Edited by
Gianluca Borzoni, Barbara Onnis,
Christian Rossi

Beyond Fake News

Governments, Press and Disinformation through International History

STUDI

Politica

FrancoAngeli

Informazioni per il lettore

Questo file PDF è una versione gratuita di sole 20 pagine ed è leggibile con **Adobe Acrobat Reader**

La versione completa dell'e-book (a pagamento) è leggibile **con Adobe Digital Editions**.

Per tutte le informazioni sulle condizioni dei nostri e-book (con quali dispositivi leggerli e quali funzioni sono consentite) consulta **cliccando qui** le nostre F.A.Q.

Edited by
Gianluca Borzoni, Barbara Onnis,
Christian Rossi

Beyond Fake News
Governments, Press and Disinformation through International History

FrancoAngeli

Università degli Studi di Cagliari
DIPARTIMENTO DI SCIENZE POLITICHE E SOCIALI

FSC Fondo per lo Sviluppo e la Coesione

REGIONE AUTÒNOMA DE SARDIGNA
REGIONE AUTONOMA DELLA SARDEGNA

Index

Part I
The Impact of Disinformation in the XIX and XX Centuries. Domestic and International Profiles

Part II
The Impact of Disinformation in the Third Millennium.
The Global Phenomenon of Fake News

Introduction

Gianluca Borzoni, Barbara Onnis, Christian Rossi

In the early 2017, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, together with representatives from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (Osce), the Organization of American States (Oas) and the African Union (Au) dedicated their annual Joint Declaration to "Fake news, Disinformation and Propaganda" and to the various damages they could produce[1]. It was a new demonstration – even more relevant, as it emanated from the most important world forum on the subject – of the pervasiveness achieved by the fake news issue, both internally and internationally.

The phenomenon is certainly not new, although only recently some research areas – and among these international history – have begun to study it scientifically. Indeed, misleading information has been used by world leaders, royalty, dictators, democratic governments, political parties, and others over the centuries to help them achieve various ends since long before the dawn of social media. However, current technologies have contributed to exponentially amplify its scope and diffusion, influencing both the political thinking of public opinion and the functioning of the democratic process.

The proliferation of social media has in fact democratized the dissemination and consumption of information, eroding traditional media hiearchies, undercutting claims of authority, thereby making the environment subject to exploitation by bad authors. «Today, states and individuals can easily spread disinformation at lightning speed and with potential serious impact».[2]

As a matter of fact, news contaminates political debates and international scenarios, with governments' involvement in different ways to handle with

---

1. Available at: *www.osce.org/files/f/documents/6/8/302796.pdf*.

2. C. Nemr, W. Gangware, *Weapons of Mass Distraction: Foreign State-Sponsored Disinformation in the Digital Age*, Park Advisors, march 2019, p. 2, available at: *www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Weapons-of-Mass-Distraction-Foreign-State-Sponsored-Disinformation-in-the-Digital-Age.pdf*.

propaganda and information, to shape public perceptions and to keep the consensus of their citizens inside their borders. After the end of the Cold War, the advent of the internet and the start of the new era of social networks charged governments' cultural diplomacy and media policy with new challenges and with the necessity to adopt legal frameworks and implement strategies to deal with fake news.

This book is the result of a multidisciplinary research project started in 2018 and financed by the Autonomous Regional Government of Sardinia (Regione Autonoma della Sardegna, Ras) aimed at investigating the impact that disinformation and fake news in general have on public opinion, on governments, and on the relations between states, in the European, American and Asian contexts. This analysis is tightly related to a previous multidisciplinary research focused on the debate on the states' soft power and public diplomacy tools. It aimed to reflect on the impact that the use of the media, in particular the press, in its traditional and most modern and current forms, had in guiding the internal and foreign policies of the main actors at the international level. The results of that study were published in a volume edited by the same authors in 2021. The book titled *Momenti di Storia Internazionale. Diplomazia geopolitica,* Soft Power, *Cooperazione*, also included some selected papers presented at the VIII Conference of the Società Italiana di Studi Internazionali (Sisi), held in Cagliari in June 2019.

