Narrative Constructions of Italian Identity. An Investigation through Literary Texts over Time

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The relevance of narratives in everyday life interactions

The origin of the label "Narrative psychology" is usually traced back to the work of Theodor Sarbin (1986) and the almost contemporary theoretical shift proposed by Jerome Bruner (Bruner, 1986, 1990), who stressed the increasing focus on information processing and the corresponding lesser degree of attention given to the construction of meaning in social psychology. According to Bruner, the so-called "second cognitive revolution" embodied individual mental processes into wider cultural and social processes, which fundamentally regard the social construction of meaning (László, 2004). Following Sarbin (1986), narratives play a fundamental function in structuring and giving meaning to human realities. In other words, the way in which people construct and communicate necessarily assumes the form of a narrative.

According to Bruner (1991), narratives can be considered conscious forms of perception of reality, a deep-rooted quality of human thinking. Distinguishing *folk psychology* from *scientific psychology*, Bruner (1990) stressed the differentiation between a narrative way of thinking, which is characterized by a collective organization of meaning aimed at preserving, transmitting, and making available functional social patterns, and a paradigmatic thinking, which is regulated by formal language, logic causality and that is proper for that particular narrative genre called 'science'. Through *folk psychology*, the cultural features of a group are organized in coherent stories that function as a reference for all its members, even in the future. Every culture has its folk psychology, that is, its common way of thinking, its "mentality": it covers more or less complex narratives about human beings, their functioning, their way of thinking and acting, the reasons why they do what they do. The goal of folk psychology is to provide not only a well-organized representation of a phenomenon or an event as "it is", but to indicate how it could or should be. Thanks to the capability of connecting ordinary elements to exceptional categories, narratives provide interpretative patterns that are able to give meaning to potential deviations from common norms and everyday beliefs.

Narrative features

The study of narratives as basic forms of human thinking and acting has concentrated mainly on the fundamental and irreducible features of stories. Starting from the work by the Russian formalists (Propp, 1968), the study of narratives revealed some common elements or features.

Many scholars emphasized the prominent role played by the temporal structure and the causal coherence in narrative accounts (Labov & Waletzky, 1997): time and coherence structure events in such a way that they express, "first, a connectedness, and second, a sense of movement or direction through time" (Gergen & Gergen, 1986, p. 25).

As stated by Sarbin (1986), "a story is a symbolized account of actions of human beings that has a temporal dimension" (p. 3). Sequentiality of two elements, or even their co-presence *at the same time*, imposes to any form of narrative to be temporally organized. To say it through the words of Ricoeur (1980), "I take temporality to be that structure of existence that reaches language in narrativity and narrativity to be the language structure that has temporality as its ultimate referent. Their relationship is therefore reciprocal" (p. 169). The different use of time in narratives has been largely investigated: without entering too much into details, the way through which events are placed on the temporal dimension – analogously as the numberless combinations of different nucleotides on a DNA segment – generates different patterns of narrative forms that are associated to different psychological states and configurations of reality.

Every narrative action implies also an attribution of intentional stances. Narrative coherence is maintained by the perception of causal linkages of two or more events. In other terms, narrative coherence indicates the principle according to which each event furnishes some elements that are used to understand how the next event occurs (Gergen & Gergen, 1986).

At this regard, for instance, Gergen and Gergen (1983) have suggested the existence of three prototypical narrative forms that arrange a sequence of events on the basis of the extent to which they are able to achieve a particular goal: stability (narratives in which no change occurs), progression (narratives in which progress toward the goal is enhanced), and regression (narratives in which the progress toward the goal is hindered).

The combination of time and coherence concur in providing different patterns of stories, or narrative canons (László, 2008). A story will then reflect recognizable human sentiments, goals, purposes, valuations, and judgments. The plot will influence the flow of action of the constructed narrative figures (Sarbin, 1986). For each cultural context, some canons are more easily available. These canons collect and provide individuals with a shared structure for storytelling, that is the situated reality that is communicated. Highly shared plots represent the meta-structure of what is acceptable, plausible and meaningful. Examples of relevant plots in the Mediterranean culture can

be found in Homeric epics (Martindale, 1987): The recurrent structure of the story comprehends a hero, who is provided with extraordinary qualities and capacities and who needs to undertake hard actions in order to prove his value and to fulfil himself. Then, a preparation-initiation phase comes, followed by some difficulties that the hero encounters, which bring him with doubts about his capacities and his chances of success. Eventually, thanks also to divine or superior interventions, the hero succeeds in his venture, thus completing his heroic identity. This kind of plots is extremely well-rooted in culture, to the point that it works as organizing structure also in therapeutic narratives (Epston, Morris, & Maisel, 1995).

