

The concept of pluralism in the Italian public media

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In this paper I argue that the concept of pluralism – the most important value in the Italian media debate – is conceptually confused. I identify three mutually incompatible conceptions of pluralism used when discussing the public broadcaster Rai: (1) structural pluralism, satisfied when the public broadcaster is divided into autonomous channels or programme groups; (2) summative pluralism, satisfied when output is divided between political actors according to some ideal distribution; and (3) pluralism ‘lottizzato’, satisfied when a number of different political positions are ‘represented’ by journalists within the broadcaster.

Keywords: pluralism; public broadcasting; Rai

Introduction

Statements of values are important. They identify which values a given individual, organisation, or society, chooses to affirm. Once such values are identified, the behaviour of the individual, organisation or society can be criticised or defended, depending on whether these practices express or fail to express the value(s) in question. This criticism or defence becomes easier where one value predominates; it becomes more difficult where individuals understand these values in multiple, inconsistent ways.

This is also true for the media. In particular, the value of objectivity is commonly cited to justify media practices in the United States; the media thereby claims that its behaviour expresses, or conforms with, the value of objectivity. This ‘strategic ritual’ (Tuchman 1972) is viable because the conception of objectivity employed in the United States has historically enjoyed considerable consensus.

In the Italian media the value of pluralism is much more important than the value of objectivity. It is routinely deployed to criticise existing institutions and (less frequently) to defend media practices. In this article I argue that the value of pluralism, as applied to the public broadcaster Rai, is too confused to be useful either

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for criticism or justification. In particular, I argue that there are three mutually incompatible conceptions of pluralism at work.

If my argument is correct, then current debate about Rai's performance is likely to continue without a satisfactory resolution (though this is probably overdetermined). Defences of the broadcaster couched in terms of one conception of pluralism will not satisfy those who hold other conceptions. Such is the conceptual disarray that even if Rai were the most pluralistic broadcaster in the world, Italian politicians would not be able to recognise it as such.

This paper is structured in several parts. First, I argue that the normative value currently attached to pluralism is not the result of constitutional or legal necessity, but rather of political decisions subsequently incorporated in the jurisprudence of the Constitutional Court. Second, I argue that, even if pluralism did have its current normative value thanks to legal or constitutional decisions, other alternative values which have also been used to regulate journalism and public service broadcasting were given equal or greater emphasis by these same decisions. Third, I argue that whilst there is widespread agreement amongst politicians that pluralism is valuable, there is great conceptual confusion about the requirements of the term. In particular, at least three conceptions of pluralism recur in debates about Rai. These conceptions – which I call structural pluralism, summative pluralism, and pluralism 'lottizzato' – concern different aspects of the public broadcaster: respectively, its organisation, its output, and its personnel. Each conception is supported by a case for *prima facie* desirability; each conception has been openly sustained with varying intensity since the nineteen-seventies; and yet each conception undermines the corporation's defence of itself. These conclusions are based upon a study of (1) parliamentary debates concerning Rai in the years of major reform laws (1975, 1993, 2004); (2) secondary

literature on Rai; (3) a review of all articles from Repubblica with the words ‘Rai’ and ‘pluralismo’ between 1985 and 2006.¹

The derivation of pluralism

Conceptual confusion *per se* is not a reason to disregard a particular value. If the value of pluralism were particularly important, or derived from a particularly important source, some degree of conceptual confusion might be tolerable. In particular, if the value of pluralism derived from the Constitution this might be reason enough to continue using the concept, given that the Constitution is routinely praised by all parties. This indeed seems to be the case: Roberto Zaccaria, a leading jurist in the field of telecommunications (as well as former Rai President and parliamentarian), has defined pluralism as ‘the most important constitutional value in the field of telecommunications’ (Zaccaria 1998, 162).

This judgement rests upon a series of decisions by the Constitutional Court. Yet the basis for these decisions is not obvious. There is nothing in the text of the Italian constitution which refers to pluralism or any similar concept; and the elucidation of the ‘constitutional value’ of pluralism is confusing. By 1988, the jurisprudence of the Court seemed fully-formed, complete with nuanced distinctions between ‘internal pluralism’ (a special requirement of the public broadcaster) and ‘external pluralism’ (the existence of a competitive media market with low barriers to entry).² In drawing this distinction, the Court argued that the field had been ‘profoundly affected by the jurisprudence of the Court, moved by the constant and predominant preoccupation to ensure... the fundamental value of pluralism’, and citing a previous 1974 judgement.³ Yet this 1974 decision does not use the term ‘pluralism’ in connection with the media. It mentions the ‘social pluralism’ found in

Italian society, which the media ought to reflect; but the term is used descriptively, not to indicate any value-claim, still less any inference from the text of the Constitution. The same holds for the court's (two) references to a 'plurality of sources of information' – again, the term is used descriptively. Thus, any support for the idea that pluralism in the media is a constitutional value cannot be based on what the Constitutional Court's 1974 decision, nor on any other Court decisions before that time.

