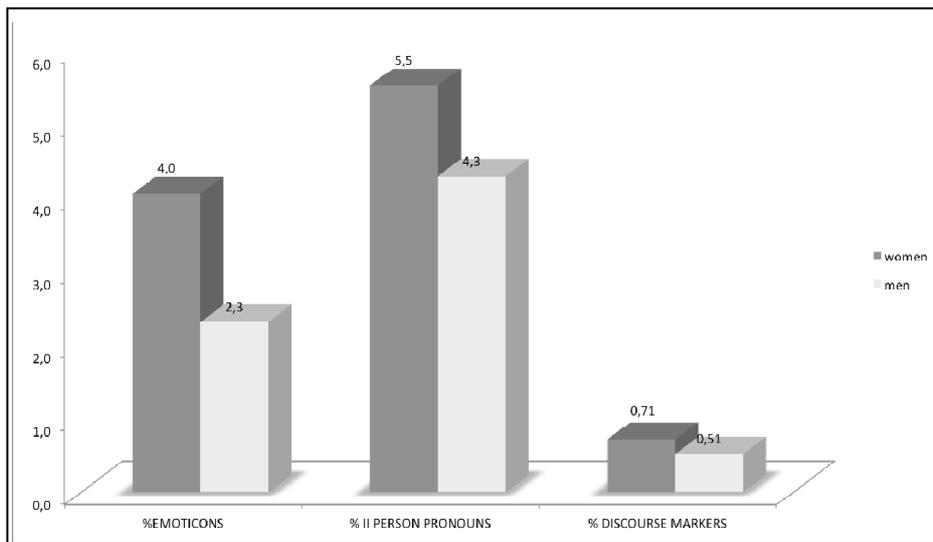


Fig. 2 - The distribution of a few selected linguistic features in women's and men's tweets

Moving to identity construction in profiles, a first analysis looks at the four main groups (personal, political, professional, involvement data): as shown in fig. 3, the involvement and political data are the most used by both men and women, and, interestingly, women score less than men in all types of self-presentation. In addition, a considerable number of women (27%) do not use any profile description.

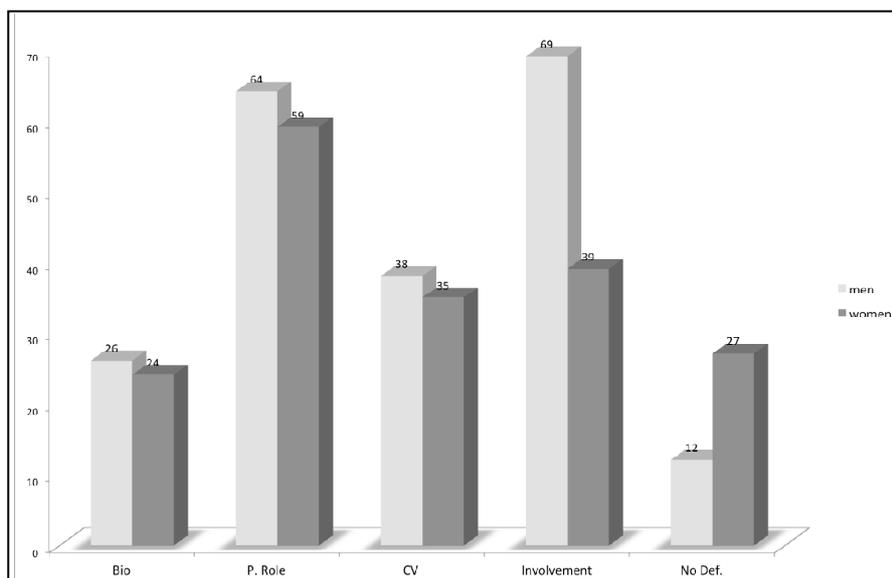


Fig. 3 - The distribution of men's and women's profiles in four main groups

5. Discussion: conversationality

The first aim of this study is to provide evidence of the different strategies used by women and men within the stream of conversations on Twitter. As for the term “conversation”, we follow Herring's broad definition, which includes all the written forms of conversation that are typical of computer-mediated discourse: a conversation is “any exchange of messages between two or more participants, where the messages that follow bear at least minimal relevance to those that preceded or are otherwise intended as responses”.¹⁵ According to this definition, the typical form of conversation that takes place on Twitter is a short exchange, usually symmetrical, made up of a first message and a reply. More rarely, conversations have a longer extension and multiple participants.

In all these conversational exchanges, a key role is played by the mention, which is an increasingly interpersonal resource and performs the multiple roles of:

- marking addressivity or reference to other users;
- relating one tweet to another;
- assuring coherence to exchanges (which is an important function, because turns in conversations are often interrupted by other tweets).

The results of this analysis of mentions revealed that women use this deictic strategy much more than men, to involve someone else in a conversation and to reply to someone else's tweet; as suggested by Herring and Honeycutt (2009:6)¹⁶, tweets that contain a mention are more focused on an addressee, and their content is more interactive. In contrast, tweets without mentions are more self-focused. The data also shows that men proved to be more self-focused, less interactive, less inclined to reply to the requests of involvement from other participants, and less prone to conversation than women.

The analysis of the selected conversational features also revealed that Twitter interactions share some of the same conversational strategies as in face-to-face conversations.

Women use more than men these strategies, particularly in replies: what emerges from the data is that when they reply to someone else, their focus is much more on establishing interpersonal relationships rather than on simply providing information, as it happens in example (2), which is a tweet written by a man politician (@kito_84):

(2)
ora su #radiowave [link]
(Now on #radiowave [link])

¹⁵ Herring, Susan. “Computer-mediated conversation: Introduction and overview”. *Language@Internet* 2010:4.

¹⁶ Herring, Susan and Courtenay Honeycutt. “Beyond Microblogging: Conversation and Collaboration via Twitter”. *Proceedings of the Forty-Second Hawai'i International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS-42)*. Los Alamitos, CA: IEEE Press, 2009: 1-10. Print.

An example of these different strategies is the use of emoticons, which is aimed at the representation of paralinguistic features (Baron 2008)¹⁷, but also at the establishment of interpersonal connection with other users.

The smiley, for example, has precisely this function of creating familiarity and complicity with the addressees, and it also has a strong association with mention, with whom it co-occurs very often; in example (3), @RosCapacchione, a woman politician, interacts with someone who was asking for news on a wind farm in Sardinia:

- (3)
 @RosCapacchione Che bello sarebbe conoscere tutta la verità sul parco eolico del Sulcis, pezzo di paradiso in pasto alla malapolitica!
 (@RosCapacchione How nice it would be to know the whole truth about the Sulcis wind farm, a corner of paradise in the hands of bad politics!)
 @frademuru con un po' di pazienza, se ci fanno lavorare, ci riusciremo :)
 (@frademuru With a little patience, if they let us work, we will succeed :))

Example (4) shows that the smiley and the mention themselves can make up the entire content of a tweet, a very short and fixed pattern to reply to a question expressing a mixed feeling of agreement and search for conviviality.

- (4)
 Che sia giunto il tempo anche in Italia di un ministro della difesa donna?
 @robertapinotti #flashforward
 (Could it be the time in Italy for a woman as Defense Minister?)
 @robertapinotti #flashforward)
 @defilippochiara :-)

The widespread use of emoticons, with the function of creating familiarity with others, is one piece of evidence of a search for interaction and dialogue in Twitter exchanges; a striking difference between men and women is not only in the overall frequency of emoticons, but also in their diversification (see table 1), in an attempt to express different nuances and feelings when connecting with others.

Table 1

| Emoticons used by women and men | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|-------|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|------|
| women | :-) | :) | ;)) | ;-) | :(| :P | :-D |
| | :-(| <3 | XD | :-P | :-* | :D | :(((|
| | :-p | O_O | -- | =D | :S | :- | .- |
| | :-))) | ;-P | :-/ | o_o | =(| :/ | O.o |
| men | :) | ;-) | :-) | :) | :D | :-D | :(|
| | :-* | o) | :- | :-P | :-(| :P | :O |

¹⁷ Baron, Naomi. S. Always on: Language in an Online and Mobile World. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. Print.

To summarize what we have discussed so far with regard to the attitude to conversationality, the analysis of the data suggests that women politicians:

1. systematically use the mention as a deictic marker of addressivity, and they do it significantly more than men;
2. reinforce the co-occurrent use of other conversational devices (discourse markers and emoticons), which strongly qualify their tweets as real conversational exchanges;
3. base their exchanges on Twitter more on the construction of interpersonal relationships than on the simple delivery of information.

6. Discussion: Identity

As mentioned before, women score less than men in all types of self-presentation in profiles.

The involvement group, in particular, seems to be more often used by men: 69% of men against 39% of women present themselves by offering, among other things, information that aims at involving readers.

Looking more in depth into the communication patterns of this group we found that this high percentage is mainly due to a definition used exclusively by the members of M5S in their profile, that is *citizen*. M5S members, in fact, stress that they are not a party but a “movement of citizens”. In addition, few women are interested in offering an email or blog/site address to establish a contact with their readers: as the data on conversationality revealed, connection with others seems to be instantiated by women more in actual interactions.

Personal data is the third category in use. No gender effect has been observed at a general level. Moreover, the mention of sons or daughters not only is less used than other personal data (such as place of birth, age), but women also refer to children less than men (six women and ten men, 6,6% vs. 11%). We can speculate that the features associated in our culture with the role of father (responsible, reliable, serious) have more positive implications for a politician than the features associated with “mother”.

The most striking result, however, is that twenty four women vs. eleven men (27% vs. 12%) do not use any profile description. This issue will be the object of a further investigation: are “empty” profiles correlated with linguistic features of tweets?

To sum up, the actual political role is the most frequent identity chosen by politicians. Almost one third of women do not use profiles and in general women systematically score less than men in the use of the four category groups.

7. Conclusions

Twitter is emerging as an environment where people establish relationships rather than simply share information (Zappavigna 2012)¹⁸, and where, through a

18 Zappavigna, Michele. *The Discourse of Twitter and Social Media. How We Use Language to Create Affiliation on the Web*. London: Continuum, 2012. Print.

continuous stream of conversations, users negotiate and maintain these relationships.

Political actors, who use social networks to spread a positive representation of themselves, are faced with a new approach to their audience, based on horizontal and pervasive forms of conversation; in a gender perspective, this study aimed to shed light on their interactions on Twitter, which can be considered a window on how women and men represent and construct their gender and political identities within conversational flows.

This study has shown a different approach by Italian men and women politicians towards this conversational nature of Twitter exchanges: while women appear more inclined to a dialogic approach and systematically use linguistic resources to engage specific users in conversations and to establish interpersonal relationships with them, men are far less oriented to the new conversational approach and tend to adopt a self-focused attitude.

It is possible to read in the same direction the results on the use of profiles, in which women appear to disattend the expectations that the profile slot creates in readers/users more often than men; men, conversely, are more comfortable with an assertive and declarative way of presenting themselves.

The politicians in our corpus often do not offer contact information in their profile, but connecting with others seems to be instantiated by women in actual interactions: for women, conversationality is not regarded as an episodic, ephemeral feature, or only as an instrument for creating relationships, but it appears as an intrinsic aspect of the self.

A further stage of our research will be devoted to investigating the procedural consequences of self-definitions (through the integration of profile and tweet analyses), in order to answer the question: how visible is the declared identity in interaction? At a practical level, on the basis of gender peculiarities, can we suggest more consistent ways of integrating men and women styles, and of using Twitter as a platform for networking and self-affirming?

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HOW ITALIAN FATHERS' PERCEPTION OF THEIR CHILDCARE CAPACITY IS CHANGING BETWEEN TRADITION AND MODERNITY

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Abstract: This exploratory study provides an examination of Italian fathers' perception of their child care capacity and their concepts about fatherhood and parental sharing before and after childbirth. A snowball sample of fifty fathers living in a big city of Southern Italy, with social and cultural heterogeneous background and children aged one to six, was interviewed. Subjects declare their willingness to accept new models of fatherhood, showing a positive attitude towards parental sharing, although these purposes appear scarcely applied in their daily life. Their involvement in child caring seems to be limited to slight activities, whereas primary care remains an almost exclusive mothers' prerogative. The results show that paternal role appears still to be "under construction" when compared to the maternal one and in search of its own and independent identity.

Keywords: new fathers; child care; parental sharing; gender roles; parental leave.

1. Introduction: a different culture of parental roles

In the last five decades the traditional family model and gender relations within European society have been undergoing deep transformations, especially regarding the new role of women as salaried workers, the consequent reorganization of parental tasks, the development of different fatherhood models connected to the growth of new paternal identities.

Social and cultural meaningful changes shook the Western society in the 19th and 20th century, the period when the great mass movements, such as feminism, contributed to the passage from a patriarchal to a nuclear family model, with the birth – for the first time in history – of a “family-feeling” (Ariès, 1981)³. The patriarchal family was organized as a unit, with indistinct economic and affective functions. In this model, several generations lived together, gender roles were strictly defined, fathers occupied a main position as economic providers – breadwinners – unlike women, considered responsible for home and children.

With the beginning of the Industrial era, affective and economic aspects, until then rigidly combined, split up, due to the modernization process. A new consciousness arose about family, perceived now as the elective place of affects, with a clear separation from the public sphere (Badolato, 1993). The nuclear family

¹ University of Bari, Italy. Para. 1, 2, 4.

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³ Ariès, Philippe. *Padri e figli nell'Europa medievale e moderna*. Trans. Maria Garin. Bari: Laterza, 1981. Print.

model appears to be generally constituted by two parents and their children, their grandparents, father's and mother's siblings and their sons and daughters. Relations and roles inside it are established in a very different way when compared to the previous model: children represent no more a working-force and their birth is accompanied with different motivations, often following a conscious choice by parents.

In the 20th century another important factor in determining this passage was the increase of school attendance rate in many European countries, with more women educated and employed, a condition that influenced the aspect and the sense of the traditional family. In addition to this, the relationship between men and their paternal models began to change, causing a crisis of the traditional fatherhood and the need for new identities.

Maternal and paternal models constitute points of reference during pregnancy and childbirth for the parents-to-be, who search for indications useful to face the new tasks, interpreting them according their time sensitiveness (Rosnati & Iafrate, 2007). In this context, the maternal role seems to have gone better through historical transformations, appearing more codified than the paternal one, fairly vague and uncertain. So a different culture of parental roles has emerged or is trying to emerge in Europe, with many differences between the northern and the southern part of the continent. In the Italian case, in their effort to develop a new role, fathers cannot count on strong social reinforcement, and in these conditions mothers' support appears to be more crucial.

A particular form of nuclear family model is the symmetrical family, where concepts such as "equality of roles", "sharing" and "interchangeability" are emphasized, due to the greater presence of women out of the domestic environment. In this model the relationship inside the couple becomes central, the object of mutual egalitarian expectations, with a pressing demand of continuous trading especially by women. The contemporary European and Western society is in fact characterized by women's dual role, mothers and workers at the same time, who show more assertiveness and determination than in the past. Still, although they are expected by themselves and society to advance in their career, the roles' arrangement inside the family continues to be traditional (Pleck, 1985).

On the other hand, men, whose dominant values are independence, self-sufficiency, competition and individualism, seem to have lost the "authority"-role, that has defined fatherhood for many centuries.

