BERLUSCONI, RAI AND THE MODERNISATION OF ITALIAN FEUDALISM

CINZIA PADOVANI

ANDREW CALABRESE

Cinzia Padovani is Ph.D. student and Andrew Calabrese is Associate Professor in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Colorado at Boulder, PO Box 287, Boulder, CO 80309.

Introduction

Since the time this research[1] was done, the Prime Minister of Italy, Berlusconi was indicted on several charges of corruption for bribing government officials (*The Observer*, 21 May 1995; Vivarelli 1995). Berlusconi is known to have had a long and very close friendship with exiled former Socialist Prime Minister Bettino Craxi, who lives in Tunisia and has been tried **in absentia** and convicted of corruption charges, and who will be jailed if he returns to Italy. Craxi is known to have doled many political favours to Berlusconi during the former's time as mayor of Milan and later as Prime Minister of Italy.

Also since the time this paper was written, nationwide popular referendums were held to decide twelve different controversial issues in Italian politics, four of which pertain to broadcasting policy. Prior to the referendums, Berlusconi used his TV networks, CANALE-5, RETE-4, and ITALIA-1 to conduct an anti-referendum publicity campaign in the hopes of preventing the votes from taking place. Berlusconi characterised the possible forced divestiture of his Fininvest broadcasting holdings as the spectre of a possible "colonisation of Italy" by powerful outside investors. Not surprisingly, Berlusconi played the nationalism card in order to manipulate popular opinion in his favour (Taylor and Gilligan 1995). The four media-related referendums, voted on 11 June 1995, were as follows: (1) to limit individuals to the ownership of one television channel (voting outcome: NO); (2) to do away with advertising breaks during televised films (voting outcome: NO); (3) to limit the activities of advertising companies (such as Publitalia, a Fininvest company) to two national channels (voting outcome: NO); and (4) to allow RAI, the Italian public broadcasting authority, to be privatised (voting outcome: YES). The po-

sitions of Berlusconi and his allies were supported on all four counts, contrary to the positions of the Democratic Party of the Left (PDS). During the referendum campaign, Berlusconi used his television networks to maximum advantage. The referendum outcomes do not create new laws, but they do undermine Italy's Constitutional Court ruling that a 1990 law permitting Berlusconi to own three networks is invalid (Graham 1995). Berlusconi has divested some of his financial share of Fininvest, but he retains majority ownership, and the three TV networks remain Fininvest property. The sale and restructuring of portions of Berlusconi's assets is considered to have resulted in putting Fininvest on much more solid financial ground, and it is anticipated that this will lead to more efficient media operations (Hill 1995).

Leading Italian journalists tend to agree that the Berlusconi government represented the emergence of a new social bloc which would consolidate and last for a long time (Delavecuras 1994, 15). As one well-known columnist for ***Corriere della Sera*** recently stated, "Nobody really knows how the story will end. The only thing everybody is sure of is the impossibility for the crisis to end in a short period of time" (Franchi 1994, 5).

The "Great Dichotomy" and the Defences of Public Communication

The dichotomy of public and private, and more importantly the blurring of this dichotomy, is a classic source of tension and inquiry in social and political theory and practice. In his lamentation on modern "re-feudalisation," Habermas (1989) writes that mass media function effectively in advanced capitalist society as means to manipulate opinion in the service of elites, not to subject ideas to the court of public opinion. Following Habermas, Bobbio (1989, 16) writes of "the revenge of private interests through the formation of large organised groups which make use of the public apparatus in order to achieve their own aims." As Bobbio notes, feudalism reminds us of an age in which "political relations are contractual," (Bobbio 1989, 15) and where the distinction between public and private is nonexistent.

