

Robert Kaiser | Jana Edelmann [eds.]

Crisis as a Permanent Condition?

The Italian Political System between Transition and Reform Resistance



Nomos

Transnational Perspectives on Transformations
in State and Society

edited by

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Volume 1

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Preface of the book series editors

In a globalized world, transnational interactions in its various forms significantly determine the problem-solving capacity of democratic politics, the development of pluralistic societies as well as the reform capacity of political systems and highly-industrialized economies. This book on the “Italian crisis” with which we introduce our new book series on “Transnational Perspectives on Transformations in State and Society” provides manifold insights into strategies and processes of national reforms that are significantly affected by external conditions and transnational exchanges.

The institutional reform deadlock that characterized Italy for decades has its roots particularly in the deep ideological divide between Catholicism and communism that remained extraordinary stable during the Cold War. The lack of confidence of Italian citizens in their own state was for a long time reflected by above-average support rates for European integration. In parallel, however, Italy’s role in determining the future shape of European integration has decreased significantly since the 1980s mainly as a consequence of the inability of the political elite to formulate a coherent EU policy approach. The European economic and financial crisis can explain why there are today more chances for institutional reforms in Italy than at the time immediately after the breakdown of the First Republic. Although the level of public debts is currently as high as it was in the 1990s, the financial stability of the country is not only an Italian problem anymore, but a crucial aspect for the assessment of the functioning of the EURO zone.

In this respect, the contributions to this volume perfectly fit with the editorial aim of this book series. They present original research and valuable information not only on the domestic dimension of the country’s crisis, but also on how different patterns of transnationality impact on the national political system and society.

Robert Kaiser
Christian Lahusen
Andrea Schneider

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Introduction: Italy between transition and reform resistance

Robert Kaiser / Jana Edelmann

Italy is in crisis. This finding is hardly contested in public opinion neither in Italy, nor in the rest of Europe. There is, however, much less consensus on the causes, the scope and the consequences of this crisis.

Some observers consider the Italian crisis as a specific variant of the economic and political turmoil that has affected the Mediterranean periphery of the European Union at large. This is, however, not fully plausible. In contrast to the other 'euro-crisis countries', Italy does not suffer from a collapse of the housing market, nor does it have an over-sized banking sector. Italy is also not a victim of an over-specialization in service industries. It rather has the second largest industrial sector in Europe.

Furthermore, Italy's current economic situation cannot be sufficiently explained as a result of the global financial crisis. That is why *The Economist* attributed the title of "the real sick man of Europe" to Italy already in May 2005 and thus rightly pointed to the fact that the country suffers, at least since the mid-1990s, from low productivity growth, decreasing industrial competitiveness and high public debt. The rate of youth unemployment in Italy is, of course, worrying. In terms of overall unemployment, however, Italy's performance is on average with EURO zone unemployment.

Not surprisingly, the chronic economic disease has spilled out into the country's political sphere.

The success of Beppe Grillo's populist movement in the parliamentary elections in 2013 is a remarkable development, but not because of the increasing support for a populist movement in general. Those parties exist in many European countries, even though they are quite different in terms of their ideological positions. The exceptional aspect rather is that the Five-Star Movement became the largest single party in the Italian parliament although it had made it clear from the very beginning that it would not engage in the process of government formation. Berlusconi's agonizingly slow retreat from Italian politics seems to have destabilized the bipolar party system which - as some observers believed - had consolidated after the 2006 and 2008 elections.

These developments cast doubt on whether or not there has really been substantial change in Italy during the last two decades. The claim that Ita-

ly is currently at the threshold of the third republic seems to be equally plausible as the notion that the country is still affected by most of the institutional dysfunctions of the first republic.

Indeed, there are striking parallels between the crisis of 1992/1994 and the current situation:

- in 1993, international investors lost confidence in the financial stability of the country which had accumulated a debt mountain of 120 percent of its GDP (which is pretty much the same level as today),
- in the 1990s but also recently, a paralyzed government was displaced by technocratic cabinets, and
- both crises paved the way for a national populist party which before had quite limited success only at the local and regional level: The Lega Nord in 1993 and the Movimento Cinque Stelle in 2013.

So, what has really changed?

First of all, the outcome of the General Elections in February 2013 had triggered widespread criticism as regards the country's electoral law and furthermore had revealed the electorate's fundamental discontent with the established parties. On the one hand, neither the centre-left nor the centre-right was able to obtain a majority in both chambers, due to the Porcellum's genuine majority bonus system. On the other hand, Beppe Grillo's populist protest-movement Movimento 5 Stelle, harshly condemning the traditional party politics and openly disguising the established political elite, was backed by one in four voters. M5S's electoral rise put an end to the so-called bipolarism between centre-left and centre-right and further complicated the formation of government, as the protest-movement refused to collaborate with the traditional parties and subsequently rejected any coalition aspirations on the part of the centre-left. Italy seemed, once again, to be shaped by the dynamics of an 'ungovernable country'. Consequently, 'stalemate', 'deadlock' and 'paralysis' were the slogans usually used to describe the political landscape following 24 and 25 February 2013.

