Hospitality and exchange: Identity relationships between 'natives' and 'foreigners' in Sardinia

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Abstract: Islands have frequently been invoked as a central *topos* of anthropological inquiry. The idea that islands and their inhabitants were isolated from the rest of the world led to them being treated as living laboratories, ripe for the investigation of a supposed cultural and biological purity. In contrast, the history of Sardinia shows how the island and its inhabitants have historically demonstrated agency in their relationships within the Mediterranean space and beyond. Moving from the assumption that a social group elaborates its identity by experiencing the 'other', I use the concept of hospitality as a theoretical framework for its ability to encompass complex and correlated questions helpful in thinking about individuals' and societies' relationships with 'intimacy' and 'otherness'. Following this perspective, the contribution aims to examine how, in Sardinia, practices of hospitality have been involved in shaping a feeling of belonging that, in this case, could be called 'Sardinian-ness'. Specifically, I investigate how global phenomena such as mass tourism and transnational migration impact and change the cultural trait of traditional hospitality, and how these phenomena unfold in an insular context.

Keywords: native anthropologist, hospitality, migration, tourism, identity

https://doi.org/10.24043/isj.176 • Received February 2021, Early access September 2021

Introduction

This article reflects on Sardinian identity as the result of encounters between 'islanders' and 'others'. Specifically, I investigate the significance of the hospitality category in the contemporary phenomena of receiving tourists and welcoming migrants. I employ the frame of hospitality because I deem it a heuristic means of exploring the tension between global and local dynamics as they unfold in Sardinia — as much as in other Mediterranean islands. Since many of the sources used in the article come from the Italian context, all translations from Italian to English are my own unless otherwise noted.

Islands are a *topos* in the epistemology of biology, geography, literature, and anthropology (Eriksen, 1993; Fabietti, 2011; Macleod, 2013). Since the 19th century and for most of the 20th century, this *topos* included not only islands *stricto sensu*, but also any place classifiable as 'isolated': either because they were difficult to reach, or merely because they

were still unknown to (Western) scholars. The epistemological framework of positivism drew a correlation between insularity and isolation, and islands were framed as living, bounded, and 'unspoiled' laboratories. As such, those populations ethnographers came into contact with were conceived as closed systems, with a particular and 'original' culture (Barth, 1969, pp. 33–34). In the second half of the 20th century, most anthropologists abandoned the functionalist paradigm and started investigating 'practices of contact'. It became clear that it was no longer possible to ignore the relationships between populations, especially since communities and nations are "internally globalised" by transnational circulations (Molz & Gibson, 2007). However, despite the changes of the last decades, islands continue to be good to think with.

In our case, people from Sardinia have 'always' come into contact with other populations and individuals from neighbouring areas across the Mediterranean Sea, establishing different kinds of relations with them (Brigaglia & Ortu, 2002). Although the sea invokes metaphors of flows, waves, and liquidity (Molz & Gibson, 2007), it has been conceived as both a "frontier" — a territory where diversities can meet and confront each other — and as a "border" — a line separating the internal from the external (La Cecla, 2003, pp. 133–134). The identitary perception of the collective self radically changes according to which of these two conceptions is applied. To complicate matters even further, the conception of 'the sea' as a blank space, limit, or boundary, implies that islands are 'segregated' and excluded from any relations with the outside. Hence, islanders have "bounded" identities (Hay, 2006). In criticising these conceptions through the polysemy of the term 'island', sociologist Alberto Merler (1990, p. 156) noted that, philologically, it assumes the divergent meanings of "enclave [… and] circularity […]. In other words: on the one hand, [an island is] closed in itself, difficult to access; on the other, [it represents] the unlimited possibility of access from all directions, and openness to the outside." Merler argues that when a dualistic logic stands out, only one of the two meanings emerges, obscuring the conditions of thinkability of the other.

Even though history (Marroccu et al., 2015) and genetics (Francalacci et al., 2003) display the abiding nature of the encounters Sardinia experienced, the "*senso comune*" (common-sense; Gramsci, n.d.) continues to connect insularity with ideals of 'purity', 'authenticity', 'tradition', and 'naturalness'. Given the complexity of identity-building processes, this isolationist approach seems to increase the risk of essentialising gnoseological positions (Paulis, 2019). Nonetheless, although this approach could be defined as 'spontaneous' — despite being based on language, and its performativity (Austin, 1962) — it is often fuelled by the 'exotic' character of tourist-oriented advertising, as well as literary and movie production.

Through an interdisciplinary analysis, I will discuss how Sardinian identity — 'Sardinian-ness' (*sardità*) — was and is currently shaped and represented through the encounter between 'natives' and 'Others' in an insular perspective (Conkling, 2007). I focused on hospitality because it seems "an exceptionally mobile concept in theorising social relations between people in an increasingly mobile world" (Molz & Gibson, 2007, p. 20). Furthermore, hospitality is considered a representative cultural trait of Sardinian-ness, both in hetero-direct self-representations produced by 'Sardinians' (Bachis, 2015) and in 'foreigners' narratives (Boscolo, 2003). Within a "counter-islandness" (Bernardie-Tahir & Schmoll, 2014) approach, I focus on 'traditional' hospitality since it is connected to the phenomena of both

touristic reception and welcoming migrants. Finally, the 'hospitality' frame constitutes a central concept for the paradigm of 'mobilities' (Molz & Gibson, 2007) and a heuristic tool to investigate the tensions between the local and the global, spontaneity and calculation, and friendship and enmity (Candea & Da Col, 2012).

To build this theoretical and methodological framework, I employ academic sources from different disciplines and cultural products about Sardinia, Sardinians, and their relationship with Otherness. Although it is not my intention to give islanders "some pseudo-purist stock or pedigree" (Baldacchino, 2008, p. 39), following an emic conception of the "ethnic *boundary*" (Barth, 1969, emphasis added), the reference group of my research is represented by 'indigenous natives'.