Beyond time and coherence, narratives can be decomposed in other structural features such as perspective (Polya, László, & Forgas, 2005), goals (Gergen & Gergen, 1983), roles (Parker-Oliver, 2000), characters' agency (László, Ferenczhalmy, & Szalai, 2010), evaluation (Bigazzi & Nencini, 2008; Stephenson, Laszlo, Ehmann, Lefever, & Lefever, 1997) and interpersonal relationships. In particular, the latter can be used in order to deepen the study of collective identity as a relational, interactive, construct.

The relationship feature of a narrative regards to the way in which interpersonal bonds between individuals are legitimated and become meaningful within a cultural group. The number, frequency and value of relationships contribute to generate a psychological reality that defines what a group is, in all its different typologies, such as, family, worker, nation…

The relationship pattern also contributes to embed and diffuse the most frequent and functional ways of human interaction in narratives. In this sense, the relationship pattern, together with the "evaluation" feature, concur in providing a narrative with a normative, often implicit, system that differentiates what *is* from what *is not*, what *is possible* from what *should not be.* The study of relational attributes in narratives have received less attention as compared with time and coherence, but nevertheless it is possible to find some illuminating examples and suggestions. For example, Propp (1968), in his renowned study of Russian folktales, showed how stories are composed by a combination of a limited number of functions or narrative units. Functions are considered generalizations of characters' actions, loaded with intentionality and emotional value. The composition of such functions itself is regulated by patterns that determine the final plot or global style. Without entering too much into details, it is important to stress that the functions studied by Propp are not considered objective characteristics of the text, but rather they are deep-rooted modalities in which language is used over time in a given cultural context. Therefore they constitute actual ways of reality construction.

The intersubjective patterns of relationality sustain and transform narratives over time. The relational pattern provides public narratives with cultural and institutional intersubjective networks

that can be found in local or macro-stories. These stories range from the narratives of one's family, to those of the workplace, church, government and nation (Somers, 1994), providing strong metaphorical structures for how relationships are meaningful in a given society.

Narratives and identity

Through the narrative perspective, the construct of identity needs to be reconsidered and reformulated according to what previously said. The prominent focus on the process of co-construction under the narrative coherence principle requires that identity becomes an individual (or group) story in which events and experiences are placed along a temporal line: each element assumes valued connotations in the story, which is always told from a particular perspective. What it is called 'identity' is the story that structures and organizes past and present experiences in order to anticipate the future (Bruner, 1987), or, to say it in different words, identity is the result of a constant reconstruction of one's own biography (Ricoeur, 1980): Past elements join with present experiences and future purposes, in a continuous process of reorganization that aims to give coherence and continuity to the group.

Ricoeur (1991) sustains that the essential feature of identity, that is the self-perception of continuity as the "same" individual notwithstanding the multiple variations in the way of being and behaving, is based on the narrative structure that attributes the form of a life story to these perceptions. In the same way, group identity can be considered as a set of stories about the group itself, which are more or less shared and available to its members. In these stories is easy to find the connection to Bruner's *folk psychology*. For instance, László, Ehmann and Imre (2002) have emphasised the link between individual and group narratives, showing that these narratives are mainly constituted by some patterns that recursively come back across history and everyday life. More specifically, the authors illustrated how narratives about relevant events in the Hungarian national history can be traced back to a limited number of patterns in which the moral and evaluative process remains constant: the acknowledgment of the good qualities of the Hungarian ingroup leads to a first phase characterised by victory or partial success, often followed by a painful and bitter defeat that lingers on depressive collective memories. Another example is advanced by Thorne and McLean (2003), who collected accounts of traumatic events provided by American adolescents. The analysis of recurrent narrative patterns among the different stories allowed to illustrate three narrative models of emotional positions: the "John Wayne" narrative, defined by a focus on action and on courage; a "vulnerability" narrative, which emphasized one's own fear, sadness, and helplessness in the face of the traumatic event; and a "Florence Nightingale" narrative, characterized by care and concern for the feelings of others.