If the public sphere can embody such ideals as the ones found in the writings of those who lament their demise, then it is important to understand whether and to what extent modern media institutions, and media policy, can become more responsive to its constitution. We believe it is important to keep alive the general ideal of a positive relation between media and democracy, at least insofar as media institutions may constitute public spaces within which democratic life can flourish. This paper is concerned with the situation of the public broadcasting service in Italy. The urgent need for exploring the condition of the Italian public broadcasting system known as RAI (Radiotelevisione Italiana) springs from recent events, specifically the influences the recently collapsed Italian government, and its Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, have exercised upon RAI.

As privatisation and deregulation efforts in Italian broadcasting under Berlusconi's political leadership have illustrated, the pace of breakdown in the public-private dichotomy has been accelerated. Issues of ownership, which already were in question before the advent of commercial television (indeed, RAI from its beginning was funded by private and public capital), have now become more confused through political interference. What is most significant is that public service broadcasting seems to have lost much of its **raison d'être** in the Italian context. What is happening in Italy is in

some ways an extreme case of a process widespread among the affluent countries of the North of decay in the importance and justification of public broadcasting. The theoretical and political problems which are behind this eclipse are alarming. Issues regarding the right to participate on a universal basis in a country's cultural, political and social heritage, and the right "to live the life of a civilised being," (Barbalet 1988, 182) appear to be at risk if a central public space is steered primarily by profit-based considerations. Implicit in the analysis of the Italian case below is that it is indeed in the specific role of public television, and the specific task of the state, to foster and guarantee some forms of universal rights to be informed, and to have access to the means of communication, without which, as Garnham argues, it would be impossible

> *for citizens to possess the knowledge of the view of others necessary to reach agreements between themselves (...) to possess knowledge of the actions of those to whom executive responsibilities are delegated so as to make them accountable; to possess knowledge of the external environment necessary to arrive at appropriate judgment of both personal and societal interests* (Garnham 1992, 364).

Ironically, the Italian Prime Minister, who should represent the public interest above any private interest, was at the same time the owner of an international media empire. Among the unfortunate outcomes of that situation is that during the last month of September 1994, on the occasion of the election of the General Directors of the three RAI channels (RAI 1, RAI 2, and RAI 3), there were suspicions regarding presumed actions taken by Berlusconi himself, and by his government, actions which were to lead to the support and the eventual election of people from CANALE 5, (one of Berlusconi's commercial television channels) and from Fininvest (his holding company), as the new General Directors. These decisions were strongly opposed and criticised by the journalists of RAI, who had been lamenting the fact that no one among them had even been taken into consideration as possible leadership candidates in RAI. These events bring attention to an issue that deserves examination, namely, whether there is a future for public service broadcasting in Italy. In addressing this issue, we provide an historical account of the development of public and private television in Italy with the primary goal of highlighting the way in which the concepts of the public, and the concept of television as a public service, have been evolving from the beginnings of television broadcasting up through the 1980s, when the advent of commercial broadcasting became evident.

The guiding thesis of this study is that Italy's polity is moving at an accelerated pace towards a neo–feudalist era, as judge Antonio Di Pietro lately has defined it. One of the reasons for this re–feudalization might be found in the fact that television is dismissing its role as a public space and is becoming perhaps more concerned in pushing quickly toward an alignment which is already familiar in the United States but is more novel in Italy, namely, the identification of "public" and "market," of "citizen" and "consumer." However, it is precisely this relative unfamiliarity which makes the privatisation and deregulation of Italian broadcasting seem barbaric to many, and which may explain the vigour of opposition towards the Berlusconi government. But in the wake of that effective opposition to Berlusconi's populist and rightist revolution, what is the rationale and what are the resources available for sustaining a movement to resist a more subtle and insidious process of contamination of the idea of the public in Italy, including its broadcasting system? The force behind the rallying cries of Berlusconi's opponents in the streets of Italian cities during the final days of his

regime must be translated into ideas and measures which sustain and extend the public space of the streets more fully into the public space of the media.