Furthermore, I question my positioning in the field as a 'native' researcher (Narayan, 1993). Because of my anthropological background and its holistic bias, my research started with 'fieldwork', the experience of *in situ* interrelation that allows 'observing by participating' that which Malinowski (1922/2005, p. 14, italics in original) called "the *imponderabilia of actual life*." However, working in the context in which I was born and raised has given rise to several doubts on how to approach the issue of identity from a nissological (McCall, 1996) and native perspective (Baldacchino, 2008; Nimführ & Otto, 2020). As the anthropologist Gianni Dore (1990, p. 65) noted:

> Getting into such politically and emotionally burning issues —such as that of ethnic identity and the enacted and conceptualised ethnicity within one's own society— poses considerable epistemological problems, since it is even more difficult to avoid an emotional involvement of the anthropologist when touching upon the heart of belonging to one's own culture.

Even though I have been researching migration towards Sardinia since 2010, by interacting with migrant communities, local institutions, and third sector organisations, part of the fieldwork consisted of experiences outside of the researcher's role. This involvement was unavoidable since I have been living in Sardinia for most of my life. Indeed, I spoke with several people in an unstructured way — and without revealing my academic interests — because the matter at hand involved us in equal measure, for we lived in the same territory, and, precisely, because it concerned our self-recognition as 'Sardinians'. Despite such partial academic anonymity, my positioning was balanced by my public engagement in local anti-racist associations supporting sub-Saharan migrants.

Most of the data presented here result, therefore, from previous ethnographic investigations, theoretical analysis of academic and documentary sources, "netnography" (Kozinets, 2007; see also Biscaldi, 2019), and "analytic autoethnography" (L. Anderson, 2006).

Sardinia and its environment

Almost equidistant from the Tunisian, Algerian, Italian, and French coasts, Sardinia is at the centre of the Western Mediterranean Sea. Historian Fernand Braudel (1977, pp. 8–9) answered the question "What is the Mediterranean?" with these words:

> A thousand things together. Not one landscape, but countless landscapes. Not a sea, but a succession of seas. Not one civilisation, but a series of civilisations piled one above the other. [...] All of this because the Mediterranean [Sea] is a very ancient crossroad. For millennia, everything has flowed into it, complicating and enriching its history.

From a Eurocentric perspective, we can even say that it constituted the world's centre or the world itself until the great discoveries shifted the axis of European — and thus 'global' — interests (Matvejević, 1998; Nocco, 1990).

With 1.6 million inhabitants — including 'natives', 'immigrants', unregistered 'emigrants', and owners of second homes — Sardinia is sparsely populated and shows a negative demographic trend in addition to the scourge of depopulation: out of 377 municipalities, 128 have less than 1000 inhabitants; 28 more than 10,000; 4 exceed 50,000; and only Cagliari — the Regional County Seat — more than 150,000 (ISTAT data 2019, from Tuttitalia.it, n.d.). Furthermore, since the end of the 20th century, the push towards the coastal urban centres — which are only 71 out of the 377 total municipalities — has generated an uneven distribution of the population that Gianfranco Bottazzi (1990) defined as a "doughnut" effect phenomenon. Strange as it may sound for an insular context, this disproportion between the inland and coastal municipalities results from historically rooted settlement schemes. As we will see below, conquerors arrived from the sea. Even the current ecological situation is partially the outcome of the processes of exploitation that were put into place by the different populations that occupied Sardinia, pillaging it in order to 'export goods', and subjecting it to different social systems with the aim of 'importing civilisation'.

The various other (in 'the us')

Being at the centre of the Mediterranean, Sardinia itself has historically been a 'frontier' territory. From the 1st millennium B.C. onwards, 'Sardinians' came in contact with different peoples. Between the 10th and 8th centuries B.C., at the peak of the 'native' Nuragic civilisation (Lilliu, 1982) — so defined for the existence of about 8000 *nuraghes* (megalithic towers) — the Phoenicians arrived first as merchants. They were assimilated into the coastal Nuragic villages, bringing new technologies and lifestyles and boosting trade. Subsequently, starting from the 6th century B.C., the Carthaginians subdued and included the island in their domains. From then on, the territory and its inhabitants have been subjugated by conquests and exploitation. Since the 3rd century B.C., except for the self-government during the Judicial period (9th–14th centuries), Sardinia (more or less in its entirety) has been consecutively dominated by Romans, Vandals, Byzantines, Aragonese, Spaniards, and Piedmontese. Eventually, in 1861 — starting with the Kingdom of Sardinia — the reigning House of Savoy proceeded to the national unification of the Italian peninsula, thus making the island part of the Italian State (Farinelli, 2017). After the proclamation of the Italian Republic, and since 1948, Sardinia benefits from a special regional status, which grants it legislative power over some specific matters, such as environmental protection and tourism. This status was granted for geographic and historical reasons, as requests for a greater level of autonomy had been frequent since the First World War.

Over the past two centuries, the reasons leading people to the island have changed and become more heterogeneous. Starting from the second half of the 20th century, tourists —

who often also invest in a second home — have joined those who previously arrived as merchants, explorers, scholars, soldiers, priests, teachers, skilled workers, exiles, or prisoners (Aru et al., 2013). Since the early '80s, the 'economic (im)migrants' have constituted *the* new typology of 'foreigners' (Aru et al., 2013; Gentileschi, 2007, 2009). In the last decade, the 55,000 'foreign residents' (ISTAT data 2020, from Tuttitalia.it, n.d.) include an increasing number of people who moved from continental cities in Northern Europe. Indeed, each year, more and more people opt to relocate to Sardinia with the intent of benefitting from the milder climate, less stressful lifestyle, and lower cost of living. Lastly, refugees have been reaching Sardinia either through unauthorised landings, coming by boat directly from Algeria (Obinu, 2013), or because of the reallocation policies implemented by the European and National Reception System.