To this regard, Hammack (2008) focuses on the relationship between 'master' narratives and personal identity. According to the author, a 'master' narrative can be intended as a cultural script that is continuously accessible to the members of a given group, may this be a nation, an ethnic group or a community group. Within this narrative, each individual may find his or her own personal positioning, i.e. a plot that organises one's individual experiences in a coherent story (also) as a member of the group, a story enriched by values, meaning, explanations and possibilities of the future. In this sense, identity becomes a construct that connects the self, the group and the societal level through narratives that give meaning to social categories.

Towards a relational vision of national identity

It is largely accepted that the "nation" is a relatively recent product if confronted with the human phylogenesis. The birth of the nation is usually traced back to the second half of the XVIII century, after the crisis of the traditional empires (Hobsbawm, 1994). In opposition to the essentialist vision of a nation, which considered the origins of the national group and some specific characteristics (language, national character, land…) as indicators of the true essence of it (Guibernau, 1996), some authors, and in particular Benedict Anderson (1983), stressed that the nation can be considered as an imagined community held by a series of symbolic relationships among its members. Anderson reprised the label "imagined community" from the French philosopher Renan (1990), and described the factors that brought to the birth of modern nationalisms and to the development of the current national structures from an historical and modernist perspective. According to Anderson, a nation is an "imagined" community because the content of the relational bond among its members is necessarily symbolic, related to all the potential interpersonal relationships that can be imagined even without concrete interactions. The nation is also "imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (Anderson, 1983, p. 6). It is limited because every nation is represented with borders, which separate a nation from another and who is in(group) from who is out(group). It is sovereign, because, according to the author, the nation was constructed in the illuminist period, where freedom was considered one of the highest ideals. And finally, a nation is a community because, notwithstanding the inequities that usually occur, a nation is always experienced with affective involvement formed by "deep, horizontal comradeship" (Anderson, 1983, p. 7).

The imagined community described by Anderson is a macro-social symbolic entity that is mainly constituted by sense of belonging and intentions to act with reference to it, rather than a clear object made of concrete elements that can be "objectively" described and measured. In this perspective, relationships assume a privileged position: A nation has to be considered a cultural

construction - as any other anthropological construct such as "kinship" and "religion" - that is strongly structured along the symbolic connections between members which generate complex systems that respond to individual and social needs.

In other, more social psychological words, it is possible to affirm that a nation - and, as a consequence, the story of living one's life as being part of it (i.e., national identity) - assumes the traits of a particularly "thick" social construction, widely diffused through numerous collective narratives over time. At the basis of the construction of a "nation" we can identify the everyday interactions of those who use this construct and, through discourses, actions, and different kind of references, concur in assembling the normative narrative structure of what a nation is, what a particular nation means, how one should behave with reference to his/her nation, how one should interact as member of his or her nation, who are the members of one's nation.

Narratives of national identity

Mainstream social psychology has studied and studies national identity referring mainly to the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1981) and to the Self Categorization Theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987): the nation is considered a social category equal to others and, as a consequence, it is subjected to the processes typical of intergroup relations (categorization, identification, social comparison). Within this framework, national identity has been studied mostly as an independent variable and, consequently, research has looked at its effects on other psychological variables or intentions to act (Cinnirella, 2007; Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, & Manstead, 1998, 2006). However, national identity risks to be used as an ontological reference to the "nation" category, which is, as we discussed earlier, far from being a defined and clearly identifiable element.

Following a narrative approach to the study of identity as social representation (László, 1997), national identity can be conceived as a series of stories concerning the national group that are more or less shared and available to its members (László, 2008).