The present volume is divided into two parts that reflect the main thematic themes analyzed in the multidisciplinary research project. On the one hand, the impact of disinformation throughout history in different contexts; on the other, the impact of disinformation in the third millennium with the global explosion of fake news. The use of case studies will be useful for readers to better understand impacts and outcomes of fake news on both domestic policies and international relations, throughout history and with reference to different political contexts, and how the States tried to counter.

The first part aims at investigating the use of disinformation in history (XIX and XX centuries) with the use of specific case studies in different geographical contexts, from Sardinia to France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States. Indeed, the use of fake news to de-legitimize possible political opponents or those considered by the government establishment to be disturbances of order is a practice that transcends geographical and temporal boundaries.

Roberto Ibba explores the public and political use of history – a topic that has interested historiography for decades until today. During the 20th century, historians, and philosophers not only discovered and denounced fakes, but also opened an interesting field of research on "fakes" as historical objects. More recently, with the cultural turn, the approach of post-colonial studies, the public's constant demand for history and the development of the web and social networks, the need for historians to participate in the public debate has emerged, both to provide keys to interpreting past phenomena and to debunk

false narratives that are rapidly spreading thanks to the web. In particular, the article aims at analyzing some phases of Sardinian history in which a public debate on historical issues, be they true or false, was most developed, with a special focus on the Falsi d'Arborea and their long-term effects on the debate between different political components on the historical roots of Sardinian autonomy and, finally, on the simplified narratives of history used by various contemporary political factions.

Federica Falchi focuses her attention on the attempt made by the Italian patriot Felice Orsini on January 14, 1858, against Napoleon III, whose plan – suggested by the French government and supported by conservative French and British press – was attributable to Giuseppe Mazzini. The aim was to politically delegitimize Mazzini and paint him as a dangerous conspirator.

Andrea Serra's chapter offers an analysis of the "episode" that saw the writer Fyodor Michailovitch Dostoevsky involved in Tsarist Russia, with special reference to the alleged revolutionary plans of what later was called the Petraševskij club. The meetings of the Petraševsky house would have never been a severe problem for the government, except for the fact that, in 1848, revolutionary movements broke out all over Europe. Frightened by a possible contagion, Tsar Nicholas I opted for the arrest of all its members, falsely assimilating the circle to the Decabrist movement who in 1825 attempted to overthrow the autocratic system and whose bloody repression inaugurated the beginning of his reign. Serra's analysis emphasizes how the tools of Tsarist propaganda served to mystify meetings of young intellectuals as a severe revolutionary threat to the country.

In his article, Christian Rossi analyses how the British Foreign Office, in the early 1960s, decided to update its public and cultural diplomacy, information and propaganda in the light of changes that other countries, such as the United States and Soviet Union were employing. Whitehall's determination clashed with the decrease of public money decided by the Cabinet, due to the economic downturn, therefore the Foreign Office had to reflect on how to minimize the impact. One of the possibilities would have been the creation of a European cultural diplomacy, a way to share the costs and to comply with the political decision of Her Majesty's Government to apply for membership into the European Economic Community. A proposal that was perhaps too much hasty, even for the pragmatic British diplomacy.

Alessio Zuddas's essay aims at contributing to the debate on broadcasting policies and soft power instruments in the United Kingdom and Europe with a specific focus on the role played by the Bbc External Services. Foreign implications of domestic Direct Broadcasting by Satellite (Dbs) were fundamental for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, while for the Home Office it was just an internal settlement matter. The United Kingdom, as a member of the European Community, was a main actor in shaping policies for their future, with a high impact due to its interests and involvement in this area. With a great tradition of foreign broadcasting strategy and instruments,

such as the External Services, London was determined to maximize political and commercial outputs of the satellite broadcasting but had to face internal obstacles and other Member States positions. With fast technological development, governments had to deal with new political, social, and economic challenges. The British Government, thus, tried to keep its leading role in international broadcasting.