How was Berlusconi possible? More specifically, what in the Italian understanding and expression of the public interest made Silvio Berlusconi's initiative to overpower RAI with a commercial system and to dismantle RAI possible? To address these questions, we turn to a historical excursus on the development of RAI. In the process, we underline the conception of the public which has informed the philosophy of RAI since its early beginnings. Particular attention is given to developments occurring during the 70s, which were decisive in shaping the events of the 80s and the 90s.

Origins of Public Service Broadcasting in Italy

From its beginnings, broadcasting in Italy has lacked a clear concept of the public interest, a dubious distinction by comparison with the historical models of public service broadcasting in many other European countries. When RAI was instituted, the idea of the public interest was uncritically identified with the state, which meant that the state allowed the exclusive right to provide for radio and (later) television broadcasting, even though the capital used was, for the most part, supplied by private investors. "Corporatism," a principle of state organisation which emerged in fascist Italy in which state-directed activities are supported economically by private capital, was characteristic of Italian broadcasting policies during Mussolini's government.[2] Costanzo Ciano, the Minister of Communication in fascist Italy, intervened into matters of radio transmission by encouraging the fusion of URI and SIRAC into URI, conferring to it in 1924 the exclusive right for radio broadcasting. Needless to say, the state intervened in controlling and censoring the cultural "quality" and the political character of programs. Of course, URI had a strong fascist imprint.

Following the collapse of fascism and the end of the second world war, RAI obtained in 1952 the monopoly for television broadcasting. Interestingly, the major part of the shares was owned by IRI, and before that, by SIP, and the shareholders were persons appointed by IRI itself.[3] Through IRI, and through the intervention of the government into the election of six out of the sixteen members of the administrative board, RAI was entirely under government control.

It is relevant to note that, as early as the 1960s, the influence of the state upon RAI was already questioned by Italian intellectuals from all different political backgrounds. The interference of party appointees within RAI was opposed by intellectuals mainly under the premise that the bureaucrats could not appreciate the value of broadcasting for cultural elevation, moral development, and general educational purposes. Commercial television was opposed by scholars advancing a kind of paternalistic, moralist critique, because they feared it would appeal to the lowest common denominator among the public. Entertainment was acceptable only if it had the redeeming potential to uplift public sensibilities. The public was understood in these terms as a mass whose well–being it was the moral duty of the state to cultivate. It represents a rather elitist view, described by Umberto Eco in his book *Apocalittici e Integrati* (1964) where the vision of the public as being a mass is described as being a dominant one in 1950s Italy, and in particular among the intellectual elite.

While in need of cultivation, the public, from RAI's perspective, was not intended to gain access to, or control of, the use of the means of communication. This attitude can be explained in part by the fact that the two world wars and post-war reconstruc-

tion in Italy significantly slowed down the process of Italian unification, begun in the 1860s. After the second world war, the unity of Italian-ness was still in question, particularly as it pertained to economic, political and cultural differences between northern and southern Italy. Most notably, conflict between northern and southern Italy, referred to sometimes as the **Problema del Mezzogiorno**, or "the southern question" (Barzini 1964, Gramsci 1971), long pre-dates World War Two and has not disappeared since the war, as the republican separatist sentiment of the contemporary political party known as the **Lega Nord** (the Northern League) confirms. In the post-war era, the Christian Democrat party emerged as the dominant political force, and its control of the government, as well as RAI, contributed to the paternalistic tone of RAI: Indeed, the Italian "mass" public was mainly in need of education. This understanding also mirrors what Putnam (1993) terms the "patronage" way of doing politics in Italy, which he finds especially characteristic of southern and central–southern Italy. As a consequence of this conception, public communication and civic participation mainly has meant interaction among "patrons and clients, or governors and petitioners," rather than an "interaction among equals" (Putnam 1993, 88).[4]

Given the paternalistic attitude that permeated Italian political life, it is not surprising that issues of civic participation certainly were not on the main agenda of RAI during the first decades of its life, that is, from the 1950s to the early 1970s. As Cesareo rightly points out, the broadcasting system in Italy has served to convey the dominant ideology, in order to be functional for the main parties. Cesareo notes that participation on the part of social groups, minorities, political groups, and citizens in general, was actually non-existent. Within this model, information flowed "from the top to the bottom, from the centre to the periphery" (Cesareo 1974, 13). In contrast, Cesareo advocates the necessity for more and direct participation of citizens in television.