The usual correspondence between a nation and its land is studied for its capacity of generating meaningful stories of membership and territorial settlement (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). National identity is shaped in relation to other memberships connected to relevant symbolic places (Breakwell, 1986, 1992; Twigger-Ross, Bonaiuto, & Breakwell, 2003): through the use of geographical labels, whenever individuals represent their membership, they refer to different territorial levels (local, regional, national, supranational...). Therefore, national identity can be considered a fluid construct: representations of national identity are composed of narrative elements that can be found also in more local territorial levels.

These narratives are not cold or neutral. On the contrary, they are filled with judgments, values, evaluations and beliefs. They are actual common sense theories that can be used by community members in a specific context. Consequently, representations of national identity are structured as a series of "stories" about past meaningful experiences, which constitute functional models available to individuals every time a territorial reference to identity is salient.

Following a narrative perspective, the narrative construction of Hungarian national identity has been studied focusing on the cultural artefacts that are perceived as relevant for the diffusion of collective knowledge, such as history text-books (Vincze, Tóth, & László, 2007) and successful historical novels (László, Vincze, & Somogyvári, 2003). Both types of material contain and make available fundamental narrative elements - such as characters, goals, moral evaluations, relationships - that are necessary for the organization and transmission of identity content. The final product contributes to the formation of narrative-organized representations (László, 1997) of the past, the present and the future of the national group.

Literary texts as well-organized representations of social realities

The relationship between psychology and literature has been characterized by numerous exchanges and reciprocal contaminations (Moghaddam, 2004), although criticisms and scepticism towards the scientific nature of this collaboration has always been there. Novelists, dramatists and poets – storytellers all – have continued to provide insights about human motives and actions, even during the years in which human conduct has been studied by scientific psychology (Sarbin, 1986). The distinction proposed by Bruner (1986) about the nature of narrative psychology finds a good objectification in the differentiation concerning the realm of "reality" to which both psychology and literature refer to. However, referring to a social constructionist framework, social realities are inter-subjective products that are generated through social interactions. From this perspective, the distinction between the object of psychological research and the object of literary representations becomes thinner and thinner, to the point that it can be transposed to the perception of coherence between what is told and what is experienced by social actors. Thus, literary texts can be used as relevant social artefacts as much as other psychological theories, the former being distinguished from the latter for their communicative registry and their goals, but not for their domain of reference. Novels and fictions constitute different ways of representing human experiences and, at the same time, means through which to act on the social world as active elements in the collective discourse. Voices of writers and scholars are important in contemporary societies as expression, on the one hand, and as proposal, on the other hand, of debated issues and generative views of the world (Gergen, 1989).

Every text is made of both shared, culturally available elements and original, peculiar qualities (Nencini, 2011). Relevant literary texts are able to depict plausible fictional worlds so that the reader can accept the described reality as "real" and recognise some relevant patterns for his/her own life in what is narrated (Contarello, 2008). This type of texts usually responds to criteria of success (i.e., the capacity to encounter and fulfil social needs), diffusion (i.e., the possibility to reach a large number of individuals and, consequently, feed the collective debate) and authoritativeness (i.e., the writer's ability to reproduce relational, emotional and cognitive aspects of human experience that are able to resonate with the readers' personal experiences; see Larsen & Seilman, 1988). Regardless of the domain of the described reality, a well-organised literary text that fulfils the above-mentioned criteria draws on plausible and shared elements that refer to the world of the author and to the one of the readers.

Literary texts can thus be used also as research material. Specifically, successful novels that are narrated by "those with well-honed language skills" (Gergen, 1989, p.76) - professionals in storytelling with particular sensibility in describing and communicating -, and that have a particular social-historical impact, can be investigated as real exemplification of possible social worlds.

Narrative representations of Italian national identity

The above mentioned theoretical considerations were used as guidelines in the studies that are going to be presented here. They aimed to explore the content and the narrative structure of representations of national identity from an historical perspective. The main goal of the project was to search for common and divergent elements in the historical evolution of different levels of national identity, with particular attention to the macro-contexts "North" and "South" of Italy. To this purpose, narrative patterns of Italian national identity were researched in successful literary works: Novels written and set in different periods of national history were analysed in order to explore the representations of relevant social "realities" they provide. Analyses were aimed at investigating many aspects concerning Italian national identity – the way in which different levels of territorial identity are constructed and negotiated, the structure of social relations and the evaluations used by characters in the text, the main themes on which characters define their territorial identity. For the scope of this presentation, I will focus mainly on the results related to the relationship feature.