Secondly, the very same political parties that were not able to build a working parliamentary majority also proved to be incapable of reaching a cross-party consensus when it came to the presidential election in April 2013. In five ballots, none of the candidates presented was able to obtain the necessary majority. Finally, the parties' failure of finding a mutually acceptable candidate resulted in the re-election of the 87 years old Giorgio Napolitano in the sixth ballot. This unprecedented step of a President's re-

election for second term was widely interpreted as a further sign of political stagnation in Italy.

It was in this environment of acute institutional crisis and political uncertainty that the theme of Italy's need for fundamental change and profound overhaul started to (re)dominate the political debate. Not only did Giorgio Napolitano establish a 'committee of wise men' that should elaborate strategies for Italy's institutional and socio-economic renewal, but also the newly formed grand coalition under Enrico Letta installed a 'commission for institutional reforms' of experts, setting a 18 months deadline for constitutional reform.

Of course, this was not the first time the theme of 'crisis' and 'renewal' has taken centre stage in the Italian political discourse and media debate. Following the crack of the entire party system in the early 1990s, for the most part triggered by the widespread corruption scandals of 'tangentopoli' and the subsequent judicial inquiries of 'mani pulite', expectations were high and outlooks optimistic that Italian politics and its institutional system would soon face a 'fresh start'. Then, it was almost taken for granted that comprehensive reforms would be designed and implemented in order to tackle structural problems, an expectation which was not met by reality. Consequently, ever since the end of the so-called First Republic and the beginning of the so-called Second Republic, the debate about (the ongoing) Italian transition has not yet come to an end.

At the time of publication, this debate is still highly relevant and not yet to be answered with final certainty. There are strong signs that, indeed, Italy eventually is being renewed and reformed. The most powerful agent of change seems to be its new Prime Minister, Matteo Renzi, who assumed office in February 2014. The 'scrapper', as he has labelled himself, built his political career on exactly this promise: to renew and replace the old and corrupt Italian political class, to reform and smash its encrusted and inefficient structures. Ever since being in charge as Italy's new head of government, he not only repeats this message whenever and wherever possible, he has also introduced sweeping institutional reforms, directed at the very core of Italian consensual and often ineffective politics. Firstly, in May 2015, a new electoral law based on proportional representation was passed, which, among others, assigns a 55% majority bonus no longer to a pre-electoral alliance consisting of various different parties, but to one single party. In other words, one party alone will be provided with an unshakable majority. Furthermore, the respective party heads do have considerable leverage over the selection of Deputies, thus are able to handpick loyal candidates. Briefly, the so-called 'Italicum' is clearly designed to

guarantee governmental stability and to explicitly strengthen the Prime Minister.

Secondly, and even more important, Renzi's government currently is pushing a constitutional reform through parliament, which will put an end to the so-called 'bicameralismo perfetto'. The reform profoundly reduces the Senat's political role and its size remarkably. It would no longer be necessary for forming a government and passing (most) national legislation. The Senate would cease to be a directly elected body, becoming a second-tier one, mostly consisting of representatives from regional councils and autonomous provinces (plus five Senators that may be appointed by the President for a seven-year mandate). This is, in fact, the establishment of a unicameral national parliament. Streamlining of the legislative process and downsizing of the political class are said to be its two main effects, effects which for decades are widely requested by all political parties and institutional experts likewise. "With the final approval of the constitutional reform, scheduled for the end of 2015, Italy will then have an important lever to restart the driving force of economic and social development", it is optimistically stated on the website of the Ministry of Reform.

With all this progress being made, is there, after all, any substance left for still referring to an 'Italian Crisis'? For the time being, uncertainty about the final outcome of Renzi's reform agenda clearly prevails. This is due to several points, including institutional as well as political aspects. As regards the constitutional reform, predicting the final outcome is rather difficult, since Renzi's government has announced to hold a referendum even in case of approval by a two-third majority. At least in view of recent election results, Renzi's approval ratings witnessed severe decrease in the regional and local elections in spring 2015, with his Partito Democratico performing rather unsatisfactorily. Renzi's publicly announced renewal of the political elite reveals to be a rather bumpy path, as well. His former infrastructure minister had to resign due to a corruption scandal, and various candidates supporting the PD in the regional elections in May 2015 were criticised for allegedly having connections to the organized crime.

Looking at the current situation, there are good reasons to assume that the Italian political system is still in the process of transformation. From a theoretical perspective, this would not be a big surprise. Historical Institutionalism would tell us that the design of complex institutional arrangements can be understood as a result of an elite compromise that was functional and maybe even rational at a specific moment in time. The simple fact that some of these institutional arrangements became more and more

dysfunctional over time does not necessarily mean that there will be a decisive change. Both the uncertainty about the performance of alternative arrangements as well as the fact that these dysfunctional institutional arrangements still provide sufficient benefits for a country's elite can explain why wide reaching institutional reforms do not take place very often and, if at all, only under very specific circumstances.

The negative consequences of institutional path dependency evolve, of course, not only in the case of Italy. However, Italy currently is paying, and will most likely continue to pay in the near future, an incomparable high price if institutional reforms will not take place. Two examples may explain this assumption.

