

# Sardinian, Italian, Mediterranean: The Significance of Cagliari's Liminality in Post-War Documentaries and Newsreels

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## Understanding the liminal position of Cagliari after WWII: context and methods

“Ci prenderemo cura di lei perchè è una forte e sincera regione d’Italia” (We will take care of her because she is a strong and sincere region of Italy). This sentence is from the voiceover of a 1949 newsreel entitled *Notizie dalla Sardegna: prima fiera campionaria* (News from Sardinia: the first trade fair).<sup>1</sup> It describes a scene in which young girls dressed in folk costumes observe and cautiously touch a huge tractor exhibited at the international fair held in Cagliari, the capital city of the island. The girls embody Sardinia and her contact with modernization (represented by the tractor) in a process that notably occurs in the island’s capital city. The narrator’s use of the first-person plural (“we will take care”) implies that it is time for both the city and the island to be properly integrated into the larger social, political, and economic framework of Italy.

Narratives and visual tropes such as those mentioned above were a persistent feature of state-supported non-fiction films about the city of Cagliari. Although a wealth of scholarship has addressed the construction of the image of Sardinia in post-war films, this has predominantly focused on either banditry or economic and touristic development, and has paid much less attention to newsreels about the island’s capital city.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, this article will focus on twenty-five short

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1 “Dalla Sardegna: prima fiera campionaria,” *La Settimana INCOM* 247 (Rome: INCOM, February 4, 1949), newsreel. Due to the serial nature of the analyzed newsreels, as well as the absence of an identifiable author or director, the footage will be referenced by indicating the title in quotation marks, the series in italics, and the identificatory number of the newsreel; following this, the place of production, the studio, and the date are given in brackets. The film corpus analyzed here was viewed at the Historical Archive of the *Istituto LUCE*, whose film archive is also available online at *ArchivioLuce*, accessed July 28, 2020, <http://www.archivioluce.com>. All translations from Italian are my own.

2 Goffredo Fofi and Gianni Volpi, *Vittorio De Seta: il mondo perduto* (Turin: Lindau, 1999); Gianni Olla, *Dai Lumièra a Sonetaula, 109 anni di film, documentari, fiction e inchieste televisive*

films produced between 1947 and 1964—the golden age of Italian post-war newsreels—that deal with the political and economic situation of Cagliari, plans for its urban development, and the city’s traditions.<sup>3</sup> Following Ann Rigney’s and Astrid Erll’s invitation to expand the transnational paradigm in memory studies,<sup>4</sup> this article will first contextualize both the city’s transcultural background and the mechanisms of film production. This will allow it to ascertain the extent to which the complex cultural memories of Cagliari were selectively used and adapted based on the aspiring hegemonic national discourses underpinning these films.<sup>5</sup> It will then examine how such a selective adaptation cinematographically remapped the fluid status of Cagliari between isolation/archaism, and the modernization project pushed by Italy. To shed light on these processes, the concept of liminality will be used to foreground how translocal, transnational, and transcultural memories were re-arranged and able to dialectically coexist within the film corpus. The intersection of time (post-Fascism, the passage from “archaism” to modernization) and space (the island, in the middle of the Western Mediterranean Sea, as part of Italy yet separated from the peninsula) alludes to the uncertain position of Sardinia’s capital city within Italian maps of belonging.<sup>6</sup> As such, the analysis will deal with the paradoxical coexistence of two sets of contradictions: first, the attempt to disentangle the city from an essentialized image of the past and join the nation-state on its journey towards modernization; and second, though related, the re-articulation of its transcultural past in order to reframe its peculiar identity. The filmic representations of Cagliari will be understood accordingly as referring to a

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*sulla Sardegna* (Cagliari: Cuccu, 2008); Antioco Floris, *Banditi a Orgosolo: il film di Vittorio De Seta* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubettino, 2019).

3 Post-war cinematographic news broadcasts presented some continuities in terms of style and production with the propaganda films made during Fascism. From the late 1950s onward, the advent of television broadcasts brought the use of cinematographic information services to a slow decline. INCOM ceased newsreel production in 1964.

4 Ann Rigney and Astrid Erll, “Editorial,” *Memory Studies* 11, no. 3 (2018): 272–273.

5 This article uses the terms “discourse” and “discursive” in line with a Foucauldian understanding, whereby discourse indicates sets of representation, texts, institutions, and social and cultural conventions that produce culturally and historically located meanings and specific forms of knowledge. See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. Sheridan Smith (London: Routledge, 1989 [1969]); Michel Foucault, *L’ordre du discours* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970).

6 In this article, “Fascism” (with a capital F) will be used when referring to the Italian regime (1922–1943), often also called the *ventennio*. The adjective “fascist” will always be in lower case, following Roger Griffin, “Studying Fascism in a Postfascist Age: From New Consensus to New Wave?,” *Fascism: Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies* 1 (2012): 1–17. Post-fascist (hyphenated), as with other words prefixed with ‘post-’ (like post-colonial, post-war), will be used to indicate a temporal fracture, in this case the period that comes after the fascist regime; postcolonialism/postcolonial (not hyphenated) refers to the political, ideological, and scholarly critique of colonial history, practices, and knowledge.

form of permanent liminality, unable to comprehensively breach the discursive polarization between nation/modernity and island/backwardness.<sup>7</sup>

From a more theoretically oriented perspective, post-Fascist newsreels and documentaries will be regarded as cultural memory *dispositifs* (apparatuses) due to the role they played in enhancing and maintaining hegemonic exercises of power within the national community.<sup>8</sup> *Dispositif* refers to a specific and historically mutable arrangement of elements and the system of relations between these elements; it thus has a “dominant strategic function” that responds to an “urgent need.”<sup>9</sup> As memory *dispositifs*, such short films were part of a “conglomeration of media text” that determined the nature and function of cultural memory at a given time.<sup>10</sup> They therefore did not “transport public memory innocently”;<sup>11</sup> rather, they filtered and circumscribed how Italians should adapt their translocal and transcultural memories according to the new image of a national future, which itself reflected the hegemonic forces at play in post-war Italy.<sup>12</sup> The choice to focus on this rather neglected corpus of short films, in other words, is motivated by their claim to represent a given

7 Agnes Horvath, “Mythology and the Trickster,” in *Democracy and Myth in Russia and Eastern Europe*, ed. Alexander Wöll and Harald Wydra (London: Routledge, 2008), 39–58; Arpad Szakolczai, “Living Permanent Liminality: The Recent Transition Experience in Ireland,” *Irish Journal of Sociology* 22, no. 1 (2014): 28–50.