The choice of the "social realities" - the novels - to be investigated is a relevant part of the research itself, because the criteria through which a researcher selects the particular portion (configuration) of the world to investigate, inevitably direct the possibilities of the results that will be obtained. Since one of the aim was to study the representations of national identity over time,

three relevant periods of Italian recent history were chosen: the Thirties-Forties (Italy between the two World Wars); the Sixties (the Italian "economic boom"); the Nineties-Two Thousands (contemporary Italy). For each period, two novels were selected, one written by an Southern author and set in Southern Italy, and the other written by an Northern author and set in Northern Italy. Then, in order to fulfil the criteria of diffusion, success and authoritativeness, the novels had to:

- be published and set in the historical period of reference, i.e. novels have to narrate the present of the described social "reality";
- be successful and popular at the time of publication;
- meet with approval of the present critics, i.e., considered relevant texts from a social and historical point of view;
- have similar length;
- be narrated in first person (by the protagonist);

At the end of a long collaborative procedure of evaluation that involved other colleagues and two schoolteachers, the six novels were selected[1].

Novels were analysed for their contents related to characters, evaluations between characters and references to national identity (or other levels of territorial identities). Content analysis was performed through two different techniques: a manual Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) and an Automatic Analysis of Evaluations (AAE). TCA was conducted with the aid of QSR Nud.Ist.4 (Richards & Richards, 1998).

Each novel was first divided into text units (each corresponding to a sentence) and then text units were coded on the basis of their contents related to interpersonal relationships and evaluations. The coding of relationships was further divided into "Agent" - the character who gives an evaluation – and "Co-Agent" - the character/group who receives an evaluation. Evaluation included the content of attributes and actions used to denote the other. Finally, references to the territory used by characters to define themselves and their salient social environment were also coded.

The AAE (Bigazzi & Nencini, 2008) consisted of a linguistic analysis conducted through the aid of the software Nooj (Koeva, Maurel, & Silberztein, 2007) and by means of specific grammars created on purpose by the author of the present chapter, and aimed at automatically extract interpersonal and intergroup evaluations from the texts.

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[1] The novels are: from the Thirties-Forties, "Conversations in Sicily" by Elio Vittorini (South) and "Your Villages" by Cesare Pavese (North); from the Sixties: "To Each His Own" by Leonardo Sciascia and "La vita agra. It's a hard life" by Luciano Bianciardi (North); and finally, from the Nineties-Two Thousands: "Involuntary Witness" by Gianrico Carofiglio (South) and "Techniques of Seduction" by Andrea De Carlo (North).

Through the TCA a series of co-presence matrixes was created: each matrix extracted the frequency and the content of every interaction between two characters (Agent and Co-Agent), thus allowing to re-create a relational network of the novel (illustrated in the next paragraph), qualitatively and quantitatively weighted.

The AAE provided support to the TCA by automatically extracting the evaluative expression of interpersonal interchanges and giving the opportunity to explore the most frequent evaluative dimensions used in the text. Also, combining evaluations with the character who was object of that particular expression, we extracted a series of "models of individuals" that were made available through the novels.

Contents and structure of relationships over time

The analysis of the evaluations between characters allowed to quantify the number of interrelations and to qualify the most frequent contents for each interpersonal relationship.

In order to construct a visual structure of the relationship patterns underlying the texts, characters of each novel were connected by arrows as in a classic sociogram, where the thicker the line is, the more frequent the interrelation is, i.e. the number of evaluations between characters. Globally, as shown in the figures below, texts written and set in Northern Italy show a relational pattern in which an independent self prevails, an individual who autonomously moves in the society in search of the fulfilment of individual needs, desires, and choice. From the analysis of the novels set in Southern Italy, on the contrary, a more crowded and complex relational pattern seems to emerge. Relationships are more frequent and broad, connecting a larger number of characters. The individual identity is composed of a number of "others" who enter, sometimes forcedly, the life narrative of the single individual.