The first example concerns the country's innovativeness and competitiveness. The European Commission measured in 2005, thus well before the Global Financial Crisis, the relative position of the EU member states in terms of their innovative performance. As a result of this analysis, it clustered all countries in four categories: the innovation leaders, the innovation followers, the moderate innovators and the catching-up countries. Italy was classified as a moderate innovator, along with other southern European countries and most of the new eastern European member states. The more worrying result of this assessment was, however, that Italy had a time-lag of more than 10 years to catch up even to the EU-25 average (European Commission 2005: 13). And most recent analyses confirm, that countries in the group of moderate innovators have improved their situation only marginally after the financial crisis. Regional variations in innovative performance are, of course, large in Italy. However, at a national scale, both private and public investments in research and development were and still are extremely low. Public R&D investments are about half of the OECD average. International studies explicitly criticize a rather limited innovation policy mix and a lack of incentives especially for entrepreneurship and science-industry interactions. Based on that assessment, there is not much reason to assume that Italy will be able to improve its industrial competitiveness in the near future.

The second example concerns Italy's involvement in European politics. As a founding member of the European community and as a country that has the same number of votes in the council as the other big member states (Germany, France, and Britain) one could expect that Italy plays an important role in the EU politics. In fact, I did so until the mid-1980s. The Genscher-Colombo Initiative of 1981 or Spinelli's draft European constitution of 1984 prove the country's engagement especially in situations in which the process of European Integration stagnated. Since that time,

however, Italy's influence on European Politics has more and more diminished.

The instability of Italy's governments, the incoherence of the country's positions towards key European projects, and last but not least the collapse of the DC, which had provided a platform for interaction with leaders of other Christian democratic parties in Europe, led to a situation in which Italy's position was hardly acknowledged anymore. At the same time, public support in Italy for European integration decreased considerably. With the enlargement of the European Union, the situation even worsened. Nowadays Italy is often considered as part of the Club Med or even as a member of the PIGS, the group of EU member states that is most exposed to the current economic crisis. Empirical analyses on strategic coalition building in the European Union suggests, on the one hand, that net receiver countries in the EU often prefer coalitions with the Spanish government which they believe can support their position much more effectively. On the other hand, Italy's recent attempts to establish a coalition with France and Spain, which was obviously an attempt to challenge Germany's power position in defining the stabilization measures for the EURO, were doomed to failure from the beginning. They simply ignored the logic of European policy-making or they at least overestimated the French willingness to question the Franco-German axis.

In November 2013, an international interdisciplinary conference tackled the question of the alleged and frequently cited 'Italian Crisis'. Under the heading "*Politics all' italiana – crisis as a permanent condition?*", some of the most respected scientific experts for the Italian political system and the history of Italy were invited to the University of Siegen to present their very own findings as regards the claim of an 'Italian Crisis'. This formed the basis of this conference volume.

The conference aimed at an in-depth analysis of some of the central aspects of Italian political life, in order to be able to understand the country's underlining structural political features. The overall purpose is to convey a sound understanding of the various inherent dynamics of the Italian political system by focusing on longstanding historical and socio-cultural patterns as well as on current political developments and personalization tendencies. This volume is thus organized around the following four topics:

1. National identity
2. Political system and institutions
3. Political actors and elite structures
4. Personalized politics and political leadership

1. National identity and political culture

The first chapter deals with the national and regional basis of the Italian Republic. The selected aspects reveal the historical embeddedness of current developments and the importance of taking history into account when trying to understand and explain Italian politics.

In the first contribution, *Christopher Duggan* focuses on of the Italian cultural landscape's characteristics that stand out as distinctive and enduring forces conditioning the development of its political life. While rejecting the potential historical determinism of a "longue durée" perspective, he identifies the particular weight and presence of the Catholic Church in Italy and the experiences of Fascist regime as the two dominant cultural characteristics that might help understanding the problematic issue of the nation-state since its very beginning with the Risorgimento, as well as the party-state tendencies of the First Republic, according to Duggan.

Günther Pallaver and *Marco Brunazzo* analyse the altered relationship between territory and politics in view of the transition from the First to the Second Republic. According to the authors, there has been a "new-renaissance" of regional parties in the Second Republic due to the new party system and the new electoral laws adopted in 1993 and 2005. Following these institutional changes, regional parties gained a pivotal role in the formation of coalition governments. In contrast to the First Republic, regional parties such as the Northern League therefore now play a decisive role in national politics, strengthening the "voices of the territories" in the Italian political system.

Silvana Patriarca addresses the topic of the Italian national identity, stating that there has been a significant strengthening of the concept of national identity throughout the 2000s. She ascribes this tendency towards renationalisation, this "renationalization of the political field", clearly to the political presence of the Northern League and the subsequent change of discourse and debate as regards national identity. This might seem a paradox, given the fact that the party's political rise in the 1990s was widely seen as a threat to national unity by various political spectators and experts alike. However, Patriarca shows that the Northern League can indeed be characterized as a "de facto Italian nationalist party".

2. Political system and institutions

The volume's second part is dedicated to Italy's political system and to the question whether there has in fact been a transition taking place following the crises-years in the 1990s. Overall, all authors agree that, at least up until the time of their papers' completion, the fundamental rules of the political and institutional game have not been fundamentally changed.