This is particularly important because the 1974 decision – and its presumed call for greater pluralism – had tremendous impact on the structure of public service broadcasting in Italy. In it, the Court validated the constitutionality of the state monopoly on nationwide terrestrial broadcasting, provided a series of conditions on its exercise were met. Whilst the Court refused to judge whether Rai had violated those conditions, the judgement effectively called into question the legislation governing Rai at the time. Following the Court's decision, a new law was passed (law no. 103/75) reforming Rai. Though discussions about a new broadcasting law had been going on since 1968, the stated aim of the law which was eventually passed was to implement the (supposed) principles of the Court's sentence: the majority report of the committee which reported on the draft bill⁴ summarized the 'decatalogue' of commandments issued by the Court in its decision, but did so incorrectly, falsely attributing to the Court a request for 'the objectivity of news programmes and pluralism of thought in cultural programmes', a phrase not present in any of the Court's landmark decisions of 1974. The same error was made in the plenary: Gianfranco Merli (Dc), speaking for the majority, argued that

One should note certain arguments which justify the choice of pluralism, *which is at the base of the Constitutional Court's judgement...* The concept of pluralistic information as a duty and thus as a service, which affects all means of communication, *as the Court has recently held in its judgement*, causes us to take up once again the reform of Rai⁵

Why did the Parliament act as if the Court had made pluralism the fundamental constitutional value in the field of the media when it had not done anything of the sort? One possibility – and the most faithful to a legalistic reading of the principle's exegesis – is that the value of pluralism, whilst not explicitly mentioned in the Court's ruling, was 'latently present', and that legislators 'uncovered' the value in the same way that the Court 'uncovered' the value in its subsequent rulings on the subject. An alternate possibility is that the value of pluralism was not, in fact, found in the Court's ruling, but that legislators acted as if it were in order to win greater legitimacy for a value that had essentially political roots. It is this interpretation which I favour, but in order to make this case, it is necessary to establish the context in which the reform law was passed.

The state concession which formed the basis for Rai's operation had expired in 1973, and the Andreotti government had made it known that extensions to the concession would henceforth only be granted on an annual basis (Chiarenza 2002, 160). Reform had been promised since 1969 (Chiarenza 2002, 148), and the Court's judgement only increased the pressure for quick parliamentary passage.

Quick parliamentary passage, however, was not something that the fourth Moro government – a minority government formed by the Dc and the much smaller PRI – could guarantee. The Dc was weak after the failure of the 'No' campaign in the previous year's divorce referendum; what parliamentary energy the party could muster was employed in the passage of the public order law, the *legge Reale* (Ginsborg 1990, 371). Consequently, any reform legislation capable of being approved in short order would have to win the support not just of a parliamentary majority but of a sufficiently large majority to prevent parliamentary obstructionism.

The PCI was disposed to form part of this super-majority. By 1975, the party had embarked on the process of moderation that would lead it, a year later, to give its support in parliament to a Dc-led government. Overt parliamentary obstruction of an important piece of reform legislation would have seemed incongruous with this new dash for respectability.

At the same time, the PCI remained a Gramscite party, which viewed television as ‘an instrument for the conditioning of the subaltern classes along the lines of a bourgeois model’ (Chiarenza 2002, 166-7). Abetting the DC in the reform of such an instrument would seem antithetical to the party’s interests. Consequently, it was necessary that the reform be portrayed as furthering a value which could be shared by the PCI.

Pluralism was just such a value. Part of the PCI’s moderation was terminological. As Alessandro Pizzorno wrote,

The PCI needed to declare its ideological conversion. ‘Democratic’ it was by definition. ‘Liberal’? This would have been a bit much. ‘Pluralism’ was a relatively fresh term. Few knew what it meant: it would therefore be discussed for quite some time, if only to find out what it meant (in Ufficio Stampa della Rai 1976, 248)

Recognition of some element of pluralism - here understood as a plurality of competing parties - was found as far back as the Eighth Congress of 1956, but ‘by the 1970s the principle... [had been] explicitly recognized... At every meeting with the representatives of other Communist Parties the Italian Communists... re-asserted the fundamental importance of pluralism in the construction of a socialist society’ (Sassoon 1981, 215).

The value was equally palatable to the Dc, harking back to the arguments made in debates in the Constituent Assembly concerning the ‘pluralistic society’, which some Dc politicians supported as a *via media* between ‘the two false and opposing doctrines of individualism... and collectivism’. (Matteucci et al. 1976, 721)

Consequently, the value of pluralism was sufficiently politically convenient – and vague – to allow the approval of the reform, passed with an ample majority on the 26th March 1975.

If the genesis of the value of pluralism is essentially political, and not legal-constitutional, then the subsequent jurisprudence of the Court should be viewed as the reinterpretation of the constitutional text within the parameters set by the legislator. This need not rob the value of its constitutional standing; yet it may rob the value of some of its rhetorical impact. If the value has a political origin, campaigning on this basis may not seem *supra partes*, but instead the vindication of previous power struggles.

Pluralism and other values

Pluralism is not the only value in the media. Other competing values are present now and were present at the time of the reform of the seventies. Why then has pluralism become the dominant value? I argue that other, competing values surrounding content were politically unacceptable to various parts of the coalition which enacted the reform. In particular, values like objectivity, and other values which imply the possibility of non-ideological reporting of facts, could not be accepted by the PCI.