In response to those calling for more local participation, two major developments occurred in the early 1970s which decisively fostered drastic changes in the structure of television broadcasting in Italy, and which were important signs of social and political changes occurring in the country. They were the birth of new regional institutions, reflecting a decentralisation of political power which until then was strongly centralised in the hands of politicians in Rome; and the end of the RAI television broadcasting monopoly and consequent birth of private, commercial channels. The relevance of these developments is to be found in the fact that decentralisation fostered a new conception and articulation of the idea of civic participation and cultural power. Along with the decentralisation of governance, so was RAI decentralised from its general headquarters in Rome throughout the rest of Italy. A new concept of public service also began to emerge.

The political climate of the early 1970s in Italy was electrifying. The outcomes of 1968, including the rise of left wing parties (the Communist Party, for example, at the end of the 1970s came close to participating in the **Maggioranza di Governo**, the famous **Compromesso Storico**), and the rise to prominence of trade unions, regional assemblies, and local political groups, all fired demand for greater civic participation and a general rethinking of the communication system (Richeri 1978, 75). Fundamental to this movement were the efforts to reform public service broadcasting and to establish privately owned local stations which would be more responsive to subnational differences in Italy.

Movement Toward Decentralisation

Putnam (1993, 22) notes that in 1975, "just after a powerful swing to the left in the second round of regional elections, the regionalists succeeded in pushing through parliament Law 382, authorising the decentralisation of important new functions to the regions." In the arena of television regulation, parallel changes were occurring during the same years. In the early 1970s, a 20-year-old agreement between RAI and the government came to an end, thus leading to challenges to dominance over broadcasting by the Christian Democrats (Richeri 1978, 76). In July 1974, the Constitutional Court passed a reform declaring the state monopoly of television and radio unconstitutional. Indeed, the Court declared that the very criterion of "general usefulness," a prerequisite according to the Italian Constitution for justifying the control by the government over the media sector, was reformulated. Now it imposed stipulations for program diversity, representation of all cultural groups, unbiased representation of ideas, and rights of access (Richeri 1978, 76). In 1974, a first stroke against the state monopoly in the name of pluralism, objectivity, and universality was delivered. The need for more civic participation, and for a less monolithic representation of Italian culture in all its diversity, could not be met by the state monopoly. As a result of this law, an avenue opened for the development of independent broadcasting stations. Many who led this movement held strong political and social commitments to the left. Radio Antenna Rossa, Radio Citta Futura, and Radio Alice were some among the most famous ones. The movement guiding this opposition to the state's monopoly over broadcasting took the name of "freedom of antenna" (liberta d'antenna).

In 1975, a reform law was passed which marked an attempt to control the confusing situation of unrestricted proliferation of local television and radio broadcasting stations. The result was the reconfirmation of the state monopoly's control of broadcast frequencies and the nation-wide cable network for distributing programs. While control was tightened, national and regional access to broadcasting was guaranteed to principal social groups (Richeri 1978). These developments marked the attempt by the government to meet new social needs and requests for participation in the control of and access to the means of communication.

It is interesting to note that notwithstanding the state monopoly, private broadcasting stations continued to proliferate. Nevertheless the spirit of the reform did indeed mark an attempt to re-articulate the role of television as an essential public service. The ideals about which Cesareo was writing early in the 70s seemed closer to a more decentralised, pluralistic and participatory system of broadcasting in Italy. The private stations were to be heralds of freedom, the concrete expressions of "liberta d'antenna," as it was defined.