The formation and reiteration of Sardinian-ness

Sardinia does not fit in the small islands' category due to its expanse (24,000 km^2) and its highly diversified territory. Instead, it could be defined as an archipelago for the presence of 68 small/tiny islands — about a dozen of which are inhabitable. Moreover, it has been considered as a "quasi-continent" (M. Serra, 1958). This environmental heterogeneity has led to a considerable diversification of work niches and cultural traits and a fragmentation of the island's social landscape. Nonetheless, and as Conkling (2007) argues, the experience of living in a territory surrounded by sea contributes to a heightened feeling of belonging, and Sardinia is no exception. It engenders an ethnic and cultural "homogeneity" (Barth, 1969, p. 10) that allow us to deal with the issue of "ethnic identity" as a category "of ascription and identification recognised by the actors themselves" (Barth, 1969, p. 10), and as a discriminating factor in defining insiders and outsiders.

Among the influences of 'foreign dominations' over cultural and identity matters, I mention here the issue of language, as it is subject to widespread debate, not only among specialists. While Sardinian language appears — from an external point of view — as an unmistakable sign of identity that brings all the 'natives' together, the matter is more complex from an internal viewpoint. We cannot just say that Sardinian exists as a separate idiom among the Romance languages, nor that it was eventually promoted and 'safeguarded' through the constitution of a standardising linguistic code such as *Limba Sarda Comuna* (Common Sardinian Language), which can be nowadays chosen in the language settings of some social networks. We must recognise that every municipality has its dialectal variant, to the point that it is not unusual for speakers to have trouble understanding each other as the distances between their villages increase. To these dialects, we have to add linguistic enclaves such as Catalan, Tabarchino, and Gallurese. Although we can refer to the island as a linguistically coherent aggregate, it is essential to specify that practically every village could be considered as a linguistic *unicum* (Caltagirone, 2005, p. 87) to which someone would also link — in a "*campanilista*" (local rivalry; Caltagirone, 2005, p. 87) way — a 'cultural uniqueness'. Far from being an anomaly in identity construction processes, it is almost an emblematic demonstration of it. All communities are, in fact, based on an "imagined" (B. Anderson, 1996; see also Barth, 1969; Herzfeld, 1992) separation, produced through mechanisms of exclusion that distinguish who is a member and who is not.

In my case (I was born in the town of Nùoro of a Sardinian mother coming from a small village, and of a Sicilian father who moved to Sardinia for work), the question of

belonging and recognising myself through a single 'status' has long been problematic. Because of my 'immigrant' ancestry, I have tried to exclude myself from the "segmentary logic" (Evans-Pritchard, 1940) of belonging. Nonetheless, after some years spent abroad, I do not just say that I "come from" Italy when I introduce myself. I always specify that "*sono Sardo*" (I "belong to" Sardinia), and if my interlocutor knows the island, I point out that "*sono di*" (I "belong to") Nùoro. I realised that the widespread construct "I belong to," used in place of the more correct "I come from," depends on the performativity of the linguistic act. While Sardinian is not my mother tongue, I relate to my origin through this language. Since I was a little boy, when I went on holiday to my mother's hometown, I was always asked: "*de inue ses*?" (where do you belong to?) and "*de chie ses*?" (literally, "whose are you?" – as in, "from whom do you descend?"). Giovanna Bacchiddu (2013, pp. 92–93) notes that this expression can indicate, in a broader meaning, "Which family unit/lineage do you belong to? To whom are you historically and biologically related?"

This primacy of ancestry in generating a sense of belonging, in its most blatant and essentialist — yet not infrequent — variants, is not only related to the genealogical lines that can be reconstructed through the archives. Attempts to 'anchor it to the remote past' are often made by identifying the 'ethnic roots' in the prehistoric inhabitants of the island or in myths. Archaeologist Rubens D'Oriano (in Mocci, 2017) defines some of these beliefs as deriving from the success of "fanta-archeo-sardism":

> [A discipline] that feeds on a mythical image of Nuragic Sardinia. According to this theory, Sardinians of today, in terms of cultural [and biological] identity, descend from the ancient Nuragic people, the people who dominated the whole Mediterranean and perhaps beyond, the last authentic bulwark of a Sardinianness later colonised and exploited by Phoenicians, Romans and other 'invaders'.

Without denying the importance and originality of the Nuragic civilisation, contemporary Sardinians are, nonetheless, the result of a complex stratification and cultural hybridisation that occurred over time. To this end, Jean-Loup Amselle (2010, p. 72) reminds us that, in a time frame, the issue of autochthony "is a difficult weapon to use" because "one person is autochthonous only compared to someone, to another." Reasoning about cultural 'purity', the anthropologist Ugo Fabietti (2002, p. 91) argued:

> On an empirical level, cultures have always been hybrid, at least in the sense that what constitutes the world of our shared experience, practical and symbolic, is always the result of encounters, contributions, different mentalities, oblivions, and memories that draw on different cultural experiences. [This] primarily depends on how cultures combine and recombine themselves according to specific acts of strength.

Godfrey Baldacchino (2008, p. 37) states that "the insider/outsider distinction does not work all that well when it comes to islands, where hybridity is the norm." Geneticist Paolo Francalacci and colleagues (2003) have shown this aspect also in biological terms.

