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Cultural Demise: South of Rome and American Terroni – Piedmontista Then and Now (Silvana Patriarca, Nelson Moe, Italian Studies)



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prima "briganti" e dopo emigranti!

TOM VERSO (October 3, 2011)

"I will not invoke the REALITY behind [Piedmontese] representations [of the South]..." writes renowned Italian historian Silvana Patriarca. This incredibly pregnant clause is a conceptual vortex capturing the dialectics of Hegel's "Master-Slave", Gramsci's "Cultural Hegemony" and Edward Said's "Orientalism". In short, when two conscious entities (e.g. cultures) dialectically encounter each other, each hegemonically attempts to destroy the "Other" by negating the Other's REALITY. American de facto Piedmontista such as Patriarca, Nelson Moe and Italian Studies

Programs, acting out the role of north-Italian cultural hegemonist, contribute to the demise of southern Italian culture by writing (much more importantly – teaching) Italian history as though Southern Italian REALITY does not, indeed never did, exist...American TERRONI beware the nocturnal siren-songs streaming from the Chairs of Wisdom – first a culture sleeps and then it dies. No history (REALITY) – No Culture! No southern-Italian history (REALITY) – No southern-Italian American culture!

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Cultural Demise: South of Rome and American Terroni – Piedmontista Then and Now (Silvana Patriarca, Nelson Moe, Italian Studies)

TOM VERSO



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Preface Descriptions vs. Representations

Silvana Patriarca writes:

"I will not invoke **reality**, but will focus my attention on what today's social scientists would call "hard data," i.e. quantitative information, and *treat them* as a **representation**."

(*"How many Italies? Representing the South in Official Statistics"* in *Italy's 'Southern Question'* ed. Jane Schneider – emp.+ p78)

Nelson Moe writes:

"The bulk of this study examines **the way the south was represented** in the decades before and after unification..."

(*The View from Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question* p. 2 emp.+)

Note: the common use of the word "**representation(ed)**"; they *do not* say **descriptions**.

Patriarca's readers **should not assume** that the "hard data, i.e. quantitative information" is **accurate (truthful) descriptions of the reality of southern Italy**, during the years of the Patria Meridionale Brigandage War (aka Risorgimento).

Similarly, readers of Moe must not confuse "**the way the south was represented**" with **the way the south was described**.

Descriptions are **true or false** empirical propositions, either accurate or not accurate.

Representations are **metaphoric statements**; they are **epistemologically empty** (neither true or false)– i.e. they **convey no knowledge** of the object under consideration. **Representations** tell us about the **subjective opinion** (value judgment) of the person making the representation.

Students of Italian southern history must become **very aware of** and **sensitive to** the **distinction** between '**descriptions**' which are the **facts** of history, and '**representations**' which are the **propaganda** of hegemonist.

Silvana Partiarca History of the Mezzogiorno as "Lies, Damn Lies and Statistics"

In her article, Professor Partiarca discusses the **1861 Census of Italy**, which she describes as:

"The **most important statistics** of the first decade of existence of the new state were undoubtedly those on population...The census formed the basis of any statistical and economic inquiry... **demographic data** served as the **principal indicator of the condition of the country**" (emp.+ p79)

Note the phrase: "**principal indicator of the condition of the country**".

Again, as with the word **representation**, professor Partiarca uses the word "**indicator**" and continues to eschew the word '**description**' or '**measurement**'. She does not say: "**demographic data is the principal "description" or "measurement" of the condition of the country.**"

When, *if fact*, a **census** consists of **descriptive statements** of **demographic Reality**; i.e. the census is a collection of statements that **describe** the **characteristic** of the population –i.e. the population **reality**.

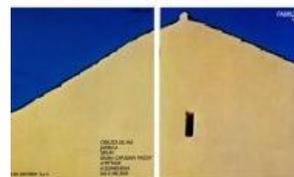
Descriptive statements are either **accurate (true)** or **not accurate (false)**. If, for example, the U.S. census document reports that "**seventeen million Americans are of Italian descent**", then that statement is either accurate (true) or not accurate (false).

Towers, the Palazzo and the Farm"



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However, in her own words, Professor **Partriarca is not interested in reality**; i.e. not interested in the **truth or falsity** (accuracy or inaccuracy) of the statements in the 1861 Italian census.

And, probably **for very good reasons** – the 1861 census of Italy south of Rome, unless and until empirically demonstrated otherwise, has a **very high probability** of being a **worthless description of southern Italian reality**; a classic example of Mark Twain's adage: "*Lies, Damn Lies and Statistics*".