2. Shared parenting and child's development

In the last years very extensive theoretical considerations and empirical studies have been carried out about the division of roles and shared parenting in the Western society. In these contributions both the mother's and the father's importance have been stressed, recognizing their complementary resources, useful for integrating, modifying and sharing the daily tasks, in order to develop common purposes in children's education (Surrey et al., 1991). Some findings (Fivaz-Depeursinge & Corboz-Warnery, 2001) highlight the importance of fathers' support

to their partners in the early days after child birth, promoting the idea of a shared parenting, focusing on the qualitative aspects of interaction among adults and their child: the triadic unit (McHale, 2010). According to Feldman (2000) each dyadic relationship seems to affect the others: parental convergence on marital satisfaction depends on father-child interaction; sharing household tasks and child caring influence mother-child and father-child relationships; child caring activities performed by fathers are associated with maternal sensitivity. Assuming more responsibility in child caring helps fathers to develop a more emotionally funded relationship (Clarke Stewart, 1978). Moreover, Pleck (1997) reports: “[...] the childcare tasks in which parents engage also differ, with mothers doing more physical or continue care of children than fathers. Additionally, although mothers spend more absolute time playing with children, fathers spend a proportionally larger amount of their time engaged in play”⁴.

In Italy a breadwinner typology of family still prevails (Sainsbury, 1996). Ichino & Galdeano (2003) argue that Italian fathers dedicate less time to child care when the mother is unemployed, offering more of their contribution when their partner works, unlike what happens in Sweden or Germany, where fathers’ behaviour remains unchanged. Italian society is characterized by a low female participation in the labour market and this condition is more evident in families with children. More than half of the women with children 0-3 do not work (Del Boca et al., 2004). Some studies in Europe and the US (Engle & Breaux, 1998) report that a fully experienced fatherhood represents a beneficial growth factor for children’s intellectual, social and emotional development (Clarke Stewart, 1978). The quality of interaction between father and his child, rather than the overall amount of time, was found to be a better predictor of children’s cognitive performance. These children had fewer behavioural problems, more sense of their ability to do things and higher self-esteem. For Badolato (1993) we have the best condition when a father is “neither seduced nor frightened by his son’s needs and desires, responding appropriately to them”⁵.

In the past, fathers were forced to spend most of their time out of the domestic environment, either for economic reasons, or because their presence was considered unimportant for care purposes. They established the rules, guided their family, accompanied children in their socialization process, but always as “distant figures”, both in a physical and psychological way, due to their emotional control.

The framework appears still nebulous also because the scientific literature contains very few contributions about fathers, having always focused its attention particularly on mother-child relationship.

At the moment a father is considered “involved” when he wonders about his identity and its changes, desiring a real daily relationship with his children. It represents a difficult task because fatherhood has cultural roots and needs social

⁴ Pleck, Joseph. *Father involvement: levels, origins, and consequences*. In: Lamb. *The father’s role*. New York: Wiley, 1997. Print.

⁵ Badolato, Gabriella. *Identità paterna e relazione di coppia. Trasformazione dei ruoli genitoriali*. Milano: Giuffrè, 1993. Print.

confirmation and rituals, attesting its boundaries and peculiarities. Paternal models pass through family of origin's education, that establishes father's role in the marriage, work and in relation to the other family members. In the course of time, once any position of authority got lost, fathers assumed a peripheral role.

3. New images of fatherhood and social laws

Our exploratory study has been carried out in a big city of Southern Italy, involving a snowball sample of fifty fathers aged twenty-fifty belonging to heterogeneous socio-cultural backgrounds with children aged one to six. The aim of the research was to investigate fathers' attitudes towards new models of fatherhood and parental sharing, examining the feelings they reported before and after childbirth and perceptions they had about their child care capacity. The sample responded to a semi-structured questionnaire composed of three parts: the first one involved social and personal data, the second and the third ones open and close questions about several aspects of fatherhood.

According to fathers' answers, desire for parenthood was fully shared by both parents (eighty-six percent). In the ninety percent of cases the news of pregnancy were accompanied by "joy", while ten percent declared "surprise"; no one mentioned have been afraid. However, if they were asked to speak about feelings experienced during the period of pregnancy, sixteen percent of them experienced "concern".

Fifty-six percent of fathers stated that child birth limits personal freedom and determines deep changes in the couple's relationship (forty-two percent). At the end of the pregnancy most of them experienced happiness and pride. Eight percent felt "confused".

Almost half of the sample thought to be immediately capable to care for children, while sixteen percent reported the opposite, reflecting the difficulty in hiring new paternal behaviours still not confirmed by experience.

Some fathers have expressed their desire of recovering a deeper relationship with their children, characterized by dialogue (seven percent) and tenderness (two percent), showing different approaches from the mean.

According to these results, fathers spend less time in child caring than mothers and their role appears to be only additional. Fifty percent of them state that it is always the mother who takes care of the children, especially washing, feeding and dressing the baby, whereas dads seem to be totally eclipsed. Their presence is rather large in the play-verbal communication areas such as playing games (thirty-two percent), walking (twenty-one percent) and talking (five percent). Interaction with children lasts one-three hours per day in twenty-six percent of cases, while mothers' presence is continuous. Although fathers' role in child caring is severely limited, eighty-six percent of them think that child caring should be "shared equally" by the parental couple.

When fathers are asked to imagine their partners to need help for children, sixty-four percent replied that they would look after them without any problem, as "helpers". In fact, forty-four percent report receiving often information about child caring by wives, an aspect confirmed by literature (Thompson & Walker, 1989)

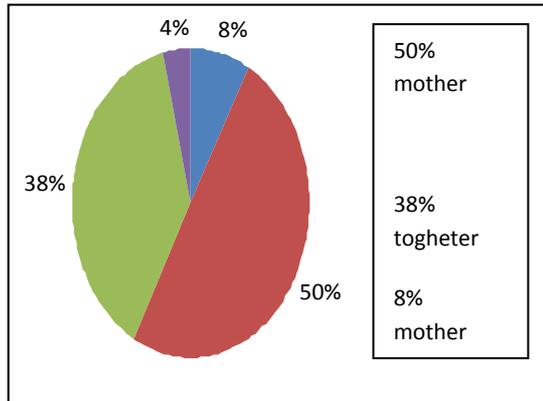


Figure 1 - Fathers' answers to the question: "Who generally looks after for your child your family?"
SOURCE: Rossini, Loiacono, Fiore 2013.

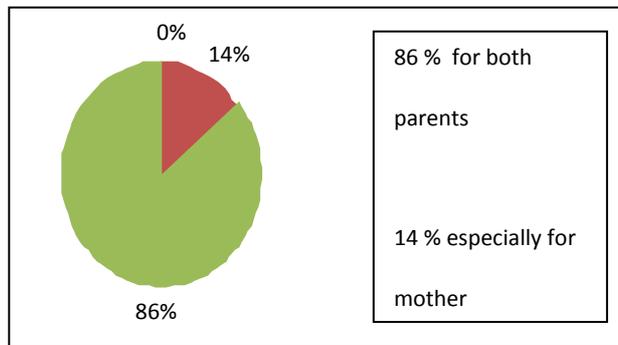


Figure 2 - Fathers' answers to the question: in "In your opinion, child caring is a task for?"
SOURCE: Rossini, Loiacono, Fiore 2013.

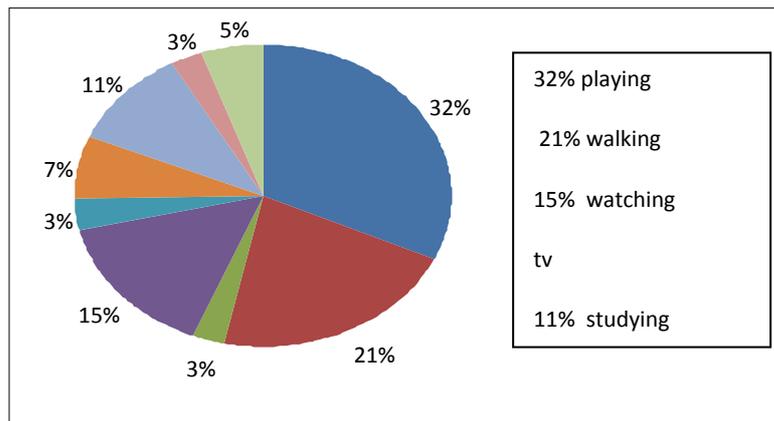


Figure 3 - Fathers' answers to the question: "What activities do you do with your child?"
SOURCE: Rossini, Loiacono, Fiore 2013.

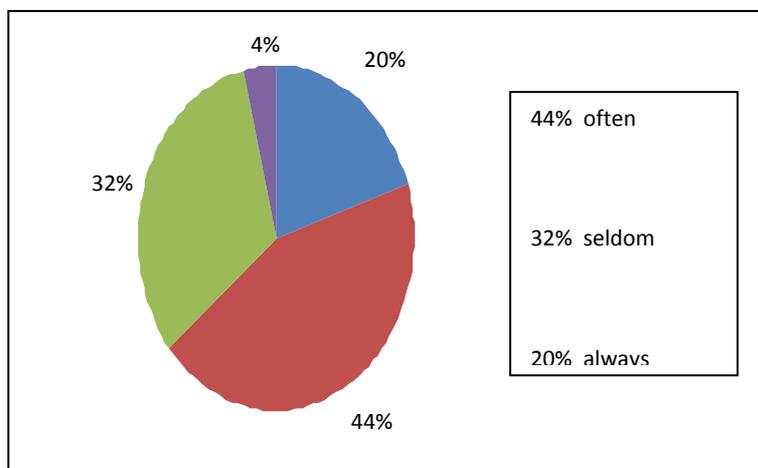


Figure 4 - Fathers' answers to the question:
 "Does your partner give you any information about child caring?"
 SOURCE: Rossini, Loiacono, Fiore 2013.

The question "do you think that after child birth fathers should remain more time at home to help their partner?" obtained affirmative answers in the eighty-two percent of cases, even if subjects are vague in specifying what they should do with their children ("a bit of everything every time it is required", "what my wife asks me to do"). It seems clear that they avoid to perform those activities less delightful for both, such as cleaning or getting up at night if the child is crying. The reason they gave is the alleged difficulty to handle infants, relying on a supposed better performance by their wives ("have more practice ", "are more inclined to do it"). Only sixteen percent spends more than six hours a day with child, and in general the main characteristics they think a father should have are: patience, responsibility and authority.

Discussing these data we can evidence an actual but difficult transition from a traditional model of fatherhood to another one, where sensitiveness and readiness to perform all child caring tasks are clearly declared but barely put in practice. Taking care of a small child implies tenderness, a capacity of emotional abandonment and intimate communication, anxiety and fear, elements that men are generally accustomed to distance and control (Gianini Belotti, 1981). The literature also shows mothers' ideal images of their children's fathers, viewed as practical, active, simple, efficient, able to perform their duties safely, with the desire to spend more time with children. According to Des Rivières-Pigeon et al. (2002) cultural factors determine the expectations and desires of men and women concerning fatherhood and motherhood. In a culture where women expect men to play a large role in domestic work, strong tensions may build up if the actual division of domestic work in the couple does not confirm what is expected. Alternatively, in a culture where men play a lesser role in domestic work, women's expectations are probably different. Thus, alternative strategies, such as asking support from other

family members, may then be used by women. Furthermore, in the first case, while performing most of the family work, mothers get to the stage of desiring their husbands to be no more involved in newborns' care, to avoid a 'surplus' of effort, in giving detailed instructions, checking whether the task has been carried out properly, and when something does not work, doing it again (Romito, 1997). Like this last author, we are very sceptical in considering this behaviour as the consequence of a supposed women's attitude to maintaining their "sovereignty" in the domestic sphere, but actually it could be a form of ambivalence not really supportive towards their partners' efforts. Twenty-six percent of Italian mothers indicate to do "always" more than half of child care tasks, while in France this percentage decreases to twenty percent and in Québec to fifteen percent (Des Rivières-Pigeon et al., 2002). This last author considers male participation as an "outcome value", particularly important for mothers of one-year-old children: it is perceived as a form of support and as value for the child, fulfilling what women expect from their husbands/partners. Some tasks appear to be accomplished exclusively by women: feeding the child and changing his/her nappies. According to recent findings (Tanturri & Mencarini, 2009) there are some categories of fathers more involved with their children, depending on their work: clerks and teachers, unlike managers or independent professionals, who represent the least involved category. The authors of this study conclude that fathers having a higher position are probably those who invest more in their role of providers than carer. Thus, time constraints seem to affect father's involvement in daily care activities. Ackerman (1968) observes that especially young and more educated couples tend to have an extraordinary awareness of their role as parents, even if they appear to be more doubtful and scared about their ability to care. Bianchi & Robinson (1997) indicate that well-educated mothers and fathers focus more of their child-related time on activities finalized to nurture their children's cognitive development. Other researchers (Aldous et al., 1998) emphasize the fact that fathers' education has no effect on direct physical care of young children but does influence the amount of time fathers spend playing, reading or going out with their preschool-aged children. Moreover, highly educated fathers generally show more egalitarian beliefs about shared breadwinning and care giving (Ishii-Kuntz & Coltrane, 1992).

According to Weldon-Johns (2013), the European Community itself has been emphasizing the pursuit of equality between men and women, especially in the last years. Previously (1976, 1992) EU reinforced working mother's role forgetting working fathers in child care, despite the aims of a shared parenting. The Equal Treatment Directive (1976) and the Pregnant Workers Directive (1992) adopted some measures to protect women during pregnancy and maternity, reinforcing the importance of the mother's caring role (McGlynn et al., 2000). In this way, working mothers were confined in their child care roles and fathers ignored with regard to their child care duties.

In 1996 a new parental leave directive was issued and legislators appeared more aware that the most important factor that would support a greater utilisation of this right was a financial compensation during this period (Moss e al., 2008).

In Sweden, where parental leave is paid, men have used or would use it in sixty-seven percent of cases, unlike in Britain or Italy, where the percentage decreases to ever lower values due to the absence of income replacement. This condition persists in reinforcing mothers in their role of primary caregivers and main users of parental leave (McColgan, 2005). Another impressive aspect is that only four percent of European men had or would take parental leave thinking that both parents should equally share responsibilities towards their offspring (Weldon-Johns, 2013).

The Parental Leave Directive 2010/18 tries to face more the traditional gender roles, focusing on both parents' right to care, "recognising the neglected role of working fathers"⁶ in the EU countries. It shows a continued focus on the reconciliation of work and family life and the need to achieve equality between men and women with regard to shared child care responsibilities, particularly by increasing the participation of fathers. The new acquisition is certainly represented by recognizing the right both parents have to care for their children, going beyond the "motherhood ideology" (McGlynn et al., 2000)⁷ that have characterized European laws in the past years. It is more important to support care during the early stages of the child's life than only defending women in the post-birth period. In Italy parental leave is scarcely used by men, with many differences between public and private sector, where private is more penalising in terms of pay (thirty per cent of the ordinary salary). Only in 2012 the Italian government, following the EU legislation, decided to introduce one obligatory day of parental leave for men during the first five months of child's life. Italy constitutes an example of the southern European welfare, with a limited presence of child programs and low levels of economic support for families. Thus, policies that economically support parents and their children may reduce time constraints on fathers, ameliorating educational effects (Sayer et al., 2004), a field where Italy has still much to do.

4. Conclusion

In the Italian context we can notice the absence of new well recognised fatherhood models, supported by experience and useful to offer solid points of reference when fathers are with their children. In fact, as we have seen, the paternal role in child caring appears still to be "accessory" when compared to the maternal one. Italian fathers are making several efforts to develop new values, trying also to construct an independent identity, different from their partners'. It represents a crucial and critical condition, where fathers appear to be uncertain about what they are supposed to do and society's expectations; after neglecting the traditional models, they are torn between imitating the already present examples of

⁶ Weldon-Johns, Michelle. "EU Work-Family Policies-Challenging Parental Roles or Reinforcing Gendered Stereotypes?" *European Law Journal* 2013, 19 (5): 662-681. Print.

