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### **Sicily's Nationhood: Melting Pot or Italy's 'Toe?'**

Arancini is a staple of Sicilian cuisine, literally known as a deep-fried, typically rice-based ball filled with many varying ingredients. Figuratively, Enzo Zaccardelli understands this ubiquitous Italian food item's significance to be a resounding metaphor for the complicated national identity of the Sicilian people. Sicilians have been and continue to disagree over who may receive the food, as the gifting of it to outsiders, or lack of gifting it, holds a grander meaning: one portion of the population openly shares arancini and see it as being "connected to the historical heterogeneity of the island," conceptualizing Sicily as a melting pot for various ethnicities, cultures, and politics to coexist or ebb and flow. Another group is more exclusionary with arancini, seeing it as "a local symbol of what it is to be truly Sicilian" and Italian. This politically-charged culinary debate mirrors the Sicilian attempt to find the 'right way' to define Sicily's national identity, specifically after joining the Italian state officially. I will argue there are confusing distinctions for Sicilians, personally, between their nation being understood as a generally globalized, multilateral nation versus the one-ness associated with joining the Italian state and that this dichotomizing of Sicilian national identity reasonably reflects disparate personal Sicilian identities and behaviors beyond strictly their politics.

The concept of a 'nation' is defined by Anthony Smith as "a named human population sharing a historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties" (Smith 447). Smith explains nationhood as an agglomeration of these clearly definable and looser aspects of general identity in a shared

significant space. The two major interpretations of Sicilian identity both fall under his definition in differing forms, especially because such vague and encompassing guidelines can be individually construed. However, defining which Sicilians succumb to each belief of national identity can not be clearly demarcated other than via their established belief systems.

The more historical, more open sense of Sicilian national identity is rooted in the island's numerous inhabitants and thus differing cultures and politics. Zaccardelli cited the Greeks, Carthaginians, Normans and Vandals, Byzantines, Arabs, Berbers, the French, the Spaniards, Italians, and briefly in the 20th century, the Americans, as all inhabiting and therefore adding to the confusion of pinpointing the national identity of Sicily at each individual time of occupancy and cumulatively (Zaccardelli, 5). "The island's multidimensional character and its long history of interactions amongst various incoming cultural waves have translated into an inability for Sicily to produce a clear image of itself" (Ovington and Lipari). The interpretation of and finding comfort in the chaos of constant personal change (especially during the period before Sicily became formally part of the Kingdom of Italy in 1861), prompts some ideas of the nation's identity to follow suit in this instability. Not only does Sicily's rich and complex socio-political history affect people's ideation of its nationhood, but it is also still home to a wide variety of people with ethnic ties to varying countries, races, and cultures. Some Sicilians — those who tend to emphasize culture in their views on nationhood — solidify their nation as foundationally being a melting pot, giving a paradoxical, quasi-sense of 'oneness' to their national identity.

The newer vision of Sicily's identity by some Sicilian people was specifically brought about by the watershed incorporation of the island into Italy's kingdom and emphasizes the heavily western Europeanization that came with the established whole Italian nationalism. "For the first time in Sicily's history the entire Island was under a single power. This fact alone is one

of the strongest unifying forces of melding together a Sicilian identity” (Avino, 17-18). With the ability to finally attach to a singular entity rather than a paradoxical comfort in not having one option, rather many, some Sicilians felt the national identity of the Roman Italians — to whom they were now directly related — best represented their nationhood. This drive was also fueled by rising globalization and thus more potent fears of being dependent and weaker; this could understandably foster compensatory ideologies that draw Sicilians “closer to the rest of Italy by creating an imagined community,” giving them privileges they would not see without aligning their nation’s ideas with Italy’s. (Zaccardelli, 10). This involves a certain level of purposeful ignorance, however, because the evidence for this identity practically excludes events on the timeline predating Sicily joining the kingdom of Italy. Saladin Ambar discusses what he (and from philosopher Ernest Renan) sees as a commonplace phenomenon in nation-building: forgetting. Ambar uses the nation-building of the United States to explain the selection and thus the glorification of some historical information over others, saying that French historian Alexis de Tocqueville’s accounts “placed America’s political origins at the Puritan founding” with the northern, New England founding rather than the southern, Virginian founding that was equally as historically significant (Ambar, 10). In doing this, Tocqueville “selectively advance(d) one national narrative over another” (Ambar, 11). This choice to highlight one of two places, ‘forgetting’ the other, can be applied to the manner in which some Italian-centric Sicilians latched onto one of two time periods — a newer, rather than an older narrative. This forges a quasi-ideological association between national identity and state/country identity, which Lowell Barrington believes is the “most important and consistent misuse of ‘nation’ in political science” (Barrington, 713). The nation and state/country identities are not completely synonymous, but this newer, exclusionary understanding of Sicily’s nationhood almost completely feeds from this

philosophy of Sicily's national identity meaning the same as the rest of Italy's. Rather than a misuse, Smith cites John Breuille (among other authors) as legitimizing a theory that people primarily center their national identities directly on state politics and state identity as the two are innately intertwined (Smith 448). In that light, the state can not be separated from the nation and it would be wrong not to majoritively rely on state identity as a basis for national identity.

Sicily becoming part of the Italian state in the 19th century marked the first split in the way Sicilians understood their own nation's identity. Whereas before the nation existed as a transitory aggregation of many civilizations in one place, it was now given structural, monolithic meaning via Italy's preexisting national identity, which was attractive to some, due to its privileges and uniformity unbeknownst to them, but also ignorant and exclusionary to others. The line between each side is purely ideological and too individualized to be qualifiable. While neither the more open, global view nor the more closed, state-centered view seems to be entirely right or wrong with such ambiguous and complex academic definitions of nationhood, the crux of this question of true nationhood lies in the existence of clashing ideas; it causes disorientation and separation within the nation in the cultural, social, and of course political realms that affect people personally and interpersonally. As a bellwether region for Italian elections, Sicily is known for holding political power, and something as seemingly basic as Sicilian national identity can be seen as affecting the outcome of Italian politics as a whole. Nevertheless, even cultural and social phenomena as simple as sharing food (the perfect metaphor of arancini as Sicilian identities) continue to prove more abstractly how this ideological divide perplexes Sicilian life beyond just state politics. Now, Sicily is an autonomous region but is still part of the Italian state, exemplifying the persistent coexistence of this quasi-dual national identity.

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