The dominance of pluralism is particularly surprising when one realises that objectivity and impartiality – values which have been repeatedly employed as regulatory values in other Western media – were not only present in the Court's 1974 ruling, but were given greater emphasis. The 'objectivity' and 'impartiality' of information were each mentioned five times in the 1974 judgement. These values were not reducible to pluralism: 'so-called pluralism of information, whilst having links with objectivity, cannot substitute it' (Fragola 1983, 197). The jurisprudential basis for these values was also less tendentious than that supporting the value of

pluralism, even if it rested on a rather bald assertion by the court: ‘objectivity’ and ‘impartiality’ were two characteristics which a state monopoly in television would have to meet if it were to qualify as a service of general interest in the sense of article 43 of the Constitution - presumably because the public had a ‘general interest’ in information of this kind.

Furthermore, the Court was able to cite references to these concepts in previous rulings;⁶ had it wished, it could have cited legislation of 1947 establishing the parliamentary supervisory committee in public broadcasting which was to guarantee ‘the objectivity and impartiality of information’.

Yet even by the time of the legislative work on the reform of Rai the Dc and the PCI had chosen to emphasise the concept of pluralism in preference to these other values. It was left to deputies of the extreme-right MSI-DN to point out that impartiality and objectivity had been neglected:

It has been said: a plurality of voices, autonomy, independence. But the commission – and thus the majority, did not want to include those other characteristics in the Constitutional Court’s judgement which were indispensable and posed conditions, namely the objectivity, impartiality, and the completeness of information. These three conditions are interdependent, connected, and cannot be removed: freedom of information has its value insofar as these three conditions exist. And yet the concept cannot be found in legislative proposal: there are only references dotted here and there⁷

These other values were shorn from the legislative text due to principled and dissembling objections to the idea of disinterested reporting. Reasons for objecting to the value of objectivity differed: some, like Umberto Eco, viewed objectivity as a ‘myth’, since it assumed that one could state facts without interpretation, when, in fact, ‘in the same moment when one chooses to publish instead of throw out an item of news, one carries out an act of interpretation which derives from the importance that [one] as a journalist judges the item to have’ (quoted in Mazzanti 1991, 193); others, writing from a Marxist perspective, viewed concepts like ‘objectivity’ as

myths, but bourgeois myths, ‘only a mask in the service of those in power’ [*soltanto mascherature del dominio di chi sta al potere*] (Cesareo 1970, 132): ‘either one speaks for the class in power or for the class opposing power: the pretence that one can speak for all, ignoring class, is typical of the bourgeoisie’ (Lidia Serenari, quoted in Chiarenza 2002, 169); others still viewed objectivity as *prima facie* possible in certain situations, but as impossible in Italy, where ‘the disagreement between government and pro-Communist opposition runs deep to the foundations of the national constitution which makes it very difficult, and often impossible, to plead absolute impartiality’ (Orlando 1954).

Three conceptions of pluralism

Given the failure of these alternative values to establish themselves during the seventies, pluralism has become dominant as the most important value in the field of the media. It dominates not merely because the term dominates the debate, but because the term commands universal approval. After all, it would be difficult to oppose pluralism, since opposition to pluralism might seem to indicate support for monism, one revealed truth, and opposition to the open society. Thus, as Gianfranco Fini has admitted, pluralism is ‘a sacrosanct concept that no-one contests’. Yet universal approval has emptied the word of its content, reducing it to a ‘magic word’,⁸ an ‘ethical term [which can] serve... to express feeling [but which is] calculated also

¹ The choice of newspaper and of period are due to the lack of comparable full-text archives from other newspapers. The online archive of *Il Corriere* only extends to 1992; Lexis-Nexis holdings for *Il Corriere* and *La Stampa* do not extend before the 1990s. I have therefore chosen to prioritize temporal span and exhaustiveness over breadth.

² Sentenza no. 826/88

³ Sentenza no. 225/74

⁴ Commission report of the 7th March 1975, on legislative proposal AC3448, “Nuove norme in materia di diffusione radiofonica e televisiva” (http://legislature.camera.it/_dati/leg06/lavori/stampati/pdf/34480002_F001.pdf)

⁵ Debate of the 13th March 1975, col. 20903, emphasis added

⁶ Sentenza no. 59/60

⁷ Deputy Baghino (MSI-DN), debate of the 24th March 1975.

⁸ B. Placido, ‘La Rai e le nomine e il gioco del lotto’, *La Repubblica*, August 12, 1990, 33.

to arouse feeling, and so to stimulate action' (Ayer 1971, 143). In fact, there exist at least three conceptions of pluralism present in the debate, the essentials of which are found in Table 1.

[TABLE 1 AROUND HERE]

Structural pluralism

The first conception of pluralism I call 'structural pluralism'. This conception holds that pluralism – insofar as it is applied to Rai – is a property of the internal organisation of the broadcaster. Specifically, pluralism is achieved, or respected, where the sub-units of the broadcaster which are responsible for output (respectively, the *rete* and *testate*⁹) are organisationally separate and enjoy substantial autonomy.