⁷ McGlynn, Elizabeth, et al. *Quality of care for children and adolescents: a review of selected clinical conditions and quality indicators*. Santa Monica: Rand Health, 2000. Print.

parenthood (such as maternal ones) and developing different ones. Primary care remains an almost exclusive mothers' prerogative, while fathers, although their declared purposes, show to be mostly involved in the play-communicative areas of child caring. It is evident in this case the lack of paternal models in such activities as "holding and handling" babies. In this situation, a more faithful attitude by ambivalent mothers about their husbands' capacity of child caring would be useful to reinforce their self-confidence. Fathers' distance from these tasks depends also on a sense of inadequacy and difficulty to express some feelings as tenderness or delicacy, due to cultural reasons, especially in the Southern Europe.

The fatherhood issue is combined with the gender equality matter, partly unsolved in many countries inside Western society. Italy is one of these, even if some differences exist according to the social and cultural background of parental couples and their level of education. Fathers with high education seem to dedicate more time to their children, but this percentage changes on the strength of their job: for example, managers spend fewer hours in child caring than teachers or clerks, with different effects on their babies' cognitive and social development.

In order to support all these processes, many contributions are needed, especially from society and government, through social reinforcement and laws, promoting a real gender equality and a closer relationship between fathers and their offspring. It is verified that some behaviours generally performed by women, such as feeding children or pushing stroller, are more likely to be performed by men when they can see other fathers doing that (Engle and Breaux, 1998).

In addition to this, we consider as absolutely meaningful the educational efforts towards the new generations, inside families and schools, to promote a real reconsideration of gender roles and equity within society.

At the present time it seems like we are witnessing a psychological and pedagogical "re-framing" of the father's role, with the interesting question about what is/are the principle/s on which it will be definitively grounded.

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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AS A HUMAN RIGHT ISSUE: THE CASE OF ALBANIAN WOMEN

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Abstract: Gender-based violence needs to be reported and understood within the context of what it actually is, a global phenomenon that is both a cause and a consequence of gender inequality. It is a complex problem that includes more than just a violent act in terms of interpersonal relationships between sexes. It is a multidimensional social problem, whose roots-run deep.

Albania, compared to the European context, is one of the countries with the highest rates of diffusion of domestic abuse. This can be explained by the fact that the discussion on human rights does not show any sensitivity towards women's issues and their social positions. Due to its patriarchal features, the Albanian society has a long story of masculine domination in both public sphere and social life.

Domestic violence against women has and comes in phases. Even though for many years it has been thought to be an exclusive problem within couples, nowadays it is becoming an important issue for the entire society. This paper aims to identify the main factors that have influenced and are still influencing the increased rate of violence against women and the reasons leading women not to denounce this violence.

Keywords: Albanian society; identity; emancipation; transformation; domestic violence; human rights; women; education.

1. Introduction

In the *Beijing Declaration for the Elimination of Violence against Women*, approved in the year 1993³, the violence against women has been defined as follows:

“Violence against women is the gender-based violence that may lead to or result in causing physical, sexual or psychological damage or suffering to women, including also threats to such acts, as well as coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, happening both in public and private life”.⁴

Gender-based violence is a phenomenon reported in an alarming level. In fact, violence against women is a complex problem including more than a mere act

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³ United Nations General Assembly. Fourth World Conference on Women, Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, United Nations Commission for Human Rights: Beijing, 1993. Print.

⁴ United Nations Development Program. Violence in the Family; Responsibilities of State Police for its Reduction and Prevention, Tirana: Ora, 2008. Print.

in personal relationships between both sexes. It is a social problem of large measure with deep historical roots, as it has been observed.

Albania is estimated, in fact, in the European context, as one of the countries with the highest rate of domestic abuse diffusion. This is explained also by the fact that the discussion of rights does not show much sensitivity related to the position and issues of women, “because the Albanian society, identified as a patriarchal one, has a long history of men domination in the social life”.⁵

The roots of continuous women mistreatment by men are very old and essentially associated with the lack of respect towards women. It seems paradoxical, especially reminding that in the *Kanun*⁶ there were provisions ensuring the immunity of women.

“But *Kanun*, on the other hand, is considered a discriminatory “law” towards women”.⁷

It is often stressed that *Kanun* is the main source for the discriminatory position of women in the Albanian society.

Modern times for the Albanian women arrived late. The emancipating season for them could be regarded in the period after the Second World War, during which was noted some success in their role and position in the society. A season that was made of social and cultural changes related to women’s role limited no more only in the familiar and domestic domain, but including also the process of education and training, and combating against illiteracy. These results provided to a certain extent a kind of economic independence to the women and therefore gave them more power within the family.

⁵ Dokmanović, Mirjana. Nikolić-Ristanivić, Vesna. International Standards Related to Violence in the Family and their Application in the Western Balkans Countries, Trans. Al. Ador Leka, Belgrade: Prometej, 2006. Print.

⁶ Kanun of Leke Dukagjini is a customary code of laws transmitted orally for centuries. It is the first “constitution” based on national traditions. Shtjefen Konstandin Gjeçov, father of the Franciscan province of Shkodra, born in Kosovo, was the one who collected directly in the region the legal customs of the mountain people. The laws of Kanun have served for more than five hundred years as a fundamental canon of social behavior and its administration for the clans of Northern Albania. The same Kanun shows how over the centuries was built the legal and institutional tradition of the Albanian people. The rules and norms of Kanun still exert a strong influence both among Albanians living in Albania, and those immigrating to other countries. Kanun is concerned with both civil and criminal law, regulating numerous aspects of life, including: Besa (indicating the term allowed by the family suffering a loss by murder, with a “promise” or “guarantee” that during that term they will not kill in turn the guilty person.), rights and immunity of the church, family, engagement and marriage, private property and its inheritance, labor, loans and donations, the ways of taking oath and respecting the promise, honor, ways of compensation, infamous murders, revenge, privileges and exemptions of them. Beshiri, Dilina. Puka, Edi. Women’s Rights in the Albanian Kanun of Leke Dukagjini, in Democratic Education, 6, Bari: Graphic Arts Favia, 2013. pp. 34-42. Print.

⁷ Miria, Silvana, Valdet, Sala. Women Victims of Many Abuses, in Study on the Written Contribution of Women Movement in Albania. Pogradec: D.I.J.A. - Poradeci, 2000. Print.

2. The emancipation of Albanian woman between tradition and transformation

In fact, the emancipation of the Albanian women has been slow over the years. After the 90s, as the society went through a real change, the media has been reporting many cases of rape and humiliation of women. It seems difficult of course to determine the exact incidence, but non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international organizations working in the field of human rights agree that violence is a serious obstacle to the affirmation of a substantive democracy in Albania.

During the communist regime, in the years 1945-1991, a period of nearly half a century, the Albanian society never dealt publically with the problem of abuse against women, as that would not contribute to the image of a perfect society propagated by communism. Indeed the woman was portrayed as the largest manufacturer and emancipating force of the society, equal to man, completely free and independent. In fact, during the communist regime, violence against women was a phenomenon that remained mostly within the house walls. At the same time, men's violence to women who were not part of their family, especially physical and sexual violence, was strongly punished by the state that had a strong control over the whole society.

In addition, the question of physical and mental exhaustion of women who were forced to work in three shifts in plants and factories was ignored as if it didn't exist at all, besides not ensuring the sufficient economic and social level of living conditions for the women. Violence against women, which was not mentioned, "but only exercised, had become almost a taboo".⁸

The collapse of communist economy, which had connected the work of women with their emancipation through creation of jobs almost equally for both men and women, announced the introduction of post-communist age of free market, which in fact limited the opportunities for women to find a job as easily as men do. This has forced many women to stay at home and live in the position of housewife.

"The economic changes brought by the transition period have also caused reduction of social and economic situation of a large part of the Albanian men and growth of incompatibility of their situation with their social status"⁹, heightening "the risk of a discomfort that he would continue to express itself in the form of abuse and violence against women".¹⁰

⁸ Miria, Silvana, Valdet, Sala. Women Victims of Many Abuses, in Study on the Written Contribution of Women Movement in Albania. Pogradec: D.I.J.A. - Poradeci, 2000. Print.

⁹ Gelles, Richard. Intimate Violence in Families, Thousand Oaks CA: Sage. 1997. Print.

¹⁰ Dokmanović, Mirjana. Nikolić-Ristanović, Vesna. International Standards Related to Violence in the Family and their Application in the Western Balkans Countries, Trans. Al. Ador Leka, Belgrade: Prometej, 2006. Print.

3. The impact of socioeconomic factors in family violence

As stated above, this research aims essentially to show the factors that cause domestic violence in Albanian society through the interviews conducted during the research project on the role of Albanian women in today's society.

The interviews were conducted in the cities of Tirana and Durrës, addressed to a total sample of 46 women, aged between 18 and 60 years. The technique of "half-directive interview"¹¹ was applied in order to guarantee to the interviewed persons a large degree of freedom in articulating their discourse and hypotheses.

By the interviews was observed that violence against women is a phenomenon reaching large dimensions in the Albanian society, especially after the 90s. 83% of respondents believe that even during communism there were cases of violence, but they were rare and usually remained within home, unlike today, as a larger number of women seem more conscious and ready to denounce such acts.

According to the respondents, the main factors influencing the increased cases of violence against women are family education and the models that have been cultivated¹² (42% of respondents), the family's economic conditions and unemployment among women (29% of respondents), stress (11% of respondents), the abuse of men with alcohol (9% of respondents), the common cultural heritage of women's submission to their husbands (6% of respondents), other causes (3% of respondents).

In Albania, family violence against women is a problem appearing in all its forms, to the extreme, becoming an ever more sensitive issue for the entire public, although since many years it is dealt with only as a problem within the pair. Despite a few reported cases, in 2009 there were four victims of violence among spouses. The fact that violence against women is a major problem in Albania is indirectly confirmed by the number of women committing crimes against their mates. In the face of continuing violence perpetrated by their husbands, some women can't restrain themselves and react by killing them.

The Albanian legislation foresees the gender-based violence, including domestic one. For the first time the art. 62 of Family Law provides for the possibility of one of the spouses to remove the violent mate from marital residence for a period up to three years. This arrangement uses a gender-neutral language, but studies and surveys show that in such cases in Albania women are mostly subjects to this form of violence, and this leads to the conclusion that this provision is intended to protect women in particular.

During the year 2010, relying to the Ministry of Labor and Social Issues¹³, there has been a clear improvement in the issues of gender equality and domestic

¹¹ *Crespi*, Franco. *Mucchi Faina*, Angelica. The Strategies of Active Minorities. An Empiric Research on the Women Movement. Liguori: Napoli. **1988**. pp. 13-27. Print.

¹² Gjermeni, Eglantina. The Survivors of Violence in the Family. in Juridical and Social Treatises on the Protection by Violence in the Family, Tirana: Pegi, 2005. Print.

¹³ Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Strategy of Social Services, Tirana, 2010. Print.

violence. There is the case of implementation of gender statistics designed to “detect” the persistence of this phenomenon, a revision of the legislation for the growth of economic power and opportunities for employment and vocational training for women. But on the other hand, there are in fact no official statistics on violence against women in order to ascertain this improved status and emancipation of Albanian women. Moreover, the crime of violence covers only the physical one, while it does not include the sexual, psychological or economic violence, leaving the victim with no adequate protection.

A significant contribution to the fight against violence on women and dealing with needs of abused women has been provided by women’s NGOs. The contribution of such organizations in defense of women has resulted in a public information campaign against violence, besides promoting advice lines, opening of refuge centers for abused women, legal clinics and law proposals aiming to combat for, defend and protect the women. Due to this contribution, it has been possible to arrive at formulating the strategy of the year 2007 - 2010 as one of the objectives including also action against violence. The government conducted with the support of parliament, civil society and press, a series of campaigns to increase public awareness on the phenomenon.

4. But which women do not report violence in the family?

Secondly, until 1995, police and judiciary institutions considered domestic violence a fact where parties had equal responsibility and intervened to convince the woman to exonerate the aggressor. If a woman was to carry forward the complaint, she had to take charge of collecting witnesses and presenting them in the courtroom. In the rare cases in which a trial ended with a positive verdict, the aggressor was punished with a fine only and he was never imprisoned. Only in the new Family Law, approved as the Law No. 9062, date 8/05/2003, the divorce was recognized to the woman as a right without imposing to her the burden of bringing proofs.

It is to be remarked that women reporting the violence are mostly those living in the cities. But “non-governmental organizations argue that unemployed women in rural areas are the most violated ones.”¹⁴

Even the concept of violence varies among women in rural and urban areas. Especially rural women consider mainly only the physical violence, while women in the cities mention mostly psychological and economic violence. However, there are always larger percentages of women considering the “violence” only in its extreme form. Some of them say: “If your husband hits you once while he is bored, you cannot consider this as violence.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Fullani, Ariana. Comparative Study on Legislation in Albania and Other Countries on the Problem of Violence against Woman. Tirana: Refleksione, 1996. Print.

¹⁵ Lubonja, Fatos. Violence against Woman in the Albanian Society. Tirana: Ilar, 2009. Print.

Relying on interviews, the main factors imposing the Albanian woman not to report violence are the lack of financial support, keeping of family unity for the sake of children, lack of a job and housing, fear of being condemned by the ostracism of the community. There are cases in which a woman makes everything to hide the truth of violence she is suffering. This shows that the Albanian society is still dominated by the culture of education through violence. “Through education at home, women learn to be humble and to bear all pressure of male power”.¹⁶ It is thought that since there is an increasing in women’s education out of their families, there should be also an increasing in the number of women who report violence.

In fact, this does not always happen in Albania. Many educated women wear a social “mask” of convenience and refuge they feel they must preserve at all costs. They do not have the moral courage to denounce violence, because the preservation of the mask of a good image is very important for them.

5. Concluding remarks

The phenomenon that we have analyzed definitely requires a multi-causal approach, tending to emerge from individual dynamics and to keep in mind the complex psycho-social dynamics of women, of their family members and other individuals involved.

In fact, the lack of financial support is one of the main factors forcing the Albanian women not to report the domestic violence. The abused women agree to keep quiet and accept torture just to remain in the “false refuge” of the family. Within themselves they feel hidden prejudices, justify themselves in the social context as people having a perfect family, forgetting and trampling themselves. Not in rare cases they accept violence as a normal fact, not only to avoid living lonely or just to appear in public without their husbands, but to avoid the obligation of giving explanations to the public.

Although women in Albania have been able to achieve high levels of education and progress in the labor market and public life, gender inequality remains however a problem for the society, causing more and more women to face the dilemma between raising up children or having a career, due to lack of adjustment of schedules, social services and other obstacles that are brought by traditional gender stereotypes and male mentality of the society.

The old *Kanun* rules, which prescribe obedience to women, may also contribute to this situation, since women consider a sin opposing to their husband. Besides that, domestic affairs are still something usually to be kept as a secret.

¹⁶ Miria, Silvana. Violence against Women and Psychosocial Taboos Supporting It. Tirana: Refleksione, 1996. Print.

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SOCIAL CHANGE AND GENDER ISSUES: LOOKING AT NEW MALE JOB CHOICES

Letizia Carrera¹

Abstract: The paper aims to analyze how the performative dimension of gender affects heavily the social expectations in relation of some jobs. This qualitative research is focused on the life-stories and choices of some men who have chosen, and sometimes who have accidentally begun, care giving jobs, traditionally "suitable for women". Their words and their explanations have been the starting point of a reflection on gender issues, and on current changes. At last, the attention is focused on institutional choices, and their importance for changing gender representations.