From an historical perspective, the relational pattern is intertwined with the most relevant territorial references. In the thirties-forties, where the territorial boarders of the perceived relevant group is limited to the village, the family is central in everyday discourses and practices. Differently, in the Nineties, the relational pattern is connected with a wider territorial reference, which probably enlarges the possibility of interchange and thus of self-definition, relying on a more widely shared narrative of the individual.

In the Thirties-Forties the antinomy between "Sicilians" and "Others" (Figure 1) is opposed to the one between "Townsmen" and "Countrymen" (Figure 2). The role of the family is central in both novels, although with some differences between North and South: in "*Conversations in Sicily*" the family represents the core of the characters' identity, clearly differentiated from the other Sicilians. Although narrated in first person perspective by Silvestro (the protagonist), the relational

pattern shows numerous connections also between secondary characters. In "*Your Villages*", relations between characters are fewer, even among members of the peasant family. Relationships are centred on Berto (the narrator) and rarely show bidirectional connections. Here, the family constitutes, even geographically, the privileged place where everyday interpersonal relationships, workplace, and intimacy overlap, representing a micro-universe that the individual can hardly leave.
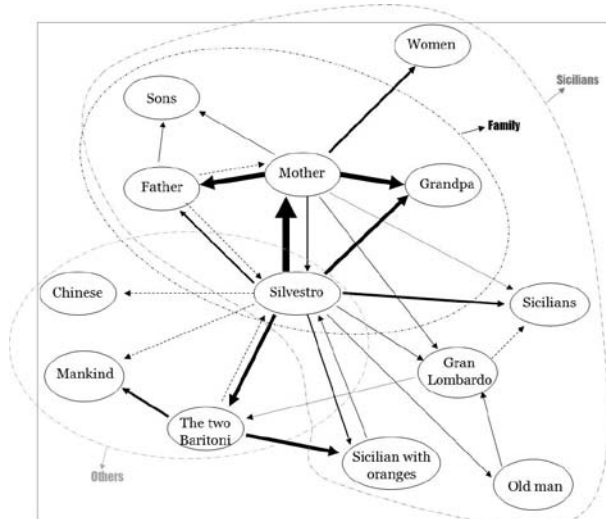

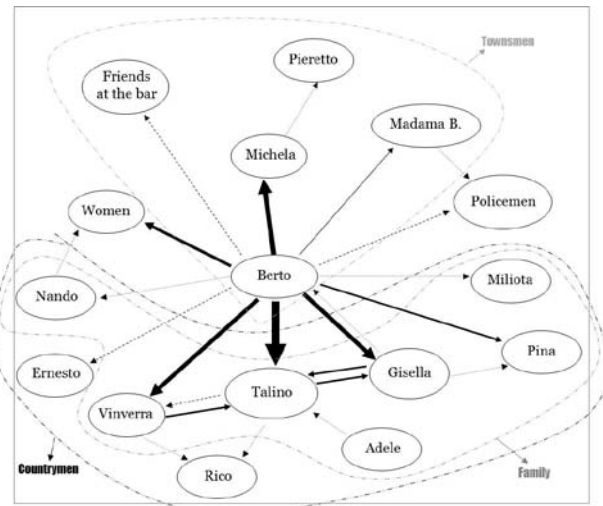Fig. 1 – *Conversations in Sicily* (1941) - South

Fig. 2 – *Your Villages* (1941) - North

The most salient territorial identity in both novels is the local one, coinciding with the island in Vittorini's novel ("*and Sicily or World was the same thing*"[2]), and with the village in which the characters live, in Pavese's. Sicilians are described as poor people and they are represented mostly through attributes of sadness and compassion ("[…] *the boat was full of third-class little Sicilians, hungry and quiet in getting cold, without any coat, with their hands in the pocket of their trousers*"). Other non-Sicilian characters are addressed with exclusion and differentiation, without peculiar explicit evaluation.

Countrymen are presented through awkwardness and stupidity ("*One from the country is like a drunk. He's too stupid to let someone make a fool of him*") but also through cunning and naughtiness (especially men). Townsmen (and in particular townswomen) are evaluated as naughty and ungrateful ("*Up the stairs she asks me if she was the first woman I came to see. And she says: - What would Pieretto say if he knew it!" – He would say you are always the same, I think*").