Gianluca Borzoni's contribution focuses on a US public diplomacy plan, called "Project Truth", which, in the early 1980s, was intended to counteract Soviet disinformation with a truthful – precisely – storytelling of American society, politics, culture, to be coordinated by various branches of the Administration responsible for national security. The project was considered of primary importance by President Ronald Reagan, who delegated its implementation to the United States Information Agency (Usia) directed by his friend and collaborator Charles Z. Wick. As an expression of a "militant" phase of the first Reaganian mandate, "Project Truth" – within which exhibitions, books and magazines saw the light, overseas operating offices were made more efficient, and the communications network was adapted to new technological discoveries – will experience a deep reorganization, parallel to the evolution in a dialogical sense of the bilateral relations between the Superpowers, of which it constitutes a faithful mirror in the information field.

The second part of the book investigates the impact of disinformation in the third millennium, with special reference to the emergence of the global phenomenon of fake news, starting from the legal framework and strategies that governments have developed in recent times to deal with the phenomenon of fake news.

Daniele Marongiu and Pietro Lucania's contributions revolve around the legal framework and strategies adopted to deal with fake news. In particular, Daniele Marongiu's chapter deals with the issue of countering fake news from a legal perspective, trying to answer some questions: whether it is the duty of law to stem disinformation on the Internet, what are the suitable means to do so (that is, strong or soft legal tools), and what results have been achieved where similar actions have already been taken. The answers are not simple. Indeed, even if intuitively the law may seem like a good tool to combat and prevent fake news, as a matter of fact, it would affect a delicate field such as freedom of expression. Therefore, the risk of hitting the good part of the system is very likely. For this reason, by examining the experiences of different countries, it is verified how today the legal systems, especially in the European Union, are moving towards different means other than the legislative acts, less unilateral and more consensual, as the promotion of self-regulation inside the social networks.

Pietro Lucania focuses, instead, on a very specific tool, such as the use of use of artificial intelligence to combat disinformation. The unrestrained growth of social media combined with the emerging power of artificial

intelligence has added new dimensions to the fake news dilemma and greatly magnified it. Moreover, owing to their sensational nature, this malicious news spread far faster over social media than genuine ones. Today, many experts consider that the algorithms that exacerbate the effects of fake news should also be used to counter them and foster critical thinking at a mass scale Artificial intelligence (AI) is now on the job to combat the spread of misinformation on the internet and social platforms.

Simone Vettese analyzes the use of online disinformation as a tool for conditioning political thought and influencing the functioning of the democratic process, using the 2016 US presidential elections as a case study, during which the so-called "fake news" played a decisive role in orienting the balance of the American democratic choices.

Roberto Di Quirico explores how, during the 2010s, the international economic crisis and the rise of populism changed politics and electoral competition in the EU member states. These changes advanced with the politicization of new issues, and this was the case with European monetary integration and the Euro. Therefore, alternative economics (or populist economic ideology) was promoted for supporting populist policy proposals. Di Quirico's chapter suggests distinguishing between "fake news" and "fake economics" when studying populism. While fake news usually deals with a specific event or persons, "fake economics" is much more complex because it attempts to create a (looks like) coherent network of fake news or misleading economic analysis. This makes the specific case of anti-euro parties and the construction of their economic ideologies crucial to study the complexity of populism diffusion in the 2010s.

Gian Lorenzo Zichi provides an historical overview which consider the fake news in the broader context of disinformation and propaganda strategies always used by states and non-governmental forces to pursue a wide range of objectives. The analysis sheds light on how the information's theme has been dealt with at the multilateral level, from the last decade of the Cold War to nowadays, and brings the case study of the *Conference* – and then *Organization – on Security and Co-operation* in Europe (Csce/Osce). Since its origin with the Final Act, in August 1975, the diplomatic exercise which made possible a dialogue on a vast range of matters on the European security between the thirty-five participating states from the East and the West, has paid a special attention to the information issue, and its uses and abuses.

