

ITALIAN POLITICS & SOCIETY

*THE REVIEW OF THE CONFERENCE
GROUP ON ITALIAN POLITICS AND
SOCIETY*

No.67 Spring 2009



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Italian Politics and Society is published twice yearly, in the spring and fall. To ensure delivery, please send updates to your email address to pasotti@ucsc.edu and Richard Katz at richard.katz@jhu.edu. Proposed contributions should be sent to Eleonora Pasotti, and proposed at the above email address. For membership information, please contact Richard Katz directly.

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NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

CALL FOR PAPERS

SISE - Società italiana di Studi Elettorali announces the Tenth International Conference in Torino, 12-13 November 2009, with the title: “Local and Regional Governments in Europe. Electoral Systems and Voters’ Choices.”

The proceedings will feature both plenary sessions and a set of workshops devoted to specific subjects which SISE will organize taking into account the papers which will be submitted. As usual this Conference will be open to academics of all different disciplines devoted to study the elections (sociology, political science, statistics, constitutional and public law, history etc.).

We will accept any well construed proposal concerning the topic of our Conference; meanwhile we suggest the following topics:

- Voting behavior in local elections
- Voting behavior in sub-national elections
- The peculiar features of local and sub-national elections
- Voters’ turnout at the different layers of government
- Old and new electoral systems at local level
- Old and new electoral systems at sub-national level
- The direct election of municipal and sub-national chief executives
- Electoral laws and political regimes
- Direct election of the chief executive and role of the assemblies
- The selection process of candidates
- Electoral campaigns
- Direct election and party systems
- The performances of sub-national parties
- The performances of local lists or parties
- Electoral management in general and the role of electoral commissions
- Local and sub-national elections history
- Methodological issues concerning the study of municipal and subnational elections outcome.

As usual the proceedings of the Conference will be in Italian or in English. Presentations may also be given in French and Spanish. SISE urges all those who are interested in taking part in the conference to submit their proposals by writing to: convegno@studielettorali.it, attaching an abstract. **Deadline: 30 June 2009.** SISE will be able to host a number of those whose proposals will have been accepted. The best paper presented by an author under 35 will receive a special recognition.

For further information, please contact:

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SISP - Società Italiana di Scienza Politica

L'Università LUISS Guido Carli ospita il XXIII Convegno annuale della Società Italiana di Scienza Politica in programma dal 17 al 19 settembre presso la sede a Roma in Viale Pola, 12. Il programma e' online all'indirizzo: <http://www.sisp.it/convegno/2009/programma>

APSA - American Political Science Association

Congrips will be present at APSA with one panel. The panel will be chaired by Maurizio Carbone and the participants will be Anthony Masi, Alan Zuckerman, Richard Katz and Filippo Sabetti. Theme, paper titles and abstracts are not available. The panel will meet on Thursday, Sep 3 at 2:00 PM

FORTHCOMING EVENTS AND PUBLICATIONS

Joseph LaPalombara and Luigi Tivelli published *Stati uniti? Italia e USA a confronto* with Rubbettino Editore. On May 27, a "presentazione" of the book took place at the Centro Studi Americani at Rome, presided by former prime minister Giuliano Amato.

The latest volume (23) of Italian Politics has been published. It is edited by Paolo Onofri and Mark Donovan, and it is titled *Frustrated Aspirations for Change*. The weblink is: <http://www.berghahnbooks.com/title.php?rowtag=DonovanFrustrated>

La fiducia nella democrazia by Fabrizio Elefante, recently reviewed for the *Newsletter* by Marco Almagisti, has been translated into English with the title *Faith in Democracy* (ISBN: 9788895145402).

NEW BINATIONAL/DUAL DEGREE PROGRAM BETWEEN CARDIFF AND TURIN UNIVERSITIES

The program is available at both bachelors and postgraduate levels. Full information is available at the following weblinks.

For Cardiff University:

<http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/euros/degreeprogrammes/undergraduate/turin/index.html>

This innovative programme allows students to obtain the BSc (Econ) in Politics and International Relations from Cardiff University, as well as the Laurea in Studi internazionali from one of Italy's most prestigious Politics Departments, in Turin University, via a three-year programme.

For Turin University:

<http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/euros/degreeprogrammes/pgtaught/politicsinternationalrelations/index.html>

The MScEcon Politics and International Relations is designed principally for students wishing to obtain this qualification and the Laurea Magistrale in scienze internazionali (Turin).

For further information, please contact Mark Donovan at donovan@Cardiff.ac.uk.

The stories of the Italian extreme right: issues of history, memory and identity

Anna Cento Bull
University of Bath

All the trials [on the bombing massacres] were botched, independently of the ability of individual judges [...] so all the defendants have been found not guilty [...] it is odd the ease with which the 'culprits' have been identified after 30 years [thanks to] a 'superpentito' who remembers practically everything and reveals names and surnames so these people are arrested and then it emerges that the 'superpentito' had provided no valid clue and had been paid but it is never discovered who paid him and told him to say certain things.

(Excerpt of an interview with a high-ranking member of Alleanza Nazionale).

The above excerpt sums up the dominant views among the Italian extreme right concerning the outcomes of recent trials on *stragismo* (bombing massacres). The first massacre took place on 12 December 1969, when bombs exploded in both Milan and Rome. One of these, in Piazza Fontana in Milan, resulted in 17 people dead and 84 wounded. Many other bombing attacks were carried out in Italy in the first half of the 1970s, although the bloodiest attack of all was perpetrated on 2 August 1980 when a bomb exploded at Bologna railway station, killing 85 people and wounding 200 others. These massacres have famously been linked to a so-called Strategy of Tension, which aimed at killing innocent civilians and at creating an atmosphere of terror and disorder in the country ostensibly with a view to promoting a turn to the right. A first round of trials on the *stragi* took place in the 1970s and '80s, mainly with neofascist defendants; each lasted several years and typically ended with 'not guilty' verdicts for insufficient evidence. In the 1990s, the availability of new 'repented' witnesses from the extreme right allowed fresh

investigations to be carried out, resulting in re-trials, most notably in relation to the Piazza Fontana bombing, for which the re-trial ended in 2005, and for the 1974 Brescia massacre (for which a re-trial opened in November 2008 and is on-going). So far, the new trials have similarly ended with a number of 'not guilty' verdicts, again on grounds of insufficient evidence, but they have also fully established the responsibility of Italian neofascism in this campaign.

While a vast literature exists on *stragismo* and the Strategy of Tension (mainly in Italian), the majority of works are either of a journalistic or a polemical nature. In particular, there exists a gap as concerns the truth ascertained by the judicial re-trials on the massacres on the one hand, and current reconstructions put forward by the neo and postfascist right on the other. It is for this reason that in my recent work (Cento Bull 2007; 2009; 2009 forthcoming), I both examined the body of judicial evidence on *stragismo*, and I also carried out various interviews with past protagonists of the neofascist movement, in the hope of achieving a more comprehensive reconstruction of the bombing campaign than the one that has so far emerged from judicial investigations and trials.

Obviously political memoirs of this type need to be treated with the utmost care, as they run the risk of being simply vehicles for self-serving and self-justificatory renditions. As Blee observed, 'one issue that plagues studies of right-wing extremists is the desire of informants to distort their own political pasts. The evidence that such informants present to the oral historian is at once revelatory and unreliable' (Blee, 1993, p. 325). In addition, as has been argued in the case of political memoirs in Northern Ireland, 'the primary purpose of such

publications can be to continue the conflict by other means ... whereby the protagonist seeks to use memoir as a proxy weapon, conducting the battle by force of argument, rather than by the argument of force' (Hopkins 2001: 75). Even more fundamentally, as Portelli and others have shown, oral sources are hardly ever reliable; indeed this constitutes their appeal, since 'the discrepancy between fact and memory ultimately enhances the value of the oral sources as historical documents. It is not caused by faulty recollections [...] but actively and creatively generated by memory and imagination in an effort to make sense of crucial events and of history in general' (Portelli 1991, p. 26).

Despite these caveats, when I started my research I believed that it would be possible to find out some reliable information about the massacres by talking to past neofascist activists, particularly in view of the demise of the old neofascist party, the Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI), and its transformation into a democratic party, Alleanza Nazionale, which has distanced itself from both fascism and neofascism. I expected that this transformation would allow some previous neofascists to revisit their own past behaviour and that of the groups they identified with in a more questioning and self-reflective manner, thereby adapting their views about the past to fit the stance they have since adopted. I also expected to find some kind of acknowledgement of the judicial evidence that has established that the bombing massacres were carried out by neofascist groups.

By contrast, I was confronted with an impressive number of individual stories and memories of the past which amounted to a collective shared narrative that was totally and uncompromisingly at odds with the judicial truth – whereas successive trials have established that neofascists had perpetrated the massacres, neofascists and postfascists alike insisted that the real culprits were anarchists and/or extreme left activists or indeed secret service agents masquerading as neofascists; whereas the trials had ascertained that state bodies had obstructed the course of justice by concealing evidence incriminating the

neofascists, my interviewees claimed that state bodies had indeed obstructed the course of justice but in order to protect extreme left perpetrators and put the blame on neofascists; while the trials have established that the massacres were intended to create an atmosphere of panic and terror in the country that would facilitate a turn to the right, my interviewees stated that the massacres, which had been masterminded by left wing activist and wealthy publisher Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, aimed at simulating a coup d'état climate which in turn would promote a revolutionary insurrection in the country at large.