Martin J. Bull analyses the past failure of institutional reform as well as including the present ambition to finally carry out such reforms successfully. In his article, he states that there are three recurrent features guiding all reform attempts: Firstly, aiming to correct political dysfunctionality, secondly, securing partisan advantages and, thirdly, creating wide-ranging consensus for the reforms. His outlook on future change is rather sceptical: Political actors still fail to fulfil the necessary preconditions for setting up a successful reform procedure. According to Bull, there are three necessary preconditions for successful institutional reforms: The passing of old elites, the formulation of an authentic reform blueprint and the existence of a decisive government majority.

In line with these findings, *Gianfranco Pasquino* in his contribution argues that there has never been any substantial change in the Italian political system and that, very likely, there will never be a structural overhaul. Referring to the typology of David Easton, he shows that there has not been any profound change neither within the Political Community, nor in the Authorities, nor in the Regime of Italy. Therefore, he bluntly rejects the denomination of the period since 1992/1994 as Second Republic since, according to Pasquino, it shows the very same features the First Republic was shaped by.

The transformations of the Italian party system will be analysed by *Maurizio Cotta*. In his contribution, Cotta focuses on the most recent developments during the economic and financial crisis. He argues that the party system's structure is far from consolidated. Moreover, special attention is given to the relationship between political leaders and parties which has acquired a strategic importance in Italian politics.

Francesco Zucchini aims at explaining Italy's poor track record as regards policy reform and policy change for the period of the entire Italian Republic. Recurring to Tsebeli's concept of veto players, he provides a spatial analysis in which policy change is explained by the nature of the status quo given the preferences of the government coalition, thus the government's unanimity core size is crucial for policy change to happen.

3. Political actors and elite structures

The third section of the volume deals with the Italian elite and as well as with the phenomena of corruption and clientelism shaping the relationship between politicians and voters systematically at least until the 1990s, as the tangentopoli scandals have revealed.

Carlo Carboni describes some long-term cultural traits shaping Italian society in general in order to subsequently establish a typology of the Italian political elite in particular. The latter, according to the author, consists of moralisers, negotiators and persuaders. Combining these conceptual findings with empirical data as regards the problematic state of Italian economics and the country's financial woes, Carboni draws a rather negative picture of the Italian political elite. Referring to Italy's new Prime Minister Matteo Renzi in particular, he remains equally sceptical on his positive effects of the political system.

Luca Verzichelli discusses the changes that have occurred within the Italian ruling class after the breakdown of the "First Republic". He argues that the crisis of the political system was the product of the collapse of an elite system centered on two generations of rulers who had grown within the anti-fascist constitutional front and particularly within the Christian Democratic party.

The contribution by *Alberto Vannucci* turns our attention to political scandals and electoral accountability in Italy. He argues that the level of systemic corruption within the Italian political system could still, even suddenly, evolve into a new "political earthquake". During the economic crisis the popular discontent with the political class even exacerbated while the impact of any incremental anticorruption reform will be probably low.

4. Personalized politics and political leadership

The last part is devoted to the theme of personalized politics, namely to the controversial, but highly successful political figures of Silvio Berlusconi and Beppe Grillo.

James L. Newell focuses on the relationship between the protest Party Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S) and the Partito Democratico (PD), starting his analysis with the electoral scoop of the M5S at the national elections in February 2013. He argues that given that the M5S was able to win support from left and right, North and South, and across classes deprived the

established parties, the PD faces a novel challenge in the form of the – permanent or temporary – end of the bi-polarity that had characterised the party system for the previous twenty years.

In the volume's final contribution, *Jana Edelmann* addresses Silvio Berlusconi's political scope for action as Prime Minister by focusing on the institutional set-up of the Italian political system. According to the contribution, various constitutional and institutional configurations have severely restricted his room for manoeuvre throughout his terms of office. Referring to the concept of Historical Institutionalism, the author also shows that Berlusconi in fact acted within the very same institutional corset as his predecessors, a finding which rejects the widespread notion of Berlusconi's alleged unique and extensive political impact.

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National identity and political culture

The problem of the nation-state in Italy: some long-term historical reflections

Christopher Duggan

In his great work on the Mediterranean in the age of Philip II, Fernand Braudel set out, as an exponent of the Annales School, to explore the relationship between the *longue durée* and the intricate web political and economic crises of the 16th century, the so-called *histoire événementielle*. Faced with the recurrent problems of the Italian state in the last twenty or so years, and the apparently anomalous phenomenon of Silvio Berlusconi, historians have been similarly tempted to delve deep into the past for possible long-term explanations. Maurizio Viroli, for instance, has suggested that the attitude of Italians towards power has been deeply shaped by its monarchist and Catholic traditions going back to the Renaissance and beyond - an attitude of subservience towards forces that are deemed too strong to counteract and a corresponding conception of freedom as freedom from control - what he calls 'la libertà dei servi' (the freedom of slaves).¹ More recently Scipione Guarracino has sought to trace the weak conception of the state, the public good, and the rule of law in Italy back to the powerful sense of universality that the idea of Rome and its cosmopolitan mission helped to generate - a sense of universality that made it hard for the nation-state binomial to put down strong roots from the 19th century.²