However, even as RAI was attempting to loosen its structures and to open up to wider public and citizen participation, the new ideals of freedom from state interference were becoming problematic. On the one hand, as Richeri (1978, 77) notes, "the private stations were portrayed as dynamic and innovative, and on the other, the elephantine government agency, RAI, was shown as carved up among the parties and incapable of any innovation."[5] RAI was identified with endless government bureaucracy and with the heavy hand of party politics, whereas the private (still local) stations were seen as dynamic and innovative, as the ones that, better than the state television and radio, were able to embody the ideals of objectivity, of impartiality, and of independence (from the power of the parties). Local stations could be more cultur-

ally and physically near to the needs and interests of the people, and they were assumed to be closer to the new spirit of regional and local participatory politics.

Paradoxically, the groups stressing the unsuitability of state television in fulfilling the requirements of a truly public service, most of which were leftist in orientation, were also the advocates of private stations. Their critiques, as Cesareo (1992) observes, paved the way for private capital to play an increasingly active role in the ownership and control of broadcasting in Italy. Liberta d'antenna continued to be the motivating slogan of this movement, and among the ranks of those who chanted it was Silvio Berlusconi, who was a close friend and political supporter of then-socialist party head and prime minister Bettino Craxi. Liberta d'antenna came to signify freedom from RAI, and since in Italy the idea of public service broadcasting had, since its beginnings, been identified with state ownership, a defence of public service was a defence of RAI, and any criticism of RAI was an attack on the idea of public service. In this context, concepts such as diversity and democracy, linked as they were to efforts of decentralisation and greater participation, were therefore understood as threats to Italy's public service broadcasting system. Those idealists who were not content with the process of **lottizzazione**, the perverse way of conducting politics through the division of spoils among the leading parties after each election and the concealment of the power of government, looked for solutions outside the state, in the realm of more locally based, private enterprises.

It is particularly germane to the topic of shifting articulations of ideas of the public that the pristine ideology of public television, with its moral task of uplifting the masses, had already begun to give way in the mid-1960s to a renewed conceptualisation of the public, and of public service. These changes in the dominant ideology of public service had been paving the way for the crisis of the RAI monopoly and the legitimisation of private ownership. The main change had been in the decline of the ideal of the broadcaster as educator and a growing emphasis on the consumer-spectator (Cardini 1993). Thus we see the concept of the public being re-defined, from the "gross" mass of the 1950s, which requires intellectual leadership, to the "intelligent" consumers of the 1980s.

Unfortunately, in light of the further developments in the television adventure, the active citizen, whose importance and potential was fundamental to the emancipatory rhetoric at the end of the 1960s and through the torrential 1970s, now appears to be only a **veloce toccata e fuga**! Before going into detail about the emergence of a commercial monopoly, it is important to examine the answer that RAI gave to the new demands which Italian society placed upon its system of broadcasting in the 1960s and 1970s. The answer was the creation of three differentiated public television channels, namely, RAI 1, RAI 2, and RAI 3, following the Reform Law of 1975. In reality RAI already was articulated into three channels, but what is significant is how they came to be shaped during this period.

The Three Channels: RAI 1, RAI 2, and RAI 3

The division of RAI television into three channels started in 1953, which was almost at the same time when public television broadcasting was born in Italy. This division, which resembles the one which already existed in Italian public radio broadcasting, consisted of the national channel and the second and third channels, distinguished mainly in terms of popularity and level of accessibility. The national channel

was the one which accounted for the largest audience, and was indeed the channel for the idealised Italian family. Deeply influenced by Catholic ideology, the national channel's moral task was to inspire and teach conformity with family values and respect for the nation. It was the channel that anyone could watch. The second and third channels were more specialised in that they targeted narrower audiences. The third in particular was more elitist, the one that intellectuals would watch for classical music, theatre, and educational documentaries. It resembled the third radio channel, a more "intellectual" kind of public radio. The third channel not only was more intellectual, but it also was, from its beginnings, the one which gave more coverage to social and political issues.