In this context, I could not treat the stories I was told as sources that would help to throw additional light upon the history of the massacres; what I was presented with was an alternative and oppositional truth in relation to the judicial truth. So, what value did these stories have? What, if anything, did they reveal about the past? And what did they reveal about the myth-making and the psychology of my interviewees, of present-day Italian neofascism and postfascism and of the 1960s and 1970s neofascist groups?

It was easier to relate these stories to the present, in ways that illuminated the contemporary consciousness of their tellers. A 'narrative psychology' approach, based primarily on the works of Crossley (2000, 2003), Freeman (1993, 2003), Gergen (1991) and Labov (1972, 2001), allowed for a better understanding of the ideological and mythic nature of the narratives of my interviewees as well as their personal and collective identity construction work. From this perspective, it was possible to view these stories as the memory work of individuals whose self-narratives identify closely with a political and ideological group and are bent on constructing both the narrators and their group in a persecuted yet heroic light. With one exception, the dominant genre adopted by my interviewees for their self-narratives was the 'quest story' which, as Feldman has argued, indicates that the self-as-character is a hero on a spiritual mission, engaged in fighting 'a much stronger, but morally inferior, antagonist' (p. 133). By contrast, one narrative adopted an ironic (and self-deprecatory) style, which indicates a clear

awareness of the distinction between the self-as-narrator and the self-as-character in the story, as well as providing different perspectives between 'now' and 'then' (Portelli 1998, p. 70).

The interviews were also illuminating in terms of revealing the personal and collective psychological reasons accounting for the narrators' manipulation of the past. I want to explore briefly these psychological reasons which can be associated with the prevailing attitudes of denial in relation to the culprits and aims of the bombing massacres.

The first set of reasons concerns the values associated with both fascism and neofascism in the eyes of my interviewees: these were presented as values revolving around the ideal model of the warrior, in accordance with the ideas they associated with extreme-right thinker and guru Julius Evola: bravery, honour, scorn for death, honesty and truthfulness. These values, indeed virtues, were repeatedly presented as frontally opposed to the vices of the opponents of the neofascists, be they the state or the extreme left: cowardice, dishonour, dishonesty and falseness. The problem with the bombing massacres lies precisely in the fact that they stand for evil and vice, in the eyes of all my interviewees. As Stefano Delle Chiaie, founder and leader of Avanguardia Nazionale, stated: 'Whether the hand was right or red, they were criminals', as well as monsters, and must be condemned as such. This is in stark contrast with other terrorist groups, for instance the IRA or ETA, which have had no qualms in claiming bombing massacres as their own. However, for my informants the bombing massacres carried out in Italy stand for cowardice (because the perpetrators did not engage in open fighting and did not risk their lives), dishonour (the perpetrators attacked innocent civilians not combatants), as well as dishonesty and falseness (because the perpetrators did not own up to the bombing). Therefore, to accept responsibility for the massacres today would mean to acknowledge that the values all neofascists ostensibly adhered to were betrayed in order to face up to a 'present and clear danger' that is, the threat of communism. In short, for postfascists today

it is not simply a question of acknowledging that certain ideas were wrong, as required by the transition to democratic values, but that those ideas had been betrayed in an underhand fashion by their own believers and proponents.

The second set of reasons concerns the issue of the alleged collaboration of neofascist groups and leaders with both state forces and external forces, such as the CIA and NATO, in the context of the Strategy of Tension. This collaboration, which was substantiated by the recent judicial evidence, was refuted by all my interviewees (with only one exception, and this is someone who is no longer a neo/postfascist). After the war, the vast majority of neofascists had rejected the bipolar logic: while they were strongly anti-communist, they also deeply resented the Allies' victory and American imperialism, representing the triumph of capitalism and liberalism. As reported in my book (2007, p. 113), in 1997 one of the AN representatives on the Parliamentary Commission investigating the massacres made it clear that in his view prosecuting magistrate Guido Salvini, responsible for re-opening investigations into the Piazza Fontana bombing, had made a serious mistake when he had come to the conclusion that Ordine Nuovo had collaborated with the CIA and the Americans in the Strategy of Tension. American imperialism and the CIA, he stated, were considered 'the enemies and political adversaries of Ordine Nuovo on the same level as the Soviet Union and the KGB'. When the judge replied that it was possible to make a tactical choice and justify it in the name of fighting 'an absolute evil', while remaining loyal to an overarching ideology, the AN representative [X] insisted that Ordine Nuovo had 'first and foremost been anti-American, much less so and only secondarily anti-Communist. If this is your idea, I respect it, but it contrasts with History'.

As this example shows, the problem for both neo and postfascists is having to acknowledge that Italian neofascism did not play an independent role during the Cold War but was subordinated to one of the two superpowers. Once again, this would bring a loss of self-esteem, as it smacks of betrayal,

falseness, dishonour and even cowardice and flatly contradicts the image of neofascists as a persecuted political group which heroically stood their ground after the war. Even worse, collaboration with the Americans suggests that the neofascists, as the war losers, were taking orders from the winners after the war and lost agency.

The third set of reasons concerns the public image of Italian neofascism compared to its historical enemy, communism. There were very strong feelings of resentment and grievance among my interviewees in relation to what they consider is a 'demonization' of the neofascists in contrast to a prevailing idealized vision of the political violence perpetrated by the extreme left. One of them articulated these feelings most clearly, as is evident from his own assessment of the need for a 'shared memory' (Cento Bull 2007, p. 118):

"There is a problem of shared memory because we cannot allow that our children will be taught, as we were taught and it is still being taught, the reading that on the right we had the massacres and the most cowardly and sinister type of terrorism, whereas on the left they carried out an armed struggle for other motives, both social and political. Hence as far as we are concerned we continue this fight for the truth about what happened from the 1960s onwards, not just the massacres but also terrorism, because tons of books have been written on the connivance between real or presumed extreme-right elements and representatives of the secret services etc. etc., and there are at least as many [cases] on the extreme left but these are still untold or if they come out they do not become exemplary ... if on one side there were the links with the CIA so it is proved that on the other side there were links with the KGB, the Stasi and various Arab socialist countries."

So the narratives I heard were concerned primarily with memory and identity, that is to say, with the construction of a counter-memory of neofascism as an oppressed yet heroic group. Somewhat to my surprise, both neo and postfascists proudly reaffirmed

a common history through their recollections of their past activism. As one interviewee from Alleanza Nazionale stated, 'we were victims of the political situation, of our complete lack of representativeness hence a community exposed to reprisals and relentless attacks'. On this basis, one of the significant findings of my research was the existence of a substantial passive opposition to change among the ranks and even some of the elites of Alleanza Nazionale. While the transformation of this party into a postfascist party has seemingly been accepted by its members and activists, this has not led to a reframing of traditional narratives about the past, so that both neo and postfascist activists continue to engage in similar practices of counter-memory, and in so doing continue to create and transmit a common subcultural identity which sits extremely uneasily with AN's present image and positioning.

Returning to the history of the massacres and the Strategy of Tension, do we need to conclude that these stories are totally unusable as sources for understanding the past, and only revelatory in relation to the present? It seems to me that there are areas – again in relation to individual and group psychology - where these narratives can help to throw some light on the events of the past.

First of all, they suggest that the massacres were carried out by a relatively small number of individuals, in line with the organizational model of all main radical neofascist groups operating in the 1960s and 1970s, as they were made up of a generic circle of supporters and activists and an inner core of hardliners. It is highly probable that only the latter were in the know as regards the massacres. This is also in line with various judicial findings. The official neofascist ideology thus remained 'untainted' by any connivance with state bodies or other anti-communist organizations, allowing neo and postfascists today (some of them possibly in good faith) to continue to uphold the uncompromising and independent stance of the radical groups of the 1960s and '70s. The exception is those neofascists, such as Vincenzo Vinciguerra, responsible for the 1972 Peteano massacre and currently serving a

life sentence, who harbour very strong grievances against their ex-comrades precisely because they believe that many of them carried out underhand acts of violence and in so doing shamed and betrayed neofascist values and ideals. In his memoirs, Vinciguerra (1989, 1993, 2000) has denounced the participation of neofascists in the Strategy of Tension in no uncertain terms.

Second, these stories help explain why the massacres had not only to appear as having been carried out by anarchists and/or the extreme left activists - in line with the logic of the Strategy of Tension, which aimed at placing the blame on the left - but also to utilize/implicate dubious and ambiguous characters as far as possible, as opposed to recognizable neofascist activists. A typical example of the first course of action is provided by the attempt in 1973 by a neofascist named Nico Azzi to blow up a crowded train by planting a bomb in a toilet. Fortunately for the passengers, the bomb exploded between his legs and Azzi was arrested. He had been careful to leave around a few copies of the extreme left paper *Lotta Continua*, just to make it clear who the culprits were. An example of the second course of action, which is morally even more disturbing, is that of an attack carried out in Milan in 1974, which left 4 people dead and 25 injured. It was carried out by a man named Gianfranco Bertoli, who claimed to be an anarchist, both at the time of the attack and in the subsequent trials, indeed until he died in 2000. Yet what emerged from judicial evidence was that he used to befriend neofascists and had been kept in isolation, indoctrinated, brainwashed, and almost subjugated by his 'friends' in the days before the attack and finally taken to the designated place, in case he might have second thoughts. The attack carried out in Brescia in 1974 might have followed a similar logic, depending on the outcome of the new re-trial.

This specific framework typical of the massacres is what today allows neo and postfascists to continue to argue that they were not the culprits and that, as a bottom line, we should all concur that in most cases the attacks were carried out by psychopaths and/or deranged common criminals. Of

course, Nico Azzi was caught red-handed and this fact contradicts the 'petty criminals, deranged characters' picture, but then this episode is treated as an isolated case in the stories of the extreme right, since they present him as a hot-headed character who was totally disconnected from the extreme right groups.