Explanations for the present that turn too far to the past are to say the least highly problematic and risk mistaking lines that can be drawn between points of apparent similarity in the past and present as causal vectors. It is salutary, for instance, when thinking of the seemingly ingrained character of corruption in modern Italy to remember just how widespread political corruption was in Britain well into the 19th century - as the novels of Anthony Trollope and others remind us.³ And still today in Britain

1 M. Viroli, *La libertà dei servi*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2010.

2 S. Guarracino, *L'Italia disunita*, Milan, Bruno Mondadori 2013.

3 For an historical overview of corruption in British politics, see J. Moore and J. Smith (eds.), *Corruption in Urban Politics and Society. Britain 1780-1950*, Ash-

the boundaries between public and private interests are far from watertight – as recurrent scandals over politicians’ expenses remind us. The forces generating changes in culture and behaviour are too constant and too powerful to risk the kind of historical determinism that a *longue durée* perspective can engender.

Therefore, I think there are a number of features of the Italian cultural landscape that do stand out both as distinctive and enduring forces conditioning the development of Italian political life – albeit in ways that are not always easy to quantify with precision. One of course is the particular weight and presence of the Catholic Church in the peninsula. It seems to me very hard, as I sought to show in my book *The Force of Destiny*, to explain the physiognomy of the main political movements of the Risorgimento, or the way in which criticisms of the liberal regime was framed between 1861 and 1922 with their recurrent stress on the state’s so-called ‘agnosticism’ and its failure to engage the masses emotionally through ideals without reference to the putative or real paradigm of the Catholic Church. And the same goes even more for the language, forms and values that shaped the fascist regime.⁴ Another long-term and distinctive feature of Italian political discourse – not unrelated, perhaps, to the influence of the Church; and about which Silvana Patriarca has written so enlighteningly⁵ – is the degree to which issues of the Italian character have been invoked to explain what has happened and to formulate possible solutions. In part this may be due to the disproportionate influence that has often

gate, Aldersot 2007. For a broad comparative and historical perspective, see A.J. Heidenheimer, M. Johnston, V.T. LeVine (eds.), *Political Corruption. A Handbook*, New Brunswick, Transaction 1999. For corruption in modern Italy, see D. Della Porta, *Lo scambio occulto. Casi di corruzione in Italia*, Bologna, Il Mulino 1992; D. Della Porta and A. Vannucci, *Mani impunita. Vecchia e nuova corruzione in Italia*, Rome-Bari, Laterza 2007.

4 C. Duggan, *The Force of Destiny. A History of Italy since 1796*, London, Allen Lane 2007, pp. 127-32, 292-3, 360-1, 377, 419, 475-83. The work of Alberto Mario Banti on the discourses surrounding the idea of the nation during the Risorgimento has highlighted the centrality of religious language to Italian nationalism since the 1830s. See A.M. Banti, *La nazione del Risorgimento: parentela, santità e onore alle origini dell’Italia unita*, Turin, Einaudi 2000. For the longer-term legacy of such discourses, see A.M. Banti, *Sublime madre nostra, La nazione italiana dal Risorgimento al fascismo*, Rome-Bari, Laterza 2011. For fascism, see C. Duggan, *Fascist Voices. An Intimate History of Mussolini’s Italy*, London, Bodley Head 2012, in particular chapters 7 and 8.

5 S. Patriarca, *Italianità. La costruzione del carattere nazionale*, Rome-Bari, Laterza 2011.

been noted of writers and literature in the framing of ideas of the Italian nation over the centuries. There are striking notes of continuity, for instance, in the highly moral readings of Italy's problems - in particular the alleged proneness of Italians to factionalism, disorder and indiscipline - in the writings of Dante and Machiavelli in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance and those of influential political figures of the 19th century such as Giuseppe Mazzini, Giuseppe Garibaldi, Francesco De Sanctis and Pasquale Turiello.⁶ Fascism's pursuit of national palingenesis through the formation of spiritually regenerated new men and new women can only be fully understood against this backdrop. And part of the enduring appeal in some quarters of neo-fascist ideas since 1945 – as Elisabetta Cassina Wolff has recently highlighted in her study of the post-war journals of the far-right (surprisingly numerous) - is the enduring attraction of interpretations of the country's problems in terms of how the Italian character is congenitally unsuited, supposedly, to democracy and liberalism.⁷

If one looks at Italy's long 19th century, from the time of Napoleon to the advent of fascism, a recurrent theme in the minds of those who were concerned with the problem of building an Italian nation-state was how this could be done given the legacy of history. To what extent Italy was in fact culturally, economically and politically more fragmented than other similarly large territorial units in the 19th century is open to discussion.⁸ But what is certainly true is that the patriots of the Risorgimento – and many members of the liberal elites after 1860 – saw historically-generated divisions (municipal and regional in particular) as the over-riding problem to be addressed if a sense of the nation as the supreme collective focus of loyalty were to be created.⁹ Alberto Banti has argued powerfully in recent years (perhaps significantly against a backdrop of increasing anxieties about the strength of collective national identity in Italy following the collapse of the First Republic) that the idea of the Italian nation, as generated by writers in the Risorgimento had greater popular resonance than has of-

6 For De Sanctis and Turiello, see Duggan, *The Force of Destiny*, pp. 229-30, 240, 260-1, 271-2.

7 E. Cassina Wolff, *L'inchiostro dei vinti. Stampa e ideologia neofascista 1945-1953*, Milan, Mursia 2012, pp. 68-85.

8 For a classic discussion of France's cultural, economic and political fragmentation in the 19th century, see E. Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen. The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914*, Stanford, Stanford University Press 1976.