8 Michel Foucault, “The Confession of the Flesh,” in *Power/Knowledge Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, ed. and trans. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980 [1977]), 194–228; Giorgio Agamben, *What is an Apparatus? And Other Essays* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

9 Foucault, “The Confession of the Flesh,” 195.

10 Laura Basu, “Memory *Dispositifs* and National Identities: The Case of Ned Kelly,” *Memory Studies* 4, no. 1 (2011): 33–41.

11 Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 20.

12 In using the phrase “trans-local memories,” I refer to a variety of mnemonic processes caused by the interrelation between different places and people within and beyond a given geographical area that is not exclusively a nation-state. Halilovich uses this paradigm to describe the memory dynamics of some of the communities that formed around regions of Bosnia, such as the Podrinje region, where local dialects are spoken and local customs continue to be observed. Migration is the key factor connecting local and transnational/transcultural dimensions of cultural memory. However, by expanding the temporal and the spatial perspective, many other factors—such as colonialism, trade, invasions, cattle drive, and nomadism, to name but a few—may have influenced the cultural memory of a given geographic area. Hariz Halilovich, *Places of Pain: Forced Displacement, Popular Memory and Trans-Local Identities in Bosnian War-Torn Communities* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013); Aleida Assmann and Sebastian Conrad, eds., *Memory in a Global Age: Discourses, Practices and Trajectories* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Lucy Bond and Jessica Rapson, eds., *The Transcultural Turn: Interrogating Memory Between and Beyond Borders* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014); Paola Bonifazio, *Schooling in Modernity: The Politics of Sponsored Films in Postwar Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014).

reality according to the ideological agenda of the Christian-Democrat ruling party, as well as that of the capitalist elites. The mediated gaze on Italy that they offer can significantly aid this article's investigation into the articulation of Cagliari's transcultural memories in the context of national reconstruction.

### Cagliari's liminality: temporalities and geographies

The selected films are memory *dispositifs* to the extent that they reworked and remapped Cagliari's transcultural memory in-between Sardinianness, Italianness, Mediterraneanness, and Europeanness. In so doing, they address the liminal position of the city both diachronically and synchronically. Diachronically, the concept of liminality will show how Cagliari's transcultural past was rearranged and portrayed as part of the pathway towards modernization as driven by the Italian nation-state. This process will be read against the background of an anthropological understanding of liminality as provided by Arnold Van Gennep,<sup>13</sup> and later elaborated on by Victor Turner.<sup>14</sup> Both scholars maintain that any rite of passage is characterized by a *séparation* from the pre-ritual stage. After this separation comes the *marge*, the proper liminal condition, a suspended phase which results in the *agrégation* of the initiate in the new status. The three-phase passage referred to by both Van Gennep and Turner provides a useful guiding light for arranging the analysis of the footage. The *séparation* will reveal how the city's transcultural past was selectively reworked in order to be inserted, via the liminal *marge*, into the final stage of *agrégation*, which in turn is presented as a new course of national history and, more broadly, of Western modernity.<sup>15</sup>

Though this methodological track may appear to follow a straight path, it will become clear that narratives about the past, present, and future of Cagliari often intertwine in each film. Arranging the analysis of the whole corpus according to a straightforward evolution from archaism to modernization could therefore be misleading. In a further methodological precaution, it is important to note that the tripartite structure is often reduplicated in the transitional period itself, as some institutionalized passages arise within the

13 Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960 [1909]).

14 Victor Turner, "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*," in *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, ed. Victor Turner (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), 93–111.

15 On the unifying and universal paradigm of Western modernity, which unfolds in the entanglement between coloniality and modernity, see Walter Dignolo, "Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality, and the Grammar of De-Coloniality," *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2 (2007): 449–514; and Enrique Dussel, "Eurocentrism and Modernity (Introduction to the Frankfurt Lectures)," *Boundaries* 20, no. 3 (1993): 65–76.

liminal moment.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, *séparation*, *marge*, and *agrégation* might be best understood as protean categories able to highlight the hidden threads that connect these films, which are themselves rather diverse in terms of content, style, and narrative. That being said, such an awareness will not constrain the applicability of the paradigm of liminality. Rather, it may enable a more finely tuned critical framework that exposes the ideological and discursive forces behind these representations, their evolution, and their attempt to reframe an image of the city and, by extension, of Sardinia in accordance with national interests.

Alongside the diachronic perspective's consideration of categories such as "backwardness" and "modernity," the portrayal of Cagliari offered in these films needs to be understood synchronically in relation to the idea of Sardinian identity as homogeneous, exotic, and subaltern: a paradigmatic image that had long influenced representations of the island by both Sardinians and non-Sardinians alike.<sup>17</sup> Since the second half of the eighteenth century, Italy became a popular stop on the "grand tour," attracting travelers driven by a passion for classical civilization and intrigued by the ruins of the ancient world. Sardinia soon became an alternative destination to the orthodox grand tour destinations because it "embodied an anti-classical, primitive, and barbaric model of civilization viewed as inferior to the world to which they [the travelers] belonged."<sup>18</sup> Travel writing describing the island fed an enduring literary canon that placed the heart of Sardinian identity in the mountain region of Barbàgia, depicted as mysterious, feral, and even lawless; in other words, Sardinia was considered to be untouched by foreign invaders or modernity. At the same time, Cagliari was styled as the place where the archaic and exotic traits of the Sardinian inland negotiated with European modernity, a city which was "lively and in many aspects agreeable; but it is not Sardinia."<sup>19</sup>

Postcolonial elaborations on liminality offer a powerful device for exploring the position of Cagliari as peripherally within the geography of

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16 Bjørn Thomassen, *Liminality and the Modern: Living Through the In-Between* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014); Bjørn Thomassen, "Thinking with Liminality: To the Boundaries of an Anthropological Concept," in *Breaking Boundaries: Varieties of Liminality*, ed. Agnes Horvath, Bjørn Thomassen, and Harald Wydra (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 39–58.

17 Giulio Angioni, "Indigenous Knowledge: Subordination and Localism," in *Nature Knowledge: Ethnoscience, Cognition and Utility*, ed. Glauco Sanga and Gherardo Ortalli (New York: Berghahn, 2003), 287–296; Maria Bonaria Urban, "Lo stereotipo del Sud fra Otto e Novecento: il caso della Sardegna," *Incontri* 26, no. 2 (2011): 50–63; Silvio Carta, "The Ethno-Orientalism of the Sardinian 'Culture'," *Interventions* 16, no. 5 (2014): 675–692.

18 Urban, "Lo stereotipo," 25.

19 Charles Edwardes, *Sardinia and the Sardes* (London: Bentley and Son, 1889), 47; Mauro Pala, "Lawrence e Junger: la Sardegna come antidoto alla modernità," *NAE* 1, no. 1 (2002): 49–54.