Finally, these narratives seem to confirm that the neofascists had not themselves developed the Strategy of Tension but had participated as (subordinate) co-belligerents within the wider coalition of forces operating in the context of this Strategy. This cannot be proved, but it seems significant that the stories of the extreme right give ample resonance and prevalence to two methods of political subversion, both considered as legitimate and even proudly laid claim to: a coup d'état and the armed struggle. In the context of a coup d'état, a few of them admit reluctantly but still significantly that neofascists collaborated - *on equal terms* - with various state forces on a tactical basis. Conversely, as regards the armed struggle carried out by extreme right groups, the consensus among interviewees is that it was a spontaneous (however misguided) form of violence directed against the state. What is glaringly missing is any reference to a third form of violence, consisting of a bombing campaign. Yet, on the basis of judicial evidence, there is reason to believe that the neofascists provided the manpower for such a campaign as a prelude to a coup. It is the total refusal to even take this hypothesis into consideration that characterizes all the stories of the extreme right today, with a surprising uniformity not only between neo and postfascists but also between different generations of neofascist activists. While the prevalent opinion circulating among young activists in the 1970s was that the previous generation of neofascists had indeed collaborated in the bombing campaign with state and 'Atlantic' forces, nowadays they all declare that they had been mistaken and that all neofascists must be exonerated from such a charge.

To conclude, virtually all the stories told by the extreme right (including by the middle ranks and even some leaders of *Alleanza Nazionale*, as well as by right-leaning intellectuals close to the party)

converge into a single collective dominant narrative which paints a victimhood scenario. As I have written elsewhere (2009 forthcoming), 'the Strategy was the main tool devised by their enemies to defame, stigmatize and dehumanize them as 'legitimate opponents', as well as to turn them into scapegoats'. The condition of victimhood has thus been appropriated by one of the groups considered responsible for the massacres.

The stories reveal an enduring depth of resentment towards a variety of 'enemies', including the communists, the extreme left and the state, who are blamed not only for being the real 'villains' in the Strategy of Tension but also for having escaped condemnation for their part in the political conflict. As an interviewee complained: 'if they arrest Sofri there is a race at whoever goes first on TV to declare that Sofri is innocent', whereas in the case of neofascists there is no escaping public opprobrium for the bombing massacres (despite the inconclusive and 'manufactured' judicial evidence). The stories also reveal a strong sense of injustice over the murder of activists from their own ranks, whose (extreme left) perpetrators have never been discovered or put on trial and whose memory their political side has a duty to keep alive. While these grievances largely explain widespread attitudes of intransigence within Alleanza Nazionale, they combine with more sinister aims among some activists, especially those who militate in the radical right groups which still adhere to fascist ideals. The main aim of safeguarding the reputation of neofascism as a revolutionary movement untainted by any crimes or underhand deals thus consists in the promotion of a new militancy.

Finally, by comparing the stories of the neo- and postfascist right with the outcomes of the judicial trials, my research findings have questioned the usefulness of the latter in terms of helping the country draw a line under its divided past and successfully achieving national reconciliation.

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Travel and Writing in Fascist Italy

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It has been the case for some years now that travel writing has attracted a great deal of critical attention. New journals have been set up with the explicit purpose of looking at travel and writing while a steady stream of publications have appeared which either explore the characteristics of the genre or which look at aspects of its working during specific historical periods.¹ What is perhaps most noticeable about the growth in interest in travel writing is that it is common to a variety of subjects within the arts and social sciences.² Though the genre has given life to some great works of literature, more often it has produced writings which from a purely literary point of view are of middling or low importance but which, because of their closeness to political or social realities, can serve as a means of telling us about the continuation over time of influential modes of perception. Travel writing, moreover, because of the often dubious nature of its literary quality, its pretension to be purely referential and its clear intention to offer a reflection on the functioning of society seems to require an approach that does not sit comfortably within the boundaries of only one discipline.

It is perhaps not difficult to understand the reasons behind the continued growth in interest in travel writing and its appeal across a broad spectrum of subjects since the issues that the genre provides a means to explore are important – they are all in some way concerned with questions of identity and otherness. Anyone who travels cannot avoid becoming involved in the translation of one sign system into the terms of another, thus the act of moving between spaces and recording the experience is one way of becoming conscious of some of the basic assumptions of one's own culture and the way in which they are, as semiotics informs

us, encoded in both verbal and non-verbal language. Travel can, to put this point slightly differently, encourage an awareness of the limits of personal autonomy and the extent of the power that collective versions of identity exert. In upsetting an individual's understanding of what is familiar or seemingly natural, the experience can incite criticism of restrictive notions of gender, sexuality and ethnicity. Alternatively, the act of travelling beyond the confines of the everyday can just as easily excite strong feelings of adherence to a national or ethnic group.

Travel writing, almost by definition, presents encounters with people who belong to traditions of thought and behaviour that are other to those of the writer. Such encounters rarely take place outside a power structure of some kind and since the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* much of the interest that the genre has aroused has focussed on what it reveals about European attitudes to non-Western cultures.³ As well as visiting a location that exists in the world of material reality all travellers at all times travel through or are enmeshed in the web of concepts, traditions and modes of perception that constitute one culture's understanding of another. The literature of travel and exploration provides clues to the development of the everyday working of colonialism and it indicates some of the characteristics that were projected onto the subjects of Western domination. It is one means, among many, of showing the levels at which the rhetoric of imperialism functioned and of the role that subject communities served in the fashioning of the image of the metropolis.

Having written on the representation of travel and on aspects of literary culture of the 1920s and 1930s, my intention in writing

Journeys through Fascism was to determine, broadly speaking, who was writing what kind of travel literature in the interwar period and what the close reading of a series of the most significant travel texts might reveal about a particularly dramatic period in Italian history.⁴ Many critics are agreed that the years before the outbreak of the Second World War constituted a singularly rich period in the history of travel writing in English, with figures of the status of Ernest Hemingway, D. H. Lawrence and Katharine Mansfield all contributing to this particular literary practice. In Italy a number of renowned individuals within the world of letters, including Corrado Alvaro, Carlo Emilio Gadda and Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, also narrated the journeys that they undertook to one place or another. The genre was swollen by the work of other writers, such as Arnaldo Cipolla or Arnaldo Fraccaroli, who published prolifically before the war but who are now largely forgotten. But perhaps one of the most important features of this area of literary production was its connection with journalism: what were later to become evocations of countries or regions tended to begin life as foreign correspondence in the columns of a national daily. Thus the boundaries between what we would now define as foreign correspondence and travel writing were not sharply delimited; newspapers like the *Corriere della Sera*, *La Stampa* or *Il Popolo dell'Italia* published writings that in many ways shared the characteristics of both.

There are, of course, a variety of approaches that it would have been possible to adopt when considering this body of literature. One approach, for example, would have been to concentrate each chapter on the work of a separate writer as Paul Fussell did so successfully in his study of British literary travelling between the wars.⁵ But the problem with the Italian case is that the number of works by highly sophisticated writers that it contains is limited. It is thus more appropriate to discard the distinction between the canonical and the non canonical, and to concentrate on the perception of other cultures and peoples that one can trace across the whole of this form of writing. It was with this consideration in mind that I attempted to address the corpus

of travel writing by adopting a methodology which, indebted to the insights of post-structuralism, saw the texts not as a collection of fully autonomous works but as a series of representations which are indicative of the working of collective patterns of thought and association. My approach fully endorsed the suggestion of *Orientalism* that every text that sets out to capture the essence of another place is itself ensnared in the web of ideas and images that have previously defined the way in which that place has been thought or written about.

But if you are working on Italian texts of the 1920s and 1930s, the overriding question that you face is what they will tell you about Fascism; what they will tell you, in other words, about the meanings that its system of ideas assumed for individuals who were prepared to record and disseminate their experience of, and in most cases their support for, the dictatorship.⁶ An important part of my research was therefore concerned with examining the part that writing on travel performed during the *ventennio* and it sought to engage with the conclusions and questions raised by a growing body of scholarship on the dynamics of culture under Fascism.⁷ More specifically, my aim was to examine how many of the ultra-nationalistic concepts that lay at the heart of ideology of the regime were expressed and elaborated on in the travel writing and foreign correspondence of the time. The myth of Roman dominance, the supremacy of Italian civilization, the irresistibility of collective action, the deification of the leader all exerted their influence over the way in which places were viewed or international events reported.

The work of Emilio Gentile has exercised a profound effect on the way in which studies of Italian culture under Fascism conceptualize the relationship between politics, society and religion.⁸ His thesis that mass political movements have, in the decline of established religion, appropriated a collective notion of the sacred and succeeded in transforming an expectation of the world to come into the anticipation of the radical alteration of this world provides a powerful explanation of how relatively recent ideologies have been able to graft themselves onto belief

structures that are extremely deep-laid within Western culture. Part of what I was attempting to do in *Journeys through Fascism* was to explore how writers and journalists of the inter-war years represented their sense of Italian or Fascist identity through the experience of travel and how, in particular, they related recent notions of identity to more long-standing philosophies of collective belonging.

Many writers, of course, simply asserted or implied that Fascism enjoyed mass consensus and that the ways of thinking and feeling that it sought to promote had been realized. But in quite a number of texts one can find the expression of a more complex reception of the ideology of the regime. Both travel writing and foreign correspondence allow their author considerable space to construct an autobiography of impressions and encounters while he or she purports to do no more than observe reality. Thus one can approach the genre as a vehicle that allows for an extensive amount of self description: it is possible to analyse not only the details of the writers' lives that are contained within the texts but also the attitudes, opinions and reactions that form part of the texts' record of their authorial consciousness. Perhaps most interestingly, one can examine how some of the most basic concepts underlying Fascism influenced the writers' sense of themselves and how these ideas were subject to individual and, on occasions, contradictory kinds of elaboration.