Keywords: gender, socialization processes, politics, job, social change, institutions.

1. Gender and the socialization process

In this essay, we focus on the deep changes in the gender representations which have been the concern of the Italian social context but also the international one for too long a time. This process has not followed and does not follow a linear development and goes through sudden accelerations: just think of the ideology and the movements in the 70s, but also the slowdowns and even regressive moments. So we need to reflect about the gender representations in a historical perspective, but starting from the specific contents which connote them today, looking at the reinforcement processes of those representations, but also of the changes which have characterized them. Also nowadays gender, or better genders, are the object of a wide debate focused on their being or not produced by culture. On the one hand, the innatist perspective, on the other hand, the constructionist one. Both consider that women and men have very different characteristics. Women "are" nice, emotional, sensitive, cerebral, sweet, "not rational" weak, "in need of help", able with care². Instead men are rational, "hard", not emotional, strong, aggressive, practical, unable with care. From the one side there are those who regard gender characteristics as something genetically determined, a sort of biological and social "destiny". In this perspective the features which mark men and women would be attributable to this genetic equipment which makes them "naturally" different from each other. From the other side, on the contrary there are those who believe that differences between women and men are rather the result of a learning process, of a sort of "social imprinting" which subjects receive from the moment they are born. Therefore the idea of a sort of biologically determined nature is replaced by the idea of a sort of "social nature", a "second nature" to be intended in a durkheimian

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² A model woman is expected to «be beautiful and shut up» is diffused yet! (Marzano 2010).

sense. Margaret Mead (1950) – on the basis of her anthropological surveys – recognized the decisiveness of the influence of the referring cultural model, thematizing the difference between sex and gender. In this second perspective the processes of cross-gender socialization are completely central; in these processes subjects, born female and male, learn to be women and men³. In other words, gender becomes the organizing element of the whole normative and value assets, and consequently, it influences the choices and behaviors of women and men, just as women and men. Every gaze at the world is oriented by our regulatory and value models, our prejudices, our representations of reality. In this sense, gender has always represented a strong parameter for giving a sense, a lens to filter the reality in order to acquire even widely different meanings. Gender plays a central role in organizing our *implicit knowledge*, we can say with Bourdieu, our *habitus* (1979), which go to substantiate the normative symbolic order. Gender is embedded and naturalized social order. The daily exposure to gender practices, i.e. separated according to gender, allows people to learn gender through those same practices which become incisive and efficient workings of socialization. Through the exposure to these practices people learn not only gender but especially naturalness. In this way, baby girls learn not only what being little girls, *doing little girls* means, as baby boys learn to *do little boys*, but moreover they learn that it could not be different than this, that they could do nothing else but “*doing so*”. The sexually-differentiated and differentiating habitus are produced and reproduced in the daily life of subjects, men and women, through both a sort of unconscious mimesis and explicit indications. At the same time, there is the mechanism of gender’s social construction, and the concealment of its unnatural and artificial feature. This concealment leads to – and strengthens – the naturalness of that way of being into the world. For all people who adapt to this gender status there are true symbolic rewards for the accordance with the common feeling. So people become «respectable» and get the symbolic privilege «to be respectable, according to the rules, so they enjoy a symbolic benefit of normality» (Bourdieu 2005: 127). The action of gender's social building is therefore complex and involves different social structures which can apply strong pressure on the socialization processes to the gender. Family, school and media (above all TV and cinemas) are certainly the agencies which have a particularly incisive power in influencing gender models, but especially in the process of naturalization of these models. Familiarity creates a sense of *necessity* of those contents and makes learning obvious and natural.

2. Gender and job choices

Job is still one of the places where this gender representation and self-representation shows its drag force. And even all the ambivalence which still characterize the way of thinking at men and women. According to those who

³ Here we do not cite the widespread debate on the issue of “other genders” who fight to be recognized, and of their claims about asking the overcoming of a merely dichotomic concept of gender differences. We can also report some LBTG (Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Gay) associations and movements.

believe in the constructionist approach, job could have showed how the “natural” female features were the result of long and invisible processes of socialization. Women, released from a traditional education, would have been able to break the invisible walls and assert themselves in the male sectors. This phenomenon would have showed how vitiated was the innatist ideology which explain the reasons of an insufficient presence of women in some sectors exactly searching for their bio-psychic peculiarity that made them suitable for some types of job (cleaning and housekeeping and, as regarding “outside” jobs, only those ones which are considered an ideal appendage to these jobs) and *not suitable* for other jobs (“male jobs” which require a greater skill, high decision-making abilities etc.). But, though the undeniable changes, the cultural oppositions become visible exactly here and are recorded by statistical data which show not only the female employment on a lower level than the male employment⁴, but also concentrated in some sectors closer to social care giving activities. Women and men carry on being considered and considering themselves, as more suitable and well-versed for very different jobs and tasks. This situation soon determines the area of the possible and of the *thinkable* and, as a sort of a self-fulfilling prophecy⁴, leading both women and men towards their *natural social destinies*. The gender socialization starts soon and it has, also, the shape of very different educational choices which lead women and men towards very different professional futures. Gottfredson (1981) elaborated the theory of circumscription and compromise, according to which six-eight years old kids already develop a very clear perception of the most accessible works, and moreover, more appropriate for a woman or a man. It means that a range of working alternatives related to the gender representation is generated. Sometimes this range is very limited and not always easily modifiable; its formation is significantly influenced also by the cultural level and the wider cultural capital of the belonging family and social group⁵. The parents' jobs, the interpretation of gender roles in the family experience, exercise, although not in a deterministic sense, an important influence in the construction of children's mental patterns and in their vision of the world, which end to influence, even unknowingly, choices and future attitudes. The family has an important role in socializing gender roles and, consequently, in reproducing inequality and gender disparities: «when moms and dads decide what to teach their Johns and Marys, they make exactly the right choice, in fact act with much more sociological sophistication than they should have, assuming of course, that the world is as they have known and it is what they want to reproduce» (Goffman 1979, 6). «The center of resistance to gender equality [that] runs in the family, at home, in the most basic practices» (Scisci, Vinci 2002, 60). This kind of “gender imprinting” still today continues to influence the people self-representations starting from their gender belonging. These representations are

⁴ These trends seem to be structural and very far from being the result of short-term trends related to the crisis that has had effects on the job market for some years (Carrera 2011).

⁵ This analytic line also supposed a decisive influence by role models, that is, people of the same sex performing professional activities which are distant from those traditionally defined as *appropriate* for a man or a woman (Gysbers *et al.* 2001).

united by a round causality with the wider social representations and this current situation still today shows how difficult is imaging women with male jobs (Cfr. Carrera 2011b) and similarly there are still a lot of “pink jobs” which are almost precluded to men. These “female jobs” are more bound to the housekeeping and the care giving, jobs which are imagined as the ideal appendage to the female job par excellence: the housewife! The housewife is the only job that, according to the Istat data, is considered a female job until at least 2000 or in some cases even until 2004⁶. Even in this case, words are at the same time a interesting observation point of the state of change, but also an important *means* able to interfere with this complex process of achievement/change of the gender representations. And even in this case, change is not only proved by the necessity of new words, but is also confirmed and made possible by those new words. But new words have to find also new frames where they can produce new effects. Cultural frames that have to be confirmed by legislative systems which roundly can reinforce and legitimate them. Still today it is valid a group of expectations founded by culture which limits the option set at people’s disposal and determines the job and social space where everybody, according to the own gender, can and have to move, and all choices those have to be done in order not to incur blame or even social penalties.

3. Beyond traditional gender representation: Research interviews about new male job choices⁷

Of course, something is changing. The traditional gender representations start to show substantial cracks. Women have begun to “infringe upon” traditionally male spaces for many decades, for example by doing jobs that before were reserved to men (Carrera 2011b). But also the opposite process is in progress. The world of traditional female jobs, those jobs which are regarded, as *care* giving activities, has begun to be performed and even chosen by men. And this concerns also the job of “housewife”. Starting from these considerations, we have implemented a qualitative survey which has allowed us to observe the presence of men employed in traditionally “female” jobs (Carrera 2013) and to examine itineraries, reasons and approaches. Between the end of 2012 and the beginning of 2013, we carried out about forty interviews addressed to men employed as baby-sitters, domestic helps, caretakers, male nurses, teachers and even house-husbands. The reference geographical area is Apulia. The main aspects have been: a) the itinerary these men have walked through towards their actual jobs; b) the sense and feeling with which their family and friends and themselves have regarded that. Through the analysis of the interviews we have been able to build a well-structured classification of four different types of men: *resigned men*, *emotionless men*, *adapted men* and *innovators*. *Resigned* are men who *have fallen into* their actual jobs. A big part of them have lost their previous jobs and afterwards they have tried to find something else. But they haven’t found anything and now they are

⁶ (Fagiani, Ruspini 2011, 95ff).

⁷ We will refer to a research whose full results are published in Ruspini, Perra 2013.

discouraged and just resigned to stay in this new job condition. *Indifferent* are men, especially young men and university students, who don't care about their actual job condition. They are just indifferent with respect to being employed in "female jobs", as they themselves call them. But they don't care about this situation even because they don't think of their actual jobs as "definitive" jobs, «jobs for the rest of their life life». *Adapted* are men who haven't chosen their actual condition, but who now see it as a positive one. They like what they do, and appreciate all the new possibilities they have available (free time, more time with children, and above all a medium level of satisfaction for what they do). *Innovators* are those men who have chosen their job condition and moreover, they like it! Some of them are really fighters for "men's rights" to be employed also in *care giving jobs*. They say that men are able to do it and, moreover, they can choose them if they want. Many of them are teachers and "stay at home men" and they report having more time with their children, more time for themselves and, in some cases, a better sense of their own life. Surely something has changed and something is changing, but there are many steps, a long way to arrive to a new definition of genders and relationship between them. And men and women have to reflect on this. Because, as research shows, women, as well as men are involved in traditional gender representations⁸.

4. Gender and politics

Politics has a key-role in hastening or on the contrary even opposing the process of change of gender representation. The social thought and the incentive towards a bigger change, which has interested these representations for some decades, need to be politically supported. The question now becomes wider, if we think of the laws that allowed women to become independent professionals, such as a magistrate, or more recently employed in the Army. Or think of the laws which replaced "maternity leave" with "parental leave", according to the logic of shared parental care⁹. Or think of the very recent and discussed laws which require companies on the stock exchange to have at least 30% women on supervisory boards. There are also legislative proposals for the need to have an impartial presence of both genders on the electoral rolls, otherwise they will be considered unlawful. Also, the system of the double preference¹⁰ and the proposals of the "gender share" should all be according to a logic of equal democracy. But the

⁸ Some men tell about difficulties with their wives or girlfriends just because of their «too female jobs»!

⁹ The first organic law on the subject was the law of 30 December 1971 n. 1204, which included provisions for maternity leave for females only. The rule was later amended with the law of 8 March 2000, no. 53, which for the first time introduced the use of parental leave for men.

¹⁰ Similar to what has already been recognised by the regional electoral law adopted in Campania. Even Apulia tried to approve this law in 2013 with a first draft of a law, an initiative organized by people that raised subscriptions but then was rejected by the Regional Council.

process is still long and implementing an only “recently” officially recognized equality in real equality needs a great and shared responsibility. We need to deal with the cultural oppositions of principles or values which all people, men and women, have experienced. Widespread systems which show to be pervasive, with the consequence that making different choices, is lived with discomfort and embarrassment, not only by those who make them but also by those who are close to him/her. Parental decisions, for example, as a result of the above mentioned, continue to be taken only by women, accounting for almost 90% of the total amount. This is certainly a consequence of the economic reasons regarding the sacrifice of a part of the male wage, which is usually higher than their partners, but is also a reason why men feel ashamed amongst colleagues for making this kind of choice¹¹. Even normative choices have to be necessary according to a totally updated gender logic¹². Going forward, for example, we observe that the agreement on the parental permissions recently subscribed by European countries in 2009¹³ aims to build the conditions for a conciliation which considers, as unavoidable precondition, the sharing of the care responsibility by the two parents. This could be an important step in order to *declare the parenting as normal life condition of the workers* (women and men) and so to dispel the image of the mother who is stifled by several roles and thousands of tasks, with all the stereotypes and discriminations which follow; and also manage to *overcome the invisibility of the paternity on the job and inside the organizations* (Riva, Zanfrini2010). Concerning these aims, the European good practices, and especially the Scandinavian ones, show to have been absolutely effective. We need to start from the safeguard of the “social normality” (Carrera 2009) and a welfare that, even though it has to deal with economic difficulties which have become relevant in this specific historical situation, is able to avoid every temptation to take only a residual aspect, by safeguarding only the desperate situation of poverty. It must exceed and go beyond the consideration and the safeguard of the social normality’s bracket, represented not by “poor people” without financial resources but by all people who can find the conditions to make also different job choices in a more careful welfare system. With good consequences both on the personal level and on the widen social level. Starting from the possibility that the sphere of the economic poverty does not expand, by swallowing up other families and other people inside¹⁴.

¹¹ “What male workers feel about their capability of exercising care giving activities are patterned after what other male workers do in their job places” (Bygren and Duvander 2006; Haas, Allard and Hwang 2002).

¹² Think of the symbolic value of the choice to fix only a day of compulsory leave and up to two days of leave optional: they are in a nutshell the days of absence from work to be recognized for the new father on the birth of a child.

¹³ Proposal Com (2009) 410 30/07/2009 for a Council Directive implementing the recise Framework Agreement on parental concluded by Business Europe, Ueapme, Ceep an Etuc and repealing Directive 96/34/Ec. Reaffirming the right of employees of both sexes to "parental leaving", it extends its period and, above all, establishing the non-transferability of a part of it.

¹⁴ We refer, for example, to the higher risk of poverty suffered by one-income families.

It means that territorial, national and international institutions have a fundamental role to contribute on changing traditional gender representations. And consequently, they have high responsibility to do that.

Conclusions

The change of the traditional gender patterns, like any other cultural change, can only be done over a long period of time and it has its own intrinsic complexity. And it can only be the result of an integrate approach which is able to build and teach a possible condition of difference. Men, as are women, are embedded in cultural and normative models, that they learn from childhood and that they incorporate as "second nature." Any chance of change starts from deconstructing and de-naturalizing these models, and understanding them as a result of learning that, as such, can be challenged and changed. But these patterns have for a long time been so well embedded in our culture, that it's very difficult to recognize them in our everyday life. The starting point for all change is to take an ethnographic perspective. And we have to pay attention to any social and personal "space" where these gender representations occur and give results, but also where they are starting to become weaker. Because, as the results of our research show, something is changing. With women but also with men (although later), they are starting to "practice" new male models, new experiences "to be men". But it's only the starting point! There is strong resistance against this changing process at personal, social and, even, institutional levels. For these reasons we need to improve our ethnographic research to find and to collect these forms of change and these forms of resistance should be allowed a wide scientific debate that can drive social and institutional decisions and changes.

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THE ROLE OF TRUST IN E-ENGAGEMENT: A CASE STUDY ON EU GOVERNMENTS

Donatella Padua¹

Abstract: The objective of the paper is to illustrate the impact of digital technology on the relationships between institutions and stakeholders in the Internet environment. The study sheds light on how trust builds value within the social dynamics of the digital ecosystem. The following case study on the 'EU Governments – Stakeholders e-Engagement' is meant to clarify the effort that the governments of the EU member states are making to change the citizens' mindset required to face the new Internet Age society.