In the Sixties, although both the novels are set in an historical moment characterised by economic growth at the national level, local territorial identities are still the most salient. The relational pattern remains substantially the same as the one emerged in the Thirties-Forties. In "*To Each His Own*" (fig. 3) an intricate web of evaluative relations is shown, where the families are again nuclear elements ("*Once the police commissioner was convinced, the girl had to convince the*

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[2] This excerpt, as well as the others that will follow, were translated by the author of the present chapter because text analyses were conducted in the original language (Italian).

entire village, 7500 people, her family members included"). In "*La vita agra*" (fig. 4), relationships are concentrated mostly from the protagonist to the other characters, showing a strong individualist conception of the self, oriented towards self-fulfilment and success.
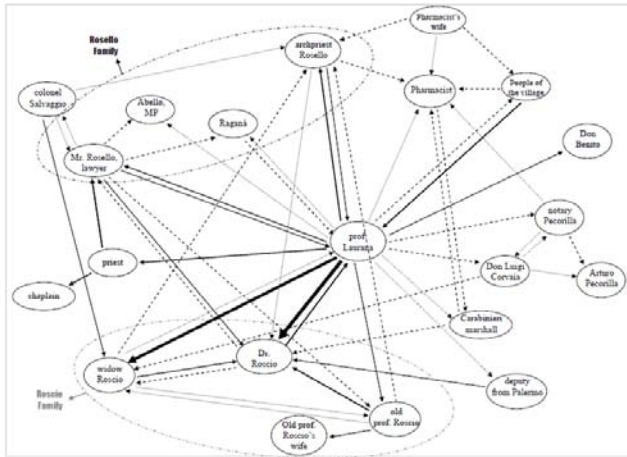

Fig. 3 – *To Each His Own* (1966) - South   Fig. 4 – *La Vita Agra* (1962) - North

Available models of individuals appear to be rooted in the spirit of the historical period (Jossa, 2006). There are successful characters, who behave functionally with respect to the social environment in which they live but who are not exactly honest or virtuous ("*Mister Fernaspe usually arrived around ten, grave and breathless, he called one of us in his room and gave him an article to pass or a title to compose. […] The Fernaspe got on the telephone and we heard him shout insults while we continued to cut and add*"). And there are traditional characters, who are depicted as appreciable persons but who are defeated and bypassed at the end of the story, and thus are considered weak or naïve ("*Yes, my son... He was intelligent: but a quiet, slow intelligence*").

Sicilians are again described through negative traits, characterised by decay and self-pity ("*A Sicilian on the contrary sees the killed dead and the murderer: and the alive one who needs to be helped is precisely the murderer*"). Families are mainly described through virtuousness, which is connected to honour and respectability, and evaluations of sorrow and unpleasantness: the specific use of an evaluation is related to processes of in-group favouritism in intra- and inter-familiar relations.

In "*La vita agra*", the antinomy is between citizens (of Milan) and those who come from (everywhere) outside the city. Townsmen are represented as restlessness, surly persons – if they are bosses – or good and poor people – if they are workers ("*Mrs De Sio did not protest, because she was a good and tolerant woman*"). Strangers are depicted mainly as worried and ingenuous persons ("*I urged to get out and have a coffee, so I sneaked out of the sheets, so softly not to wake Anna up, this irresponsible, sleepy woman. Nobody would ever steal her eight-hours sleep. As long as she had to typing, nothing worried her*").

The Nineties are years of rising globalisation, especially at European level. The relational pattern shows a wider correspondence between the two macro-regional contexts. References to a broader, global identity are frequent, while local identifications, as well as the family, loose their centrality in the description of the social reality narrated in the texts. In "*Involuntary Witness*", a more individualist pattern emerges, in which individuals are represented principally as separate entities. In "*Techniques of seduction*", the Milanese characters are separate, detached from each other, while those from Rome are joined by a higher number of interrelations, although sometimes fake and instrumental. Thus, the Roman context results to be more likely oriented to a wide and collective interpersonal network.