If it is true, as the work of Gentile argues, that it was the aim of Fascism to orchestrate a wholesale change in the way that Italians thought about themselves and other people, then one could argue that it is possible to measure the degree to which a writer was prepared to subscribe to such an aim by assessing how far the record of his or her subjectivity conformed to the model of selfhood that the regime sought to propagate. The corpus of travel writing of the inter-war years certainly offers an array of different positions concerning the assimilation of Fascist ideology: the range of positions stretches from the fanaticism of those figures like Alessandro Pavolini or Sandro Volta who identified entirely with the notion of the new Fascist man to the

more nuanced stance that writers like Corrado Alvaro or Emilio Cecchi were prepared to assume. While Alvaro used the record of his journey to Russia in 1935 to imply a series of highly ambiguous suggestions about Fascism, a writer like Appellius, as early as 1924, wrote a collection of articles on India for Mussolini's newspaper, *Il Popolo d'Italia*, in which he expounded his view that the Duce was a messianic leader whose ability to see the spirit of the nation through the masses of the Italian people had done nothing less than establish a new religion based on the cult of the nation.

As well as offering a record of differing degrees of personal identification with the aims of the regime, the writing on travel also provides an account of the stages of the supposed realization of the utopian proposal of creating a new type of society, one which would guarantee military might, order and prosperity all in the space of relatively few years of extremely determined action. It is true that the alteration of Italy's urban landscape occurred with great rapidity – as the work of Medina Lasansky has demonstrated – and it was used by the authorities as a means of demonstrating the effectiveness of Fascism in creating the future that it had promised to bring about.⁹ Many writers, including Gadda and Ojetti, speculated on the significance of the architectural renovation of the peninsula, often eliding the rational description of the work that was being carried out with an irrational appreciation of its meaning. In this form of literary production one finds a series of frequently repeated metaphors concerning the re-appearance of the Roman Empire, the expression of the 'spirit' of the community, or the appearance of the archetype within the everyday. But the device that was most consistently deployed in this writing was to compare the visit to one or other of the newly accomplished building projects of the regime to the experience of entering, in the words of Foucault, an 'effectively enacted utopia'.¹⁰

When they wrote on the new towns south of Rome, the building of EUR or other monumental projects of the time, the more discriminating commentators of the age succeeded in revealing how adept Fascism

was in manipulating its adherents' willingness to subscribe to a narrative of collective becoming. The sensitivity that these writers displayed lay in their ability to represent their own responses, their own experience of awe when confronted with certain spectacles and their own readiness to collude with the underlying purpose of such spectacles. The writing, in other words, often represented an intense psychological experience as well as evincing an advanced understanding of the internal mechanisms on which the propaganda of the regime could play. Any analysis of the states of mind, the examples of the kind of ego disturbance that were both consciously and unconsciously reported in the texts is likely to be more effectively if it uses a language that has some recourse to Freudian ideas – on the shock of the unfamiliar, for example, or on the submission to the figure of the leader – and their elaboration in a substantial body of cultural criticism.¹¹

As the pace of imperialism accelerated in the 1930s, the records of journeys that were undertaken to Italy's expanding empire further exemplified the revolutionary utopianism that lay at the core of the Fascist worldview. The writing on Italy's colonial possessions represents, as one might imagine, a distinct body of material within the larger corpus of writing on travel. All the texts that were produced on the empire, whether they were written by high-ranking colonial officials or by more lowly observers, rehearsed the arguments in favour of Italian expansionism and predicted a future of successful colonial enterprise. The interest of this writing lies principally in the way in which it displays the perceptual categories that determined the expansionist viewpoint: in whichever form they were framed, the texts indicate the desires, investments and projections that were central to the imperial rhetoric of the time. The complexity of the identifications that were made in prose writing that may, on one level, seem very simple becomes, of course, much clearer if the writing is analysed with reference to the work of Homi Bhabha and other theorists of the representation of the colonial encounter.

A superficial reading of the expansionist discourse that finds expression in much of

the writing may conclude that there was a progressive element to this discourse. Many of the most prolific commentators claimed that the aim of the nation's expansion was not simply to procure material advantage but to pursue a spiritual mission – the dissemination of the Fascist concept of the nation – and by so doing to penetrate the deepest workings of the societies over which Italy aspired to rule. Indeed, one could argue that in their desire to assert Italy's right to expand its possessions, many writers unmasked and critiqued some of the most basic features of established European colonialism, expressing sympathy with the aspirations towards national self-determination of various subject populations, and even predicting the eventual unsustainability of colonial exploitation.

Yet, if one reads deeper, if one looks at some of the implied meanings of apparently progressive statements that were made in the justification of imperialism, if one looks at some of the metaphors of colonization that were most often relied upon, then one discovers – perhaps not surprisingly – that they assert a hierarchy of cultures at every level. The image of ancient Rome, for example, was one to which those who wrote on empire rarely tired of referring and in some cases it may genuinely have been used as a symbol of universality, but in other contexts, sometimes in the work of the same authors, the status of the concept was quite different. Rather than standing for the shared participation in a set of common ideals, the putative endurance of the spirit of Rome served as a means of defining a notion of Italian racial identity.¹² By pointing to the imposing structures of Roman architecture and their astonishing endurance through time or by writing on the creation of modern simulacra of ancient buildings, Italian administrators and observers presented the image of a powerful, authoritarian society that symbolized the community to which they felt that they belonged and the end to which Italian history under Fascism was moving.

Travellers to Italian East Africa were keen to express their support for the policies of racial segregation that were pursued with increasing vigour in the late 1930s and

which have been documented, among others, by Angelo Del Boca, Luigi Goglia and Barbara Sorgoni. They did not challenge the increasingly strict distinctions between colonizers and colonized, between those who dominated and those who were dominated. It did not occur to them to contest the physical separation between races that was planned for the future development of Ethiopian towns and cities, to challenge the prohibition of collective activities or the criminalization of conjugal relations between Italians and Ethiopians. Despite the claim that expansionism under Mussolini served an evangelizing purpose, that it would spread a common philosophy of nationhood and that it would do nothing less than transform the very consciousness of the populations that were or that would be subject to Italian rule, most observers expressed a consistent hostility towards and indeed a fear of any indication of cultural or racial hybridity.¹³

In the representation of travel to sites within the empire one does not, of course, find only instances where the identity of observer and observed are posed sharply in opposition. Some of the most interesting passages of the writing arise precisely when distinctions between self and other begin to falter or when it is possible to witness a mixing of cultures taking place or, to use the language of Mary-Louise Pratt, a process of transculturation, willed or otherwise, occurring.¹⁴ Pratt has explored how the obsessive desire of the metropolis to present and re-present the importance of its colonial possessions exercises a subtle and, for the most part, unacknowledged transformation of the self image of the imperial power. There are many instances where one can see this happening in the literature of the interwar years but perhaps the most dramatic of these is the writing that surrounded Mussolini's visit to Libya in March 1937. In the reporting on the event there was a deliberate attempt to suggest that the regime had assimilated aspects of Muslim culture at the same time that its own models of speech and behaviour had been replicated by the people over whom it had imposed its rule. Indeed, the image of the Duce being presented with the sword of the 'Protector of Islam' was intended to suggest

not simply that ruling and subject population appreciated a common cult of leadership but that Mussolini could claim to possess the attributes of a Muslim ruler.

Though a large part of *Journeys through Fascism* was concerned with the writing that was produced on empire, a premise of the study was that our understanding of the representation of colonialism is enhanced if it were seen as part of the same continuum as writing that covered the other major international events in which Italian Fascism became embroiled. As well as writing on Libya or charting the progress of settlement in Ethiopia, many of the same writers and journalists adumbrated the complex of ideas that motivated Italy's allegiances and its interventions, reporting on the country's affinities with some nation states and presenting a radically dystopian vision of others. The aim of the latter part of *Journeys* was to look at some of the writing that was produced after the assault on Ethiopia and in the years immediately before the outbreak of the Second World War. More precisely, it was to examine the ways in which those who were sent to cover the Spanish Civil War framed Italian involvement in the conflict. It was to look at the perception in the Italian press of the mesmerizing example of Hitler's Germany. Finally, it was to consider how evocations of Stalin's Russia and Roosevelt's America in the late 1930s substantiated the claim of the regime that it offered a system of government that safeguarded Italy from the terrors of communism on the one hand and the dangers of unbridled capitalism on the other.¹⁵

When looking at writing on all of these places it is naturally easier to speak about support for the foreign policy that had been decided upon and which was being followed through but there are moments where one can detect a certain kind of resistance taking shape. Italian Fascism represented an evolving – and to some extent a syncretic – body of ideas and there were instances when an individual commentator expressed a view on an ideological or societal question before the regime had had time to elaborate a coherent policy on the issue. Several accounts of Germany written in the immediate aftermath of the Hitler's

accession to power, for example, poured scorn on Nazism.¹⁶ There were other instances where one writer or another used the observation of a foreign reality as the pretext for looking back at Italy and as the means of articulating a veiled, sophisticated but nevertheless perceptible critique of Fascism. This was, for example, the case in the conclusion to Carlo Scarfoglio's text on Russia where, ostensibly referring only to the Soviet Union, he spoke of an age that was dominated by the continual search for ideal templates on which to model reality, by the passion for creating transcendental hierarchies, and by the minute planning of spatial structures into which empirical reality refused to be forced.¹⁷