Western modernity. Homi Bhabha argues that liminality is an in-between status characterized by ambiguity and hybridity, in which social meanings, subjectivities, and identities are produced.<sup>20</sup> The liminal condition enables the potential for change because it breaches the dichotomous relationship between colonizers and colonized, tackling the multidimensional configurations of the relationship between hegemonic (here national/international) and subaltern (local) elements in a given transcultural relationship. As far as this paradigm is concerned, Cagliari might be regarded as the threshold site between the allegedly constructed authenticity of the inland and hegemonic national and supra-national discourses.

### **Cagliari's transcultural background and integration in the Italian nation-state**

Cagliari has served as a crossroad of cultures, languages, and political systems since the dawn of Western civilization.<sup>21</sup> The succession of Phoenician, Punic, Roman, Byzantine, Pisan, Spanish, and Italian cultures and political forms has left indelible traces in its urban landscape, such as the Tuvixeddu Phoenician necropolis, the Roman amphitheater, the medieval districts of Castello, Marina, Stampace, and Villanova, and the Art Nouveau buildings and areas near the harbor.<sup>22</sup> Linguistic elements of pre-Latin languages (Paleo-Sardinian and Phoenician), Latin, Byzantine, Catalan, Spanish, and Italian also permeate Casteddàiu, the dialect of the Sardinian language spoken in the metropolitan area of Cagliari.<sup>23</sup>

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20 Homi K. Bhabha, "Culture's In-Between," in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London: SAGE, 1996), 53–60; Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

21 Robert J. Rowland, *The Periphery in the Center: Sardinia in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2001); Gian Giacomo Ortu, *La Sardegna dei Giudici* (Nuoro: Il Maestrale, 2005); Giovanni Lilliu, *Sardegna Nuragica* (Nuoro: Il Maestrale, 2006); Michael Hobart, *A Companion to Sardinian History, 500–1500* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

22 Founded in the Neolithic/Nuragic age, Cagliari became a bustling commercial port under the Phoenician and then Punic rulers (seventh to fourth century BCE), and under the dominion of Rome. The collapse of the Roman empire coincided with a period of decline under the Vandals that lasted until the end of Byzantine domination (roughly eighth century CE). The birth of the four *Giudicati sardi* led to an early form of self-governance, which terminated when the Pisans took over the control of the city (twelfth to thirteenth century CE). Roughly a century later, rule passed to the Aragonese crown, which subsequently, together with the Catalans, gave birth to the Spanish Government that ruled Sardinia for four centuries.

23 Michael Jones, "Sardinian," in *The Romance Languages*, ed. Martin Harris and Nigel Vincent (London: Routledge, 1988), 314–350; Eduardo Blasco Ferrer, *Linguistica sarda: storia, metodi, problemi* (Cagliari: Condaghes, 2002).

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Savoy dynasty took over the Sardinian throne, inaugurating an era of modernization.<sup>24</sup> Sardinia became a peripheral extension of the Savoy administration even after unification in 1861, when the island became part of the new Kingdom of Italy.<sup>25</sup> Between 1861 and 1922, the island underwent a challenging transition from the customary rules and traditions to a new national framework that governed social, political, and economic life.<sup>26</sup> The integration of Sardinia within the Italian state, like that of other Southern regions of Italy, has often been described as a form of internal colonialism that radically changed the economic, social, and political configuration of the island.<sup>27</sup> With the advent of Fascism in 1922, Sardinia was more or less forcibly integrated into the Italian national system.<sup>28</sup> This integration manifested through multifaceted political decisions and cultural practices which extended beyond Mussolini's dictatorship into the period of national reconstruction that followed the Second World War.<sup>29</sup>

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24 Antonello Mattone, "La cessione del regno di Sardegna: Dal trattato di Utrecht alla presa di possesso sabauda," *Rivista storica italiana* 1 (1992): 5–89.

25 Mattone "La cessione"; Denis Mack Smith, *Il Risorgimento italiano* (Roma: Laterza, 1999); Manlio Brigaglia, Attilio Mastino, and Gian Giacomo Ortu, eds., *Storia della Sardegna (vol. 2): dal Settecento a oggi* (Rome: Laterza, 2002); Manlio Brigaglia, Attilio Mastino, and Gian Giacomo Ortu, eds., *Storia della Sardegna (vol. 6): la Sardegna contemporanea* (Rome: Laterza, 2002).

26 Girolamo Sotgiu, *Lotte sociali e politiche nella Sardegna contemporanea* (Cagliari: EDES, 1974); Carlo Lucarelli, *The Sardinian Anomaly in Stories of Gangs, Mafias and Honest People* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). This led to a general impoverishment of the island, as well as institutional rebellion, social protests, and mass emigration. It is worth remembering that the first Italian socialist strike calling for an improvement of working conditions took place in the mining area of Buggerru. In this period, banditry also became a widespread means of resisting the Italian authorities, especially in the center of the island.

27 Antonio Gramsci, *La questione meridionale* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1995); Salvatore Sechi, "Autonomia fallita e subnazionalismo in Sardegna," *Italia contemporanea* 161 (1985): 31–58; Nicola Zitara, *L'unità d'Italia: la nascita di una colonia* (Milan: Jacabook, 1975); Marta Petrusiewicz, *Come il Meridione divenne una questione* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 1998); Pino Aprile, *Carnefici* (Milan: Piemme, 2016).

28 Luciano Marroccu, "Il ventennio fascista (1922–1943)," in *Storia d'Italia: le regioni dall'Unità a oggi. La Sardegna*, ed. Luigi Berlinguer and Antonello Mattone (Turin: Einaudi, 1998), 501–713. Regional, political, social, and cultural practices such as the use of variants of the Sardinian language were prohibited so as to promote the Italianization of the island's culture and society. Elements of modernization were more evident in the urban centers of Cagliari, Sassari, Nùoro, and Oristano, whereas Fascism struggled to breach the pre-existing socio-cultural structure in more remote areas.

29 Alberto Boscolo, Manlio Brigaglia, and Lorenzo Del Piano, eds., *La Sardegna contemporanea* (Cagliari: Della Torre, 1995).