Notwithstanding, the concept of 'identity' is often constructed by ignoring the past and using autochthony as a marker capable of identifying who has the 'right' to claim it. Talking

about the island's inhabitants, to ignore the outgoing mobility would be highly misleading because it is decidedly more significant in terms of temporal length and consistency than the incoming flows. Indeed, emigration has constituted one of the most important social and demographic phenomena in Italian post-unification history. Geographer Silvia Aru (2015, pp. 68–69) pointed out that, regarding Sardinia, we can start talking about high mobility since the beginning of the 20th century. However, it is only since the '50s that we can quantitatively speak of a real 'exodus'. Between 1955 and 1971, about 400,000 people left out of a population of 1.2–1.4 million (see also King & Strachan, 1980).

Furthermore, Aru (2015, pp. 69-70) showed that emigration from Sardinia is still an ongoing phenomenon. In fact, between 2008 and 2015, more than 21,000 people emigrated, mainly due to the lack of work. The consistency of Sardinian emigration evokes that 'Sardinian-ness' takes place in a dimension that transcends spatial boundaries to take on a 'trans-local dimension' (Appadurai, 1996) articulated through the various nodes of the 'diaspora'.

Identity, belonging, hospitality

Anthropologist Francesco Bachis (2015, pp. 696–697) pointed out that Sardinia is one of the Italian regions where "identity discourses" occur most frequently. Moreover, they are fed by dozens of conferences and seminars organised every year (Angioni et al., 2007) to the point that many people want to run away from the trap of "identity obsession." Bachis (2015, pp. 696–697) argues that "sometimes, it seems that this term [identity] became good for thinking about the belonging of Sardinians, useful for affirming and communicating it." Historical and cultural symbols are now 'canonised' and used to promote a feeling of belonging felt and manifested intensely on an institutional, promotional, and social level. Indeed, the island's shape, the flag of the *Quattro Mori*, the *nuraghes*, the giants of *Monte Prama*'s or the typical carnival masks — to name but a few — have become helpful for commercial and political advertising, corporate brands, and tattoos.

However, common sense seems to tend to increasingly highlight some alleged characteristics of purity and integrity of the island identity, thus ignoring its 'construction' processes and assuming that it is authentic or archaic — depending on the observer's perspective. In this regard, again Bachis (2015, p. 715) reminds us that the primary limit in the representation of identity is not to be tracked on the "essentialist character of rhetorical and discursive productions, and therefore in the true or false dynamics." Instead, it has to be identified in the "impossibility of thinking about the relational and negotiating nature of identity" (Bachis, 2015, p. 715).

Given that 'Sardinian-ness' is, like all identity constructions, based on some specific characteristics used to legitimise the insider/outsider distinction, I now attempt to discuss the trait of hospitality. I refer to it because it constitutes one of the most recurrent cultural features in representations of Sardinians, and also because hospitality provides a frame to speak about several central anthropological issues such as identity and belonging, politics and inequality, individuals and community (Candea & Da Col, 2012, p. S2). Furthermore, to talk about hospitality allows us to connect with the terms and concepts of 'welcoming' and 'reception'. Indeed, they are often used as synonyms even though they diverge considerably in the practices and spirit that animate them. The former is an almost free form of taking care of

another, and the latter involves a series of work activities aimed at the wellbeing of the customer/user.

Traditional accommodation system

Before addressing the matter of the encounter between foreigners — here tourists and immigrants — and 'Sardinians', I consider it necessary to deal with the concept of Otherness and how it structures relationships between the inhabitants of the various 'cultural islands' which form Sardinia. As highlighted by Francesco Remotti (1990, p. 226), during the process of self-definition, "the 'us', far from remaining intact, is formed and transformed [...] through operations of identity and differentiation, connection and separation." Even in Sardinia, 'foreigner' — '*istrandzu*' in Nùorese dialect — is a very variable category that does not only refer to people coming from outside the island; it extends to all who do not belong to the 'community', whether the neighbourhood, the municipality, the province, Sardinia, Italy, Europe, or the West.

Given that sheep farming and agriculture have historically been the pillars of the island economy, there have 'always' been frequent exchanges amongst villages as a consequence of the need for shepherds and farmers to move regularly — either with the migratory herding of sheep or taking goods to market. In the lack of a structured hotel system, accommodation was therefore necessary. Especially in the winter months, even if 'wayfarers' were strangers, they were nevertheless hosted in private homes where they could find free board and lodging. These were named and identified, at least in my mother's village, as '*domo de posada*' (support house). Clearly, with the seasonal returns, the degree of strangeness and otherness faded, and friendships — or at least familiarities — were established. With all the difficulties accompanying the term 'traditions' (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983), the 'traditional' Sardinian hospitality was therefore developed as a 'social fact' capable of guaranteeing exchange relationships among the various 'groups' of the island (Sorge, 2009). As a matter of necessity, especially for pastoral communities, hospitality developed as a "gift system" (Mauss, 1924) capable of binding the various actors involved into mutual assistance and forging a sort of *habitus* towards the 'foreigner' (Caltagirone, 2005, pp. 291–329). It is precisely on the legacy of those olden days — still alive in the imaginaries — that the 'islander common-sense' chose the inland area as a bulwark of traditional identity (Satta, 2001, p. 16).