This conception of 'pluralism' is the oldest of the three presented here, and is also the most closely connected to the circumstances surrounding the passage of the 1975 reform. From 1961 to 1974 Rai had been managed increasingly autocratically by Ettore Bernabei,¹⁰ under whose reign the company had grown substantially. Bernabei's control over the broadcaster, in a period in which the governing parties exercised significant control over Rai, led the Communist party (and perhaps even the Constitutional Court) to (falsely) equate monocratic and centralized leadership of the broadcaster with the exclusion of opposition voices. Whilst the Court in its decision did not explicitly state that the broadcaster was subject to excess governmental interference, it did require that

the decision-making organs of the managing entity [Rai]... not be constituted in such a fashion as to represent directly or indirectly the exclusive or preponderant expression of the executive, and that their structure be such as to guarantee their objectivity (§8a).

⁹ *Rete* can mean channel, but can also be used for units within the broadcaster which are organisationally distinct but supply content to channels. *Testate* might be awkwardly translated as newsdesk, although here each news-desk usually its own bulletin attached.

¹⁰ This is more true for the second half of Bernabei's period in charge. For the first eight years of his tenure in office, Bernabei was involved in tussles both with the old guard within the broadcaster (the so-called *aziendalisti*, or company men), and with the managing director of Rai between 1965 and 1968, Gianni Granzotto. With Granzotto's resignation in 1968, and the adoption of an internal reorganisation in 1969, Bernabei's control over Rai became complete. I thank an anonymous reviewer for bringing this point to my attention.

Precisely what was meant by this last clause was not clear, but the reform law which followed the ruling tended to interpret the Court's decision as requiring a decentralisation of power within the broadcaster. Deputy Manca (PSI) stated that 'the principles and the logic which inspire the reform' led to its 'most profound innovation', namely 'the plurality of *rete* and *testate*'. The link between a plurality of *rete* and *testate* and other normatively desirable features was expressed by two DC deputies: deputy Frau described the principle of the reform as being that of

a plurality of voices within radio and television which may express themselves through different opinions, *through* two different structures which *allow* different opinions to be expressed (debate of the 12th March 1975, col. no 20844, emphasis added)

whilst deputy Manca expressed most fully the logic of this structural pluralism:

I should like to state again the conviction that the principles and the logic which inspire one of the most profound innovations that the reform touches upon, or that of *the plurality of rete and testate giornalistiche*, are not the principles of *lottizzazione*, but rather that of pluralism, which *aims* not at following the myth of objective information, but *to build, concretely, the conditions for the completeness - that is to say, the impartiality - of the news. In other terms, it is from the pluralism of television networks and journalistic testate that the full expression of the professional capacity of our journalists and cultural workers flows, because the diversity and plurality of voices are in much better position to offer a more faithful and complete picture of a variegated, complex, and, indeed, pluralistic, reality, such as is found in Italian society* (debate of the 13th March 1975, col. no 20935, emphasis added)

A plurality of *rete* and *testate* was therefore not desirable *per se* but desirable because such units, independently formed and independently managed and thus in a position to compete, can offer a better, more truthful picture of reality.

Thus the reform law – no. 103 of 1975 – restructured public broadcaster. Article 13 of the law went into exceeding detail concerning Rai's organisation: it was to have two television and three radio news bulletins, each with their own director reporting directly to the director-general. Each channel was also to have 'its own

separate complement of organisational and administrative staff'. Supplied with the necessary administrative resources, these *rete* and *testate* were in a position to draw up programme proposals which would be 'co-ordinated' by the director-general, who emerged from the reform greatly weakened. These requirements were subsequently translated into a document approved by the new Rai board later that year (Pini 1978, 63).

Competition in non-traded sectors of the economy is often undermined by accusations of wasteful duplication of effort (see Hood 1991, 10–15). Indeed, each channel represented a microcosm of the broadcaster itself, with each of the two channels (three from 1979) carrying its own news bulletin with little differentiation between each in terms of format (even if the selection of stories between the channels differs noticeably – see Tonello 2000). Each channel had to carry its own news bulletin because each channel was thought of as 'belonging' to a specific political area – and no political area would willingly deprive itself of its 'own' news bulletin.

Criticism of this duplication began in the eighties, with a youthful Walter Veltroni – at the time the PCI's main spokesperson on cultural and media affairs – an early critic of

the division of the Tg. Perhaps in the past it corresponded to a demand for pluralism. But what sense does it have today? And how much does it cost? I'm not saying, abolish Tg1, Tg2, Tg3. But the fact is that there are thirteen different television bulletins which go on air more or less at the same time, with the same selection of news. Why not differentiate them? ... That's how a real media group would operate.¹¹

Attempts have been made within the broadcaster to redefine the organisational asset of the company. Some have been more provocative than substantial: Rai President Claudio Petruccioli, at the very end of his mandate in 2008, suggested the formation of a single news-desk for Rai, without any real possibility of implementing

¹¹ G. Botta, 'Il Pci minaccia di abbandonare la commissione di vigilanza Rai'. *La Repubblica*, August 15th, 1985, 2.

such a decision. More serious efforts were made at the beginning of the nineties: Paolo Murialdi, a professor of journalism and Rai board member, wrote an internal paper foreseeing the development of a single news-desk, yet the plan provoked immediate and negative reactions from the editorial teams in question – in particular, those of the third network, who felt that the news they provided was of better quality than the other two networks, and who thus resented their possible incorporation into the continuing structures of Tg1 or Tg2.