One can argue that the very fact of representing an elsewhere, of speculating imaginatively upon the rules governing another society provided the opportunity, not always consciously embraced, of reflecting upon the contingency of the writer's culture of origin. One of the most brilliant correspondents who wrote on the Spanish Civil War, Virgilio Lilli, had no difficulty in attempting to discover a layer of common humanity that he felt lay beneath the ideological structures of modernity that clashed with such ferocity in Spain and in which, at one level, he himself was deeply involved. Margherita Sarfatti, certainly a prominent figure in the elaboration of the aesthetics of Fascist culture, used the record of the semi-official journey that she made in 1934 through Roosevelt's America as a means of articulating a critique of rapprochement with Nazi Germany, of claiming that the United States were an analogue of Italy and of elaborating a possible future path for Fascism to follow.¹⁸ Within the context in which they appeared, her writings on America represented an instance of opposition but they also displayed the occasional, and to some extent dramatic, proximity between compliance and resistance, between the identity of the proponent of a form of oppression and that of its potential victim.¹⁹

The evidence of writing about travel shows that dissemination depends on relatively complex patterns of reception and that elements of resistance – whether actual or potential – are often present within

writing which appears to offer no more than conformity to a coercive vision of reality. It is also the case that any study will conclude by posing a series of questions that can be taken further. The whole issue of the reception of the writing on places outside of Italy during the *ventennio* is certainly one that could be explored in far greater detail by mapping the views expressed by writers and journalists against those recorded by other participants in Italy's foreign adventures or against those which have been retained in oral histories of the dictatorship. Many literary representations of travel in the interwar years were accompanied by an extensive array of photographs and that collection of visual material awaits comprehensive analysis. Most of the opinions concerning other cultures that were contained in the travel literature of the time indicate, in some way, their authors' understanding of the meaning of race and the intricacy of the racial discourse of which the writing on travel is a part has not been fully considered.

Though the geographical range of the texts that I was looking at in *Journeys* was extensive, the study of travel writing in the interwar years does, of course, represent only a small part of a vast mosaic. My monograph was intended to contribute to the study of the way in which other countries and cultures were viewed during the twenty years of Mussolini's rule and the ways in which Italian Fascism sought to define itself relationally by setting itself apart from a terrifying image of communism on the one hand and an image of declining democratic power on the other. The study of this area of cultural production could be taken further by exploring the relation of the writings of those who, driven by conflicting motivations, were prepared to support the aims of the regime with those who chose the path of exile and who saw the Italian invasion of Ethiopia or its involvement in Spain in an entirely different perspective. Equally, the comparative dimension of the study could be pursued by looking in greater detail at the many writings on Italy and on Italian involvement overseas that were prepared by observers from European and non-European countries. Taking the study forward in this way would provide one

means of contextualizing the development of Italian colonialism and its 'belated' temporality.²⁰ Another question that inevitably emerges if you are prepared to consider Fascism in Gentile's terms as a secular religion is its relationship with established religions or with other ideologies that could equally lay claim to be constituted as a kind of political religion. If it was possible for the regime to justify imperial expansion by claiming that its purpose was to disseminate a new form of belief and a new form of consciousness, then the way in which that claim was assimilated or resisted represents a fundamental element of inter-cultural exchange in the years between the two world wars.

Endnotes

¹ The journal, *Studies in Travel Writing* was, for example, founded in 1997 while *Journeys: the International Journal of Travel and Travel Writing* was set up in 2000.

² A good example of a work exploring travel writing from a geographical perspective is *Writes of Passage: Reading Travel Writing* by J. Duncan and D. Gregory, London and New York: Routledge, 1999. An example of sociological interest in the literary practice is the work by C. Rojek and J. Urry, *Touring Cultures: Transformations of Travel and Theory*, London and New York: Routledge, 1997.

³ Said, E., *Orientalism*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.

⁴ See *Cultural Encounters: European Travel Writing in the 1930s* eds. C. Burdett and D. Duncan, Oxford and New York: Berghahn Books, 2002 and *Vincenzo Cardarelli and his Contemporaries: Fascist Politics and Literary Culture*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

⁵ Fussell, P., *Abroad. British Literary Traveling Between the Wars*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980.

⁶ As can be deduced by the occasional disparity between public utterance and private notation, most writers were prepared not only to submit to censorship but willingly to distort the reality that they saw.

⁷ This line of inquiry has been particularly fruitful in the United States. See, for example, the following works: Ben-Ghiat, R., *Fascist Modernities: Italy 1922–1945*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001; Berezin, M., *Making the Fascist Self: The Political Culture of Interwar Italy*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997; Falasca-Zamponi, S., *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini's Italy*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997; Schnapp, J.T., *Staging Fascism: 18BL and the Theater of the Masses for Masses*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996; Spackman, B., *Fascist Virilities: Rhetoric, Ideology and Social Fantasy in Italy*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

⁸ See Gentile, E., *Il culto del Littorio*, Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1993 and *Politics as Religion*, trans. G. Staunton, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006.

⁹ Lasansky, M., *The Renaissance Perfected: Architecture, Spectacle and Tourism in Fascist Italy*, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004.

¹⁰ Foucault, M., 'Of Other Spaces', trans. J. Miskowicz, *Diacritics*, vol. 16, n.1 (1986): 22-7.

¹¹ The work of Theodor Adorno on the psychological dynamics of Fascism is particularly important in this context. See 'Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda' in J. M. Bernstein, ed., *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, London and New York: Routledge, 1996, pp. 114-36.

¹² A good example of the deployment of the concept in this way is provided by Angelo Piccioli in the text, *La porta magica del Sahara: itinerario Tripoli-Gadames*, Intra: Apollon, 1934.

¹³ For recent work in English on Italian colonialism, see Ben-Ghiat, R. and M. Fuller, eds., *Italian Colonialism*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005; *A Place in the Sun: Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from Post-Unification to the Present*, ed. P. Palumbo, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003; *Italian Colonialism: Legacy and Memory*, eds. J. Andall and D. Duncan, Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005.

¹⁴ Pratt, M. L., *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London and New York: Routledge, 1992.

¹⁵ On this question, see Ben-Ghiat, 'Italian Fascism and the Aesthetics of the "Third Way"', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 1996, 31: 293–316.

¹⁶ See, for example, Bottacchiari, R., *Vecchia e nuova Germania*, Rome: 1935 or Giovannucci, F. S., *La Germania di Hitler e l'Italia. Cose viste*, Rome: Signorelli, 1933.

¹⁷ Scarfoglio, C., *Nella Russia di Stalin. Russian Tour*, Florence: Vallecchi, 1941, p. 409.

¹⁸ Sarfatti, M., *L'America, ricerca della felicità*, Milan: Mondadori, 1937.

¹⁹ Following the introduction of anti-Semitic legislation, Sarfatti left Italy for France in November 1938, see Cannistraro, P.V. and B.R. Sullivan, *The Duce's Other Woman*, New York: Morrow, 1993, pp. 520-30.

²⁰ On the question of the question of temporality, travel and colonialism, see Behdad, A., *Belated Travelers: Orientalism and the Age of Colonial Dissolution*, Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004.

BOOK ESSAYS AND REVIEWS

D'Auria on **D'Alessio's** *L'amministrazione come professione. I dirigenti pubblici tra spoils system e servizio ai cittadini*, **Verzichelli** on **D'Alimonte and Fusaro's** *La legislazione elettorale italiana*, **Stolfi** on **De Ioanna and Goretti's** *La decisione di bilancio in Italia*, **Korkut** on **Lang's** *Converting a Nation. A Modern Inquisition and the Unification of Italy*.

Gianfranco D'Alessio (a cura di), *L'amministrazione come professione. I dirigenti pubblici tra spoils system e servizio ai cittadini*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2008, p. 238. ISBN: 978-88-15-12218-6

Gli anni Novanta dello scorso secolo costituirono, per l'Italia, un periodo di grandi riforme amministrative, certamente le più rilevanti – per estensione e profondità – dall'entrata in vigore della Costituzione repubblicana (1948). Esse investirono l'universo delle pubbliche amministrazioni – centrali, regionali, locali – e tutte le loro 'componenti': le funzioni e la loro articolazione fra i diversi livelli di governo, la tipologia e il disegno delle strutture, i procedimenti e le tecniche di gestione, la finanza, gli ordinamenti del personale, i controlli e le responsabilità.

Alla base di tanto attivismo vi furono, oltre all'esigenza di rimediare l'ormai insostenibile arretratezza dell'amministrazione italiana, fattori molteplici: la pressione delle regioni e degli enti locali per maggiori condizioni di autonomia; la scoperta di un esteso sistema di *maladministration* e di corruzione, politica e amministrativa, per lo più alimentata da procedure farraginose (sovente arbitrarie) e da controlli soltanto formali; la crisi finanziaria dello Stato, con costi

elevatissimi del *welfare*, forti squilibri dei conti pubblici, estese aree di inefficienza amministrativa; la ricerca di strumenti per razionalizzare e contenere la spesa pubblica, anche al fine di adempiere agli obblighi finanziari imposti dall'Unione europea.

Una delle riforme che, in questo contesto, si svilupparono fu quella del pubblico impiego, realizzata fra il 1993 e il 1998 all'insegna della "privatizzazione" e, cioè, dell'obiettivo di riunificare – dopo quasi un secolo – la disciplina del lavoro pubblico e quella del lavoro privato, non tanto per ragioni ideologiche, quanto per introdurre elementi di 'gestione aziendale' nelle pubbliche amministrazioni, elevare la produttività degli apparati, rendere migliori servizi ai cittadini, ridurre – se non eliminare – l'invadenza della politica nell'amministrazione, accrescendone il tasso di imparzialità. Di qui, un complesso di norme che prevedevano la 'separazione' fra poteri di indirizzo, spettanti al personale politico (che avrebbe dovuto limitarsi a fissare piani e programmi), e poteri di gestione (per l'attuazione di quei piani e programmi), rimessi all'esclusiva responsabilità dei dirigenti.