The importance of the set of practices ascribable to hospitality also emerges in the eminent *Il Codice della vendetta barbaricina* ('The code of revenge in Barbagia'; Pigliaru, 1975). In this unwritten moral and behavioural code described by Pigliaru, the status of guest — the *hospes*, the "benevolent stranger" (Benveniste, 1976) — is covered by a quasi-sacred aura deriving from the gap between the 'host community' and the 'hosted person', and, more precisely, from the fact of keeping them out of the complex dynamics of "cultural intimacy" (Herzfeld, 1997/2016). Anthropologist Giulio Angioni (1997, p. 206) — commenting on Antonio Pigliaru's work — pointed out that foreigners have been traditionally treated with "religious respect." However, Angioni (1997, p. 206) added, they had to match it with "as many religious obligations", the most important of which was to "always feel and stay meticulously out of the fray." Such 'staying out of the fray' did not mean not participating in community life, but just participating as a spectator. Analysing Mediterranean hospitality in Crete and Rhodes, Michael Herzfeld (1992, p. 61; see also Herzfeld, 1987) argues that hospitality is "part of a reciprocal set, [that] marks a contextual definition of relative rank: the

host is always superior, at least in a symbolic and contingent sense, to the guest." Anyone who has been hosted in Sardinia can testify that it is not easy to be a guest. Especially in the inland area — less affected by the touristic mobility flows — it implies, above all, a chasm between who 'is at home' and who 'is not' (Sorge, 2009).

How long the guest status lasts is not specified, but a limit is, however, established; otherwise, there is the risk of losing this 'exceptional' position. It is equally certain that this length changes in every culture. Confirming the Kluckhohnian definition of anthropology as the "longest way round" that is also "the shortest route home" (in Remotti, 1990, p. 13), my interest in Sardinians' hospitality arose during research trips in Senegal experiencing *teranga* ('hospitality' in Wolof language). On those occasions, I also heard the following proverb: "When a foreigner knocks on your door, you must offer them food and rest. As you do not know the journey they have taken, and how tired they are, only after three days you can ask their name." Like many other contexts, Senegal promotes itself as *pais de la teranga* ('country of hospitality') and, on this, 'Senegalese people' build part of their self-presentation to show to foreigners, especially Westerners. What struck me about this saying was that there are also proverbs in Italy about hospitality that refer to the length of the stay in days, but in another manner: "The guest is like the fish, after three days it stinks," or the variant, "The first day [the person] is a guest, the second indiscreet, the third cheeky, the fourth… get out of my house." Popular wisdom handed down also that "Not welcoming a guest is a shame, chasing him away is cruelty" and "The house is never so full that there is no room for a stranger." Further, from the Christian lexicon, we learn that "Where there is a guest, there is God."

A gaze on contemporary tourism

Although it involves the transition from a gift system to a market system, the encounter between insiders and outsiders that characterises discourses on tourism is nonetheless also based on hospitality.

The milestone of what we could define 'contemporary tourism' in Sardinia was placed in the early '60s. The earliest phases of touristic development run by the Sardinian Institution for Tourist Industries (ESIT) were, indeed, mainly aimed at locals and (few) 'foreigners'.

In 1962, instead, Aga Khan IV invested in a "cultural and environmental realignment" (Macleod, 2013) of the 'unused' northeast. The aim was to create a new 'island within the island', (re)named '*Costa Smeralda*', for the 'consumption' of the international elites (Bandinu, 1989). Although these investments were intended for wealthy customers, they became a significant driving force for mass tourism: not only because the ever-increasing presence of international VIPs drew enormous attention, but also, and above all, because of the establishment of *Alisarda,* the first flight company of the island. Even though the island's economy has undoubtedly benefited, until the rise of B&Bs and Airbnb, touristic development resulted from external investments. Furthermore, they relegated natives to marginal work activities, excluding them from the main profits that, instead, return to the 'foreign' companies. Additionally, in summer, many of those who do not work in the tourist industry often perceive the presence of mass tourism as an "invasion" for several reasons: the increase in the coastal population, going from a few thousand to tens of thousands within weeks; the collapse of the coastal infrastructure system, due to massive car traffic; the crowding of (free) beaches, which reproduces the 'intensive' modalities of beach resorts in the Italian

mainland; and increased prices due to the easy earnings granted by the higher purchasing power of continental tourists.

During the summer of 2020, heated discussions of the neo-colonial nature of tourism emerged in the pages of local newspapers. After closing ports and airports due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Governor of Sardinia reopened them on the condition that non-residents should present a health certificate (which later was proved unobtainable). The mayor of Milan (Unione Sarda, 2020) replies to this measure by saying:

> I do not think Sardinia can live only on local tourism. Milanese people, at least in part, invented Sardinia as a tourist destination. I am not saying that Sardinians should be grateful to us. However, to treat us as plague spreaders? No!

It is enough to read the several online comments below the article (Unione Sarda, 2020) to realise that the exploitation theme is recurrent in the emic perspective. Conversely, we can note that the natives' counter-narratives are based on an idea of the island as a 'private home' over which the autochthonous have the right of pre-emption (Molz & Gibson, 2007, pp. 10–11): "Tourism in Sardinia was created by nature and by the care of the islanders"; "He is convinced that everything can be bought, but he is definitely wrong! Furthermore, if he wants to enter someone else's house as a guest and does not abide by the rules of the landlord, he is very impolite and is not a welcome guest"; "[...] Lombards have only succeeded in cementing every corner of [this] paradise […]. You invade Sardinia for two months a year, and we [Sardinians] also have to thank you?"; "The owners of second homes brought the virus. The first case was that of a man from Romagna who came to work. The latest one a Lombard 'donkey' who left the airport without waiting for the outcome of the swab" (Unione Sarda, 2020).

Here, I report the digital exchange between two readers, as it shows the contrast between the notion of hospitality as a gift to foreigners and the tourist reception market. Responding to a comment by user 'Gapaolo' (Unione Sarda, 2020), which reads:

> Someone has to remember that we Sardinians are the friendliest people because we have always been friendly with everyone. Furthermore, together with 'Meridionali' [Southern Italians], Sardinians living in Lombardy help [the Lombard] economy a lot. However, they have not always been friendly with us.

To this, user 'Mauricgn' (Unione Sarda, 2020) replies:

> Those times are definitely gone. Unfortunately, in Sardinia, the tourists are seen as 'easy targets' and nothing else. I understand that on a needy island that produces almost nothing, this is almost inevitable. Regarding cordiality, I would let it go. In Sardinia, you can find arrogant people as much as polite people, just as everywhere else.