The sole purpose of the 1861 Census is to function as a *Piedmontista hegemonic tool to negate the Reality of the state of 'The Two Sicilies', hegemonically destroy the culture of southern Italy and meld it into the Piedmont culture.*

It is a classic exercise in **hegemonic destruction** of the **Patria Meridionale** cultural by its dialectical **Piedmontese Other**. This is evidenced by the fact that the **compliers and publishers of the census did not distinguish between northern and southern Italy.**

Patriarca: " '**North' and 'South' did not appear as reporting units** in the official statistical publications of the 1860s" (p. 81 emp +). In short, "*Patria Meridionale*" **did not exist** as far as the Piedmontese compliers of census were concerned.

Further, the **uselessness of the 1861 Census as description of southern Italian society** in the year 1861 may be **logically inferred** without **empirically reading** the document, by **testing** it against **general standards of census taking**. Consider the following:

Reality and Census Documents

Recording Descriptions of the People

Below is a drawing depicting a 19th century census taker. There are two aspects of this picture that are significant for purposes of this discussion.



First, the Census taker is the man with the **pen and paper**. He is **creating a Document**.

Second, the **People** gathered around the census taker are **The Reality** that is being **described** (recorded) in the census **Document**.

In short, the census taker is creating a **document purporting to describe** some demographic characteristics (**reality**) of that **community** at that **point in time**.

Keeping in mind the most fundamental precept of critical historiography: "with pen and paper one can write anything",

- the question that students of southern Italian history, who are interested in the **Reality**, at the time of the Risorgimento, should ask:

"How **accurate** are the **descriptions** recorded in the 1861 Census"?

Are the '**descriptive statements**' **TRUE or FALSE?**

Further, consider the idyllic character of the depicted scene. The scene accurately **implies** that the "**hard data**" (to us Partriarca's words), is **willingly (indeed happily) provided to the census taker**.

The only access the census taker has to the "**hard data**" is from **information provided by the people**; there is **no documentary verification**. For example, the census taker asks a person their age. The statement that the person makes is recorded as 'fact'; there is no birth certificate provided to verify the person's age.

If the people are not willing to give him accurate information,

- **than the census is not an accurate description of reality; the census document is a false (inaccurate) description of reality.**

Accordingly, when considering the **census of the Italy south of Rome in the year 1861**, the historian must

make a **judgment as to how confident to be about the accuracy of the data**; which, in turn, requires a **judgment of how confident about the willingness of the people to cooperate with the census taker**.

In as much as the **South was in the process of being conquered, brutalized and dehumanized in the year 1861 by the Piedmont Army**,

- how reasonable is it to judge that the **people of the South were willing participants** providing accurate information to the census takers?

Consider, the following *descriptions* of life in the South at the time of the census reported by historian John Dickie (*Darkest Italy*) and ask yourself:

Does this sound like the type of environment that people willing meet with and provide accurate information to a census taker?

“Parliamentary commissioner Nino Bixio wrote in **1860**: ‘**this is a country that should be destroyed** or at least depopulated and its inhabitants sent to Africa...’ (p. 35 emp.+)

(Of course we know now that Nino’s wish for depopulation came true starting in 1870 and continued till 1920. Only the people went to the Americans instead of Africa.)

“The Mezzogiorno spent the first five years after incorporation into the new Italy under different forms of what was essentially a military regime...A very difficult situation developed into **near anarchy in the Spring of 1861**... (p. 37 emp.+)

“One of the most infamous instances of pitilessness was the **razing of the town of Pontelnadolfo** whose inhabitants had deceived and butchered a column of troops. (p. 41 emp.+)

“Unauthorized, **brutal measures such as mass arrest, summary executions**, and reprisals had been used from the start by the **Piedmontese** army against lawbreakers and rebels... (p. 31 emp.+)

“The many grisly **‘hunting-trophy’ photographs of the condemned or executed** taken by army officers... (p. 33 emp.+)

“...the infamous **Pica law** was passed that grafted transportation onto the system of punishments...” (i.e. the *peasants were physically removed from their communities* p. 41 emp.+)

Given those **descriptions of life south of Rome at the time of the census**,
- **How can anyone take the ‘1861 Italian Census of southern Italy’ seriously**, indeed characterize it as scientific “hard data”?

The 1861 Italian census adds new meaning to Twain’s:

“Lies, Damn Lies and Statistics”

It is a **logically valid inference** to conclude that:

The only purpose that the Census Report of Italy in 1861 served was the obliteration of Patria Meridionale culture from the historic record of Italy.