Già all'inizio del nuovo secolo, tuttavia, il 'principio di separazione' fra politica e amministrazione venne in larga misura neutralizzato dall'introduzione (nel 2002),

con riguardo ai dirigenti di più alto livello (i segretari generali dei ministeri e i capi-dipartimento), di un sistema molto simile a quello noto come *spoils system*, talché, ad ogni mutamento di governo, i dirigenti avrebbero dovuto ottenere, per essere mantenuti in carica, la ‘fiducia’ del nuovo governo.

Ne discese l’instaurazione di uno speciale vincolo fra il vertice politico e l’alta burocrazia, in ragione della necessità – non prevista dalle norme, ma perseguita nei fatti – che i dirigenti, pur avendo responsabilità distinte da quelle dei ministri, offerissero a questi ultimi precise garanzie di affidabilità politica, intesa come disponibilità a ‘convertire’ in azione amministrativa anche gli *inputs* che valicassero la linea di confine fra la politica e l’amministrazione. A bilanciare questo vincolo di natura personalistica e, comunque, per non contraddire – almeno nelle apparenze – il ‘principio di separazione’, le norme prevedevano un sistema di valutazione dei risultati conseguiti dai dirigenti, facendo dipendere solo dall’esito negativo della valutazione la cessazione anticipata dei loro incarichi (per mancato raggiungimento degli obiettivi o per inosservanza delle direttive impartite dai ministri). Peraltro, gli incarichi avevano durata temporanea (inizialmente, da un minimo di due anni a un massimo di sette; poi, la durata minima fu abolita e la durata massima fu ridotta a tre anni), talché il dirigente, per ottenere il rinnovo, doveva ottenere il “gradimento” del politico, il quale, alla scadenza dell’incarico, non era – comunque – tenuto a spiegare le ragioni dell’eventuale mancato rinnovo.

Un regime siffatto presentava una contraddizione di fondo (che i governi succedutisi negli ultimi dieci anni hanno peggiorato, autorizzando assunzioni di dirigenti senza concorso – e, perciò, in base a meri requisiti di affidabilità politica – e consentendo che fino al novanta per cento degli incarichi dirigenziali di alto livello potesse essere attribuito a persone diverse dai dirigenti generali già presenti in ogni amministrazione): quella per cui la ‘separazione’ fra politica e amministrazione, pur solennemente affermata dalle norme, veniva in realtà vanificata dal carattere temporaneo e precario degli incarichi

dirigenziali, il quale – è stato detto – metteva, e tuttora mette, il potere politico nella condizione “di influenzare anche le minute scelte gestionali, perché il dirigente che voglia essere rinnovato non oserà mettersi contro il ministro, e, anzi, cercherà di entrare nelle sue grazie” (S. Cassese).

All’assenza di ‘difese’ dei dirigenti nei confronti della politica si aggiunse la mancata realizzazione delle condizioni cui era subordinato il buon esito della riforma. Così, in primo luogo, i ministri (ma anche i presidenti delle regioni, meno i sindaci) mancarono all’impegno di predisporre piani e programmi, con tanto di obiettivi e risultati (e relativi *standards* e *timings*) sui quali impegnare i loro dirigenti. In secondo luogo, la valutazione dei dirigenti, seppur praticata in talune regioni ed enti locali, rimase ‘al palo’ nella gran parte delle amministrazioni, talché il “Comitato tecnoscience per il coordinamento in materia di valutazione e controllo strategico nelle amministrazioni dello Stato” (costituito presso la Presidenza del Consiglio dei ministri), dovette constatare che la valutazione dei dirigenti era regolata da “un procedimento ‘fantasma’ di cui non esist[evano], se non eccezionalmente, sperimentazioni pratiche”. In terzo luogo, gli stessi dirigenti trovarono – e trovano – utile, per le loro aspirazioni di carriera, non opporre resistenze ai *desiderata* dei politici (e i dirigenti più riottosi sono stati progressivamente sostituiti con il meccanismo del ‘non-rinnovo alla scadenza dell’incarico’, senza motivazione). Da segnalare, altresì, che le leggi degli anni Novanta – sempre nella logica per cui i ministri dovessero non più gestire, ma solo indirizzare l’attività amministrativa – potenziarono gli “uffici di gabinetto” (ora denominati “uffici di diretta collaborazione” dei ministri, dei presidenti regionali, dei sindaci, ecc.), i quali – però – finirono presto per sovrapporsi, nei fatti, alle strutture operative dell’amministrazione, richiedendo a queste di operare secondo il criterio della rispondenza ‘pronta ed efficace’ alle ragioni e alle priorità della politica. E’ accaduto, perciò, che, con gli “uffici di diretta collaborazione”, la ‘presa’ della politica sull’amministrazione sia addirittura aumentata, operando essi come strutture – oltre tutto assai più poderose dei preesistenti

gabinetti – deputate al controllo della quotidiana gestione amministrativa.

Né ebbero concreta attuazione le norme che riconoscevano ai dirigenti di vertice il potere di assumere, “con la capacità e i poteri del privato datore di lavoro”, tutte le determinazioni inerenti all’organizzazione dei loro uffici e del loro personale; per non dire delle decisioni di spesa inerenti all’attuazione dei programmi, sulle quali hanno pesato sia l’assunzione a livello politico delle priorità di spesa in situazione di risorse decrescenti, sia i periodici ‘tagli’ alle disponibilità di bilancio.

Il volume che qui si presenta (pubblicato nella collana dell’Associazione per gli studi e le ricerche sulla riforma delle istituzioni democratiche e sull’innovazione nelle amministrazioni-ASTRID) analizza compiutamente le tematiche cui s’è accennato, con riguardo sia al contesto nel quale maturò – fra il 1993 e il 1998 – la riforma della dirigenza, sia alle insufficienze di quella riforma e alla successiva “riforma della riforma”, realizzata nel 2002 con un’ulteriore accentuazione del rapporto di fiduciarità (se non di affiliazione o di clientela politica) fra potere politico e alta burocrazia, e conseguente deperimento dell’imparzialità amministrativa; donde, fra l’altro, una serie di interventi della Corte costituzionale che, a partire dal 2007, ha dichiarato illegittime norme statali e regionali che avevano stabilito, in semplice correlazione con l’insediamento di un nuovo governo, la cessazione automatica di alti dirigenti statali e regionali, a prescindere da ogni valutazione circa i risultati da essi realmente conseguiti.

Il volume si articola in una introduzione del curatore e in undici capitoli, che trattano: i principi costituzionali e il quadro istituzionale (F. Bassanini), la managerialità della dirigenza pubblica (A. Pioggia), l’autonomia budgetaria dei dirigenti (A. Brancasi), la selezione e la formazione dei dirigenti (G. D’Alessio, F. Parisi), la struttura e le articolazioni della qualifica dirigenziale (A. Ferrante, F. Sileri, B. Valensise), gli incarichi fiduciari (F. Merloni), il conferimento e la revoca degli incarichi (G. D’Alessio, A. Ferrante, A. Pioggia), la valutazione dei dirigenti (F.

Gagliarducci, A. Tardiola), la responsabilità dirigenziale (F. Merloni), l’etica della dirigenza pubblica (F. Merloni), i principi comuni alla dirigenza statale e alle dirigenze regionali e locali (F. Merloni, V. Spagnuolo). Ogni capitolo è corredato da proposte per l’eliminazione delle incongruenze rilevate nella disciplina vigente e delle distorsioni cui si è prestata (si presta) la sua applicazione, oltre che delle illegittimità censurate dalla Corte costituzionale. Ne emerge un complesso di indicazioni, che si fondano su alcune scelte ritenute indeclinabili: il ripristino su ampia scala di selezioni fondate sul merito, il mantenimento della regolamentazione su base contrattuale del rapporto di lavoro dirigenziale, l’attribuzione degli incarichi con atto motivato del vertice politico previo parere di un’apposita commissione parlamentare, la fissazione di un ‘termine lungo’ (sette anni) alla durata di ciascun incarico, la predeterminazione di programmi e obiettivi all’attività dei dirigenti, la periodica valutazione della *performance* da essi realizzata (con la creazione di un organismo indipendente per la validazione delle metodologie di valutazione) e la motivazione del mancato rinnovo degli incarichi, la chiara individuazione delle ipotesi di responsabilità aventi ad oggetto il mancato raggiungimento degli obiettivi e i risultati negativi della gestione.

Una parte non irrilevante di queste proposte risulta accolta dalla recente legge n. 15 del 2008 (che reca una serie di deleghe legislative al Governo per l’“ottimizzazione della produttività del lavoro pubblico e [per la] efficienza e trasparenza delle pubbliche amministrazioni”), ma sia le proposte che la legge sembrano eludere due nodi di fondo.

Il primo è quello delle misure per contrastare le inerzie e le inadempienze del potere politico (facilmente prevedibili, dati i precedenti) davanti agli obblighi ad esso imposti dalle norme: dalla programmazione dei ‘processi produttivi’ all’attivazione di efficaci controlli interni, alla non-ingerenza nella gestione amministrativa *day to day*. Si tratta, come si sa, di obblighi difficilmente sanzionabili con strumenti giuridici, onde occorrerebbe intervenire con meccanismi indiretti di ‘induzione all’adempimento’, dei quali, però, non v’è traccia né nelle

proposte, né nella legge, se non per istituire – al di là dei già esistenti organismi di controllo esterno – un'altra struttura amministrativa (qualificata come autorità indipendente), che dovrebbe sovrintendere a tutti i sistemi di valutazione adottati dalle amministrazioni (sia centrali che regionali e locali).