Keywords: Digital technology, Ecosystem, Complexity, Dialogue, Engagement, Horizontal society, Trust, e-Governments, Internet Age, Stakeholders.

The complex digital ecosystem

The 'Internet Age' is an era that started with the diffusion of the internet global network (Cavanah 58-49, Padua 3-18), characterized by a radicalization of social postmodern complexity (Appadurai 27-47, Castells 36-63, Luhmann 1995: 12-58, 2010: 105-214, Bauman 21-38). Indeed, the Internet is an ecosystem characterized by high levels of complexity (Luhmann 5-1, Prigogyne 27-40) leading to a paradigmatic shift from verticality to horizontality. This statement is justified by the following phenomena:

- the disruption of vertical top-down power and control systems exerted by organisations and institutions tracing to the creation of a new horizontal society.
- The generation of horizontal value-chains based on peer-to-peer sharing and on the production and control of information not governable by traditional top-down value chains.
- The dissolution of rational linear patterns versus creative disorder and connecting dots methodologies. This fact implies that knowledge develops more on the surface than following mainstream vertical traditional patterns, which were based on depth rather than superficiality.

The role of trust

In the Internet Age, trust has become essential to business. In a world where the new paradigm is based on connection, collaboration and innovation, marketing

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is shifting from a measure of success based on Return On Investment (ROI) to value measured in relationships and trustworthiness. As trust is the essence of relationship, building a 'Trust Strategy' (Padua 91-95) is of utmost importance for both private and public organisations. Some institutions are already operating in this direction via e-governments, participation strategies and transparency politics, namely: 'Open Government' or 'Wikicracy'. These terms relate to a form of democracy empowered by web collaborative tools (wikis) aiming to reach win-win solutions between institutions and stakeholders. As shown below in the case-study, these forms of engagement allow institutions to meet the stakeholders' need to express their opinions freely, to become protagonists by exerting a 'control' over the government, empowering people to access data and information. This process forces institutions to become more transparent and benevolent, showing integrity, key requirements to become trustworthy.

With all the difficult challenges institutions have to face today – shrinking public budgets, a fragmented and diversified society, global movements, to mention only some of the reasons behind the loss of central powers – it is much harder than earlier for governments to solve all the issues related to their institutional role.

That's why stakeholders are increasingly invited to help solve governments' problems with creative and innovative solutions. In the Internet environment opportunities for stakeholders-government collaboration lie in all forms of crowdsourcing. Challenge.gov², for example, is the US platform where the public and government can solve problems together; SeeClickFix.com³ is an opportunity for the government to hear citizens' ideas about the perfect system to receive feedback and service requests; Mysociety.org⁴ builds websites which benefit the civic and community aspects of people's lives. The objective is to help people become more powerful in these areas: reporting transport issues and street problems, receiving answers from public bodies and contacting public representatives are just some of the ways to exert civic rights and contribute to the improvement of the civic society.

In this light, building trust via the design of trust strategies becomes of utmost relevance. However, this is a complex challenge for more than one reason: trust is multidimensional and it requires to establish a one-to-one personalized relationship between the institution and the stakeholder to gain insights on his or her real need; secondly, customers are increasingly distrustful, particularly regarding institutions. As the Edelman Trust Barometer indicates⁵, in the past two years institutions have been undergoing the highest drop in trust by people, followed, at a distance, by business and NGOs: specifically, comparing the average of 2012-2013 vs. 2011, governments scored – 7 vs. – 1.5 % points of business and NGOs.

² Challenge.gov, 16 Nov 2013. Web

³ SeeClickFix.com, 15 Dec. 2013. Web

⁴ Mysociety.org, 15 Dec. 2013. Web.

⁵ Edelman.com, 18 Dec. 2013. Web.

Who has gained trust then? ‘A person like you’ and ‘Regular employees’ scored + 21,5% and + 15% respectively vs. – 12,5% of government officials and – 12,5% of CEOs(average 2011-2013).

Some reasons have to be traced to scandals and lack of competence on the institutions and organisations side versus the transparency of peer-to-peer relationships granted by the absence of any form of hidden interests: peer-to-peer trust is more immediate and irrational rather than rational and logic. As a matter of fact, trust has two sides, an irrational one and a rational one, called respectively *trust* and *confidence*.

These two constructs have several definitions in literature (Giddens 39-44, Luhmann 35-45). By synthesizing the various interpretations, trust and confidence may be considered two sides of the same coin: on the trust side, non-rational attributes prevail; on the confidence side, rationality emerges quite clearly.

Within the complex Internet social ecosystem, the irrational side of trust prevails over the rational one. This accounts for its unpredictability, to the disruption of linear patterns and the impossibility to connect causes to effects.

Relevantly, trust allows the possibility of an action within a framework of reciprocity. The circulatory process of exchange, which is an inside link among persons and a builder of society, is the main framework within which interaction takes place generating reciprocal influence and exchange⁶. As society is made up of social interactions and exchange is not possible without trust, it is clear that trust generates social cohesion and it is a very powerful tool of integration, allowing action to take place (Giddens 85-112).

The objective of a trust strategy (Padua 95, 179-182), is to manage reputation via:

a. working on the five critical areas of trust, which are Competence, Benevolence, Integrity, Transparency and Value Congruence:

1. *Competence* relates to technical ability and performance (Cofta 39-40);
2. *Benevolence* relates to the positive quality of relationship. It is the extent to which a trustee is believed to want to do good to the trustor, aside from an egocentric profit motive (Mayer et al. 709-34).
3. *Integrity* refers to values and to an ethical approach. It implies that the trustor perceives the trustee as adhering to a set of principles (personal integrity) considered acceptable (that is, to display moral integrity) by the trustor, including honesty, fair treatment and the avoidance of hypocrisy (ivi718);
4. *Transparency* relates to the rule to communicate. It may be interpreted as the possibility of the trustor to acquire information about the trustee’s integrity.

⁶ Georg Simmel, a philosopher and sociologist, in his work on the ‘philosophy of money’ (Simmel, 1900) argues that exchange is one of the functions that creates an interjacent link – that is, society- from the simple proximity of individuals.

5. *Value congruence* is related to identity (Pirson and Malhotra 43-50). It expresses the sociological relation between identification and integration or sharing (Simmel 500-1).
 - a. being able to create positive experiences and perceptions, via a communication strategy and dialogue. In the case-study shown below, different communicational formats emerge from various governments' websites, indicating different levels of emotional communication and involvement: an example is the Denmark website⁷, rich in pictures, colours and engaging content versus the Latvia⁸ website, which appears very informative and straightforward.

Trust and social capital

Trust is an enabler of social capital.

In sociology as in economics, these two concepts are of primary importance. Social capital allows an understanding of the new meaning of *value* within the digital society – the relationship upon which relational goods are founded. In our perspective of digital context and responsibility, we focus less on Coleman's utilitarian position (Coleman 300-21), giving more attention instead to the collectivist positions of Putnam, and to the relational-dialogic approach of Donati, who has investigated the concept of relational goods in depth (Donati and Solci 140-187; Putnam 65-78, Nussbaum, 343-354). In fact, as the utilitarian position refers to a cooperative rationale (i.e. an entrepreneur cooperating for a project with other entrepreneurs), the collectivist positions refer to building social capital as an outcome of a reciprocal exchange of relations useful to the collective. Fixmytransport, for instance, is a web community to make petitions for the fixing of transport problems⁹. According to Putnam, social capital is the «set of socio-organizational elements – as trust, shared norms, social networks – which may improve the efficiency of society itself, facilitating the coordinated activity of individuals» (Putnam 65-78).

Based on this consideration, it is evident how social capital puts trust at the centre of the process: social capital, by connecting people, is an essential element in the building of social networks that are vital in nurturing and meeting the expectations and preserving of social norms. In turn, trust reduces distances between brands and stakeholders following viral patterns. Trust is a diffusive good, tending to expand from one point of a society to many others (Stzompka 37-62). Trust virality leverages the invaluable trustworthiness of those stakeholders having a leadership in opinions, the so-called 'influencers' or 'trust agents' (Brogan and Smith 1-31) of a company. Within social networks, trust may be inferred by the observation of other agents' behavior, without a complete pre-existing set of information.

⁷ denmark.dk, 10 Aug. 2013. Web.

⁸ mk.gov.lv/en/mk/sastavs12 Aug. 2013. Web.

⁹ Fixmytransport.com, 12 Aug. 2013. Web.

In summary, managing trust online reduces brand-consumer distances and may be a fast diffuser of a positive reputation, thanks also to the role of influencers or trust agents. For this reason, building a trust strategy means managing reputation in time and space.

Case-study: Analysis of the EU Governments – Stakeholders e-Engagement Background

Institutions provide different levels of interpretation to the concept of e-government. According to the definition of the World Bank,

«e-Government” refers to the use by government agencies of information technologies (such as Wide Area Networks, the Internet, and mobile computing) that have the ability to transform relations with citizens (G2C), businesses (G2B), and other arms of government (G2G) into more friendly, convenient, transparent, and inexpensive relationships. These technologies can serve a variety of different ends: better delivery of government services to citizens, improved interactions with business and industry, citizen empowerment through access to information, or more efficient government management. The resulting benefits can be less corruption, increased transparency, greater convenience, revenue growth, and/or cost reductions»¹⁰.

In some countries, the meaning is restricted to a mere offer of electronic inquiry or to file an application, to electronically receive information, to ease the handling of administrative procedures; in the other cases, instead, e-government relates to the adoption of digital stakeholders’ engagement strategies to build deeper and long-lasting relationships with people, to encourage bottom-up participation and horizontal dialogue.

The below analysis is grounded on this latter more extensive interpretation of e-government. Results provide a ranking of EU countries based on digital stakeholders engagement.

Key Learnings

It is evident how a well-established stakeholders’ engagement strategy doesn’t make the political, economic and social success of a whole country. However, it is clear how it represents an initial way to drive the socio-political strategy of a country towards a stakeholders’ engagement strategy, matching the new needs of the digital empowered society. Giving voice to the people, letting them participate in the process, building long-lasting relationships represents the strategy of capturing value from the horizontal society. Indeed, a digital

¹⁰ web.worldbank.org, 12 Aug. 2013. Web.

Indeed, a substantial two-third of EU countries are still reluctant to start an interaction with their stakeholders. Out of this figure, 47%, representing the overall highest percentage of performance (yellow colour), show low levels of engagement. This reflects a lack of any form of participation platform, missing open consultations or petitions encouraged by the government and lack of any other form of participation such as volunteering and direct involvement in improving communities. The residual 6% don't show any form of engagement.

Sample and Methodology

The totality of the universe of the 28 EU member states has been considered. For each country the official government website has been analysed according to the following variables:

a. *Presence of participation platforms*. This variable refers to dedicated webpages such as 'gov.uk/government/get-involved' for UK or 'partecipa.gov.it' for Italy. In some cases this variable includes the presence of social media links well evidenced in the institutions' website homepage.

b. *Level of evidence* of the above specified webpage link in the home-page. If well-evidenced, it reflects a clear-cut strategy of stakeholder engagement, encouraging an open dialogue and participation.

c. *Social media channels*. Presence of blogs and/or other social media such as Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, Pinterest, Youtube, G+, to encourage conversation and horizontal WOM (Word of Mouth).

d. *Open consultations* with stakeholders on specific subjects. This is a major way of building trust via participation. It corresponds to co-production processes in the business sector.

e. *Petitions* encouraged by governments. Often, petitionwebsites are bottom-up sourced, created by other constituencies. In this study we refer only to specific petitions webpages linked to the official government's website.

e. *Participation*. The analysis refers to other forms of participation following the UK 'Big Society' concept. According to this model, the government supports people who care about their communities and want to get involved in improving them. It believes that people understand the needs of their area best, which is why it transfers power so people can make more decisions locally and solve their own problems to create strong, attractive and thriving neighbourhoods¹¹. It includes volunteering, community organisation, protecting building, and many other bottom-up initiatives.

¹¹ gov.uk/government/topics/community-and-society, Aug. 10, 2013. Web.

Key findings

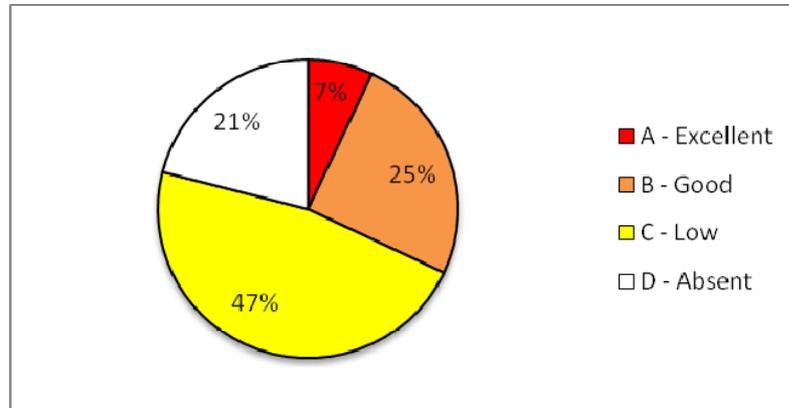


Figure 2

The percentage of governments putting stakeholders engagement at the centre of their strategies is still very low, 7% vs. 25% of governments showing a good level of engagement. The majority of governments (68%, 47% at C-level + 21% at D-level) have a low or absent level of engagement (see Figure 2).

Undoubtedly, the UK shows a top performing website both under the communicational and engagement perspective. The claim ‘Simpler, clearer, faster’ perfectly summarizes the opening to involvement and dialogue. The four ‘trust beliefs’ clearly emerge both from the content and execution of the website, matching transparency, benevolence, competence, integrity and identity. The number of closed and open consultations confirm the success of the strategy: 76 open consultations and 600 closed consultations in the past 12 months¹² indicate a positive government-stakeholders engagement. Consultations cover a wide range of topics, from arts and culture to law and justice, from employment to crime and policing.

The Italy website¹³, at the time this study was carried out, had an excellent and well-evidenced platform, stimulating participation¹⁴: partecipa.gov.it, aiming to a consultation on Constitutional reforms. The outcomes appear encouraging: more than 200.000 filled applications (validated by ISTAT, the Institute of National Statistics), 4 million minutes spent online by Italians of all ages to express their own ideas on forms of government, on tools of free and democratic expression, on priorities on the effectiveness of the Parliament. However, after the consultation was successfully closed, the government website did not show any other open

¹² gov.uk/government/get-involved, 3 Feb. 2014. Web.

¹³ Governo.it, 13 Aug. 2013. Web.

¹⁴ Partecipa.gov.it, 1 Feb. 2014. Web.

consultation (nor does it currently¹⁵). For this reason, time will confirm if there is a consistent intent by the government to field a stakeholders' engagement strategy.

Germany is a case apart. No traces of any encouragement to participation, no stakeholder engagement emerge. Clearly, this reflects an institutional decision and strategy.

Some other governments are positioned in between an A- and B-rating, indicated as a B+. This rank reflects a solid presence of an e-government platform although with a somehow restricted interpretation of the e-government approach. Specifically, the Austrian government's website highlights Austria as the '2013 European Champion in e-Government' for the fourth time in a row¹⁶. Although this is an excellent result, digitalization appears to work essentially for electronic inquiries or to file an application, to electronically receive information, to ease the handling of administrative procedures. No direct encouragement to dialogue is expressed in the official website. Seemingly, the Slovenian government shows an e-government website¹⁷; however, the concept of e-government is interpreted in a quite restrictive and one-way direction, being informative only and not encouraging any thorough interaction with stakeholders.

The Estonia¹⁸, Ireland¹⁹, Malta²⁰ websites represent similar cases, performing same rankings.