Barbara Onnis and Alessandra Melis explore the phenomenon of the fake news in the People's Republic of China (Prc). Despite the authoritarian nature of its government and the strict regulations of the media and internet, Prc has been dealing with disinformation/fake news, or with what the Chinese government generally refers as "rumors", for a long time, going back at least to the spread of internet in late 2000s. Both articles study the impact of this phenomenon in the specific context of the Covid-19 crisis, of which, at least in the public opinion, China is considered the main responsible (even

if the origins of the crisis are still under scrutiny). In particular, the focus of Barbara Onnis's analysis are fake news created *ad hoc* by the Chinese government to serve its political interests. A special attention is given to the disinformation tactics adopted by the communist authorities in order to change and consolidate their narrative on the novel coronavirus, to the reasons why Beijing felt the necessity to establish "its truth" and the role played in particular by the so-called "wolf warrior" diplomats in spreading and defending the official narrative all over the world.

Alessandra Melis investigates how disinformation and fake news related to the Covid-19 pandemic contributed to the spread of anti-Chinese, and more general anti-Asian, attitudes that often translated in racist and xenophobic incidents against citizens or immigrants of Chinese/Asian origin, in particular during the first phase of the emergency. The author offers brief observations on how information disorder played a socially determinant and destabilizing role.

Through different research and analysis methodologies, the contributions contained in this volume identify a unitary reading key in the role assumed by the forms of disinformation on the internal and international scale, thus outlining the historical path which ultimately led to the emergence of the fake news phenomenon and the political and social consequences it generated.

Cagliari, 7th October 2021

Part I

The Impact of Disinformation in the XIX and XX Centuries. Domestic and International Profiles

Public and Political Use of History: Case Studies Between the 19th and 21st Centuries

Roberto Ibba

1. Introduction

The debate on the public and political use of history has been going on throughout the twentieth century, but it has been rekindled with greater vigour in the first twenty years of the twenty-first century. The debate is undoubtedly fuelled by a renewed demand for history on the part of the public, which "professional" historians are only able to satisfy in part by publishing their research in monographs and specialist journals. The public, therefore, seeks and finds answers elsewhere, especially on the web, where everything is synthesised, simplified and disintermediated.

The subject of forgeries is certainly nothing new for historians: the cases, some of them sensational, of the production of forgeries, of distorted interpretations of history, of improper uses of the discipline date back to antiquity. A recent posthumous publication by Paolo Preto[1] retraces the history of forgeries starting from the comparison of sources for the ancient age, through the Middle Ages with the "forgery workshops" of the monasteries, passing through the modern age of the invention of saints, of city supremacies, of the construction of nation states, up to the contemporary age with the nineteenth and twentieth century "conspiracies" (Protocols of the Savi of Zion, Council of Egypt, Fakes of Arborea, Kalergy Plan). We are therefore faced with documents created as forgeries, altered documents, distorted interpretations of historical events[2].

For the great historian Marc Bloch, the forgeries themselves are interesting objects of study for the historian, who can analyse their genesis, the people who produced and disseminated them and their relationship with the present by analysing their long-term effects[3].

---

1. P. Preto, *Falsi e falsari nella storia. Dal mondo antico a oggi*, Viella, Roma 2020.
2. P. Narni, A. Rocci, *Le falsificazioni in storia*, in P. Nanni, E. Rigotti, C. Wolfsgruner (eds.), *Argomentare: per un rapporto ragionevole con la realtà*, Fondazione Sussidiarietà, Milano 2017, pp. 180-208.
3. M. Bloch, *Apologia della storia*, Einaudi, Torino 1950.

The discussion on the relationship between the public and history is launched by Habermas in post-World War II Germany, especially in reference to the heavy legacy of Nazism and its metabolization[4]. In Italy, it was Nicolò Gallerano who inaugurated the debate on the public and political use of history, also opening up positive interpretations if history has a mediated use by historians towards the public[5].

However, cases of public and political use of history in contemporary Italy have often served to legitimise political positions and to fuel opposition: think of the debates on the Resistance, the foibe, the Risorgimento[6].

According to the famous conceptualisation of the French historian Hartog, contemporary society can be defined as a society of presentism, imprisoned in a continuous present, with no past and no future[7]. The present is immediately historicised and continuously projected into a compulsive revisiting of the past and a future burdened with the weight of irreversibility and irreparability[8].