According to Sandro Curzi, Murialdi viewed the journalists' resistance to his plans as evidence that journalists owed their careers to their political connections and the existing parallelism between political parties and networks, and feared for their future in a new, post-reform world (Curzi and Mineo 1994). This may be mistaken, but in any case, the continuation of the three networks perpetuates the idea that the structure of Rai is dictated by a political, rather than a public service logic.

A 'journalistic intentional fallacy': pluralism lottizzato

The second conception of pluralism presented here is closely related to structural pluralism. This conception – the most damaging for the perception of journalism within Rai – views pluralism as a property of the personnel employed by the broadcaster, and in particular a property of the political or social views held by employees in journalism or management. The broadcaster achieves, or respects, pluralism, where,

- for each major social or political or cultural reference group, there are some employed by the broadcaster who belong to that group, and where
- there is no such reference group membership of which would bar one from employment with the broadcaster, and
- there is no reference group which 'has', or controls, the major decision-taking posts within the broadcaster, in management or in journalism.

This conception of pluralism can be understood as a way of satisfying the Constitutional Court's request that the broadcaster 'effectively manifest the plurality of voices present in our society' – except that according to this conception, the 'voices' in question are not manifested through the broadcaster's output, but are the voices of the personnel of the broadcaster themselves. The desirability of this conception rests in part on the past exclusion from Rai of Communists or Communist-sympathisers. Before the nineteen seventies, a number of promising journalists were discriminated against on the basis of their Communist sympathies. Once the 'respectability' of the PCI was acknowledged, this discrimination was both difficult to justify (discrimination in employment on the basis of political beliefs being illegal) and damaging to the company (depriving it of otherwise talented journalists). Consequently, measures which would permit a greater representation of this group had a certain appeal, either as a form of reparation, or as representing moves towards greater equality of opportunity within the broadcaster.

Unfortunately, this conception in practice has become associated with the practice of *lottizzazione* (Ronchey 1977), or the practice of dividing up posts within the broadcaster according to party label, according to ever more complex schema, leading to the common aphorism within Rai, 'let's take on one Christian Democrat, one Socialist, one Communist... and one good one' (Mazza and Agnes 2004, 35). Such practices went beyond any pretence at combating unjustified exclusion, even if the PCI did justify its participation in them by invoking previous discrimination.¹²

Structural pluralism and 'pluralism *lottizzato*' are independent. The broadcaster could be divided into separate channels without these separate channels being staffed by broadcasters who sympathise with particular parties. Or, broadcasters could still be *lottizzati*, but work within a single channel - say, with broadcasters of

¹²

Botta, op cit.

opposing political persuasions monitoring each other's output (cf. Padovani 2005, 110).

It is for these reasons that I refer to this conception of pluralism as 'pluralism lottizzato'. I believe the linkage between the two concepts of pluralism and *lottizzazione* is justified for two reasons. First, as Forcella notes,

Lottizzazione... is something bad... Yet one still needs to find a *lottizzatore* (or someone who has been *lottizzato*) who presents himself as such. In his eyes, even the grossest cases of *lottizzazione* constitute an homage to the sacrosanct principle of democratic pluralism¹³

Thus, whether or not pluralism originally meant, or ought to mean, 'pluralism lottizzato', the term has been used in this sense to provide rhetorical cover for practices of *lottizzazione*.

Second, there are those who, despite the negative image which attaches to *lottizzazione*, use the term explicitly in connection with pluralism. These defences of 'pluralismo lottizzato' may be more or less robust. There are those who argue that *lottizzazione*, practised to a certain extent, at certain times, is or may have been desirable, but has now ceased to be so:

The good side of *lottizzazione* is pluralism: it's a practice which at the beginning produced excellent results. Then it become too rigid, extending itself even to the doormen¹⁴

There are also those who maintain that *lottizzazione* is admirable, even to the extent that it should be reformulated for the party system following the end of the First Republic. Former President of the Republic Cossiga argued that

Relying upon a professional code of conduct [*deontologia professionale*] like that of the BBC, is, for us Italians, not yet possible. Realistically, therefore, we must take note that *lottizzazione* is a democratic path of attaining pluralism¹⁵

¹³ E. Forcella, 'Ecco il Tg per i lottizzatori solo politici e mezzibusti', *La Repubblica*, September 27, 1988, 8.

¹⁴ Former President of Rai Manca in C. De Gregorio, 'Manca: 'lottizzare sembra facile...'', *La Repubblica*, July 11, 1994, 7.

¹⁵ S. Mazzocchi, 'Par condicio da rifare', *La Repubblica*, March 25, 1995, 6.

Publisher and notionally left-wing board member of Rai Carmine Donzelli went further in 2002, arguing that the first channel should be entrusted to the majority, the second channel to the opposition, and that the third channel should instead be ‘standard-bearers for public service broadcasting’, representing all those who didn’t fit into either the majority or the opposition.¹⁶

Even if *lottizzazione* after the end of the First Republic is less thorough-going than that practised previously, the conception of ‘pluralismo lottizzato’ survives in the Second Republic. It is this sense of pluralism which is (presumably) employed when nominees to important posts within Rai are criticised for representing a ‘violation of pluralism’.