## Post-war non-fiction films: reimagining local and national identities

The Second World War devastated Italy. It destroyed cities and social and economic structures, and the violent conflict between the puppet Republic of Salò and the resistance movements formed a persistent sore that remained far from healed.<sup>30</sup> In this fractured context, mass media sought to make “Italian society more visible and audible to its own members” by refashioning local traits into a united Italian social model.<sup>31</sup> Against this backdrop, newsreels and documentaries backed by the government permeated everyday Italian life and propagated a new political, economic, and social agenda.<sup>32</sup>

In 1945, the cinematographic market was formally released from the shackles of the totalitarian control that had characterized the previous fascist propaganda system.<sup>33</sup> However, non-fiction film production and diffusion maintained a peculiar monopoly, or, more accurately, an oligopoly. New laws regulating non-fiction cinema favored the largest companies with close ties to the government and the capitalist institutions that operated during the reconstruction of Sardinia’s identity, such as big industrial groups or agencies with links to the Marshall Plan.<sup>34</sup> Among these companies, the Industria Cortometraggi Milano (INCOM) took the lion’s share of the non-fiction market. INCOM films exalted the expansion of Italian productivity and the repositioning of Italy within the Western-Atlantic sphere. They praised the governing Christian-Democrat party and celebrated the capitalist economy with its associated glamorous, consumerist lifestyle, whilst simultaneously emphasizing local traditions and religious values.<sup>35</sup> Like the fascist

30 Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943–1988* (London: Penguin, 1990); Claudio Pavone, *Una guerra civile: saggio storico sulla moralità nella Resistenza* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1991); John Foot, *Italy’s Divided Memory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). After the imprisonment of Mussolini (July 1943) and the armistice with the Allies (September 1943), Italy became a divided country. The North was formally run by the fascist government (the new *Repubblica di Salò*) and controlled by the Nazi Army; the South remained under the rule of the monarchy and the Allied forces.

31 David Forgacs and Stephen Gundle, *Mass Culture and Italian Society from Fascism to the Cold War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

32 Augusto Sainati, ed., *La settimana INCOM, cinegiornali e informazione negli anni ‘50* (Milano: Lindau, 2001); Bonifazio, *Schooling in Modernity*, 11–27.

33 Phillip V. Cannistraro, *La fabbrica del consenso: fascismo e mass media* (Rome: Laterza, 1975); Mino Argentieri, *L’occhio del regime: informazione e propaganda nel cinema del fascismo* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1979).

34 Lorenzo Quaglietti, *Storia economico-politica del cinema italiano 1945–1980* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1980); Gian Piero Brunetta, *Storia del cinema italiano: dal neorealismo al miracolo economico 1945–1959* (vol. 3) (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1993).

35 Maria Adelaide Frabotta, “Il cammino dei cinegiornali italiani nel Paese e in Europa,” in *Identità italiana e identità europea nel cinema italiano dal 1945 al miracolo economico*, ed. Gian Piero Brunetta (Turin: Edizioni della Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli, 1996), 173–191; Sainati, *La settimana*

propaganda films previously produced by Istituto LUCE, INCOM films were compulsorily shown at every Italian film screening. This meant that both Sardinian and Italian spectators watched these films *en masse*. This touches on one of the most controversial points around the reception of non-fiction films: the audience's appreciation of these products. The majority of scholars agree that post-war non-fiction films were appreciated, mostly because their style was undoubtedly more vibrant and sophisticated than prior fascist footage. However, as political propaganda films came to be regarded as outdated due to the spread of television in the late fifties, it is highly likely that mandatory screenings before feature films for which the audience had bought a ticket began to be perceived as an unnecessary interruption.<sup>36</sup> This notwithstanding, non-fiction footage indirectly backed by the Italian government remained a pivotal and popular tool with which to reimagine national belonging and memories in accordance with the ideological prerogatives of the political and economic elite.

### Traces of Cagliari's transcultural past: the feast of Sant'Efis

A remarkable example of the reworking of Cagliari's transcultural memories for a national audience is provided by a series of newsreels about the religious feast honoring Sant'Efis (Saint Ephysius). The story of Ephysius is one of the very few that runs throughout the timespan considered here, and features several transcultural traits. Ephysius was a Roman soldier born in Antioch (Turkey) who was martyred near Cagliari because of his conversion to Christianity (in the fourth century CE). In the mid-seventeenth century, and under Spanish dominion, Cagliari was ridden with plague. Its local authorities decided to pray to Saint Ephysius to free the city from the disease, organizing a large procession towards the site of his martyrdom. This event has taken place annually ever since.<sup>37</sup>

Two films about the feast, namely *Si celebra da trecento anni la festa in onore del santo che avrebbe salvato l'isola dal flagello della peste: processione in costumi folkloristici* (The feast honoring the saint who would have saved

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INCOM; Pierre Sorlin, "La Settimana INCOM messaggera del futuro," in *La Settimana INCOM: cinegiornali e informazione negli anni '50*, ed. Augusto Sainati (Milan: Lindau, 2001), 71–77; Bonifazio, *Schooling in Modernity*. In spite of the structural and stylistic similarities between LUCE and INCOM production, Pierre Sorlin has highlighted subtle differences between LUCE and INCOM films, suggesting the former were mere tools of political propaganda whilst the latter seemed to be more inspired by capitalist interests.

36 Gianmarco Mancosu, *DecolonItaly: Decolonization and National Identity in Post-War Italy 1945–1960* (PhD diss., University of Warwick, 2020); Argentieri, *L'occhio del regime*; Ernesto G. Laura, *Le stagioni dell'aquila: Storia dell'Istituto LUCE* (Rome: Ente dello Spettacolo, 1999).

37 A smaller procession in honor of Saint Ephysius is organized every Easter Monday, commemorating the unsuccessful attempt by the French navy to invade the city in 1793.

the island from the plague has been celebrated for three hundred years: the procession of folk costumes)<sup>38</sup> and *Cagliari: festa di sant'Efisia* (Cagliari: the feast of Saint Ephysius)<sup>39</sup> assert the distinctiveness and the homogeneity of Sardinian traditions, which are essentialized in the shots of the colorful procession winding throughout Cagliari's streets, in the close-ups of people wearing folk costumes, and in the details of dresses, jewelry, and *traccas* (old Sardinian ox-carts). The diegetic sound of the *launeddas*, a Sardinian woodwind instrument,<sup>40</sup> accompanies the moving images. High-angle shots of people crowding the streets convey the heartfelt involvement of Sardinians in the feast, which stands as an identity marker that attracts and connects people from every corner of the island. Cagliari surfaces here as a site that homogenizes and evens out the multiple and even contradictory histories, memories, and local specificities of the island's sub-regions.<sup>41</sup> All of these stylistic choices tend to detach the celebration and the attendees from their historical dimensions, and the choice to avoid the account of the composite transcultural memories concerning the celebration of Saint Ephysius seems to be consistent with an attempt to "bring Cagliari back to an enchanted place," to quote the voiceover in the 1960s film *Cagliari: la sagra di sant'Efisia*.<sup>42</sup> An island in which time seems to have stopped might be the epitome of such an "enchanted place," and the exaltation of the annual rituality of the procession emphasizes this circular and timeless dimension of Sardinian identity.