9 C. Duggan, *The Force of Destiny*, pp. 90-112.

ten been thought.¹⁰ This may be the case for a relatively brief period in the 1840s, but less, so, I think, after 1848. Furthermore, whatever the truth of the situation, the fact is that the country's leaders after 1860 believed the division between the elites and the masses (between the *paese legale* and the *paese reale* as they were soon called) to be enormous. The rift with the Church was a vital ingredient in this; and the emergence almost concurrently with unification of anarchism and revolutionary socialism as major European political forces further compounded the problem.

This situation of deep insecurity coloured the establishment of the Italian state at the outset; and the fraught relationship that ensued between 'governo e governati', to use Pasquale Turiello's phrase, reverberated, I would suggest, for many decades, setting in motion a dialectic of responses that frequently did more to exacerbate than reduce the gap between people and state. To take just a few examples from the 1860s. The decision to extend the highly centralised Piedmontese state to the whole of Italy was made largely on the grounds that this was the best practical means given the unexpectedness of events in 1860 of keeping the country together. But this arrangement of course immediately generated anger not just among the defeated democrats (most of whom had no illusions that what was being played out in the spring and summer of 1860 was tantamount to a civil war) but also among conservative elites in many parts of the country who had been keenly anticipating some degree of federalism.¹¹ The massive unrest in much of the South in the 1860s again triggered responses that in certain respects were counter-productive. Unable as a liberal state ostensibly built on the will of the people to indicate to the outside world that the disorder in the South contained strong elements of political opposition, the new rulers had recourse instead to the language of criminality: *brigantaggio* and, from 1865, *mafia*.¹² Seeing the enemy in this way served both to shape and justify the very brutal responses used, but it left a legacy of anger that fuelled the north-south dispute for decades to

10 For a discussion of Banti's views on the Risorgimento, and in particular his contention that the movement for Italian unity had 'mass' support, see the articles in *Nations and Nationalism*, vol. 15 (3), July 2009, pp. 396-454.

11 See, for instance, R. Romanelli, 'Centralismo e autonomie', in R. Romanelli (ed.), *Storia dello stato italiano dall'Unità a oggi*, Rome, Donzelli 1995, pp. 131-7; R. Romeo, *Cavour e il suo tempo*. Vol. 3: 1854-1861, Rome-Bari, Laterza 1984, pp. 859-63.

12 For 'the mafia' as a concept tailored to the political situation in Sicily in the 1860s, see C. Duggan, *Fascism and the Mafia*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press 1989, pp. 24-7.

come: anger not just at the violence perpetrated, but also at the highly negative image of the South that was generated.¹³ And ironically, given how relatively disorganised private violence was in the South in the 1860s, the sense of mistrust towards the new state gave rise to forms of cultural reaction in regions such as Sicily that arguably helped criminality to become both more embedded and more organised. The enduring political force of what occurred – or allegedly occurred – in the South in the 1860s is evident in the popularity of sensationalist works such as those by Pino Aprile.¹⁴

Another response to the sensed gap between the *paese legale* and the *paese reale* – though it also intersected with the persistent moral readings of Italy's problems often summed up in Massimo D'Azeglio's injunction to 'make Italians' now that 'Italy [had] been made' – was the pursuit of success in war. This, it seems to me, was one of the most important facets of the attempts after 1860 to establish the authority of the state, and one whose long-term consequences were to be profound. The disastrous engagement in the Austro-Prussian war in 1866 was the first major attempt to resolve internal disorder through foreign policy. The crisis that engulfed the country in the 1890s as a result of the collapse of the public finances and the banking sector (Germany had to step in to salvage the situation), the massive corruption scandals that all but destroyed the moral credibility of the institutions (including the monarchy), and the growing strength of anti-system forces led by the socialists, led to an almost messianic cult around Francesco Crispi, the man who dominated Italian politics for over a decade. Crispi also looked to war: first in Europe, in alliance with Germany against France; and when this did not materialise, in Ethiopia. The upshot, as we know, was the catastrophe at Adowa in 1896.¹⁵

13 For images of the South after 1860, see N. Moe, *The View from Vesuvius. Italian Culture and the Southern Question*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2002, chs. 5-7; C. Petraccone, *Le 'due Italie'. La questione meridionale tra realtà e rappresentazione*, Rome-Bari, Laterza 2005.