This conception of pluralism cannot provide Rai with a bulwark against criticism, for two reasons. First, the relative stability of shares of power held by the main parties of the First Republic meant that rules for the division of posts within public companies could be formalized and persist over time without provoking the ire of the parties; but this is no longer true in a democracy with a bipolar vocation. The coalition which wins the general election feels entitled to a majority of posts within the broadcaster (see Berlusconi’s statement of June 1994: ‘it is certainly anomalous that one should find, in a democratic state, a broadcaster that goes against majority opinion’ [*è certamente anomalo che in uno Stato democratico esista un servizio pubblico che va contro la maggioranza*]); the coalition which loses insists that pluralism instead requires that the opposition is granted a non-negligible share of posts, possibly a blocking minority – though precisely what share is open to question.

More importantly, though, this conception of pluralism damages the attempt to form self-regulatory norms for journalism within Rai, because it privileges the personal political or social beliefs of the journalist or manager over the structure

¹⁶ C. Donzelli, ‘Ecco il mio patto per le nomine Rai’, *La Repubblica*, April 3, 2002, 16.

within which that journalist or managers finds him- or her-self. That is to say, ‘pluralismo lottizzato’ assumes a journalistic ‘intentional fallacy’ (Wimsatt and Beardsley 2004):

- the primary or exclusive determinant of a journalist’s output are his or her personal beliefs, and that
- such beliefs are always present.

Given these assumptions, journalists are damned if they do, and damned if they don’t: the denial that they have any personal political beliefs smacks of bad faith, whilst admitting such beliefs immediately disqualifies that journalist as an ‘impartial’ or ‘objective’ commentator.

Summative pluralism

The final conception of pluralism, which has become more common since the late nineties, holds that pluralism is a property of the output of the broadcaster, and in particular of the division of output between various competing political and social groups. Output is divided amongst groups either by

- granting a particular group a specific amount of time to voice a position, either by repeating recorded statements made by that group, or by inviting the group to participate in a particular program, or by
- using a specific amount of time to discuss the position of a particular group¹⁷

Output is more pluralistic the greater the division of time between groups approaches a certain rarely-specified ideal distribution; the further output departs from this division, the less pluralistic it is. Let us call this conception of pluralism ‘summative pluralism’.

The earliest available reference to this conception of pluralism comes from the mid-eighties. In response to accusations that the then-director-general of Rai, Biagio

¹⁷ The first of these is similar to what Agcom calls *tempo di parola* (speaking time); the second is similar to *tempo di antenna* (air time).

Agnes, was biased in favour of the DC, the party's spokesperson on radio and television, Borri, argued that such accusations were misplaced, since the 'data'

statistically demonstrated that the presence of political personalities on Rai programmes was substantially balanced, whilst, by contrast, the division of time in news that Rai dedicated to the parties in 1984 penalized the DC in comparison with its electoral weight¹⁸ (Delli Colli 1985).

Borri's implicit claim is that Rai's output (or possibly just its news coverage) would be pluralistic if it devoted coverage to the several political parties in proportion to their electoral weight. As the largest party, such a division would have benefited the DC.

There was considerable objection to summative pluralism during the eighties and the early nineties. Critics largely attacked the assumption at the heart of this conception, viz., that pluralism could be operationalised numerically as a distribution between specified groups. Critic of this assumption was (again) Walter Veltroni, for whom pluralism could not be 'a sum of different opinions'.¹⁹ The objection to such an assumption was well put by Alberto Ronchey, in a 1988 editorial:²⁰

The most controversial issue is the supposition that, for example, three news bulletins supported by the Christian Democrats, the Socialists and the Communists, or Tg1, Tg2, and Tg3, could, together, represent a guarantee of pluralism and correctness in television news. Considering of course that objectivity can only ever be relative, three twisted mirrors do not make a relatively objective mirror, three partial voices are not mutually correcting, and do not complement each other case-by-case

By the early nineties, few still supported summative pluralism. Some - such as the President of Rai Pedullà and Christian Democrat leader Ciriaco de Mita - argued that summative pluralism had made sense at the time of the '75 reform, but had subsequently degenerated thanks to greater conflict between the parties and the spread

¹⁸ L. Delli Colli, 'Il Psi vuole che i vertici Rai intervengano sul 'caso Biagi'', *La Repubblica*, March 20, 1985, 2.

¹⁹ D. Brancati, 'Rai Due contro il suo direttore', *La Repubblica*, June 29, 1984, 23; D. Brancati, 'I padroni dei media', *Repubblica*, Novembre 24, 1988, 8.

²⁰ A. Ronchey, 'Il modello della Rai, pochi pregi, tanti guai'. *La Repubblica*, Novembre 29, 1988, 10.

of 'militant information'.²¹ The '*teoria della sommatoria*' (theory of summative pluralism), as De Mita put it, was judged unacceptable.