Since the '70s, an 'apparently' different type of tourism has taken place in the inland areas, defined as "ethnic" tourism (Satta, 2001, pp. 62–64). Far from the coasts — considered common good and owned by no one — this "ethnic" tourism aims at enhancing the territory and its traditions. Nevertheless, it is more about branding the island than about safeguarding its cultural heritage (Macleod, 2013), putting it at risk of "tourismification" (Salazar, 2009).

At the end of the last century, structured events such as *Autunno in Barbagia* (Autumn in Barbagia) and *Cortes apertas* (open courtyards) arose, 'playing' on the footprint of 'ancient hospitality's poetics' (Herzfeld, 1997/2016). On these occasions, houses open up their intimacy alongside their courtyards to the curiosities of 'strangers'. As mentioned above, it is an 'apparently different' tourism because, as Silvia Barberani (2006, p. 90) specified in the wake of Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical model:

> The encounter between host and guest appears as an opposition between visitors' desire to penetrate the intimacy of back regions, and the desire of locals to protect their privacy trying to limit the tourists' gaze to the surface of the front regions.

In the most recurrent and widespread manifestation of hospitality cultural practice — *su cumbidu* ('the invitation') — the interactions between locals and 'foreigners' usually occur in the bar and can last several hours. On these occasions, we can observe the 'home-group' performing its compactness according to a well-studied scenography. It includes the specific host and his '*cricca*' (friendship clique), as well as the bartender. During the stay at the bar, the 'outsider' guest, especially if they are a tourist, cannot participate in the gift-giving circuit where each friend will take turns paying for the clique's drinks (Satta, 2001, pp. 163–179; Sorge, 2009). The guest — albeit hyper-socialised — is included in the circuit in a subordinate position. As if a child, they are 'obliged' to continuously receive without the possibility of reciprocating (Godbout, 1998, pp. 41–42). The alienation of 'foreigners' from active participation is emphasised when the 'hosts' speak in Sardinian language, thus excluding the 'guests'.

(Im)migrations

The relationship between 'host' and 'guest' also allows a connection with the topic of migration. Considering migrants over the course of the history of human mobility, the stories go beyond those which tragically fill today's newspapers. In the 18th century, people coming from the island of Tabarca moved to Sardinia to settle in the uninhabited islands of San Pietro and Sant'Antioco. In the 19th century, people from the island of Ponza arrived in Eastern Sardinia to practice offshore fishing for commercial purposes. Since the beginning of the 20th century, people from Northern Italy also arrived with the demand for the labour force for mining and the reclamation of large swampy areas.

Looking at the historical evolution of the migration phenomenon in Sardinia, it is worth remarking that the island has been affected since the late '70s by incoming migratory flows (Gentileschi, 2009). Furthermore, for the first time in history, incoming flows were more consistent than the outgoing ones and mainly involved people from countries outside of the European Economic Community (later European Union; EU). As the EU is a constantly evolving economic-political subject, its legislative developments are accompanied by changes in people's status and 'autochthonous' sentiment. To cite one case, upon their arrival in the '90s, Romanians were the object of growing social stigma, which only diminished with the entrance of Romania into the EU in 2004.

In the last fifty years, Polish men and young Palestinian refugees first arrived in Sardinia to work in the mines (the former) and as university students (the latter). From the '80s, Moroccan and Senegalese men turned up in numbers, creating the conditions to establish a novel labour niche in the itinerant trades. Subsequently, Chinese people came for trade and

food services. At the same time, women and men from Eastern European countries and the former USSR started working in the farmlands and as caregivers for the elderly. Indeed, changes that had occurred in the social organisation of Sardinians during the previous thirty years no longer allowed these tasks to be carried out within the domestic unit. However, not even such influxes compensated for the exodus of the 'indigenous' population.

Nonetheless, Patrizia Manduchi (2007, cited in Bachis, 2013, pp. 241–242) highlighted that the overlapping of depopulation and resettlement has contributed to the affirmation of positive discourses. These were also often used as a model to contrast the settlement conditions of the urban contexts of Northern Italy. Bachis (2013, pp. 241–242) summarised them through two arguments: on the one hand, an institutional discourse that identified migrants as a possible replacement for the 'indigenous' population (increasingly smaller and older); and on the other hand, public discourses which encouraged the continuation of the "custom of hospitality."

As previously discussed, hospitality practices are structured around specific rules. In Sardinia, they appear to be heavily influenced by 20th-century emigration. The fact that Sardinians lived the migratory experience and the related one of being the object of social stigma, both in other Italian regions and abroad, seems to constitute a pivot on which to build non-antagonistic dialogic practices.

Among various scholars and writers who noted this, it is relevant to quote the perspective of Boucar Wade (2016, pp. 32–33), a Senegalese writer and street seller — "Sardinian-by-adoption" — who writes:

> All this set [of negative experiences] that marked the traditional Sardinian migration has naturally motivated an immense understanding of the new migrants. [Sardinians] closed their eyes on many small behaviours that would never be tolerated if engaged in by their countrymen […]. They have seen in these people [the migrants] the pressing need for survival.

A connection between incoming and outgoing movements can also be found in regional legislation since the early '90s. Aimed at enhancing the importance of community ties during the migratory path, the Region has promoted associationism among Sardinian emigrants beyond Sardinia and immigrants within Sardinia. Thanks to Regional Law 7/1991 and its allocated funds, *circoli* (clubs) opened wherever a large community of emigrants was present. Their role was "the assistance and enhancement of Sardinian emigrant culture, and their human and professional resources [because they] play a decisive role in strengthening the cultural identity, especially in the current global context" (Regione Autonoma della Sardegna, n.d.). Currently, there are 66 registered clubs in Italy and 53 in the rest of the world (Regione Autonoma della Sardegna, n.d.). Migrants' associations in Sardinia are decreed by Regional Law 46/1990 concerning the "Rules for protecting the living conditions of non-EU workers in Sardinia" (Region Autonoma della Sardegna, n.d.). More than thirty years after the promulgation of this law, it is still within its provisions that dozens of associations find the funds for activities aimed at promoting interculturalism.