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38 "Si celebra da trecento anni la festa in onore del santo che avrebbe salvato l'isola dal flagello della peste: processione in costumi folkloristici," *La Settimana INCOM* 941 (Rome: INCOM, May 8, 1953), newsreel.

39 "Cagliari: festa di sant'Efisia," *La Settimana INCOM* 1401 (Rome: INCOM, May 11, 1956), newsreel.

40 Andreas Fridolin Bentzon, *The Launeddas: A Sardinian Folk Music Instrument* (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1969). The *launeddas* are composed of three hollow canes that are blown into simultaneously using a particular breathing technique that sees the player use their mouth as an air reservoir. One of the pipes produces a droning bass-like sound whereas the other two play a melody. The structure of the instrument and the timbre it produces make the *launeddas* quite similar to the bagpipes.

41 Three macro-areas can be roughly outlined in the island: Campidano is considered to be the southwestern flatland area; Barbagia spans the central mountain region; Gallura consists of the northern area. Each region differs from the others in terms of its geographical, climatic, linguistic, and historical traits. Moreover, Campidano, Barbagia, and Gallura can be divided further into sub-areas, which makes finding consistent identity markers within them even more difficult.

42 "Cagliari: la sagra di sant'Efisia," *Settimanale CIAC* 596 (Rome: Compagnia Italiana Attualità Cinematografiche, May 12, 1960), newsreel.

## ***Séparation: Cagliari's traditions and its contact with the "outer" world***

The cinematographic stabilization and objectification of these transcultural traits disclose an unstable balance between the key categories of tradition and modernity conveyed by the national films about the city. Two other films about the Saint Ephysius procession, *Italia: l'ambasciatore statunitense Zellerbach visita la Sardegna* (Italy: the US Ambassador Zellerbach visits Sardinia)<sup>43</sup> and *Cagliari onora sant'Efisia* (Cagliari pays homage to Saint Ephysius),<sup>44</sup> exemplify the contact between the city's traditions, its exotic features, and the national audience. *Cagliari onora sant'Efisia* praises the city's devotion to the saint, a devotion acknowledged by both the Catholic Cardinal Ottaviani and the Secretary for Post, Telegraph, and Telecommunications, Antonio Maxia, who traveled from Rome to attend the feast. Diegetic and non-diegetic sounds play a crucial role in structuring the film's narrative; the *launeddas*, Sardinian songs, and the noises of the procession lend a folkloric nuance to the film. This sonic dimension, however, contrasts with frames that dwell on people wearing modern clothes and the Art Nouveau buildings of the Cagliari marina. This contrapuntal arrangement of sonic and visual elements is heightened by the voiceover, which talks about an evocative spectacle proper to the "old, but always new, land of Sardinia." The city's suspended time is put in contact with the modernity of the mainland, embodied by the Secretary of the Italian government, as well as the images of an urban landscape that has already been "Italianized." Furthermore, the voiceover stresses that the celebration attracts an increasing number of tourists from the peninsula; the recollection of Sardinian belonging thus begins to assume a marketable dimension, insofar as those traditions are a potential boost for the economic growth of the island.<sup>45</sup>

The tropes of commodification and "ethnographic marketability" of the city's past return in the 1957 film about the visit of the US ambassador James David Zellerbach. The first part of this newsreel explains some of the economic plans that both Italian and international governments are implementing in Sardinia, which are to be supervised by Zellerbach. The second part shows the ambassador attending the Saint Ephysius procession in Cagliari, with a voiceover stating that the island is moving toward the future while keeping its traditions alive. There is a short scene in which two girls wearing folk costumes shake hands with and gently curtsy to the ambassador, who is in an elevated

43 "Italia: l'ambasciatore statunitense Zellerbach (sic!) visita la Sardegna," *La Settimana INCOM* 1534 (Rome: INCOM, May 7, 1957), newsreel.

44 "Cagliari onora sant'Efisia," *La Settimana INCOM* 1916 (Rome: INCOM, May 6, 1960), newsreel.

45 Sandro Rujū, *La Sardegna e il turismo: sei testimoni raccontano l'industria delle vacanze* (Sassari: Edes, 2012).

position on a bench. They seem to pay homage to the US ambassador, who, in the first part of the newsreel, is shown to have supervised and facilitated the development projects. In other words, this scene clearly envisions the *séparation* from traditions by showing the *agrégation* within the nation-state and the Western world, which is welcomed by Sardinians themselves.

These films take into account images and discourses of Sardinia's essentialized identity, at times indirectly and at times more overtly. Even when describing the more modern areas and the city's infrastructure, the film continues to resort to narratives and tropes such as traditional costumes, craftsmanship, and folk music, all of which are portrayed as coming from an undefined and timeless past. Such elements perform a symbolic rather than descriptive function, because they often seem removed from the plot at hand. However, they in fact serve as cardinal directions, conveying the film's narrative and, in so doing, refashion exotic images of Sardinia for a national audience.<sup>46</sup>

### ***Marge*: the city's past and its path toward modernization**

The refashioning of both Sardinian exoticism and archaism for a national audience did not surface exclusively in the films about the Saint Ephysius celebration. Much of the footage about Cagliari's modernization is also characterized by scenes asserting that Sardinia is backward and exotic. In particular, two scenes from the documentary referenced at the very beginning of this article offer remarkable examples of the process that essentialized Cagliari's transcultural past according to its new economic and cultural setting.<sup>47</sup> The film starts with a long aerial shot taken from a plane flying over the city. The voiceover describes the harbor as the place from which Phoenicians, Romans, Byzantines, Pisans, and the Spanish enriched Cagliari's urban landscape and history. A sudden transition brings the viewer into a completely different setting: a low-angle wide shot frames an old woman in traditional dress who walks slowly next to a wall of prickly pears that, according to the commentary, are reminiscent of "African and Oriental visions." The transcultural background conveyed in the first scene is therefore suddenly compressed, de-historicized, and exoticized in order to even more dramatically contrast with the subsequent scenes that feature a crowded trade fair and the technological innovations brought in by the national exhibitors. This film, together with *La III fiera campionaria sarda* (The Third Sardinian

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46 Maria Bonaria Urban, *Sardinia on Screen: The Construction of the Sardinian Character in Italian Cinema* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

47 *La Settimana INCOM* 247, newsreel.

Trade Fair),<sup>48</sup> juxtaposes frames of tractors, trucks, and industrial supplies with close-ups of people wearing folk costumes while sewing or whittling. The voiceover exalts the benefit of such traditional skills, explaining that they are a driving force for the economic growth of the island within the national economic structure.