With Law 103 of April 1975, the pre-existing setting of the three channels changed. Among the other innovations, Law 103 proposed that public broadcasting no longer be controlled by the government, but rather by Parliament (Cardini 1992). This change was implemented in order to diminish state interference, but instead the influence was institutionalised in the Commissione Parlamentare di Vigilanza, whose mission was to link RAI and the Parliament (Mancini 1986). We can see how, from the good will of trying to meet "new needs" that came into the political forum in the early 1970s, the situation gradually changed. The shift in the public body which was supposed to ascertain the quality, objectivity, and cultural pluralism of television broadcasting, signalled instead, the beginning of the period called lottizzazione. The power that, until then, the government exercised, was replaced by the power of political parties. It was not the end of state control, but merely more of a capillary penetration into RAI itself. The political parties, following a perverse logic based on their control and influence in the Maggioranza (in the dominant majority), and in proportion to their electoral strength, took the habit of appointing their own members into key positions in RAI. They not only wanted to control the top managerial positions, but they also wanted to become more directly involved in the actual conduct of each of the three channels. The three channels were therefore lottizzati (shared among the political parties) as follows: The first one, RAI 1, went into the hands of the most powerful party, the Christian Democrats, who had led the "First Republic" since the Second World War until the "clean hands" scandal of three years ago, which destroyed its power and its credibility. The second one, RAI 2, was "given to" (taken by) the Socialist Party, which in those years was on the edge of starting its rise to power, culminating in the 80s when Bettino Craxi became prime minister. These are the socialists that in the 80s were called "rampanti," a kind of Italian yuppies. These were also those socialists who helped Berlusconi in his accumulation of wealth and rise to power. The third channel, RAI 3, the one which historically was more "intellectual," was assigned to the Communist Party.

This division of power within RAI was not overt. The more publicly diffused reason, the one that will take us back to the relation between the institution of the "Regioni" in 1975 and the need for more decentralisation within RAI, was indeed the following one: Public television was trying to open up to the "periphery" in an effort to realise a more pluralist understanding of the diversity of Italian society. In this project, RAI 1 was supposed to keep its character of "family television," with light but nevertheless intelligent entertainment, and with a "cultural" purpose perhaps to foster a unitarian or monolithic image of Italian culture and politics. RAI 2 was supposed to provide more diversity, while still centring on nationally produced and distributed programs.

RAI 3 had the specific task of connecting the centre to the periphery, of developing more locally based programming, of favouring more participation of various social and political groups, including minorities, in the public sphere. The peculiar task of the RAI Regione was to institute local production and broadcasting stations in each region and major city. The relation with the other local, but private, stations was supposed to be to complement each other. Unfortunately, the regional public broadcasting experiments clashed with the privately owned local commercial stations. Ultimately, the commercial stations won out.

A search for an explanation for the failure of local public stations to withstand the threat of commercial competition may be found in the logic of the parties, which conceived of the reformulation of the three channels as an occasion to be exploited in order to gain even more power within RAI. The parties of the Maggioranza were perhaps more concerned in assuring their position and their ideology than in trying to make the experiment in civic participation feasible. Another hypothesis follows as a consequence from the politics of patronage in Italy, as Putnam (1993) describes them, particularly with respect to the southern regions of the Country.

Putnam demonstrates in an analysis of the twenty new regional governments that the variable which has determined the degree of their success is the strength or weakness of the roots of a tradition of civic participation in public life. This, together with the way in which politicians see both themselves and the value of political life, determines the nature of the regional governments. The northern regions are better off, the southern ones are plagued by centuries of weak civic involvement, tracing back at least as far as the period of Norman domination. It would be relevant to analyse how media, and television specifically, fits into this development of civic participation. Could it be said that the experiment with regional public television met with the same kinds of problems that the regions did more generally? In other words, did the success or failure of RAI 3 depend on the tradition of civic participation in the region where it had been operating?