Adriano Prosperi has defined the contemporary era as a time without history, where the complexity of history as the science of change, but also the science of forgetting, which selects through scientific rules what to tell and what to forget, has been replaced by the intrusiveness of memory[9].

Over the years, attempts have been made to create shared, unifying, pacifying historical memories. But for the creation of these memories, short historical information has been used, unrelated to the historical method, often ideological, sometimes anonymous or mixed with scraps of individual memories. At a time when everything has become post, the bridge between historiography and the common sense of history has been eroded in the media. Today, there is an urgent need for historians to take possession of the tools of the media, which must become part of the training of those who work in history. The infosphere society, based on the information and knowledge economy, is also a hyperhistorical society whose development coincides with digital prehistory. It is the beginning of a path that will allow the storage of information from the past to make it useful for the present and the future. If we are imprisoned in an eternal present, we must therefore ask ourselves about the future of history. Gathering positive signals, we can say that the network has enabled many citizens to approach the discipline,

4. J. Habermas, *L'uso pubblico della storia*, in G.E. Rusconi, *Germania: un passato che non passa. I crimini nazisti e l'identità tedesca*, Einaudi, Torino 1987, pp. 98-110.

5. N. Gallerano (ed.), *L'uso pubblico della storia*, FrancoAngeli, Milano 1995.

6. L. Falsini, *La storia contesa: L'uso politico del passato nell'Italia contemporanea*, Donzelli, Roma 2020.

7. F. Hartog, *Régimes d'historicité. Présentism et expérences*, Editions du Seuil, Paris 2003.

8. D. Di Bartolomeo, *Lo specchio infranto. «Regimi di storicità» e uso della storia secondo François Hartog*, in «Storica», n. 49, a. XVII, 2011, pp. 83-84.

9. A. Prosperi, *Un tempo senza storia: la distruzione del passato*, Einaudi, Torino 2021.

to access digitised documents, to start participatory research through citizen science projects[10]. The gradual development of Public History in Italy, and of Digital Public History, i.e. those practices that allow to make history with the public and for the public, has fostered the creation of community involvement projects, the opening and use of digital archives, but above all it has been possible to carry out debunking operations to unmask false histories and distorted theories. At a time when history is increasingly becoming a common good, there is a need to mediate history in the inter-reality, between real and virtual, accepting the rules of engagement of the new environment. The historical research method of sources, comparison and reflection does not fit well with the world of the web and social networks, based on speed and synthesis. However, social networks have become a great digital archive that stores users' data and repurposes them by creating connections between present and past, selects memories and makes traces easily accessible. The wall of our socials is constantly updated, throwing us into an indeterminate present that leaves no room for doubt or investigation, making it difficult to develop critical thinking. In social networks, history is overtaken by the memory of the past, which allows for greater immediacy and interconnection with the public. It is therefore a swarm of groups reconstructing collective narratives and memories (village groups, neighbourhood groups, etc.), reconstructing the past without distinction of sources and without contextualisation. This has produced an epidemic of memories that seems to have led to a collective cultural autobiography that projects us into the past in a "perfect lost world" and denies the future the possibility of improvement[11].

When this synthetic and rapid reconstruction of the past goes beyond the limits of the ego-histories of individuals and proposes itself as the history of communities, nations and peoples, the risk of developing counter-narratives that lend themselves to political use becomes increasingly evident.

This work proposes to reconstruct some cases of the use of history in the political sphere, both in reference to the creation of false documents, and in relation to the reading of the past for the search of legitimation of political positions. In this second case, we will keep far from expressing value judgements on interpretations, but will limit ourselves to recording their use and purpose, contextualising them in time. The subject will be the history of Sardinia, its narration, its falsifications and its contemporary interpretations.

10. M. Ravveduto, *Il passato senza Storia: il presente continuo nella società dell'iperstoria*, in P. Bertella Farnetti, C. Dau Novelli (eds.), *La Storia liberata. Nuovi sentieri di ricerca*, Mimesis, Milano 2020, pp. 217-233.
11. *Ibidem*.