B+ -ranking also indicates governments not using any specific platform dedicated to stakeholders' participation, indeed showing an engaging and rich scope of social media links, well evidenced in the homepage. The Danish and Finnish governments' websites are cases in point.

In the C-ranking cases, there is a lack of any specific participation platforms and other indicators are usually negative. However, an encouragement to dialogue via blogs or social media is often present, evidenced at low or good level. This may reflect a genuine first step to an engagement strategy that reveals a 'shop-window' approach, aiming just at a communicational or 'maquillage' effect.

In this view, and close to the Germany-case, it would be worthwhile to further investigate the reasons behind the poor performance of the French government's website, which restricts dialogue with stakeholders to a few social media links posted on the home page. Seemingly, Spain just adds to some social media links an invitation to write to the President.

D-ranking shows no engagement in any form: besides the 'Germany' case, there are Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Luxembourg, Slovakia, Sweden.

¹⁵ At Feb. 3, 2014.

¹⁶ digitales.oesterreich.gv.at, 11 Aug. 2013. Web.

¹⁷ <http://e-uprava.gov.si>, 12 Aug. 2013. Web.

¹⁸ e-estonia/digital-society, 10 Aug 2013. Web.

¹⁹ gov.ie/services/egovernment-suggestions, 11 Aug. 2013. Web.

²⁰ mygov.mt/portal, 25 Jul. 2013. Web.

Concluding remarks

In the Internet Age we are witnessing an unprecedented reversal of roles, where stakeholders are able to freely produce content, dramatically impacting on an organisation's reputation (Padua 46). These are premises that point to a new dynamic concept of value, based on a direct participation in the process, calling for two-ways dialogic communication patterns.

Opening a dialogue to the extent of building relationships has become the critical objective for organisations as, in the Internet Age, this means building loyalty to the brands of institutions. To achieve this intent, however, organisations have to become trustworthy, as trust allows the opening towards building a relationship. Indeed, it means complying with the power of stakeholders, able to 'act' on the web, that is: to get information, express their judgment and govern the reputation of the institution. In other words, institutions are called to reach win-win solutions, matching their compelling objectives with the stakeholders' new digital needs. The case-study shown in this paper is a case in point, shedding light on a cultural issue generating a massive communication gap between institutions and stakeholders and on many missing opportunities of dialogue (only about one-third of governments show an excellent or good level of engagement).

Importantly, this study may represent a useful basis for further researches aiming to investigate the impact of the above analysed e-engagement strategies in terms of value generation. The goal would be to capture the real effectiveness of the levels of engagement and trustworthy relationships between governments and stakeholders. An interesting route could be to apply indicators such as Social capital and Relational or Common goods (Donati 140-187) and models of measurement of engagement and trust (Cofta, 73-85, Laco  e 29-31, Padua, 167-200).

Appendix I: Levels of Engagement of the Websites of the EU Countries

| | EU Countries | Participation Platforms | Level of Evidence | Social media Channels (FB, g+, Twitter, ...) | Open Consultations | Petitions Encouraged by government | Participation (big society model: volunteering community org., national service, protecting buildings...) | Rating on Engagement |
|---|--|-------------------------|-------------------|--|--------------------|------------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| 1 | Austria http://www.austria.gv.at | Yes (1) | No | No | No | No | No | B+ (digitales.oesterreich.gv.at) |
| 2 | Belgium http://www.belgium.be/en/ | No | No | Yes | No | No | No | C |

| | | | | | | | | |
|----|--|---------|---------|-----|-----|-----|-----|---|
| 3 | Bulgaria http://www.government.bg | No | No | No | No | No | No | D |
| 4 | Croatia http://www.vlada.hr/en | No | No | Yes | No | No | No | C |
| 5 | Cyprus http://www.cypus.gov.cy | No | No | Yes | No | No | Yes | C |
| 6 | Czech Republic http://www.vlada.cz/en/ | No | No | No | No | No | No | D |
| 7 | Denmark http://denmark.dk | Yes (2) | Yes + | Yes | No | Yes | No | B |
| 8 | Estonia http://valitsus.ee/en/ | Yes | Yes +++ | Yes | No | No | No | B+ (e-estonia/digital-society) |
| 9 | Finland http://valtioneuvosto.fi/etusivu/en.jsp | Yes(2) | Yes + | Yes | No | No | No | B |
| 10 | France http://www.gouvernement.fr | No | No | Yes | No | NO | No | C |
| 11 | Germany http://www.bundesregierung.de/Webs/Breg/EN/Homepage/_Node.html | No | No | No | No | No | No | D |
| 12 | Greece http://www.primeminister.gov.gr | No | No | Yes | No | No | No | C |
| 13 | Hungary http://www.kormany.hu/en | No | No | Yes | No | No | No | C |
| 14 | Ireland http://www.gov.ie | yes | Yes ++ | Yes | Yes | No | No | B+ (gov.ie/services/Egovernment-suggestions/) |
| 15 | Italy http://www.governo.it | yes | Yes +++ | Yes | Yes | No | No | A |

| | | | | | | | | |
|----|--|---------|---------|-----|---------------------------|-----|--|--|
| 16 | Latvia http://www.mk.gov.lv/en/mk/sastavs/ | No | No | Yes | No | No | No | C |
| 17 | Lithuania http://www.lrv.lt | No | No | Yes | No | No | No | C |
| 18 | Luxembourg http://www.gouvernement.lu | No | No | No | No | No | No | D |
| 19 | Malta http://www.gov.mt/en/Pages/gov.mt%20homepage.aspx | Yes (2) | Yes + | Yes | No | No | No | B+ (mygov.mt/portal) |
| 20 | Netherlands http://www.government.nl | No | No | Yes | No | No | No | C |
| 21 | Poland http://www.poland.gov.pl | No | No | Yes | No | No | No | C |
| 22 | Portugal http://www.portugal.gov.pt/en.aspx | No | No | Yes | No | No | No | C |
| 23 | Romania http://www.gov.ro/main/index/1/2/ | No | No | Yes | No | No | No | C |
| 24 | Slovakia http://www.government.gov.sk | No | No | No | No | No | No | D |
| 25 | Slovenia http://www.gov.si | yes (1) | No | No | No | No | No | B+ (http://e-uprava.gov.si) |
| 26 | Spain http://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/home.htm | No | No | Yes | No | No | No | C |
| 27 | Sweden http://www.government.se | No | No | No | No | No | No | D |
| 28 | United Kingdom https://www.gov.uk | yes | Yes +++ | Yes | 404 closed in past 12 mos | Yes | Yes https://www.gov.uk/petition-government | A |

Key:

A=excellent. Key indicators are positively performed: the presence of interaction platforms is well evidenced, enforced by social media and consultations. In top performance cases, petitions and other forms of participation are performed such as: volunteering, community organisations, national service, protection of national buildings.

B=good. Interaction platforms, e-government websites are present on the homepage. Sometimes well evidenced social media links replace specific interaction websites, often integrated with other indicators. Consultations, petitions, citizens' participation are usually not encouraged. B+ are ratings between A and B, due to effective digital technology efforts such as e-government platforms, even though sometimes intended in a restricted way, and not directly encouraging dialogue.

C=low. Absence of specific participation platforms. However, an encouragement to dialogue via blogs or social media is often present, evidenced at low or good level. Other indicators are usually not performing.

D=absent. There isn't any form of engagement; dialogue is not encouraged.

Notes:

- (1) Government websites with a restrictive interpretation of the e-government concept, not directly encouraging any interaction with stakeholders. E-government works essentially for electronic inquiries or to file an application, to electronically receive information, to ease the handling of administrative procedures.
- (2) In these countries, even in the absence of a specific webpage, a rich scope of social media is well evidenced on the homepage.

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THE SEED PROJECT: ENFORCING CITIZEN-CENTRED SOCIAL DIALOGUE IN EUROPEAN MUNICIPALITIES

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Abstract: This paper describes the initial results of the Speeding Every European Digital project SEED (www.seed-project.eu), a thirty-month pilot type-B EU co-funded project running under objective 4.1. "Towards a cloud of public services" of the CIP-ICT-PSP programme in seven member states (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Croatia, Czech Republic, Latvia, Romania and Spain.

Keywords: e-Participation, inclusive e-Governance, social media, social dialogue

1. Introduction

Conceptually the aim of SEED is to expand, through a cloud computing approach and a very cheap network of Interactive Public Service Advertising (i-PSA) nodes, the positive results of European Inclusive e-Governance initiatives to boost citizen-centred e-Government Services, to reuse as much as possible the European, National, Regional and Local stocks of Public Sector Information (PSI) and to leverage saving costs of e-Government and e-Governance deployments. SEED reuses PSI making mash-ups of e-Government contents for raising awareness of citizens about e-Government services available across all Europe, in effect transforming PSI in i-PSA messages². The rest of the paper is organized as follows: Section two outlines the current situation in Europe and the SEED value proposition, while section three describes the facts in SEED partner Member States. Section four presents the applicability of SEED. Section five presents the benefits of SEED for Public Administrations. Finally, section six concludes the paper.

2. The current situation in Europe and the SEED value proposition

Governments are being asked to do more with less. This seemingly elusive goal of efficiency, effectiveness and added value has become an inevitable reality for public administrations across Europe. The economic and financial challenges

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² *SEED Description of Work*. CIP-ICT-PSP.2011.4.1 Project Reference #297192. 2011. Print.

over the past few years have affected the private and public sectors alike. The public sector is facing radical and on-going changes and is being shaped by macroeconomic, social and environmental, and global business trends that are affecting governments and companies around the world. These trends are determining new policies and also transforming the way in which governments and agencies are led and managed. The economic uncertainty in the present times of austerity as well as the lack of stability at governmental level in some countries results in frequent reorganizations and replacements. These negative factors can greatly affect the service market introduction, more precisely if they are combined or/and assisted by situations such as:

- 1) High centralization and direct economic dependence from the Central Government (this is a commonality in most European countries).
- 2) High bureaucracy and dependence (lack of autonomy in decision making and implementation, and delays in procedures).
- 3) Low interest of National, Regional and Local Public Administrations to provide new e-Government services as well as promote similar services that may exist.

This last point is essential in understanding the main reason behind this poor behaviour of European citizens. Unless users/citizens are aware of any service (action), usage is bound to be low. Likewise, unless users/citizens accept that e-Government services can deliver what they require (reaction), take-up will be low. Figure 1 depicts the strategy that SEED follows in order to overcome the barriers that slow down the deployment of e-Government services in Europe. With less effort (mainly by reusing previous efforts already spent) it aims to achieve a larger impact on citizens and, in turn, to increase the engagement of citizens and Public Administrations in a constructive social dialogue. At the same time, the adoption of SEED i-PSA strategies even allows to empower the impact achieved and multiply the efficiency of those e-Government deployment efforts, generating savings to the Public Administration.

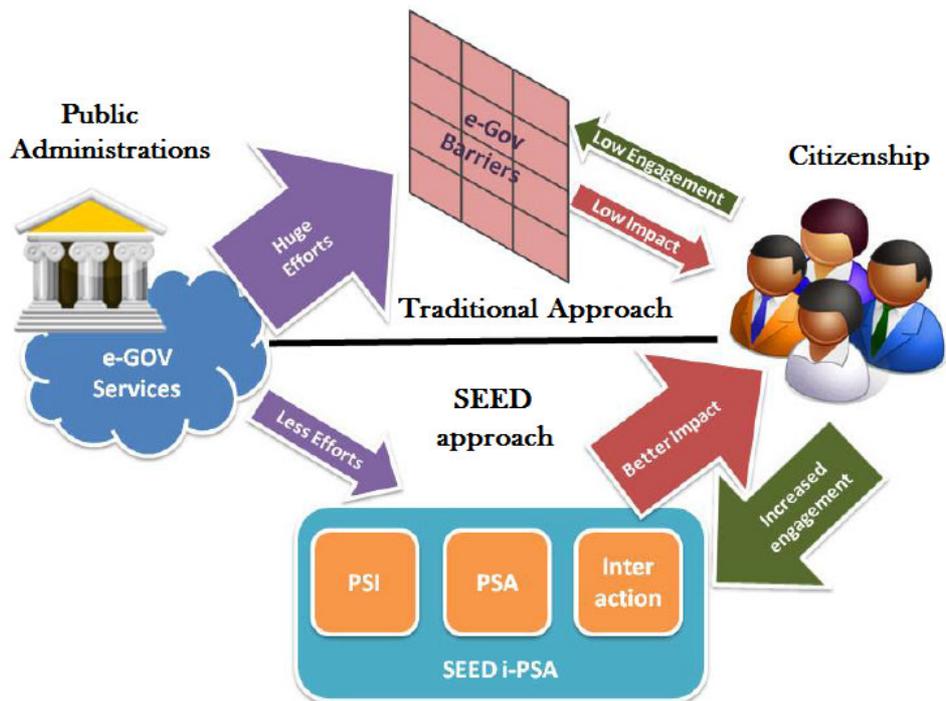


Figure 1 - SEED strategy to overcome e-Government barriers

3. Facts in SEED partner Member States

Focusing specifically on the negative exogenous facts that can be identified individually per member state/SEED partner, for example, in countries like Cyprus and Romania, we realise that the level of sophistication of digital Government services between some beneficiaries and the EU average is very uneven, whereas in Bulgaria e-Government development is still in its initial stage and the take-up of e-services is relatively low, with low socio-economic groups still at risk of e-exclusion.

Croatia reports the lack of a national strategy for public administrations and reusing PSI stocks is not among its priority, absorbed as it is with its accession into the European Union on 1 July 2013. The country is currently facing significant economic challenges and reforms, but it is also aware of the importance of investments in ICT, which is one of the fundamental drivers of economic growth. Implementation of new technologies that allow public administrations to improve their services to citizens by reducing administrative barriers, increasing socio-economic impacts on society and at the same time reducing the costs of providing new services are indispensable. On the other hand, the private and non-governmental sectors in the Czech Republic face a number of obstacles regarding PSI reuse. Some public institutions in the Czech Republic explicitly prohibit the reuse and especially commercial exploitation of PSI. Information published, for instance via a website, is followed by an announcement that only personal usage of

the information is permitted, but processing and dissemination is prohibited. Some institutions refuse to provide information for commercial use especially to commercial entities. Those institutions are probably not even aware of the fact that they interpose and put up barriers against European trends, where reuse of PSI is supported and encouraged by the EC. The lack of clarity around the long-term strategy of the public sector in the Czech Republic concerning the future development of digital services is a significant barrier for more dynamic development of commercial services based on PSI. Private companies, therefore, consider very carefully their own investment in value added information services. If it is not clear whether the public sector would invest public money in the same services, the business sector will always hesitate. No private company can win over the state in a long-term perspective. There are quick-changing socio-economic conditions in the Czech Republic, creating a demand for very flexible public administrations. It seems that better cooperation between PAs and private businesses is welcomed. So, any positive experiences of public-private partnerships could be very useful and should be supported.

In Latvia many of the developed electronic services are not designed as user-centric. Even with SEED contributing to disseminating and making citizens aware of them, they lack the attractiveness necessary to be used by citizens.

Other negative factors that are common in all seven SEED participating member-states (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Croatia, Czech Republic, Latvia, Romania and Spain), include services that are not easy enough to be used in order to be accepted by a majority of citizens and especially by socially disadvantaged groups; citizens' ignorance of existing services; unclear goals and guidelines in e-services; unclear long-term strategies in the development of Public Administration electronic services; broadband problems like uncovered areas or low speeds; technological scepticism, civil servants reluctance to change; self-training required by civil servants.