Il secondo è quello di stabilire se e quale rilevanza debba avere, nell'attribuzione e nella revoca degli incarichi dirigenziali, il 'movente fiduciario' e, cioè, l'affinità politica (o partitica) fra il dirigente e il ministro (o il presidente della regione, o quello della provincia, o il sindaco) come garanzia di affidamento sulle particolari capacità o sensibilità del primo a 'tradurre' in operazioni di carattere amministrativo le indicazioni di convenienza politica o partitica provenienti dal secondo.

In realtà, ove una siffatta 'fiducia' (che le norme – si ripete – non hanno mai menzionato) continuasse a trovare spazio nella disciplina della relazione fra indirizzo politico e gestione amministrativa, il principio costituzionale di imparzialità dell'amministrazione ne risulterebbe definitivamente cancellato. Nel rapporto fra dirigente e ministro verrebbe introdotto, infatti, un elemento esattamente contrario all'esigenza – richiamata in Assemblea costituente da C. Mortati – che i funzionari venissero circondati delle garanzie necessarie a "sottrarli alle influenze dei partiti politici", come condizione per "avere un'amministrazione obiettiva della cosa pubblica e non un'amministrazione dei partiti". D'altro canto, nell'affrontare il tema dello *spoils system*, la Corte costituzionale ha apertamente escluso che la 'fiducia politica' possa costituire il 'collante' del rapporto fra potere politico e dirigenza.

Occorrerebbe, dunque, instaurare le condizioni per impedire che la 'fiducia politica' assuma (sia pure 'di fatto') un rilievo inquinante nelle fasi dell'instaurazione e della cessazione dei rapporti di lavoro dirigenziale. E, per far questo, sarebbe necessario stabilire che alle funzioni più elevate della dirigenza pubblica si acceda mediante concorso, mettendo in competizione concorrenti interni ed esterni all'amministrazione; che le selezioni e le nomine siano sottratte al potere politico, per

essere rimesse a organismi indipendenti di garanzia, cui spetterebbe anche di fissare il trattamento economico corrispondente a ciascuna posizione dirigenziale; che tutti i dirigenti siano sottoposti a periodiche valutazioni ad opera degli stessi o di altri organismi indipendenti.

Per parte sua, la citata legge n. 15 del 2009 appare orientata ad attenuare – attraverso i futuri decreti delegati – il tasso di fiduciarità degli incarichi conferiti dal potere politico, prevedendo che una quota (al momento indeterminata) degli incarichi dirigenziali di più alto livello venga attribuita con procedure selettive, ma senza garantire che il criterio (di fatto) preponderante della selezione non sarà quello della 'fiducia personale' del politico nei confronti del dirigente. Né la legge distingue i dirigenti che operano ai livelli più elevati delle strutture amministrative, in posizione di 'snodo' fra queste e il vertice politico, dai dirigenti che, affiancando i ministri nell'elaborazione dell'indirizzo politico, sono gli unici rispetto ai quali pare ammissibile un rapporto di 'fiducia personale' con i responsabili politici delle amministrazioni.

Così stando le cose, la separazione fra politica e amministrazione, l'imparzialità e l'efficienza delle amministrazioni, l'autonomia e la responsabilità dei dirigenti nella gestione dei servizi alla collettività rappresentano, a tutt'oggi, in Italia, valori e obiettivi la cui realizzazione resta affidata all'avvento di una nuova – ed incerta – stagione di riforme amministrative.

Gaetano D'Auria

Corte dei Conti, Roma

Roberto D'Alimonte e Carlo Fusaro (a cura di), *La legislazione elettorale italiana*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2008, pp. 424, ISBN: 978-88-15-12519-4.

Il saggio introduttivo di questo libro ci svela il principale obiettivo dell'intrapresa: compiere il primo passo di un "programma sistematico di ammodernamento e manutenzione della legislazione elettorale ed elettorale di contorno" in Italia. Questo

programma ha una motivazione forte ed è subordinato a precise condizioni di metodo: la motivazione di fondo è quella di assicurare una conoscenza precisa ed obiettiva della coerenza del regime elettorale italiano e dei bisogni che emergono da esso, muovendo dalla considerazione che l'attenzione politica e scientifica degli ultimi quindici anni su rendimento e adeguatezza del *sistema elettorale* (ovvero le regole che determinano la trasformazione dei voti in seggi) non è stata sostenuta da una adeguata riflessione sulla *legislazione elettorale* (ovvero la complessa serie di norme in materia di competizione, modalità di voto, collegamento tra esiti del voto stesso e funzionamento delle istituzioni rappresentative). Le condizioni affinché tale programma possa aver successo, affrontate da Fusaro nel suo capitolo introduttivo, attengono da un lato alla natura necessariamente interdisciplinare dello studio, e dall'altro alla "laicità" che si richiede ai contributori ed allo stesso lettore: l'analisi della dinamica di ammodernamento della legislazione elettorale deve in sostanza liberarsi da ogni pregiudizio favorevole a un sistema elettorale o all'altro, e da valutazioni più o meno strategiche sul tipo di modello democratico che si intende raggiungere. Inoltre, anche se il volume è esplicitamente dedicato all'evoluzione del regime elettorale italiano, molti dei suoi contributi palesano una conoscenza approfondita dello scenario comparato in cui i vari fenomeni analizzati si posizionano. In effetti, la virtù principale dei migliori contributi politologici o giuridici in materia elettorale è quella di saper definire i problemi e discutere le caratteristiche di un determinato caso di studio nel contesto di una modellistica democratica più ampia.

Il volume si struttura coerentemente con questa impostazione metodologica. Dopo un utilissimo capitolo di D'Alimonte, Chiamonte e De Sio, dove si contestualizza la riforma del 2005 (ed il dibattito successivo) rispetto ad una serie di modelli di regime elettorale, la situazione italiana corrente viene passata in rassegna attraverso una approfondita analisi di tematiche relative al processo di selezione politica (il capitolo di Floridia sull'accesso alla competizione e quello di Pezzini sul

riequilibrio di genere), alle caratteristiche del voto (Feltrin e Fabrizio sulle procedure, Gratteri sul voto degli italiani all'estero, Gardini sulla campagna elettorale, Pinelli sui rimborsi elettorali) e infine ai problemi relativi allo status del rappresentante ed alle modalità di rappresentanza (i capitoli di Lupo e Rivosecchi e di Ciaurro su eleggibilità e compatibilità e quello di Curreri sui gruppi parlamentari).

Tutti i capitoli sono molto interessanti ed importanti nella logica del volume, e se qui non ci soffermeremo su alcuni di essi è evidentemente solo per mere ragioni di spazio. Focalizzeremo invece tre questioni evidenziate nel volume che, oltre ad essere più rilevanti per gli interessi del recensore, ci sembrano particolarmente utili da segnalare ai tanti studiosi "italianisti" che non sono esperti in senso stretto di studi elettorali.

Il primo tema da considerare è il cambiamento delle domande alla base della legislazione elettorale, emerso dopo la scomparsa della "delega in bianco" conferita ai partiti nei percorsi di selezione della classe politica. Tale esigenza è ben rappresentata, per esempio, nel saggio di Floridia, dove si coglie l'utilità di un supplemento di analisi sulla questione della partecipazione al processo di selezione politica, e in prospettiva si pone il problema della utilità di qualche ulteriore intervento legislativo che possa importare anche in Italia una regolazione più stringente sull'uso delle "primarie" o di altri criteri aperti di selezione delle candidature.

La seconda tematica rilevante è relativa alle varie incongruenze oggi evidenti tra l'architettura istituzionale che il sistema elettorale in qualche modo determina, unitamente alle altre variabili politiche che con esso interagiscono, e una legislazione elettorale di contorno che è cresciuta in modo irregolare e non coordinato rispetto al modello di democrazia che si stava delineando durante la lunga transizione italiana. Molti sono i riferimenti che si potrebbero fare al riguardo, ma un esempio che sembra macroscopico è quello costituito dalla legislazione in materia di rimborsi elettorali. Tale normativa appare oggi costruita su una nozione di unità competitiva (partito, simbolo, lista, coalizione, a seconda

del contesto) sfuggente ed incoerente, e presenta inoltre ancora troppi incentivi alla frammentazione, a dispetto del trend opposto inseguito dai sistemi elettorali successivi alla “prima repubblica”.

Il terzo tema che ci sembra importante sottolineare è quello delle connessioni – anche qui, molto spesso incongruenti – tra la legislazione elettorale vigente ed i regolamenti parlamentari. Il saggio di Lupo e Rivosecchi, particolarmente interessante al riguardo, fa luce su una galassia di norme e di prassi parlamentari sconosciute ai più, i cui effetti in termini di sopravvivenza di *benefits* e cumulo di mandati ci sono tuttavia piuttosto noti. La palese incoerenza di una disciplina come quella in materia di ineleggibilità e incompatibilità, rilevano gli autori, è infatti alla base di abusi e di una continua carenza di prestazioni sanzionatorie da parte delle assemblee elettive (e in particolare de parlamento).