2. The invention of Sardinian history and nineteenth-century nationalism

Nineteenth-century Sardinian historiography, in reconstructing the events of the island and the Sardinians from the origins, had both the aim of investigating the history of Sardinia and the desire to legitimise it in the broader context of the national history of the nascent Italian nation. The nationalist spirit also influenced Sardinian historians such as Manno, Martini, Siotto Pintor, Tola and Spano, to name but a few, who did their utmost to write various tomes on Sardinian history, each in their own field, in which the Sardinians were presented as a unitary people from the very beginning.

Within this historiographical wave that adhered to the Italian unification movement, some attempts emerged that went as far as forgery, as in the case of the Sardinian idols purchased by the director of the Royal Museum, and the false *Carte d'Arborea*.

The vicissitudes of the Arborea forgeries, the *Carte d'Arborea*, are widely known and explored. In 1845, the monk Cosimo Manca, of the convent of Santa Rosalia in Cagliari, offered for sale to Pietro Martini, director of the Royal University Library, a parchment of uncertain origin, credited as a small part of the lost Judicial archives of Oristano. Martini, considering the importance of the historical information it contains, buys it at his own expense. The forged documents were produced for over a decade and circulated until the 1870s. The Sardinian and European cultural circles were shocked by the mysterious appearance and subsequent publication of the *Carte*. Sardinia suddenly takes on a new light in the romantic and nationalistic context of the time. Sardinia would be the birthplace of the Italian language and the protagonist of the birth of European law. Many Sardinian intellectuals endorse, without the necessary philological and palaeographical skills, the authenticity of the *Carte*: Pietro Martini, Alberto Ferrero della Marmora, Carlo Baudi di Vesme, the canon Giovanni Spano and some members of the Academy of Sciences of Turin. The economist Giuseppe Todde took charge of creating a joint-stock company for the publication of all the papers that monk Manca continued to supply to the Sardinian cultural world[12].

Among the most dubious of the Arborean papers were the Sicilian historian Michele Amari and the Berlin Academy of Sciences led by Theodor Mommsen. In 1870, the rigorous German academics judged the documents to be forgeries, demolishing them from both a philological and palaeographical point of view, marking an important gap between the German scientific school and that of the newborn kingdom of Italy. The forgery was then confirmed by Mommsen in 1877, after his trip to the island and despite his

12. L. Marrocu (ed.), *Le Carte d'Arborea. Falsi e Falsari nella Sardegna del XIX secolo*, AM&D, Cagliari 1997; F. Loddo Canepa, *Carte d'Arborea*, in *Dizionario archivistico per la Sardegna*, in «Archivio storico sardo», XVII (1929), pp. 331-420.

friendship with Baudi di Vesme, who repeatedly invited him to reconsider his position[13]. Even Giorgio Asproni, who must have suspected the falsity of the documents, sent him copies of the published documents to encourage Carlo Cattaneo to resume his studies on Sardinia. The aim was, on the one hand, to reunite the Sardinian front in an anti-Piedmontese direction and, on the other, to highlight Sardinia's role in national history.

It was certainly a golden age for the discovery and rediscovery of Sardinia and its history: these were the years of the monumental works of Manno, Tola, Martini, Angius, Spano and Siotto Pintor. The effects of the troubled reforms in the cultural and economic fields allowed a new generation, mainly citizens but sometimes coming from the rural elites, to emerge in studies, politics and economics[14]. A cultural awakening in which even the false charters of Arborea played a role for more than two decades and, as will be seen, even beyond.

Psychiatrist Nereide Rudas has analysed the *Carte* from the point of view of individual and collective meta-psychology as a "novel of origins", referring to the concept of the "failed" or "abortive" nation, which already emerges in the writings of the sardists Lussu and Bellieni, to explain at least in part the invention of such a clamorous forgery. Each Sardinian would have internalised in his or her own way the failure of Sardinia's lack of "sovereignty", so Rudas writes, which according to the psychodynamic perspective is overcome through a painful process of transformation and metabolisation. The *Carte* would be part of a process that tends not towards the construction of identity but towards its deformation, expressing an almost pre-adolescent immaturity. The invention of a genealogy allows the creation of inauthentic but satisfying models. The construction of an authentic historical genealogy confronts us with reality and our true identity[15].