This conception gained a boost with the entry into politics of Silvio Berlusconi and the consequent passage of the *par condicio* (law no. 515 of the 10th December 1993; law no. 28 of the 22nd February 2000). These laws required not only that party political broadcasts be made by the parties on an equal basis, but also that broadcasters divide their news coverage of the competing parties or blocs on an equal basis, or otherwise, as specified by the sectoral watchdog, the Authority for Communications Guarantees (*Autorità per le garanzie nelle comunicazioni*, Agcom).²²

These laws have made necessary the collection of data on the amount of screen-time given to each competing subject. This monitoring is carried out not just by Agcom (which has gone substantially beyond its mandate [as specified in Art. 1, §6b, paragraph number 9 of law n. 249 of the 31st July 1997], in collecting not merely information on political coverage during electoral periods, but also during normal politics, where no quantitative obligation is placed on broadcasters), but by a number of private organisations, including the *Osservatorio di Pavia* (the closest to an 'official' source of such information, since Rai has signed a long-term contract with the group, and the same data is used by the parliamentary committee which supervises Rai), and the *Centro d'Ascolto dell'Informazione Radiotelevisiva*, which was set up by the Radical party in 1981, and which occasionally supplies data to Agcom.

Despite the fact that the *par condicio* only applies during electoral campaigns, data from these organisations were used by Rai, and by those outside it, to alternately

²¹ Interview with Walter Pedullà, 'E la Rai il canone dovra sudarselo', *La Repubblica*, October 8, 1992, 10. Interview with Ciriaco de Mita, 'La Rai? Libera per disperazione', *La Repubblica*, October 20, 1992, 17.

²² Whilst the dispositions emitted by Agcom vary according to the type of election, general elections from 2001 onwards have required that news coverage be divided equally between competing blocs.

defend or attack the broadcaster for a presumed lack of pluralism. The most concerted attempt to reassert summative pluralism, and to put this conception on a sounder footing, was made by Roberto Zaccaria, president of Rai between 1998 and 2002. In the run-up to the 2001 elections Zaccaria defended Rai from accusations of impartiality by citing data both from two different sources (the *Osservatorio di Pavia* and the *Centro d'Ascolto di Roma*) which showed that Rai 'had respected political pluralism - the principle of the three thirds',²³ according to which screen time should be shared equally between the legislative majority (1/3rd), the legislative minority (1/3rd), and the governing institutions (1/3rd).

Zaccaria's use of this principle was sagacious. 'Reliance on numbers and quantitative manipulation minimizes the need for intimate knowledge and personal trust' – trust which certainly did not exist between the parties and Rai at that time. If 'the drive to supplant personal judgement by quantitative rules reflects weakness and vulnerability' (Porter 1995, ix, xi), Zaccaria's move seems appropriate given the weakness and vulnerability of Rai in particular and the Italian journalistic corps in general. This principle also had the advantage of international precedent, having been previously employed by the French *Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel*. Had the principle of the three-thirds won acceptance in Italy as it did in France, then this conception of pluralism might have become dominant. Unfortunately for Zaccaria, the criterion was not accepted by the legislative minority, who objected to the over-representation of government ministers speaking, in their view, not as office-holders but as partisan figures. Francesco Storace (Alleanza Nazionale) claimed that

those Italians who do not vote for the *Ulivo* or *Rifondazione* have been wiped-out by the public news. Between the 25th January and the 30th April... the majority won with 60% against 40% for the opposition in news programmes; or as much as 70% in the news bulletins²⁴ (Fontanarosa 1998)

²³ S. Caviglia, 'Zaccaria: Per Berlusconi un anno da record sul video', *La Repubblica*, February 16, 2001

²⁴ A. Fontanarosa, 'Rai, An torna all'attacco'. *La Repubblica*, May 17, 1998, 22.

Such percentages were entirely in line with the principle of three-thirds enunciated by Zaccaria, but were still perceived by Storace as a ‘violation of pluralism’. Even Zaccaria himself did not stick rigidly to his own criteria: in response to Storace’s attacks, he argued that quantitative data alone were insufficient: what was required was qualitative data demonstrating whether time given over to each group was favourable or not.

This is just one of the qualifications which have meant that this conception of pluralism suffers from internal problems. First, and most obviously, there is disagreement over the correct distribution principle: Zaccaria would have it that the majority, including government institutions, should have two-thirds; Carmine Donzelli proposed that the incoming governing coalition should get the same percentage of time as the outgoing governing coalition; Storace (presumably) sought loose parity with share of the popular vote, and so on. Second, there is some debate about which data are the ‘correct’ data: given the plurality(!) of observatories supplying such data, politicians may be able to choose the data which best supports their preconceptions. Third, there is debate about the proper sphere of application of summative pluralism: does it apply exclusively to news coverage, or do entertainment programmes – such as sports programmes – also count? Fourth, and finally, there is even debate about whether certain kinds of coverage – coverage which is positive towards its target, or coverage which gains higher ratings – ought to be counted differently.