Putnam does not specifically address issues of media participation, although he more then once hints at the fact that "in the most civic regions ... citizens are actively involved in all sorts of local associations" and "they follow civic affairs avidly in the local press," whereas "in the least civic regions ... the absence of civic associations and a paucity of local media...mean that citizens there are rarely drawn into community affairs" (Putnam 1993, 97). By tracing a parallel between the institution of the RAI 3 Regione, and the institution of the new regional governments, we find applicability in Putnam's conclusions. In essence, his analysis suggests that the new decentralised institutions work where there already are strongly rooted traditions of civic involvement, an analysis which helps explain RAI 3's vulnerability. With the benefit of hindsight, we can see how throughout the late 1970s and the 1980s the development of decentralised public broadcasting was affected deeply by commercial concerns, which Richeri (1978) warned might happen.

For several years after the reform of 1975, the government and the Parliament undermined the regulation of the private broadcasting sector. As a consequence of this lack of discipline, private entrepreneurs seized the moment to their advantage. Free of restrictions, the powerful editorial groups of Rusconi, Mondadori, and Rizzoli became the main private companies which began television ventures. CANALE 5, ITALIA 1, and RETE 4 were the first three private national television stations. By 1980,

Berlusconi's holding company, Fininvest, already had ten channels in the major cities and other affiliated stations. Meanwhile, Rusconi and Mondadori's ventures failed and left the way open for the development of Berlusconi's empire. The Italian "Third Empire," as some critics have defined it, includes CANALE 5, ITALIA 1, and RETE 4 as part of the same corporation. Since then, Fininvest's holdings gradually expanded to include other networks, and the firm has diversified into the film and publishing industries. Today, Berlusconi's empire extends beyond Italian borders to include operations in France, Germany, Spain, Eastern Europe, and South America (Fisher, 1988). Berlusconi was elected Italian Prime Minister at the last national election, after which his government tried to influence the appointments of top managers in RAI. Since then, the public character of Italian television has been seriously threatened by private, profit based considerations.

Conclusion

Did the experiment with RAI Regione, and the matter of civic participation, fail completely? It is lamentable that the rights of all citizens to be informed and to participate to the heritage of society, rights that should be available to all citizens, seem not to be on the government agenda. Indeed, the process of re–feudalization, as a crisis in representation, was dramatically illustrated on a public stage, as it were, in what happened last July when Berlusconi, while criticising journalists in RAI for having broadcast something "against" the government, said, in a press conference, that "since RAI is supported by citizens ... it should not go against the majority that they support." In other words, the editorial line of RAI should follow and respect the secrecy, the non-publicity, of his government. More then ever, RAI seems to be a place where political power represents itself before the people. Within this context, the voices of minorities, of those who oppose the government and sectoral politics, are deeply threatened. How can citizens find and recognise themselves in such an institution as RAI, which has been, and still is, poisoned from all the power games that have been, and still are, played around and within it? Will the civic traditions which Putnam observed in the Northern and Central regions be able to arrest and reverse the ongoing process of re–feudalization?

Notes:

1. This paper originally was presented at the 1995 Conference of the International Association for Mass Communication Research (IAMCR), June 27-30, 1995, Portorož, Slovenia. The authors are grateful to Sérgio DeSouza for research assistance.

2. Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini (1975/1936) wrote an influential work which forever links fascism and corporatism in the minds of many political theorists. According to Cawson (1991, 104), "corporatism" referred initially to an inter-war phenomenon in fascist states in which social control was steered closely by organisations created and licensed by the state. Contemporary analyses of "liberal corporatism" in advanced capitalist societies emphasise "the extent to which formally private bodies perform public tasks." Three distinguishing features are the monopoly role of corporatist bodies, the fusion of representative roles and implementation, and the role of the state in licensing monopoly representation and co-determining policy. Corporatism often is typified by tripartite relations among the state, capital, and labour which aim at the subordination of the working class (see also Held 1987, 214-220), although defenders of modern social democratic variants dismiss "tripartism" as a singular perspective which is not representative of corporatism *per se* (e.g., Grant 1985).