Nonetheless, there are also positive aspects that allow us to be optimistic about the deployment and the future of SEED. There are several pros for the SEED service deployment in the partner-countries that are mentioned in the remainder of this section. Most important is the backing of the European Commission to the amendment of Directive 2003/98/EC³ (on the reuse of public sector information, also known as the PSI Directive), that was formally approved on 10 April 2013. Once into force, the Directive will boost the data market in Europe by making all the generally accessible public sector information available for reuse.

Developers, programmers, creative citizens and businesses will be able to get and reuse public sector data at zero or very low cost in most cases. They will also have access to more exciting and inspirational content since materials in national museums, libraries and archives now fall under the scope of the Directive. The reuse of public sector information is and will be, at least for a few years, a hot topic generating huge interest in all member-states.

³European Commission. *Commission welcomes Member States' endorsement of EU Open Data rules*. Brussels: European Commission. 10 April 2013. Web. 25 November 2013.

In many European countries the provision of e-Government at a centralized level is promoted by governments, whereas at a local/regional level, this is done by the local authorities, which in most cases are independent and autonomous organizations (such as municipalities and communes). Almost all municipalities and a large number of community councils maintain their own website and promote the electronic communication with citizens who can lodge complaints, report problems and recommendations electronically. Nevertheless, in many countries “face-to-face” communication is the traditional and still most common way to interact with public authorities. The means used for this interaction include phone calls and personal visits to the local authorities, and are limited to the time call centres and offices are open to the public. From their portals only one-way communication is supported and citizens can only retrieve limited information, and therefore they are rarely used.

In Spain, a lot of “disaggregated” products can be found (such as digital certificates, digital signatures, content management systems), but an integral solution combining them is not offered. Thus, we can say that the PSI-PSA/e-Government market is still a highly fragmented one. All the partners report that several of the Regional Authorities are highly committed to deploying e-Government services that need to be filled with an adequate content to be of any use, and they are prepared to develop their own systems if no suitable commercial system is available. There are quickly changing socio-economic conditions creating demand for flexible services in public administration (something that still remains an exception). Moreover promotion and raising awareness of e-Government services is still an underdeveloped issue, which makes SEED an innovative approach.

The reduction of costs (per citizen) and administrative burden can be a big advantage in reaching citizens by reusing public spaces and facilities. Governments need to adapt and continuously evolve to create value. They need to stay relevant by being responsive to rapidly changing conditions and citizens’ expectations. Citizens are demanding more visibility on the allocation of public resources and challenging governments to be more efficient and equitable through accountability and transparency. Throughout this process, governments must stay coherent, which may prove to be the biggest challenge of all. SEED can be an ally to help achieve the objectives that current Public Administrations are forced to reach.

4. SEED application framework

SEED is a most convenient tool to facilitate the implementation of the new PSI Directive. It is a good means to redistribute data digitally through multiple communication channels while, at the same time, promoting social dialogue between Public Administrations and their citizens. Public Organizations are by norm rather passive and quick decision-making rarely counts among their strengths. They usually react when something becomes mandatory; laws are published urging for concrete actions and results usually when approaching electoral campaigns. Fortunately, EU regulations and directives are working

towards improving this situation. Surprisingly, it is possible to find small and very small local public administrations active in adopting innovative ICT services. This confirms once more that will and creativity more than money are the source of making success possible independently of the entrepreneur size. It is true that there are barriers to overcome the traditional ways of doing things and nowadays budgetary cuts have become the perfect excuse for most administrations to do nothing. On the other hand, we are amid quickly changing socio-economic conditions creating demand for very flexible public administration. Moreover, promotion and raising awareness of online Government services is still an underdeveloped issue, which makes SEED proposals innovative and appealing. Furthermore, by reusing public resources (infrastructures, information) reduction of costs (per citizen) and administrative burden can be a huge advantage in reaching citizens. A challenge will be the empowerment of a network between private and public stakeholders both. SEED's future goes interlaced with the future of government that lies across networks that include government, business, NGOs and civil society at multiple scales and levels, from global institutions to large cities and small commune councils. In this fragmented market, SEED has a role to play and plenty of opportunities ahead. Locating the most effective nexus for particular activities and understanding how governance works in this new complex ecosystem are at the core of SEED priorities for the future of government. Governments need to adapt and continuously evolve to create value. They need to stay relevant by being responsive to rapidly changing conditions and citizens' expectations. Citizens are demanding more visibility on the allocation of public resources and challenging governments to be more efficient and equitable through accountability and transparency. Throughout this process, governments must stay coherent, which may prove to be the biggest challenge of all. SEED can be an ally to help achieve the objectives that current Public Administrations are forced to reach. Summarizing, we could say that despite the currently unfavourable economic restrictions and the financial instability that can result in limited business interest for new services, this could be an opportunity for SEED. With SEED (a solution based on the cloud) Public Administrations have an easy and affordable tool to increase the citizens' awareness of digital services availability, uncovering their potential and possibly, as a consequence, contributing to an increase in their use by citizens. SEED's flexible and sensitive strategies towards the needs of public administrations can be offered to them as "very fast, very cheap and with little upfront investment" – which should result in being a very competitive alternative in a time of crisis. Public administrations across Europe are engaging in transformation processes, aiming at achieving a more efficient, effective, friendly, and citizen- and business-centric delivery of public services. This approach, also known as "Transformational Government"⁴, has become a driving force for innovation and reduction of the administrative burden in European public

⁴Shareef, Mahmud Akhter. et al. *Transformational Government through eGov Practice: Socioeconomic, Cultural, and Technological Issues*. Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2013. Print.

administration, taking advantage of the possibilities that the most recent technological developments have opened. The opportunities presented are enormous, but so are also the challenges to address in the implementation of such transformation processes.

SEED is but one answer to approaching administrations and citizens, effectively envisioning to act as a bridge between traditional social dialogue and modernized social dialogue. SEED enables the deployment of new channels of service delivery, making transactions with public administration more convenient for citizens, and contributes to making possible the redesign of services around the needs of citizens instead of around the needs of administrations. SEED e-Government solutions allow local, state and national governments to improve the quality and effectiveness of their communication with citizens, as well as between various government agencies and other governments. SEED gives to any public authority a flexible tool for blending priorities with available human and financial resources.

5. Benefits for Public Administrations

The main aim of SEED is to properly tackle the issue of raising the awareness of European citizens about useful e-Government contents and services previously invested by European Public Sectors, mainly by mixing cross-border services at European, national, regional and local levels. The results achieved so far where SEED pilots were launched in seven member-states demonstrate, firstly, the multicultural acceptance of the idea and, secondly, the feasibility of supporting such a citizen-centred social dialogue empowered by previous municipal investments in e-Government services and in public digital nodes like internet-enabled TVs, info-kiosks and digital signage⁵.

It is therefore planned that the main benefit for public administrations would not be a direct income, but a set of combined socio-economic gains, not all of which can be monetized. However, speaking about benefits in a long-term perspective, it is necessary to stress the significance of more efficient e-services for better economic situation in the region and for overall cost savings. The use of SEED can bring benefits to the community such as:

- 1) Improvement of the communication between civil servants and citizens (multiple ICT channels available);
- 2) Cost-savings on staff costs due to more efficient services;
- 3) Higher awareness among citizens of the activities and initiatives organized by local councils;
- 4) Upgrade of the quality of the public services and the existing infrastructure;
- 5) Enhancement of decentralization and organizational flexibility;

⁵Neophytou, Haris, and NeofytosGerosavva. *SEED Deliverable D5.3.1 Business Plans Production*. CIP-ICT-PSP.2011.4.1 Project Reference #297192.2013. Print.

- 6) Deeper impact among the population as a whole and especially among the typically excluded groups such as the elderly and people with disabilities; offer of inclusive services targeting citizens with disabilities;
- 7) Provision of deeper customization depending on the needs and special circumstances of every customer;
- 8) Reuse of content (PSI), thus avoiding new investments;
- 9) “Giving a voice” to citizens. Enabling higher e-Participation especially in the evaluation of public services;
- 10) Their residents who will be informed with absolutely no charge for a wide range of topics and moreover- they will have the opportunity to express their opinions and suggestions and even criticisms, giving valuable feedback to the municipality in their effort to make SEED an essential tool towards the provision of quality and effective e-Government services;
- 11) Improvement of the communication between civil servants and citizens (more channels available);
- 12) Cost-savings on personnel costs due to more efficient services;
- 13) Achieve higher awareness of the activities and initiatives organized by the local council;
- 14) Upgrade the quality of the public services and the existing infrastructure;
- 15) Achieve greater decentralization and organizational flexibility;
- 16) Provide a deeper customization depending on the needs and the special case of every customer.

Table 1 summarizes both the tangible and intangible benefits of SEED for Public Administrations.

Table 1

Tangible and intangible benefits of SEED for PAs

| PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|---|
| Municipality | Civil Servants | Economic | Citizenship | Political |
| A technological platform to promote inclusive e-services such as: employment, citizenship participation, e-government, multimedia, etc. | Tools for ensuring better management services | Savings due to a cloud computing model of service provision | Easier access to public services (friendlier interface, design for all, multi-channel capabilities) = DIGITAL INCLUSION | The administration will be recognized as an active booster of e-Inclusion policies in order to transfer the message to other municipalities |
| Lowcosts of implementation | Saving efforts due to the interoperable capacities of SEED. Reuse of information | Reuse of previous investments (Kiosks, PCs, TVs) | More services available with a citizen-centric perspective | Due to the fact that all services have an innovative aspect the administration |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|--|--|
| | | | | can act as an innovation vehicle towards the transfer of knowledge to the other PAs |
| Less effort needed in content maintenance as a result of the web-services developed | New services deployed in different organizational areas | Cost-savings on personnel costs due to more efficient services | Increasing of supporting courses for digital literacy supported by the SEED platform | The administration can establish a role as a promoter of several e-services in different areas (employment, e-government, e-democracy) |
| A platform with multi-channel capabilities and multilingual features together with accessibility features | Improving proximity between civil servants and citizens (more channels available) | Moving towards "green" organizations (digital instead of paper) | Higher awareness of the activities and initiatives organized by the PA | The administration will increase the use of their previous IT projects through the interoperable web-services built in SEED and moreover can proceed to joined solutions |
| Reusing previous investments in hardware (kiosks, public PCs, etc). | Better reports about the use of public services and a way to justify job tasks. | Reuse of content (data) avoiding new investments | Promotion of e-Participation. "Giving voice" to citizens. Higher participation in the evaluation of public services. | Being a more efficient organization overall |

6. Conclusions

Amidst the current European debt crisis and the public sector budget cuts⁶, the SEED project aims to provide a completely novel approach to traditional politics, which is meant to change the way public administrations communicate with citizens and promote social dialogue in a smarter, ICT-empowered, more

⁶ Blundell-Wignall, Adrian, and Patrick Slovik. "A Market Perspective on the European Sovereign Debt and Banking Crisis." *OECD Journal: Financial Market Trends* 2010.2 (2010): 9-36. Print.

efficient and economical way. Simultaneously, SEED – based on a continuous and sincere democratic debate – will help public administrations to re-establish a new citizen-base. Citizens will be informed on a wide range of topics and, moreover, they will have the opportunity to freely express their opinions, suggestions and even criticisms, giving valuable feedback to the administration. Therefore, SEED will be an essential tool towards raising citizen awareness about existing e-Government services.

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THE ROLE OF FORUMS IN THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF PUBLIC OPINION

Andrea Cassano¹

Abstract: We live in a time where knowledge construction is strongly influenced by social media. Many social and educative analyses about digital natives focused on the wiki as a way to build knowledge. This is a dynamic platform inspired by Wikipedia, in which cooperation and collaboration are central. In this work we want to analyse the role of the web forum as a part of this process. In particular we want to analyse the use of these spaces in discussions on political and public topics.

Keywords: forum, politics, Bildung, knowledge, discourse, analysis, web, cooperation, education, citizenship.

1. Introduction: the role of forums in formal and informal situations

One of the most important functions developed by the social success of the web is the large use of forums in daily life. Forums are often considered useful tools for problem solving. When we have doubts about any aspect of our culture, we look for the opinion of other people using the Internet and we usually spend a lot of time reading forums. This process could appear spontaneous, especially to young learners but it represents a real revolution in our culture. In the past few years people have shared and built new forms of knowledge in small communities. In these communities, people exchanged their thoughts with other people that they knew and each one had a role and a clear expertise. Nowadays we do not see the author of a thought, but we search for opinions, which are not connected to a person with a role. In general, we try to understand if an opinion is eminent using an unscientific discourse analysis. We use spontaneous tools and we do not resort to a scientific method of analysing texts. For example if we find a good dictionary or if we can understand that the author has a good competence in the subject matter of the forum we deduct that his/her opinion is plausible. This kind of discourse analysis does not constitute a scientific study but instead a daily practice. So we can also build our knowledge in a large community where Internet users share their expertise. We could ignore everything about these users except for their own personal opinion. This is a new form of collective knowledge building. In the past few years, a lot of studies in communication researches underlined that people used to consider more plausible opinions than the ones developed on television. The Internet changed this paradigm because web users used to search plausible opinions in the on-line world. Internet users are more interactive than television

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viewers. They generally try to analyse the texts that are shared in forums or in other web-spaces.

In Psycho-Pedagogical studies, we can find a lot of research on forums. In particular, the constructivist approach focuses greatly on collaborative practices of knowledge building. Forums could help to develop communities of learners, where people cooperate and share their expertise. The exchange of opinions and points of view makes learners more stimulated and makes the process of learning more interesting and interactive.

We can mention the *progressive inquiry model* proposed by Mukkonen et al 2 and the model of Knowledge Building Community³. In these models, the forums are improved as useful tools to permit learners to compare their points of view and to develop their capacities in the use of the web. In fact, in these environments tutors indicate the steps to build knowledge on the topic of the community and give to learners useful tools to cooperate. Tutors plan the learning environment before the process of knowledge building starts and supervise every interaction between community's members.

In informal contexts, this process could be more irregular.

2 The political forums

For our study on forums, we selected a particular type of argumentation: the one on politics. Political discussions generate public opinion and so we can consider the use of forums as meaningful in the development of public debate, in a society where knowledge is shared every day through the Internet.

Our goal is to observe if it is possible to use qualitative discourse analysis to understand the building of knowledge about political questions. Our interest is on informal process of knowledge building and so we analysed forum web sites largely used in Italy. Therefore, this research is focused on the Italian context.

It is difficult to resume in a few lines the features of the national situation. Still, we can underline the most important factors of social and political communication in Italy.

Firstly, the use of media in politics is largely dominated by the presence of charismatic leaders. In the past few years, former prime minister and media mogul Silvio Berlusconi used his channels and his abilities in top-down communication to develop his personality and his idea of society. The spread of the web partially reduced the Berlusconi hegemony in political communication. Beppe Grillo and his movement also largely used the web for their propaganda. In this case, we can

² Muukkonen, Hanni, Hakkarainen Kai, and Lakkala Minna. "Collaborative Technology for Facilitating Progressive Inquiry: Future Learning environment Tools." Proceedings of the CSCL '99: The Third International Conference on Computer Support for Collaborative Learning on title: Designing New Media for A New Millennium: Collaborative Technology for Learning, Education, and Training. Eds. Cristopher M. Hoadley, and Jeremy Roschelle. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum. , 1999. 406-415. Print.