Due to the heterogeneity that marks the 'migrant category', I focus on those who "burned the borders" (Obinu, 2013) between June 2014 and December 2017. I refer to those who arrived through small boats and rafts directly from Algeria and those brought to Sardinia

by NGO ships engaged in search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean. This 'group', likewise discretionary, consist of over 22,000 men, women, and children — mainly from sub-Saharan and Northern Africa — who have been relocated to the island. Even though they arrived to 'take benefit' of a structured 'welcoming' for asylum seekers, it is essential to note that insularity entails critical issues in everyone's migration projects. Seen from another angle, as in the rest of the country and other islands like Crete (Lenz, 2010) or Lesbos (Vietti, 2019), in Sardinia, the need for accommodation led to the 'appearance' of facilities to lodge migrants. More precisely, there has been a (easier and cheaper) 'conversion' of disused buildings and accommodation facilities running at an economic loss. This 'welcoming' system has meant that the island, and even small villages in the inland areas, came into contact with forced migration routes and correlated territorial settlement — almost suddenly, and for the first time. With prefectural provisions, and often without consulting the population, SPRARs (Protection Service for Asylum Seekers and Refugees) and CASs (Extraordinary Welcoming Centres) opened in several inland centres with less than 5,000 inhabitants, 'welcoming' dozens of people. Again, it would be more accurate to say they are 'lodged under a regime of partial freedom'. At worst, people were interned in the penitentiary structures of the CPR (Permanent Repatriation Centre) accused of illegal migration. The mere existence of such 'disciplinary structures' shows that Sardinia, after decades of its apparent peripheral position, maintains a role as a "barrier, hub and place of settlement" within "a circle of useful peripheries" (Bernardie-Tahir & Schmoll, 2014, p. 48) of which Malta and Sicily are also part (see also Albahari, 2008; Chambers, 2008).

Shedding my role as researcher, I directly experienced the National Reception System while collaborating with an NGO engaged in managing services related to the reception/welcoming of asylum seekers. During this experience, I could interact with various social actors discussing the ways 'Sardinians' were or were not putting into practice their renowned hospitality and the non-virtuous work of some associations. As Daniela DeBono (2019) did after field working in Malta and Lampedusa, I would like to point out that the humanitarian rhetoric of reception/welcoming has generated misunderstandings in the collective perception of the phenomenon. Being structured through the 'language of hospitality', migrants' reception/welcoming has been seen as an undue favour and even a waste of economic resources. Contrary to these beliefs, leaving aside money invested for boarding and lodging each migrant, many 'Sardinians' have willingly found an opportunity to not emigrate by working in this sector. Again, many associations have made incredible efforts to develop opportunities for interaction and integration; and many migrants have found the conditions to integrate into society and the labour market. Despite everything, migrants are represented mainly as "freeloaders" (Calabrese & Brisi, 2010) aspiring to an ethnic substitution as part of a neo-colonial project led by undefined "international *poteri forti*" (powerful forces; Calabrese & Brisi, 2010).

As much as in the rest of Europe, the xenophobic, if not racist, positions of some political and social fringes have 're-surfaced' — because they have 'always' existed (Deplano, 2017; Rivera, 2003; Tabet, 1997). Again, Boucar Wade (2016, pp. 32–33) noticed this: "Over time, slowly but unavoidably, the availability and understanding [of Sardinians] melted like snow in the sun, accompanied by unforeseen and inevitable circumstances: the economic crisis and overpopulation." Anyone perceived as an immigrant may experience daily acts of racist exclusion in Sardinia; there have also been occasional manifestations of extreme

violence. Over the years, there was a build-up of criminal acts — sternly condemned at all levels — connected to the arrival of refugees: in some villages, the reception facilities have been devastated; in Sassari, in a football pitch near a CAS, some writings appeared claiming the use of those spaces for the neighbourhood's 'natives' and against the "ni**ers" who occasionally went to play there; finally, in August 2020, there was an attempt to establish a self-managed anti-migrant patrol against the people lodged in the CAS located in the town of Monastir, after the migrants had been accused of spreading COVID-19. Especially on social networking platforms, some have also wished death upon the asylum seekers as a possible solution to avoid their "invasion" and the related "duty of reception."

Migrants are represented and seen as 'new invaders' and not as people embarking on the Mediterranean for lack of alternatives. Moreover, if they got heard, it would be understood that they would leave the island in search of better living conditions as soon as possible. As remembered by Pietro Clemente and Alberto Sobrero (1998, p. ix) — although political and media proclaims often to forget about it (Orrù, 2017) — "To say 'people' is to use a rather demanding expression: at first glance, one grasps above all the ethical value, the value that involves a commitment not to 'objectify' human beings, not to 'combine' cultural forms experienced by individuals." Interviewed by a local magazine, Giulio Angioni, in turn, commented:

> We lack historical memory, and racism arises precisely from ignorance of the past. We would not have such indescribable attitudes if we kept the bitter memories of what we suffered as emigrants […]. We are not interfacing with a new phenomenon. [Current immigration] is only an intensification of what has always existed: the animal-man has always been on the move. Migrations were born with him and occurred at all latitudes; what we are observing today is only more accelerated than in the past. (Runchina, 2016, pp. 50–51)