People wearing folk costumes are also seen in other documentaries about the trade fair (such as the INCOM newsreels 409, 1517, and 1896).<sup>49</sup> In these films, however, folk clothes stand as a symbolic reference point, presenting Sardinia's insularity to a national audience as peculiar and backward instead of showing the conversion of the island economy to the national framework. Moreover, these scenes essentialize the identity of both the city and the island, the latter of which is starkly juxtaposed with the modernity of the mainland. This mechanism is especially evident in a scene from *Tappe della ricostruzione: fiera della Sardegna* (Stages of the reconstruction: Sardinia's Trade Fair),<sup>50</sup> in which people wearing traditional costumes carefully observe plastic models of ships and planes. Their old-fashioned attire symbolizes the isolation briefly mentioned by the voiceover, yet the curiosity with which they regard the plastic models conveys an aspiration to break out of this isolation and embrace modernization.

The juxtaposition between the archaic and backward inland landscape and the urban and modern landscape of Cagliari becomes even clearer in footage showing important visitors such as the Italian Prime Minister and members of parliament; see, for example, the film *Il ministro Taviani in Sardegna* (Minister Taviani in Sardinia).<sup>51</sup> Visitors also included foreign figures such as the US ambassadors Zellerbach and Luce,<sup>52</sup> NATO members,<sup>53</sup> or groups of journalists

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48 "La III fiera campionaria della Sardegna," *La Settimana INCOM* 565 (Rome: INCOM, March 8, 1951), newsreel.

49 "Tappe della ricostruzione: fiera della Sardegna," *La Settimana INCOM* 409 (Rome: INCOM, March 1, 1950), newsreel; "Inaugurata la Fiera di Cagliari alla presenza del Ministro Medici e del presidente della regione," *La Settimana INCOM* 1517 (Rome: INCOM, March 13, 1957), newsreel; "Italia, Cagliari: inaugurata la XII Fiera Campionaria Sarda," *La Settimana INCOM* 1896 (Rome: INCOM, March 23, 1960), newsreel.

50 *La Settimana INCOM* 409, newsreel.

51 "Il ministro Taviani in Sardegna," *La Settimana INCOM* 1387 (Rome: INCOM, April 12, 1956), newsreel.

52 "Sardegna assetata: l'ambasciatore Luce consegna all'isola il foraggio americano che, con quello nazionale, sventerà le minacce della siccità," *La Settimana INCOM* 1192 (Rome: INCOM, May 5, 1955), newsreel.

53 "Ufficiali della Nato in Sardegna," *La Settimana INCOM* 1353 (Rome: INCOM, May 25, 1956), newsreel.

and tourism entrepreneurs.<sup>54</sup> These figures are shown visiting Cagliari and the inland to solve deep-rooted problems such as drought, malaria, and economic and social underdevelopment. They thus embody a hegemonic discourse of development that was put into practice through several economic, social, and military policies. The *Piano di Rinascita della Sardegna* (Plan for Sardinia's rebirth), together with the establishment of numerous NATO military outposts and petrochemical production plants, were exalted as projects that were able to connect the island to the Atlantic-Western world in accordance with the increasingly polarized context of the Cold War.<sup>55</sup>

### ***Agrégation: shifting Cagliari into the Western world***

The presence of Italian as well as foreign politicians, journalists, and entrepreneurs is a testament to the integration and legitimation of Cagliari as a truly Western city. Three films show the integration of the island's capital city in the national/Western political, economic, and cultural framework even more clearly.<sup>56</sup> These films record the inauguration of certain pieces of infrastructure, events attended by Sardinian and Italian politicians who embody the nation-state taking care of the city. This element stands out in the film about a new public housing project in Cagliari, which is celebrated by the Italian Prime Minister Antonio Segni.<sup>57</sup> This film, but also films about the inauguration of the city's industrial district and the railway connecting Cagliari to the mining area of western Sardinia, neither employ symbols of the past (*launeddas*, folk costumes) nor transcultural memories of the city. Instead, long shots of various technological innovations (trains, cranes, buildings) convey the idea

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54 "Numero unico dedicato alla Sardegna: i problemi del lavoro e l'emigrazione e gli sviluppi dell'agricoltura. I villaggi turistici sorgono sulle coste settentrionali," *La Settimana INCOM* 2257 (Rome: INCOM, August 10, 1962), newsreel.

55 Simone Sechi, "La Sardegna negli 'anni della Rinascita'," in *Storia della Sardegna (vol. 5): il Novecento*, ed. Manlio Brigaglia, Attilio Mastino, and Gian Giacomo Ortu (Rome: Laterza, 2002), 66–82; Piero Bevilacqua, *Breve storia dell'Italia meridionale: dall'Ottocento a oggi* (Rome: Donzelli, 2005); Guido Floris and Angelo Ledda, *Servitù militari in Sardegna: il caso di Teulada* (Serdiana: La Collina, 2010); Francesca Sanna, "La miniera e il petrolchimico: una questione storica nella Sardegna e nell'Italia del secondo dopoguerra," *Diacronie* 17, no. 1 (2014): 1–28. The *Piano di Rinascita* (Plan for Sardinia's Rebirth) was composed of a series of investments and policies that led to the heavy industrialization of some areas of the island and the construction of petrochemical, iron and steel, and energy plants. As far as international military presence in the island is concerned, Sardinia is home to 60% of all NATO military bases located on Italian territory.

56 "Una data importante per la Sardegna: inaugurato il tronco ferroviario Villamassargia–Carbonia," *La Settimana INCOM* 1486 (Rome: INCOM, 1956), newsreel; "Politica edilizia: il Presidente del Consiglio inaugura 171 nuove abitazioni," *La Settimana INCOM* 1492 (Rome: INCOM, December 21, 1956), newsreel; "In Sardegna si dà l'avvio alla zona industriale di Cagliari," *La Settimana INCOM* 1506 (Rome: INCOM, February 6, 1957), newsreel.

57 *La Settimana INCOM* 1492, newsreel.

that Cagliari is already within the national framework, and that the liminal and suspended condition of the city is relegated to the past.

The fulfilment of the shift from archaism/isolation to modernization also features in other films that deal with political themes and the diffusion of national/western leisure. As far as the latter topic is concerned, two films about the Italian road cycling championship held in Sardinia portray Cagliari as a city in which a passion for this national sport has already awakened.<sup>58</sup> A similar narrative is conveyed in a 1959 INCOM newsreel about a national song contest held in Cagliari.<sup>59</sup> The voiceover laments that even the “noble land of Sardinia has, alas, its contest,” suggesting that Cagliari has also embraced the more glamorous events proper to the capitalist lifestyle.