14 P. Aprile, *Terroni. Tutto quello che è stato fatto perché gli italiani del Sud diventassero Merdionali*, Milan, Piemme 2010. Many of the allegations in this book – which sold 250,000 copies in its first year – regarding the levels of violence perpetrated in the south after 1860 are not supported by documentary evidence. For a more balanced assessment of the incorporation of the South into united Italy, see S. Lupo, *L'unificazione italiana. Mezzogiorno, rivoluzione, guerra civile*, Rome, Donzelli 2011.

15 Crispi's pursuit of a European war in alliance with Germany was central to his foreign policy in 1887-91 and, to a lesser degree (given the more limited oppor-

The myth of the redemptive war was curiously strengthened in certain quarters by Adowa, but with the aim more of challenging and discrediting the authority of the liberal state than of reinforcing it. The attempt by Giovanni Giolitti to steal the thunder of the Nationalists by invading Libya in 1911-12 largely backfired; so too ultimately did the participation in the First World War. As the events of 1919-22 showed, the gap between the *paese legale* and the *paese reale* was as wide, if not wider, than ever. The last desperate throw of the dice was proportional representation with universal male suffrage – but this simply laid bare the depths of popular disaffection and the shortcomings of the liberal state's endeavours over a period of more than two generations to forge an integrated strong nation-state. The way was opened to extremism, chaos and civil war, and the eventual triumph of Mussolini and the fascist party in 1922-25.

Given the highly negative image of the liberal state that had developed in the decades before fascism – and the attacks had come from almost all quarters of the intellectual and political spectrum – it is perhaps not surprising that fascism had as its central agenda and *raison d'être* to heal the divisions between legal and real Italy and establish a state that had compelling moral authority and strength. As the 1925 formula of Mussolini put it: 'Everything within the state, nothing outside the state, nothing against the state'. And yet one of the ironies of the fascist experience – and one that had huge implications for the post-war Republic – was the remarkable degree to which it left the idea of the state as a 'stato di diritto', based on the rule of law, deeply discredited. It is worth recalling here the admonitory words of Piero Calamandrei in March 1947 to the Constituent Assembly as it began its deliberations to draw up a new constitution: 'One of the most serious illnesses' he said, 'one of the most serious pathological legacies of fascism to Italy has been the discrediting of laws. The Italians have always had a weak sense of legality, the sense that every citizen ought to respect the law and take it seriously as a moral duty, independently of judicial sanctions. After fascism they have lost it almost completely.' Calamandrei's remarks were made as a warning to the Assembly not to draw up a constitution that contained promises and com-

tunities presented by the international situation), in his subsequent term as prime minister in 1893-96. See, C. Duggan, *Francesco Crispi. From Nation to Nationalism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press 2002, chs. 14 – 19. For a review of the evidence for this thesis – which Italian historians have not wished to engage with – see A. Lyttelton, 'A certain idea of Italy', in *Times Literary Supplement*, 2 May 2003, pp. 3-5.

mitments that could not possibly be fulfilled. Otherwise, he presciently said – and it is a point to which I will return shortly - the new Republic far from establishing a ‘*stato di diritto*’ would be merely confirming and accentuating inveterate attitudes of mistrust towards the state.¹⁶

One of the obvious difficulties with the fascist state – and again it would have major repercussions after 1945 – was the constant tension that operated between party and state. *Squadristo* worked from the outset in defiance of the state authorities and the law, and that spirit of revolutionary defiance remained at the very heart of the regime for more than twenty years. At the local level, as Paul Corner’s recent study of the fascist party and popular opinion has highlighted, there was persistent rivalry between the *federale* and the prefect, the Militia and the police; and all too often fascist bosses measured their power, not to mention their rebellious fascist spirit, in terms of their capacity to disregard or bend laws with impunity and thereby pose as the *de facto* arbiters of the local situation. Linked to this was the proliferation of clientelism, with new fascist *notabili* throughout the country competing aggressively to replace the old networks of power of the professional and landowning liberal elites. Clientelism indeed, based on party credentials rather than competence, became all pervasive, with hugely damaging effects on almost every aspect of society in the inter-war years.¹⁷

Let me just take a couple of examples of the contradictions inherent in fascism’s claims to elevate the authority of the state. In 1925 a high-profile campaign was launched by the regime against the Sicilian mafia, a campaign which Mussolini hailed as a triumphant success and a demonstration, as he said in 1927, of the effectiveness of ‘fascist surgery’. But the pattern of arrests was heavily shaped by party-political considerations and by the regime’s determination to show that fascism was endowed with an energy and resolve that liberalism had not possessed: on both counts the letter of the law suffered badly. Sentences and acquittals were strongly influenced by clientelism – which caused widespread public dismay. And to compound the problem the regime’s claim by 1929 that the mafia had been defeated and was no longer to be referred to publicly provided a shield behind which corruption, violence and lawlessness could proliferate

16 Calamandrei’s intervention of 4 March 1947 can be found at: <http://www.nascitacostituzione.it/02p1/02t2/032/index.htm?art032-005.htm&2>.