In an essay published posthumously, Renzo Laconi points out that the *Carte* are the fruit of a backwards process of Sardinian culture, in a spasmodic search for every small fragment of history, every mention in literature and chronicles, in order to wrest the history of the country from oblivion and recompose it in unity, to give faces to the protagonists, even those who were defeated or destined to be subjugated, who could reveal the imprint of their own individuality and national character[16].

13. L. Marrocu, *Theodor Mommsen nell'isola dei falsari. Storici e critica storica in Sardegna tra Ottocento e Novecento*, Cuec, Cagliari 2009; A. Mastino, *Il viaggio di Theodor Mommsen e dei suoi collaboratori in Sardegna per il Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, in «Diritto@Storia», n. 3 – maggio 2004, available at: *dirittoestoria.it/3/TradizioneRomana/Mastino-Viaggio-di-Mommsen-in-Sardegna.htm*.

14. A. Accardo, *La nascita del mito della nazione sarda*, AM&D, Cagliari 1996.

15. N. Rudas, *Le Carte d'Arborea come romanzo delle origini*, in L. Marrocu (a cura di), *Le Carte d'Arborea*, cit., p. 523.

16. R. Laconi, *La Sardegna di ieri e di oggi*, edited by U. Cardia, Edes, Sassari 1988, p. 92.

3. History, identity and autonomy in the Sardinia of the "Rinascita"

During the twentieth century, the debate on Sardinian history intersected with the search for the roots of autonomy and the political formulation of Sardinia's autonomy with respect to the Italian state. Autonomy sentiment was already developing in the first decades of the century when Attilio Deffenu and Camillo Bellieni outlined the first trajectories of studies and interpretations.

It was especially after the Second World War that the most interesting cases of historical research and political confrontation developed with the debate on Autonomy and Renaissance.

In 1951, the review Il Ponte, directed by Piero Calamandrei, dedicated a monographic issue to Sardinia, in which Emilio Lussu and Renzo Laconi, among many others, wrote: the two men began a journalistic and epistolary controversy that gave an idea of the intellectual values involved[17].

A founder of the Sardinian Action Party, Lussu considered Sardinia and Sardinians to be a people without history, at least until the first appearance of the peasant and workers' movements at the end of the 19th century and, above all, the experience of Sardinian soldiers in the Sassari Brigade, which he himself experienced in the front line with the rank of captain. According to the intellectual from Armungia, the first idea of autonomy was born in the trenches of the Karst. Thus the myth of the Sassari Brigade was born, both on a military and political level, resulting in a strong affirmation of identity and political mobilisation. Lussu himself defines it as a "revolutionary deposit" of Sardinia after the war, which would awaken the failed nation of a people without history from its torpor[18]. The Sardinian fighters first became aware of the military, then the social and political spheres. Lussu wrote that life in the trenches had created a solidarity previously unknown among Sardinians, stimulating social demands[19].

Renzo Laconi, who contributes to the same issue of Il Ponte, has instead a different approach to Sardinian history, gaining over time considerable analytical and elaboration skills. Laconi collects his reflections in notebooks and worksheets, from which his work plan can be deduced. The books include, among others, Giovanni Battista Tuveri, Giovanni Siotto Pintor, Giuseppe Manno, Arrigo Solmi, Enrico Besta, Ugo Mondolfo, Francesco Loddo Canepa, or an important part of Sardinian historiography between the 19th and early 20th centuries.

The greatest influence, however, came from the writings of Antonio

17. G.G. Ortu, *L'intelligenza dell'autonomia. Teorie e pratiche in Sardegna*, Cuec, Cagliari 2018, pp. 48-52.

18. Ivi, pp. 17-21.

19. E. Lussu, *Tutte le opere. Tra sardismo e socialismo. L'impegno per la rinascita sarda (1944-1957)*, edited by G.G. Ortu and L.M. Plaisant, Isola Palma, Monastir 2020, pp. 199-209.