The full *agrégation* of Cagliari into the national system features in the few films about political themes that were set in the city. Italy’s geo-political position meant that the country was caught between the two sides of the Cold War. Reconstruction works funded by the Marshall Plan, and the development of the Cold War order, heavily influenced Italian political, cultural, and social life, which started to polarize around the two biggest parties, the Christian-Democrats (closely linked both to the US and to industrial groups) and the Communist Party (the biggest communist party operating beyond the Iron Curtain).<sup>60</sup> This divided political context influenced the representation of Cagliari’s political and economic integration within the national system.

A film about the ten-year anniversary of Antonio Gramsci’s death entitled *Decennale della morte di Antonio Gramsci alla presenza di Palmiro Togliatti* (Tenth anniversary of the death of Antonio Gramsci attended by Palmiro Togliatti) is worth mentioning because it interprets the political memory of the fascist dictatorship as a dreadful chapter of Italian history.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, it portrays Cagliari as the place in which the stark juxtaposition between the Christian-Democrats and Communists could be somehow suspended in remembrance of Gramsci. The first part of the film is set in the village of Ales and portrays people paying tribute to Gramsci’s birthplace, while the voiceover describes him as a martyr killed by fascist hate. The second part is set in Cagliari, and it shows a very well-attended gathering in honor of the

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58 “S’apre la stagione ciclistica: la Sassari–Cagliari,” *La Settimana INCOM* 126 (Rome: INCOM, March 3, 1948), newsreel; “Domenica sportiva in Sardegna: a Fiorenzo Magni la prima del ciclismo. Cagliari–Genoa 1–1,” *La Settimana INCOM* 909 (Rome: INCOM, February 25, 1953), newsreel.

59 “Italia: tanto per cambiare anche in Sardegna un festival della canzone,” *La Settimana INCOM* 1823 (Rome: INCOM, October 2, 1959), newsreel.

60 Elena Aga Rossi and Victor Zaslavsky, *Togliatti e Stalin: Il PCI e la politica estera staliniana negli archivi di Mosca* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007).

61 “Decennale della morte di Antonio Gramsci alla presenza di Palmiro Togliatti,” *La Settimana INCOM* 56 (Rome: INCOM, May 2, 1947), newsreel.

Communist thinker. In spite of the indelible fact of his membership in the Communist Party, Gramsci is described as a figure able to offer unifying values that may assist in rebuilding Italy, and is remembered as a national hero due to his bold anti-fascist activity. The footage also presents Palmiro Togliatti, the leader of the Italian Communist party, proclaiming the universality of Gramsci's thought and the relevance it enjoys well beyond the political debate of his time. This conciliatory narrative is an exception to the standard viewpoint of INCOM productions, especially in view of the company's allegiance to the Christian-Democrat party and capitalist groups.

Political themes concerning the city also feature in films about national and regional elections. *Notizie dalla Sardegna: elezioni regionali* (News from Sardinia: regional elections) recounts Cagliari's journey to become the new capital of the autonomous region of Sardinia, and praises the citizens' fervent participation in regional elections.<sup>62</sup> This enthusiasm materializes through lively editing in which shots of the voters' faces are interspersed with frames of the long queues at the polling station; backdrops for a commentary exalting the democratization that followed Sardinia's authoritarian phase. Another film produced in 1955, *Personaggi della breve crisi, apertasi con le dimissioni di Corrias e conclusa con l'elezione di Brotzu* (The protagonists of the brief crisis, which began with the resignation of Corrias and resulted with the election of Brotzu), is more sober, offering an account of the political crisis that led to the election of the new president of the region of Sardinia.<sup>63</sup> Both films thus show the political *agrégation* of the city within the national system, while also outlining the peculiarities that made Sardinia an autonomous region of Italy.<sup>64</sup> In these films, Fascism is forgotten, or at least not named—though in the latter film the new president of Sardinia, Giuseppe Brotzu, does mention the countless problems Sardinia has inherited and the challenges facing the island if it is to modernize as part of Europe.

These last films depict Cagliari as an important stepping-stone by which the peninsula's social and economic growth may reach the Sardinian inland. The city's role as a bridge to modernization is especially palpable in three other INCOM films.<sup>65</sup> These films share a fairly similar structure. At the

62 "Notizie dalla Sardegna: elezioni regionali," *La Settimana INCOM* 289 (Rome: INCOM, May 13, 1949), newsreel.

63 "Personaggi della breve crisi, apertasi con le dimissioni di Corrias e conclusa con l'elezione di Brotzu," *La Settimana INCOM* 1266 (Rome: INCOM, June 24, 1955), newsreel.

64 Francesco Casula, *Statuto sardo e dintorni* (Cagliari: Artigianarte editrice, 2001). Due to their geographic, linguistic, and cultural peculiarities, Sardinia, Sicily, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol, and Val d'Aosta are sanctioned by article 116 of the Italian Constitution as autonomous regions of Italy.

65 "Sardegna: Nuovi impianti telefonici," *La Settimana INCOM* 415 (Rome: INCOM, March 15, 1950), newsreel; "La Cassa per il Mezzogiorno stanZIA 80 miliardi per la Sardegna," *La Settimana*

very beginning the camera is placed on a ship or mounted on a plane and portrays the city from the perspective of the arriving non-Sardinian visitor. During these scenes, a voiceover usually recounts some historical details about the city, often exalting its beauty and making vague mention of its ancient history. Introductory frames like these are followed by shots of people engaged in manual and agricultural-pastoral work, or remote villages and untouched landscapes dotted with *nuraghi* (megalithic towers left by the Nuragic civilization),<sup>66</sup> *launeddas* music often accompanies such scenes. The commentary intersperses thinly veiled references to the severe socio-economic conditions and the backwardness of the island with descriptions of a utopic arcadia geographically and chronologically detached from the contemporary world. This scenario suddenly changes as the images, soundscape, and commentary depict the new development projects and the technologies introduced by national and foreign actors whose activities are shown to be based in Cagliari. The inauguration of the city's new airport, the introduction of phone lines, the development of public and private industrial districts, and the expansion of shipping, train, and air services are all exalted as serving to connect the inland to the city and, in turn, to the rest of the world.