17 P. Corner, *The Fascist Party and Popular Opinion in Mussolini’s Italy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012. See also, S. Lupo, *Il fascismo. La politica in un regime totalitario*, Rome, Donzelli, 2000, pp. 165 ff.

in the island almost unchecked. Internal party reports, accounts from foreign observers, and the letters of private individuals reveal an often terrifying situation of disorder in Sicily in the 1930s - one to which a blind eye was in large part deliberately being turned by the authorities in order not to expose the hollowness of the fascist state's claims to have succeeded in imposing the rule of law where liberalism had failed.¹⁸

To take another example, this time in the fascist colonies: The flurry of laws that were issued in the wake of the invasion of Ethiopia in 1935-6 to regulate relations between Italians and the local population were a reflection of the desire of Mussolini to ensure that fascist Africa became a showcase for how a modern totalitarian state could export 'civilisation' to a supposedly backward country. But as numerous reports indicate, lawlessness and corruption were rife in Ethiopia and became impossible to control. Party-based clientelism flourished unchecked; and the orders from Rome to maintain dignified and restrained conduct ran counter to the entire spirit of the invasion, which had been premised on the defiance of international law and the employment, in the spirit of fascist revolutionary ardour, of untrammelled energy (in practice violence) against an enemy universally portrayed as barbaric.¹⁹ The most conspicuous example of the intrinsically anarchic character of the occupation came with the massacre in February 1937 of thousands of civilians in Addis Ababa, largely by members of the fascist Militia, following an attempt on the life of the Viceroy, Rodolfo Graziani. Graziani himself did not dare to report to Rome on the extent of the violence - which recent well-researched estimates place in excess of 10,000 dead in two days.²⁰

All this raises the question of the legacies of the fascist regime to the post-war Republic. Understandably, perhaps, given the desire both to demonstrate and promote a sense of rupture with the past, the official emphasis after 1945 was on the idea of a definitive turning of the page after the Second World War, of the birth of a new democratic and liberal state committed to the rule of law and the upholding of the rights of all citizens on an equal footing. Some commentators and historians - one thinks here of Claudio Pavone's seminal essay of 1974 on the 'Continuity of the

18 Duggan, *Fascism and the Mafia*, chs. 11, 12 and Epilogue.

19 Cf. G. Barrera, 'Mussolini's colonial race laws and state-settler relations in Africa Orientale Italiana (1935-41)', *Journal of Italian Studies* (8), 3 (2003), pp. 425-43.

20 I. Campbell, *The Plot to Kill Graziani. The Attempted Assassination of Mussolini's Viceroy, Addis Ababa*, Addis Ababa University Press 2010, pp. 241-75.

state²¹ – did from time to time turn the spotlight on the issue of legacy, but in general, until the meltdown of the First Republic in the early 1990s, neither the left nor the right had much interest in airing the question too openly. The left because it risked, certainly in the context of recurrent debates about the nature of totalitarianism, opening the door to arguments that communism had natural affinities with fascism (and the welcome given by the PCI to former fascist intellectuals after 1945 made this an understandably sensitive issue),²² the centre and right because they had no desire to damage the image of the country, especially in the eyes of the international community, as one committed to the progressive principles enshrined in the 1948 constitution, or to offer any ammunition to their opponents on the left who were indeed frequently tempted to call into question the democratic credentials of the Christian Democrats and their allies in government.

In the last twenty years, however, with the demise of the First Republic amid the lurid revelations of the Tangentopoli scandal and the subsequent dominance of the political scene by Silvio Berlusconi and his allies, historians – and I am thinking, for example, of the late Pietro Scoppola, Ernesto Galli Della Loggia, Paolo Pezzino, Simona Colarizi, and Guido Crainz – have begun examining in more detail the character and extent of the legacies from the fascist period in terms of political institutions and practices and more problematically of cultural values and ideology.²³ Related to this is the still largely unaddressed issue of precisely how ‘fascist’ fascist Italy was. The view of the left that fascism was in essence a class dictatorship to which the masses were essentially extraneous and impervious made the issue of popular attitudes to fascism seem unnecessary to address; while the centre-right’s idea that fascism was supported precisely because it lacked any serious ideological content or commitment likewise militated against an investigation into grass-roots opinion. And in both cases there

21 C. Pavone, ‘La continuità dello Stato. Istituzioni e uomini’, in *Italia 1945/’48. Le origini della Repubblica*, Turin, Giappichelli 1974, pp. 139-289.

22 For the attitude of the PCI to former fascists, see G. Parlato, *Fascisti senza Mussolini, 1943-1948*, Bologna, Il Mulino 2006, pp. 115, 186-97.

23 P. Scoppola, *La repubblica dei partiti*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1991, pp. 83, 161; E. Galli della Loggia, *Le radici storiche di una crisi*, Bologna, Il Mulino 1994; P. Pezzino, *Senza stato. Le radici storiche della crisi italiana*, Rome-Bari, Laterza 2002, pp. 110-48; S. Colarizi, *Storia politica della Repubblica 1943-2006*, Rome-Bari, Laterza 2007, pp. 14-15; G. Crainz, *L’ombra della Guerra. Il 1945, l’Italia*, Rome, Donzelli 2007, pp. 39, 41-3, 131-2; G. Crainz, *Autobiografia di una repubblica. Le radici dell’Italia attuale*, Rome, Donzelli 2009, 25-8, 41-4.