3. IRI was a government agency, which was financed in part by private capital.

4. Putnam traces different traditions in citizenry and civic participation in Italy, in which people participate in political and social life, from the late medieval period. The northern part of the country, less attached to central governments, were at around the 12th and 13th centuries the places where "local particularism triumphed all but completely" (Putnam 1993, 122), whereas, in the southern regions the Norman kingdom (which was built upon Byzantine and Islamic Arab foundations) impeded the flourishing of the "communes" by creating the bases for "the lack in civic enterprise, [which] also derived from the fact that the Norman monarch was too authoritarian ... to encourage the cities" (Putnam 1993,128).

5. This view was encouraged, according to Richeri, by the national press. *Espresso*, gave this issue wide coverage, as did *Panorama*, and *Corriere della Sera*, this last owned by Rizzoli, one of the first private groups to attempt the television adventure.

References:

Barbalet, J.M. 1988. *Citizenship*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Barzini, Luigi. 1964. *The Italians*. New York: Bantam.

Bobbio, Norberto. 1989. *Democracy and Dictatorship: the Nature and Limits of State Power*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Cardini, Flaminia. 1993. The Means of Regulation in the Radio-Television System. In S. Splichal and I. Kovats (eds.), *Media in Transition: An East-West Dialogue*, 90-110. Ljubljana, Slovenia: Communication and Culture Colloquia.

Cawson, Alan. 1991. Corporatism. In D. Miller, J. Coleman, W. Connolly, and A. Ryan (eds.), *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Political Thought*, 104-106. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Cesareo, Giovanni. 1974. *La Televisione Sprecata*. Milano: Feltrinelli.

Cesareo, Giovanni. 1992. Privatization: Some Questions and Paradoxes. Paper presented at the "Media in Transition Colloquium," Piran, Slovenia, 17-21 October.

Delavecuras, Teodoro. 1994. The Italian Political Scene. *Italian Journal* 8, 5-6, 15-17.

Eco, Umberto. 1964. *Apocalittici e Integrati*. Milano: Bompiani.

Fisher, William. 1988. Europe's Media Moguls Play Monopoly. *Sight & Sound* 58, 16–18.

Franchi, Paolo. 1994. From a Partyist Italy to a Partyless Italy. *Italian Journal* 8, 4-6.

Garnham, Nicholas. 1992. The Media and the Public Sphere. In C. Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, 359-376. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Graham, Robert. 1995. Italian Referendums Bring Elections Nearer. *Financial Times*, 13 June.

Gramsci, Antonio. 1971. Notes on Italian History. In A. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 44-122. Translated and edited by Q. Hoare and G. N. Smith. New York: International Publishers.

Grant, Wyn. 1985. Introduction. In W. Grant (ed.), *The Political Economy of Corporatism*, 1-31. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Habermas, Jürgen. 1989. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Held, David. 1987. *Models of Democracy*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Hill, Andrew. 1995. Demise of a Debt-Laden Monster. *Financial Times*, 21 July.

Mancini, Paolo. 1986. Between Normative Research and Theory of Forms and Content: Italian Studies on Mass Communication. *European Journal of Communication* 1, 97–115.

Mussolini, Benito. 1975. *The Corporate State*. New York: Howard Fertig. (Originally published in 1936).

Putnam, Robert. 1993. *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Richeri, Giuseppe. 1973. Italy: Public Service and Private Interests. *Journal of Communication* (Summer), 75–78.

Taylor, Jessica and Andrew Gilligan. 1995. Italian Viewers Get Chance to Keep Out Murdoch Referendum on Ownership. *Sunday Telegraph*, 14 May.

Vivarelli, Nick. 1995. Italy Indicts Berlusconi. *The Hollywood Reporter*, 22 May.