And, so very sad to say:

A Piedmontista teacher could use a high Chair of Wisdom (Ivy League) to foist upon seventeen million American Terroni such a gross misrepresentation of their history.

Nelson Moe The Historiography of ‘Representation’

In two articles about southern Italy,

“The Emergence of the Southern Question in Villari, Franchetti, and Sonnino” in Italy’s Southern Question: Orientalism in One Country 1998,

“‘This is Africa’: Ruling and Representing Southern Italy, 1860–61” in Making and Remaking Italy: The Cultivation of National Identity around the Risorgimento 2001

totaling 61 pages of text, Professor Moe uses the word **represent** or **representation** 39 times, for an average of once every 1.5 pages ($61/39=1.5$). This is to say: the word *represent* or *representation* appeared (*on average*) at least once on every one and a half pages.

Accordingly, I think it is fair to characterize Professor Moe’s works as **Historiography of ‘Representation’**. Namely, he is writing the history of Italy south of Rome based on documents that, in his favorite word, *represent* the Italian south. Further, all the *representational documents* he presents in these articles were written by *Piedmontista* bent on the destruction of the Patria Meridionale culture.

Indeed, the Villari, Franchetti, and Sonnino **“representations”** bring to mind images of

missionaries traveling among the 'great un-washed' south of Rome preaching the Pietmontese Gospels. This is the what American students of southern-Italian descent can expect at the crème de la crème of the American university system.

Again, as discussed above at some length, a **representation should not be confused with a description.** Statements of *representation* cannot be evaluated for *truth* or *falsity*. Further, **truth and falsity are the criteria used to establish factual knowledge.**

In short, Professor Moe, like Professor Patriarca, sitting in an Ivy League Chair of Wisdom, provides a wealth of documents containing the subjective "**representations**" made by the enemies of the **Patria Meridionale**, but he is *lite* on verifiable **factual knowledge** claims about the history and culture of the people south of Rome.

Italian Studies Programs Italy =Arno River Valley

Italian Studies programs in American universities do not bother with **facts** or **representations** of Italy south of Rome. They just *flat-out ignore Italy south of Rome*. Indeed, Italy in those Chairs of Wisdom consists of a couple of centuries of art and literature produced in the Arno River valley. (*I have written about Italian Studies Programs in two previous articles linked at the top of the page in the "Related Articles" box.*)

In Conclusion

It is accurately said: "**History is Written by the Victors**". The voluminous number of documents Professors Patriarca and Moe cite in their works were written by "*the victors*".

The Piedmontista militarily defeated the state of the "Two Sicilies" and hegemonically overwhelmed its historic culture. Today the **word "Italy" largely means what the cultural progeny of the original Piedmontista say it means.**

However, it does not necessarily follow that contemporary historians have to **believe** the **representations** made by the dominating party in dialectical clashes between persons, states, cultures, etc. It is **possible to gain objective knowledge** of both parties to dialectically clashing states and cultures by applying the empirical and logical principles of '*critical historiography*' (see: *Marc Bloch's The Historian's Craft* - also 'linked' article on Bloch & Patriarca). And, it is possible to write **objective history** of both parties in the dialectical process, rather than "*sing the songs*" of the dominating party.

Sadly, for American Terroni, the professors sitting in the high Chairs of Wisdom largely do not see the role of contemporary historians as seekers of **object knowledge** and **accurate factual descriptions of the Patria Meridionale historic realities.**

And so, one wonders...

How do southern-Italian American students gain accurate factual knowledge of their history and culture given that the Chairs of Wisdom are so biased against them?

"Aye Now! ... There's the Rub – eh?"

And, therein lies the meanings of:

'Orientalism', 'Cultural Hegemony' and 'Master-Slave'.

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On October 7th, 2011 Prospero wrote

The usual rigmarole

Oh, for Pete's sake, Mr Verso's usual nagging rigmarole and belly-aching in defense and exaltation of Southern-Insular (Sicilia) Italy, splitting uncountable times a hair lengthwise into 77 about "description" and "representation", with sprinkling of big words such as "metaphoric" and "epistemologically". Silvana Patriarca, Mr Verso, is a Professor not in some Northern Italian university, but of Fordham University in NYC. It was about time somebody would come out countering the eternal belly-aching in exaltation of those parts of the Italian nation. The "description" (thus, 'the fact of history') is that the Italian nation, since its formation in 1861, has always had its south and that island as a deadweight on its feet, keeping it from developing into an efficient country. Any way made in such a direction has been due to the efforts of Northern and Central Italy, where the concept of the word "work" is at 180° from that down there.

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