Conclusion

In this article, I have tried to investigate how the longstanding experience of contact with 'Otherness' Sardinians have had contributed to the development of a feeling of islandness — that, in conclusion, seems to transcend a rational interpretation. Grazia Deledda — the Nùorese Nobel Laureate for Literature — condensed the 'influences' that affected Sardinia and the persistence of nature's impact on islanders' existences in the poem "We are Sardinians" (1897 [M. Colarossi, Trans., 2019]):

> We are Spaniards, Africans, Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Romans, Arabs, Pisani, Byzantines, Piedmontese. / We are the golden-yellow broom that showers onto rocky trails like huge lamps ablaze. / We are the wild solitude, the immense and profound silence, / the brilliance of the sky, the white flower of the cistus. / We are the uninterrupted reign of the mastic tree, the waves that stream over ancient granite, the dog-rose, the wind, the immensity of the sea. / We are a land of long silences, of horizons vast and pure, of plants glum, of mountains burnt by the sun and vengeance. / We are Sardinians.

Based on the excursus above, I suggest that speaking about a singular and homogeneous 'Sardinian identity' would not only be to simplify, but would also reveal a general lack of knowledge. By definition, indeed, the matter of 'ethnic group' always requires addressing the theme of 'Otherness'. Thinking that the island of Sardinia has been isolated for a large part of its history disregards the fact that the Mediterranean is not an 'empty' expanse of saltwater that divides human settlements. Like other seas, it is a frontier space through which people get in touch and cultural exchange occur. Therefore, islands have to be seen not as isolated points but as crossroads — as ethnographic case studies on Sicily, Lampedusa, Malta, Rhodes, Crete, and Lesbos show.

Although Sardinians continue to self-represent as hospitable, it seems that they are just carrying out a process of 'cultural realignment' according to a traditional representation that is becoming stereotyped (Cherchi, 2013, pp. 173–183). The fact that the moral duty towards 'neighbours' is no longer perceived is visible proof of this.

By looking at the contemporary phenomena of touristic reception and of welcoming migrants, I have tried to explore — with a 'native' gaze — how the actual practices and representations around the cultural trait of 'traditional' hospitality have evolved. Hospitality, being carried out within the interaction between at least two people or groups (those who host and those who are hosted), constitutes here a heuristic concept insomuch as it intersects gift and duty, hegemony and subalternity, membership and inclusion, ownership and reception (Candea & Da Col, 2012; Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 1997; Falcioni, 2017; Herzfeld, 1992; Molz & Gibson, 2007).

As tourism spread, millions of 'leisure travellers' arrived in Sardinia, bringing the sector to generate 12% of the regional GDP and giving significant support to air and sea transports. Notwithstanding, the islanders' judgement of it is not unanimously positive. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many people started to respond to several practices by questioning the dependency on the tourism industry. Its economic trend, in fact, often generates opposing sentiments that give rise to talk of exploitation, and as in the case of Malta, to question the rhetoric of the islanders' "openness" (Baldacchino, 2012), renewing the adage "*furat chie benit dae su mare*" ('thieves come from the sea') — a dictum which emerges from the history of past conquests.

Since the '80s, Sardinians have encountered a new 'category' of 'foreigner': the economic immigrant. After forty years, the island has now become not only a territory of transit, but also a destination for "elective residence, family reunification, and, more generally, for projects of settling down" (Corsale, 2013, p. 228; Gentileschi, 2009) for people from all over the world. Furthermore, families who settled on the island, especially children, proved to be indispensable to keep running some services, especially in the inland areas' small and increasingly depopulated towns.

As the result of the so-called "Arab Springs", since 2014, refugees have arrived in Sardinia, as well. The fear of falling into 'poverty' has often overtaken recognition of the human dignity of those who came explicitly asking for asylum. Migrants are, indeed, perceived as undeserving and ungrateful "clandestine invaders," and, as "guests" (Molz & Gibson, 2007, p. 10), they are *a priori* excluded from feeling at home. The sentence "You are born a Sardinian, you don't become one" has recently emerged in the identitary rhetoric after

a Sardinian singer posted on Facebook the picture made by Christopher Porcu of two children wearing local traditional dress during a folkloric-religious event, together with the comment "This is the Sardinia I want" (E. Serra, 2019). The sentence "You are born a Sardinian, you don't become one" not only searches to highlight the identity pride of being born on the island of Sardinia and of being a 'native'; it seeks to establish the right, and therefore the power, to self-represent and to represent another, denying the right to wear that identity symbol — the traditional dress — to a little girl because she is not an 'indigenous' with the 'typical' phenotypic traits of 'Sardinians': she has black skin, 'symbol' of her Otherness as an Afro-descendant. Paradoxically, a central role in this hypostatisation of ethnic perception is played by those emigrants, who, living abroad and emphasising their own culture, tend to assume a museum-like identity and 'racist' positions which are also shared through social media profiles. Paraphrasing Clifford (1997), we could say that 'Sardinian-ness', too, is shaped between roots and sites. The 'purist' chorus of a national-xenophobic identity matrix was fortunately countered by a larger one that defended the child's right — as well as her parents' and those who lent her that valuable dress — to feel a legitimate actor within the community where she is living and growing up. The story reached beyond regional borders and was reported and commented on both social and traditional media. The aforementioned picture even became the cover for an issue of 7 - *Sette: Il settimanale del Corriere della Sera* (March 28, 2019), a national weekly, with the title, "Why is this photo important? An innocent shot, a post on Facebook, violent and cruel responses. Nevertheless, Sardinia reacts and indicates the road to integration."

In the wake of what Jean Hiernaux (1969) said, that it is not nature but history and politics that make and undo human populations, we can say that it is not nature but cultural-political-economic decisions that establish the existence of infrastructural connections between territories and their peoples.

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