Summative pluralism may seem to be the closest to a regulatory value which can defend Rai from attack: were a division of screen-time agreed, the very impersonality and automaticity of the process would acquire a respect that would not

be accorded necessarily to journalists' discretion. Yet this ignores the fact that many of the most vociferous criticisms of Rai in recent years – those during the 2001 election campaign – were not motivated by an impression of global bias, or unfairness, but rather by specific episodes which were held by the centre-right to 'violate pluralism' – a charge which makes no sense given summative pluralism (but which was nonetheless upheld by Agcom in its decisions against two current affairs programmes *Linea Verde* and *Samarconda*). The responses of President Zaccaria affirming a global balance across all Rai's programming did nothing to defuse criticism: this may, in part, be why the next President of Rai, Baldassarre, stopped Zaccaria's practice of presenting such data after his appointment in 2002. Thus, summative pluralism disattends from questions of the standards of individual programmes.

Conclusion

So far I have argued that the value of pluralism has an essentially political genesis, and that there is considerable conceptual confusion surrounding it. Each of the conceptions voiced in the debate tends to vitiate Rai's self-defence. My analysis is useful insofar as it helps to understand contemporary debates surrounding Rai, and in particular to understand why these debates feel so unsatisfactory. It *contributes* to understanding the politics of Rai; but the politics of Rai cannot, for obvious reasons, be reduced to what is, after all, a conceptual analysis.

There are three questions I would like to touch on briefly by way of conclusion. First, if this same kind of analysis was replicated in other countries, would their values not seem equally confused -- and thus is there anything particularly Italian about this analysis? Second, if the value of pluralism is as confused as I have

claimed, why is it used so persistently? And third, despite the confusion surrounding this value, ought it guide any reform of the Italian media?

It is true that concepts used in other countries -- the concepts of 'objectivity' and 'fairness' employed in American print and broadcast journalism, the concept of 'due impartiality' employed in British broadcast journalism, and the concepts of *opartiskhet* [impartiality] and *mångfald* [pluralism] employed in Swedish broadcast journalism -- are all under-theorised in comparison to pluralism. We therefore do not know whether they are self-contradictory, or vague, or confused. Yet this is part of their success: all have a professional or industrial genesis, not a political or legal genesis. The concept of due impartiality in British broadcasting was developed by the BBC; only later was it recognised by the political authorities (with the 1926 Crawford Committee); it was only incorporated into legislation after many years of exegesis by the BBC and the ITA (with the 1990 Communications Act). The concept of *opartiskhet* was adopted by Sveriges Television from its main news supplier, TT, and the demand for pluralism voiced in the seventies was a demand from journalists, not from the authorities. The professional communities in these countries thus defined the normative terrain in which they operate, giving them an advantage in interpreting those values, and discouraging political interpretation. By contrast, the political genesis of pluralism means that politicians have as much right as journalists to debate what pluralism truly requires. Consequently, even if an analysis of this type were to be carried out in other countries, it would involve very different players.

Why then does pluralism persist? I have emphasised that the concept of pluralism has a political and not a legal genesis. Its continuance is also political. There has not been space to discuss how each of the developments which has been legitimised by pluralism has, in turn, been a response to broader political

developments, and in particular the changing loci of power within the party system. There is a yet-to-be written counter-factual history of Italy in which there were no *fanfaniani*, no Berlinguer, no Berlusconi; and in this unwritten history, the history of Rai would also have been very different.

At the same time, however, the persistence of pluralism is due to the lack of relevant alternatives, and in particular the lack of a professional community capable of articulating and following rules of conduct for independent journalism. The very call for professionalism itself has been contested (Curzi and Mineo 1994, 25). The absence of such norms is due to the relatively limited development of the market for news in Italy, and is the key to understanding the Italian media system as a whole, and not just the concept of pluralism. The confusion surrounding pluralism is a particular symptom of a much larger pathology, which has already been extensively diagnosed (Hallin & Mancini 2004, Mazzanti).

This explanation of why pluralism persists has direct relevance for the final question, of whether pluralism ought to persist, and whether it ought to be used as a standard for evaluating and for reforming the Italian media. I have described the way that pluralism has often been identified with *lottizzazione*, and whilst this may be enough to condemn the concept in the eyes of some, there are some courageous scholars who have defended *lottizzazione* as the lesser evil in the Italian context. Paolo Mancini (2009) has defended *lottizzazione* as an acceptable second-best solution capable of ensuring a multiplicity of views in broadcast and print media, given the lack of professional journalistic ethics in Italy. Unfortunately, Mancini's argument suffers from its virtues: whilst its defence of *lottizzazione* (and *a fortiori*, of pluralism) is perfectly clear, it is too clear to command the kind of broad consent that

pluralism currently has. The gap between what is practised, what is valued, and what ought to be valued is, at each step, considerable.

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Notes

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Table 1. Three conceptions of pluralism.

	Structural pluralism	Summative pluralism	Pluralism 'lottizzato'
Pluralism is a property of the broadcaster's...	Organisation	Output	Personnel
Legislative expression found in...	l. 103/75	' <i>par condicio</i> '	—
Normatively desirable in virtue of...	Miltonian relationship between competition and truth	Prior huge imbalances	Redress for previous discrimination in employment
Normatively disagreeable in virtue of...	Overlap, political colonisation	Unsatisfying balance of 'militant' partial views	Lack of merit in recruitment
Damages Rai's defence by	Creating impression of channels operating to a political, not public service, logic	Disattending from individual programme standards	Encouraging journalistic 'intentional fallacy'