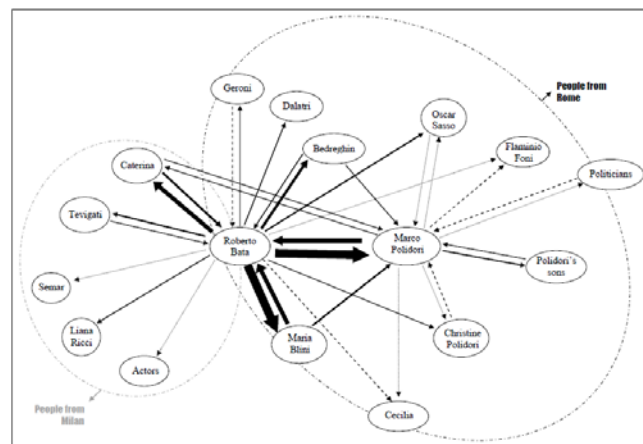Fig. 5 – *Involuntary Witness* (2002) - South   Fig. 6 – *Techniques of seduction* (1991) - North

In "*Involuntary Witness*", identities become more relevant at a supranational level, due to intergroup relation between the protagonist (Italian, European, White) and the other main character (Senegalese, African, Black). Italians are described mostly as pleasant and good people opposed to extra-communitarians that are evaluated as unpleasant and criminal ("*The first stereotype suggested me the following sequence: African, remanded in custody, drug. Africans are frequently arrested for this reason*"). In "*Techniques of seduction*", evaluations are organized along a dimension of "openness" vs. "closeness" towards the others: people from Milan are described as close, breathless individuals, whereas people living in Rome are evaluated as hypocritical but also as more calm, open, and smiling ("*Inside and in front of bars, people from the offices ate and drank and smoked and chatted without any trace of the distressing hurry that, in Milan, drives bunches of clerks to gulp something down in a few minutes and then rush back to the workplace, with the food sat heavily on their stomach*").

Concluding remarks

The analysis of the literary texts, here briefly presented, describes a series of narrative representations that constitute privileged outlooks on social "realities". These fictional narratives

collect and organise available everyday life elements in meaningful stories that, at the same time, play a key role in proposing and diffusing functional patterns of sociality (Contarello, 2008). Exploring in depth the contents and the relational structure of the representations of national identity – or more widely, the representations of different territorial identities – it is possible to map out a sort of invisible line – another narrative! – that temporally connects historical moments, social contexts and different social psychological dynamics.

Taken together, results show some points of discontinuity in relation to the representation of national identity, in particular with regards to the most salient territorial levels for each historical period and to the relational pattern that structures the story. The evolution of the narrative representation of identity at the national level appears substantially shared and coherent in its core elements, although with some interesting and peculiar differences over time and across the two macro-contexts.

From a temporal point of view, local identity is more salient in the past (especially in the Thirties-Forties), starting from family identity. The representation is characterised by differentiation and isolation. In the Nineties, a global and supranational representation can be observed, which appears to be more open to the others. Families are less important for defining the individual identity and the whole territorial representation is held principally by individualism. In all three periods, references to a common national identity are scarce.

From a contextual point of view, some relational patterns seem to be available and diffused in different ways in the two macro-contexts. In Southern Italy, the relational network is thick and the public dimension prevails on the individual one. Membership to a small group (familiar, mostly, but also local and regional in relation with the nation) is extremely relevant for self-definition. On the contrary, in Northern Italy a more individualistic organization of relationships emerges: individuals are more oriented to self-enhancement rather than to the good of the community. For the individual, concrete relations are less relevant, whereas symbolic relations related to social identities (as a worker, for example) are more significant.

From a theoretical point of view, the present paper aims to suggest that relational patterns provide a structure for those types of human interchanges that give meaning to a group. From a social constructionist perspective that sees social realities as the product of relational co-constructions, the relational patterns constitute important narrative elements for the configurations of reality that will be generated under the form of stories (Gergen & Gergen, 1986). In a certain social context then, narratives that organise forms of knowledge, practices and values of a group contain relational structures that provide indications regarding the way in which memberships and social relationships are meaningful and functional in that particular group. The relational pattern

gives to a social narrative the "ground layer" that regulates, even normatively, the social interchanges. This objectifies not only who is part of the group and who is not, but also which role one has in the group, which relationships are significant for the group's goals and wellbeing , and which practices are associated to those who are part of the relational network of the group.

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