The scenes of Cagliari's harbor, often shot from the viewpoint of a ship approaching the city, allude to a distance between the peninsula and the island that can be bridged by the implementation of national policies and discourses. Furthermore, very slow camera movements, highlighting the bustle of the harbor full of ships, cranes lined up against the skyline, and the view of lively Rome overlooking the marina, metaphorically exorcize the alleged isolation and anachronism of the city. The harbor is, therefore, a space where Italian modernity can dock and then operate in the city and beyond. The Sardinian inland can finally be inserted into the national system at the "livello delle altre regioni italiane" (level of the other Italian regions), as the voiceover of the film *La Sardegna è al lavoro* (Sardinia is working) asserts.<sup>67</sup>

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*INCOM* 696 (Rome: *INCOM*, December 28, 1951), newsreel; "Lo sviluppo economico in Sardegna," *La Settimana INCOM* 1707 (Rome: *INCOM*, October 31, 1958), newsreel.

66 The Nuragic civilization (*civiltà nuragica*) developed in Sardinia from the twentieth century BCE until the second century BCE. The name is derived from its most characteristic monument, the *nuraghe*, a megalithic tower with a truncated-cone shape devoted to multiple functions (social, military, religious, astronomical). Currently, at least 7000 *nuraghi* dot the Sardinian territory. The Nuragic civilization left no written records; the only written evidence of their existence comes from Greek, Roman, Egyptian, and Phoenician literature, which, however, must be considered more mythological than historical in nature. See Stephen L. Dyson and Robert J. Rowland Jr., *Shepherds, Sailors, and Conquerors: Archeology and History in Sardinia from the Stone Age to the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); see also Lilliu, *Sardegna Nuragica*.

67 "La Sardegna è al lavoro," *La Settimana INCOM* 2171 (Rome: *INCOM*, January 12, 1962), newsreel.

## Cagliari's permanent liminalities: bridging the gap between the island and the peninsula

The problematic status of Sardinia's capital as a fully European location is the *fil rouge* that permeates the whole corpus of films. It seems that these films sought to protect Cagliari and Sardinia from "the danger of sliding towards nearby Africa and the Third World," as Giulio Angioni describes it.<sup>68</sup> The footage attempts to avoid this danger by pedagogically envisioning the three passages (*séparation, marge, agrégation*) that transform the Sardinian society from an archaic to a modern one, albeit one driven mostly by non-Sardinian figures and paradigms. Quite peculiarly, however, these passages do not forcefully imply a straightforward obliteration of the "exotic" and "backward" traits that had traditionally characterized the portrayal of Cagliari and Sardinia in European culture. Rather, scenes showing a city participating in Italian/European modernity exist alongside the reproduction of images of Sardinia as peculiar and archaic.

This corpus does not define a straightforward passage from exoticism/backwardness to modernity. Rather, divergent cultural memories coexist within the footage, referring to what scholars such as Bjørn Thomassen, Agnes Horvath, and Arpad Szakolczai among others have conceptualized as "permanent liminality."<sup>69</sup> This conceptual tool tackles not only the nature of a given transition, but the configuration of modern societies as a whole. This is because some practices established during liminal periods—in our case the transition from Fascism to the Republic and the process of the industrial modernization of Sardinia—tend to assume "qualities of structure," thus becoming permanent beyond the transitory time span.<sup>70</sup> The rhetoric expressed by these films cements the in-betweenness of Cagliari. On the one hand, the footage recounts the city's past through tropes, symbolic elements, and narratives about Sardinian identity that have spread across European culture since the eighteenth century that are, in turn, juxtaposed with the modernization imported from the mainland. On the other hand, but in a manner still clearly related to this emphasis on the past, Cagliari is portrayed as a space in which modernization has already been moored, which negotiates the multifaceted transcultural traits of its history with the economic and social models proper to the Western world. Thus, representations of the city dwell in an unstable condition where old tropes are re-articulated along with the postulation of a new Italian identity.

68 Angioni, "Indigenous Knowledge," 293.

69 Thomassen, "Thinking with Liminality"; Horvath, "Mythology and the Trickster"; Szakolczai, "Living Permanent Liminality."

70 Thomassen, "Thinking with Liminality," 51.

This fluid balance between the exaltation and the eradication of the liminal nature of the city's transcultural background sets Cagliari both *within and outside the imagined community of Italy and the self-defined civilized world*.<sup>71</sup> Such a juxtaposition aesthetically materializes the paradigm of "Orientalism in one country," inasmuch as the films provide an attractive form of "at-hand diversity" that can be inserted in the path towards modernization as led by the Italian state.<sup>72</sup> Therefore, by welcoming modernization, Cagliari becomes a liminal site in which the particularities of Sardinian identity can be reworked and set against the background of policies and discourses introducing modernization in the city and, in turn, in the island.

Together with this diachronic inclusion of the city within Western modernity, the set of films address Cagliari's liminality synchronically in relation to the discourse of a homogeneous (and subaltern) Sardinian identity; that is to say, the negotiation between tradition and modernity put the city not simply between past and future, but also in a spatial-liminal position where the archaism and even lawlessness of the Sardinian inland, as alleged in some coeval representations,<sup>73</sup> is dissolved, while national unity and Western modernization are welcomed. Cagliari therefore becomes a site suspended between what had been constructed as the heart of Sardinian identity (the mountainous inland of Barbagia) and the Mediterranean Sea, where both invaders and beneficial exchanges arrived. As such, the city stands as a threshold space, accommodating disjunctive and even contradictory temporalities and geographies, and where diverse meanings are "simultaneously represented, suspended, and inverted."<sup>74</sup> The harbor of Cagliari in particular is a heterotopic site in which the inland's archaism is dissolved and the clock of modernity ticks. Nevertheless, it also stands as a counter-site recalling the age of invasions that, according to the discourses of these films, kept Sardinia in an isolated and backward state. Cagliari is thus simultaneously "Italian" and "other," a city whose position in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea makes it isolated as well as transculturally connected with its memories. Tradition and modernity, archaism and democratization, isolation and a capitalist way of life are therefore intertwined in this corpus of films, echoing *de facto* the multi-layered liminalities of the complex transcultural memories of the city.

71 Silvia Contarini, Margherita Marras, and Giuliana Pias, eds., *L'identità sarda del XXI secolo tra globale, locale e postcoloniale* (Nuoro: Il Maestrale, 2012), 4–12.

72 Jane Schneider, ed., *Italy's "Southern Question": Orientalism in One Country* (New York: Berg, 1998); Urban, *Sardinia on Screen*.

73 Olla, *Dai Lumière a Sonetaula*; Valeria Deplano, "Ripensare la Sardegna: l'immagine dell'isola negli anni della Rinascita," in *La Sardegna contemporanea: idee, luoghi, processi culturali*, ed. Valeria Deplano, Francesco Bachis, and Luciano Marroccu (Roma: Donzelli, 2015), 673–694.

74 Such a vantage point is consistent with Michel Foucault's definition of heterotopia as a site "juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible." Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," trans. Jay Miskowicz, *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986), 25.