³ Scardamalia, Marlene, and Bereiter Carl. "Knowledge building." Encyclopedia of Education. New York:Macmilliam Reference, 2003. 1370-1373. Print.

consider the presence of a mixture of top-down and bottom up communications. In fact, the movement promoted on-line debate and their delegates in Parliament were selected through an on-line election. On the other hand, Beppe Grillo, using his leadership's role, has given a strong direction to the movement's action. In the last year we also saw how some antagonistic leaders used social networking to promote their image.

Secondly, there is a strong and popular movement in Italy that is called "Anti political". The image of political Italian protagonists appears damaged by the inefficacy of the government's action and by the wastefulness of public resources during the economic crisis. This image makes people very distant from political dynamics and in the last years a lot of people did not go to vote.

It is important to underline these aspects because forums can be a thermometer of political feelings in the national context and the way people speak about politics in forums might be influenced by the cultural environment.

As mentioned above, the method applied to this research is discourse analysis.

3.1 The first step of the research: the discourse analysis as method to study political forums

In the next pages we will attempt to define discourse analysis. According to Fairclough, this method concerns the study of the language in use analysed as social practice⁴. The qualitative approach tries to discover the implicit aspects of speech. For this reason, this method studies discourse in its general construction and does not want to break up the text in single variables. This aspect could be useful when we analyse forums because these are characterised by very short texts and so we cannot find a large number of sub-elements. The basic idea of this approach is to read the presence of social practice covered by the way people use to speak.

Maneri reminds us of the steps in carrying out discourse analysis. The author under lines that it is very important to find specific questions to study⁵. In our research, the starting question is to understand if forums can favourite a kind of discourse that useful to the development of knowledge about political situations.

3.2 The second step: the selection of the material to study

The second step of our research is to select the material to study. We chose five forums available on four important forum web sites: *www.forumpolitico.org*, *forum.termometropolitico.it*, *giovani.it* and *it.answer.yahoo.com*.

In particular, we chose five discussions from every web site about Italian current affairs. The discussions studied were opened in the period between August

⁴ Fairclough, Norman. *Critical language awareness*. London: Longman, 1992. Print.

⁵ Maneri, Marcello. *L'Analisi del discorso*. Dipartimento di sociologia e ricerca sociale. Università di Milano Bicocca. Web. 7 Aug. 2013. <[www.formazione.unimb.it/DATA/MANERI/hotfolder/1/\(3\)%20analisi%20del%20discorso.pdf](http://www.formazione.unimb.it/DATA/MANERI/hotfolder/1/(3)%20analisi%20del%20discorso.pdf)>

and September. We had to select the longer discussions in every website to find adequate material to study – the discussions that we studied were composed by at least three pages.

The results of the analysis were as follows:

Forumpolitico and *termometropolitico* treated more specific questions connected to current affairs. In *termometropolitico*, we found two discussions about Berlusconi's legal punishment, one about the economic strategy of Fiat's manager Marchionne, one about the sell of Telecom Italia and one about the contingent economic situation of the North of Italy. In *forumpolitico*, we found a discussion about Telecom Italia's sale, one about the resignation of the Members of Parliament who supported Berlusconi and three discussions about The President of the Republic Giorgio Napolitano, his strategy and his relationship with the Members of the Parliament. In contrast, *Yahoo.answer* and *giovani.it* treated more general questions about Italian politics. In *Yahoo.answer* we found one discussion about the possible foundation of an Italian anti-euro Party, one about of the electoral situation in the South of the Italy, one discussion about Grillo's strategy and two discussions about Giorgio Napolitano's strategy. In *giovani.it* we found different sections regarding every single party.

As we can see, even though themes can vary, we can find some recurring themes such as Telecom Italia's sale, arguments relative to Berlusconi's legal punishments and the strategy of the President of Republic. We must underline the peculiarity of *giovani.it*. In this forum, we did not find many discussions that started in the last months, but we found old discussions continuously updated by the members. These are focused on general themes such as Berlusconiism, the relationship between state and church, anarchy, political coherence and the basic ideas of Italian parties.

3.3 The third step: the codification of material

The third step of the analysis was the codification of material. Discourse analysis does not need hard codification or the use of quantitative aspects. We used an open approach based on the identification of orderliness.

We already talked about the social context where our texts were born. We must also consider that on-line texts have a lot of peculiarities.

Firstly, these texts are interconnected with other kinds of text both on-line (articles published on other sites, messages published on Twitter profiles of Politicians) and off-line (concrete political events). Secondly, when we analyze a forum we do not know the real social situation of the speakers, but we can rebuild their profiles by analyzing the text's elements. However in our study our focus is not on the characteristics of the speaker but on the way the forum is used to build a discussion on the web.

Another aspect that we tried to observe is whether there are peculiar social practices covered by web forums. Forums have specific characteristics. The texts are composed by connected single presences. These presences are often based on small sentences. These characteristics make us consider forums as a genre of text with a specific nature and with specific rules.

Our codification consists in identifying the modalities of organizing discourse. The organization, according to Halliday's indication, is composed of the following aspects: the representation of experience; the consideration of politicians; the way these aspects – representations and relations - are organized⁶. Therefore, our analysis must treat the following aspects: a) vocabulary, b) *Tropoi* (Figures of speech) and c) Processes. This last aspect consists in observing the sentences of texts and in underlining what kind of participants, interactions, categorizations and circumstances appear to us.

For example, it can be important to identify if there are recurring categorizations of character or if speakers choose to give preeminence to some person in their sentences.

The process could also be categorized through the analysis of verbs. If we find many verbs that indicate feelings or impressions we can underline a peculiar kind of process, but if we find verbs connected with the cognitive area we can identify a different situation. It is also very important to identify which relationships are described in discourse. In particular, it could be interesting to underline which kind of relationship exists between authors of sentences and politicians. For example some authors consider politicians as people without a real social distance⁷. They speak to politicians using direct form of dialogue.

Therefore, it appears important to analyze the grammatical construction of sentences. If a character is often a subject in the sentences, connected with active verbs, he/she has a preeminence in the building of the meaning. We can also find subjects that are often passive actors in sentences or characters that are rarely mentioned or replaced with other verbal forms. The way a character is mentioned is also important. For example, if the real name of a political character is used, this gives him or her an important role, but if the name is replaced with a general category, then the person can be protected.

Finally, another aspect that we analyzed is the relationship between speakers. Users can choose specific linguistic acts. The observation of the elements indicated by Halliday, which are the representation of experience, the consideration of politicians and the way these aspects are organized, through the individuation of vocabulary, *tropoi* and processes used by speakers, as indicated by Maneri⁸ are important to study whether forums can be a concrete tool to improve the comprehension and the analysis of political events for digital citizens. For example, if I call my interlocutor "dear", it is because I want to create a positive environment that could improve the comprehension of the discourse's themes. However, if I create a hostile environment, users will probably not collaborate and therefore the forum will not be a positive tool to build comprehension.

⁶ Halliday, Michael Alexander Kirkwood. An introduction to functional grammar. London: Edward Arnold, 1985. Print

⁷ Sharma, Rajendra, and Sharma, Rachana. Social Psychology. Ner Dhely: Atlantic. 200-2001. Print

⁸ Maneri, 8-19

4.1 Emerging aspects of the analysis: vocabulary and tropoi

We followed the codification presented by Maneri, that we presented in the previous paragraph. As we saw, one the most important and eloquent elements to observe is the vocabulary. Vocabulary could tell us more about the experiences of forum users. We can start our focus on *termometropolitico.it* and *forumpolitico*. These websites are similar because they are thoughts for users with a previous interest for politics. In fact, we can define these website as thematic forums. Despite that, the vocabulary used in a lot of presences is a mix of elegant and informal language. Speakers describe political events in the third person, in a detached way. They try to explain facts to other users using their competences and expressing their point of view. At the same time, we can find in users' words a lot of negative feeling. There is a rising rage among users against many political protagonists. This rage determines the use of vulgar or aggressive language also between expert users. The representation of political experience in these cases appears negative. Speakers often consider actions of politicians connected to personal interests.

However, this perception also causes a creative use of language. So we can often find two specific *tropoi*: distortions of names and similes. The first *tropos* is used both in an ironic and aggressive way. In this use, we find the concept of *Transpolitica* proposed by De Kerckhove and Vincenzo Susca⁹. The theme proposed by these authors indicates web users who take the mick out of politicians through the peculiarities of Internet language. In fact Susca and De Kerckhove consider the language of the Internet informal, free from authorities or hierarchy. This characteristic of the Internet makes it a space where people can often be ironic and where people can feel themselves near to politicians or to other important personalities. This perception makes the Web rich of direct and ironical messages which users write to politicians.

This could be the symptom of the proximity to political protagonists felt by people. It is possible to consider that users apply this language because they see politicians as characters with a low moral profile. In general, politicians are considered as guilty persons. For forum users, they hold responsibility for the problems faced by people in daily life.

The use of similes is also an exercise of style used by speakers with considerable expertise. These users show their competence through these *tropoi*. The effect for reader is an ironical and informal perception of political events that appears from a creative use of the web's language.

We can conclude that in these forums we can find the same confusions that we experience in our everyday context. Often a discussion starts with an explicative intention but in its course this becomes a passionate debate. There is no possibility to build a coherent discourse. Mixes of opinions and information without clear connections prevail and this makes a real building of knowledge impossible.

⁹ Susca, Vincenzo, and De Kerckhove Derrick. *Transpolitica*. Nuovi rapporti di potere e sapere. Milano: Apogeo, 2008. Print.

4.2. Emerging aspects of the analysis: the processes

Even though *Forumpoltico* and *termometropolitico* are similar websites, we can find some differences. *Forumpoltico*'s users often speak in a more complex way. Many moderators use their post to resume political events. In fact, there is some presence composed by a lot of consecutive sentences. These posts are generally used by speaker to resume the story of political episodes. It is the trend of this site to be more informative, but also in *forumpoltico* users speak in informal way to politics.

Often we find users that speak directly to political protagonists, making questions or ordering. If we want to use a label to define the process that we described – using our codification – we can speak of a confused information exchange and we can speak of a general disaffection and diffused rage.

Our analysis must be quite different for *giovani.it* and *yahoo.answer.it*. These are two websites where users can debate about various arguments. These sites are forums supposed to clarify questions, to give answers. The target is also different because these sites are conceived for young users. In fact, the average age of users is about 23. So this different background of the websites stimulates a different user's approach. The nature of *giovani.it* is to give information to the student population. In most cases, we analyzed political discussions that we can consider as general. The focus is not on current affairs. The lexicon in this website is varied. There are a lot of didactic questions. But in these texts the language is not simple. Young users in these discussions **do not give** information, but express their ideas. These ideas appear as a result of passionate studies and this passion makes the language rich, elegant and cultured. We can consider this result as a mirror of the forum's users: young students with the passion for politics. There are many quotes and the process that appears in this discussion is an exhibition of knowledge.

The goal of this discussion should be the transmission of information but the trend to express personal ideas makes this space a virtual place to debate. This debate is not similar to the debates described in *forumpoltico* or *termometropolitico*. In fact, we cannot find any personal involvement. The subjects are often concepts rather than persons and the verbs used are connected to the cognitive area rather than the emotive field. The users involved in this discussion are less than other debates. In fact, the average number of participants is 3/4 users while in other discussions we find also 15/20 users involved. This space creates a sort of community of practice, close to other explorers.

We find a totally different representation of politics that appears placed in an ideal plan. In *student.it* we also find discussions more connected to actuality where users speak about Italian parties.

In this case, discussions start from a request made by one of the users and it becomes a debate. The language is used in interrogative forms in a lot of presences and, differently from *termometropolitico* or *forumpoltico*, often speakers use the first person. The verbs used regard the cognitive area, the need felt by users to clarify and to explain. Again, we find processes which describe a general rage against political protagonists and parties. In fact, in these discussions there is a

large use of informal language and we find a lot of offensive adjectives connected to politics.

Similar processes appear in *yahoo.answer.it*. This is a young and dynamic site and the discussion seems more instinctive. In this website, we found many discussions about the most recent political events. All of these texts had a very negative connotation. In fact, the terms more commonly used are adjectives with a reference to extremism (“fascism”, “communism”) and adjectives with the prefix “un/in” (“ineligible”, “un-presentable”). In these websites, the relationship between participants appears more aggressive. In all website, the dialogical nature of forums is recognizable through the large use of suspension points. These are often used to support a sort of continuity between presences in forums. In *Yahoo.answer* this use is intensive, but the dialogue between users often is aggressive. We found many sentences starting with a threatening style. The subject is “You” connected to verbs with a negative connotation or connected with offensive words (“You don’t know where you live”, “You’re saying stupid things”). We also found in *Yahoo* a negative connotation given to the political class. The subjects are often collective and badly connoted actors, except for Berlusconi or other specific leaders.

5. Concluding remarks

What reflection can we have from this analysis? We can use the models of participation proposed by Dahlgreen¹⁰. He speaks about civic agency to define an active process of political participation that connotes values, practices and experiences. This is a positive model for an activism that could be stimulated by the web. This possibility could be limited by the pre-condition of cultural contexts. In fact, the context can influence participants’ identities (the author defines this typical situation cultural agency). In our analysis, every forum appears influenced by cultural backgrounds that our national situation has given to participants. Forums are dialogic and so appears space where a positive debate is possible. For example, a previous study demonstrated that social networks seemed to be spaces where the debate was aggressive in many situations¹¹. However, the negative connotation of politicians felt by people is very influential.

In Italy, as Michael Slaby¹² said in a recent meeting, politics rarely use the web-tool in a real engaging way. Italian leaders use the web as they use television. So, Italian citizens are not educated to use the Internet to make politics. This factor does not stimulate a real building of knowledge in informal uses of forums. People are used to speak about politics in a self-referential way. They show their

¹⁰ Dahlgreen, Peter. *Media and Political Engagement*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Print.

¹¹ Cassano, Andrea, and Nicolini Paola. “Giovani e partecipazione politica: il ruolo del web”. *Qwerty Special Issue. Generation Y, Digital Learners and Other Dangerous Things*. Eds. Lorenzo Cantoni, and Stefano Tardini. Bari: Progedit, 2010. 89-104. Print.

¹² Michael Slaby was the Chief Innovation and Integration Officer for Obama’s electoral campaign. He spoke during the conference “Italia – Usa. Campagne elettorali a confronto” in Bari on 25/10/2013.

knowledge of facts but do not contribute to a process of knowledge building. They may also show their rage against politics. The only positive model we found is *giovani.it*: the discussion about general questions that people engaged in this website appears to us a positive way to debate. Every user explained his/her idea and his/her point of view in a cooperative way. The only problem was the absence of in depth-analysis on topics of forum: every user prefers to use his/her own ideas instead of information treated by literature. In fact a lot of users, during a debate, argue their case without the corroboration of different theories or information. They argue their case using partial information taken from a restricted literature or empirical experiences. A lot of users base their opinion on media events, interviews where politicians give an image of themselves.

For this reason, the discussion sometimes did not appear as a process of knowledge but it produced a “cultured chat” without a goal.

In conclusion, we can underline the importance of giving a guide to the process of building knowledge through forums. Forums can be a good tool to stimulate participative process. The good model in our research is *giovani.it*. Educators must know the power of forums in the process of knowledge building: a good use of these tools in educative environment can be a very important opportunity.

Additionally, the emptiness left by local politics in online communication could be repaired by the good use of forums in educative environments. If we want to create an educative project in civic education, it is important to know what happens in informal situations.

In our research, we saw how forums can be interesting for young people and how they can create a sort of virtual focus group, but we also saw that a process of knowledge building in our confused context needs a guide. Forums need a guide which structures the debate’s environment and leads the speech’s direction towards a constructive one. This is one reflection that we can resume from our analysis but we have to remember that discourse analysis is always an open process.

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