Una conclusione non dissimile la raggiunge del resto anche Curreri, affrontando la questione del “fit” tra regole della competizione elettorale e regolamenti in materia di articolazioni politiche del parlamento – gruppi parlamentari e componenti politiche del gruppo misto. L’incoerenza che ancora oggi determina la fluidità e la frammentazione di tali articolazioni (ma il caso della XV legislatura rappresenta evidentemente l’esempio più ingombrante sotto questo profilo) può essere sconfitta con interventi di razionalizzazione tutto sommato minimi e non invasivi, che gli studiosi devono tenere in dovuto conto: sia i politologi istituzionalisti, i quali non dovrebbero soltanto ascoltare le sole suggestioni dell’ingegneria costituzionale e dei sistemi elettorali, sia i giuristi che intendano non confondere la neutralità della loro analisi con un divieto di “costruttivismo giuridico” che finisce per legittimare le palesi contraddizioni riscontrabili tra le varie fonti del diritto costituzionale e parlamentare.

Questo atteggiamento “laico” e propositivo, attento al rispetto dell’esistente ma anche aperto al mutamento ed all’analisi rigorosa dei modelli alternativi, è in definitiva il messaggio principale che cuce assieme i capitoli del libro, e conduce al tema del capitolo finale – di Luca Stroppiana –

dedicato all’amministrazione complessiva delle elezioni ed alle proposte sulla eventuale migrazione della *governance elettorale* italiana dal tradizionale modello europeo continentale del controllo centrale a quello di una “mediazione” garantita da una autorità ad hoc e da un sistema regolativo di garanzie. Il capitolo ribadisce infatti con chiarezza il rendimento complessivamente soddisfacente del modello di legislazione elettorale italiano, respingendo una volta di più le fantasiose argomentazioni sulla mancanza di garanzie democratiche nel processo elettorale ed anche alcune visioni *complotistiche* – presentate da alcuni media ma utilizzate talvolta con disinvoltura dagli stessi leader politici. Tuttavia, proprio da questo tipo di analisi è utile ripartire per scoprire i limiti della attuale configurazione elettorale, e per proporre, come il capitolo in questione e tutto il libro curato da D’Alimonte e Fusaro fanno, un confronto sistematico con le diverse esperienze e con i modelli alternativi che possono fornire stimoli e “buone pratiche” da tenere in considerazione.

Nel complesso, l’unico difetto di questo libro – da imputare certo non ai suoi autori e curatori ma all’insieme degli “addetti ai lavori” – è forse quello di giungere abbastanza in ritardo rispetto ad una evoluzione della legislazione elettorale che in Italia è in moto perlomeno da quindici anni. La lunga fase di mutamento politico ed elettorale ha infatti sollevato molti problemi e determinato molte nuove pratiche, il cui controllo cognitivo non è sempre così semplice. Questo fa sì che il libro non risulti di semplice lettura, dati i tanti aspetti toccati e i tecnicismi trattati nei vari capitoli. Ma proprio il fatto di essere riusciti a contenere così tanti e specifici aspetti in uno spazio tutto sommato limitato ed all’interno di una – sia pure ancora iniziale – discussione organica sulla legislazione elettorale è ovviamente un grande merito, e non certo una colpa.

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Paolo De Ioanna and Chiara Goretti, *La decisione di bilancio in Italia*
Bologna: Il Mulino, 2008, pp. 286, ISBN
978-88-15-12594-8

In this book, authors Paolo De Ioanna and Chiara Goretti set out to propose ways to reform the institutions and procedures of the Italian budget process in light of the double challenge coming from Italy's participation in the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) and of the ongoing federalization of the country. In fact, the greater challenge is in a sense posed by federalization: Chapter 6 underlines the difficulties that beset the granting of fiscal autonomy to the regions, and in particular the constant tension that exists between the need to make regional administrators responsible for the way in which they use the resources entrusted to them and the constitutional requirement that citizens across the national territory have access to the same level of fundamental services such as health.

Conversely, as it becomes apparent from reading the book, participation in the EMU is at least as much an opportunity as it is a challenge. True, the Stability and Growth Pact and the Maastricht Treaty before it have given legal cogency to fiscal rules and in this sense have reduced the leeway of political decision-makers in Italy and elsewhere in Europe. However, especially in high-debt countries like Italy, fiscal discipline has become necessary regardless of specific European stipulations, and the Italian political class has indeed in the past twenty years or so increasingly internalized a culture of fiscal responsibility. Given a domestic context that is more aware of the costs of unbridled debt than it was in the 1970s and 1980s, participation in the EMU has brought into relief some structural problems in the procedures and institutions of budgetary policy-making. Probably the most immediate of these problems has been the fact that in the postwar years fiscal discipline has been based on the ex-ante and "marginalist" perspective of Art. 81 of the Constitution. That is, this article has been interpreted to mean that in the yearly budget decision Parliament must introduce measures to compensate (through increases in revenues or reductions in spending) all

new spending decisions. As De Ioanna and Goretti make clear, this interpretation of Art. 81 does not imply any ex-post requirement regarding the actual evolution of public finances. Even under the more stringent legislative rules introduced over time to limit the profligacy of Parliament (notably the introduction by law 362/88 of the mandatory setting of the deficit at the beginning of the budget session rather than at its end, when it would only sum up all the result of the parliamentary decisions rather than act as a constraint on it), the natural development of ongoing mandatory expenditure was outside the remit of the constraint at the margin imposed by Art. 81.

However, the ex-post requirements that derive from participation in the EMU have finally introduced into the Italian budget process a new focus on fiscal outcomes. In turn, this focus brings into relief the fact that fiscal choices always imply a trade-off among different uses of public resources, thus, at least potentially, improving the quality of democratic decision-making.

A summary of book so rich in analysis and suggestions will unavoidably fail to do it justice. In extreme synthesis, the first chapter provides a pithy and clear-minded description of the last thirty years of budgetary reforms, with a focus on the introduction of the cornerstone document of the Italian budget process, the *legge finanziaria* (financial law), in 1978, and on the significant debate in the 1980s that led to the reform of 1988 and the introduction, among other things, of a medium term budgetary framework (the DPEF or *Documento di Programmazione Economico-Finanziaria*) and of the quantification requirements on spending bills.

Chapter 2 zeroes in on the procedures for fiscal analysis and for the quantification of new spending. In line with the state of the art in the literature on fiscal policy-making, the chapter emphasizes the central importance of transparency in the production and dissemination of fiscal information. The authors do not shy away from stressing the inadequacies of the procedures underlying the production of fiscal data, in particular with regard to the quantification of the costs of new spending decisions.

Chapter 3 discusses the problems of calculation and compatibility of the different fiscal balances that are relevant for domestic and European purposes. Most of Chapter 4 is devoted to analyzing the nature of the UPB (*Unità Previsionali di Base*, the basic voting units for Parliament when it approves the budget, introduced in 1997 and subsuming the much more detailed budget items that were each individually voted until then), their potential implications for the way the public administration works, in particular with regard to the potential increase in the flexibility and responsibility in the use of public resources, bringing up the discussion all the way to the reorganization of the budget into programs and missions in the last few years. Importantly, the chapter also emphasizes some of the ways in which the quest for flexibility has been interpreted in Italy. Rather than as a way to improve the efficiency of the administration, it has in the past few years been a shortcut to make up for inadequate financial planning.

In Chapter 5, De Ioanna and Goretti address the question of the reform of the budget procedures in the context of the international debate on fiscal rules, coming out in favor of more top-down procedures that combine greater power for the finance minister with greater responsibility for the line administrations and the spending ministers. In particular, in spite of the strengthening of the finance minister since the 1990s, the existing planning system only focuses on the deficit, and it has thus been unable to give the finance minister much planning control on the overall level of spending.

Chapter 6 reviews the federalizing turn that has reshaped the country from the late 1990s on, and Chapter 7 brings together the main conclusions and suggestions of the authors. These include the strengthening of financial planning, which ought to include fiscal constraints for the lower levels of government and should enable the finance minister to control the overall evolution of government spending, and the improvement of the quality of the information produced by all the actors involved in the budget process, from Parliament to the actors inside the executive, as a necessary prerequisite for

the citizens/taxpayers to be able to assess the quality of their elected governments.

This is an important and ambitious book which, as befits the expertise and professional position of its authors, aims to move forward the debate on budget reform in Italy. It does so on the back of detailed and very up-to-date analysis that always takes into consideration the broader concerns and suggestions emerging from the international literature and from international organizations as the OECD and the EU. Another distinctive and successful element of the book is the effective combination of theoretical discussion and hands-on examples drawn from the professional experience of the two authors.

If there is room for improvement, it is in the treatment of the political dimension of budget reform. Despite some references to the importance of the political context for reform here and there in the text (for instance with regard to the 1978 reform that was made possible by the temporary inclusion of the PCI in the majority supporting the government), politics is largely absent. To be sure, both the left and the right have made dubious decisions regarding how to interpret or change the budgetary rules. However, the reader is left wondering if there have nonetheless been systematic differences across the two main political groupings that have coalesced since the early 1990s over how to manage and reform budget procedures and institutions. Furthermore, one may wonder if the changes advocated by the authors could take place irrespective of broader political conditions.

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Ariella Lang, *Converting a Nation. A Modern Inquisition and the Unification of Italy*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, pp. 237, ISBN-13: 978-0-230-60672-2.

Ariella Lang's book "Converting a Nation" visits two topics of particular importance to the materialization of the nation state formation process in Italy. In terms of religious rule and secular politics, Lang

investigates the relationship of Catholic officialdom to the ideology of secular Italy and nation state, and the problem of the situation of minority religions in the context of Catholic culture on the peninsula. In this respect, Lang looks at the processes of conversion of Jews into Christianity in the Italian peninsula – especially in the Papal States, and proposes an account of how the process of conversion affected the construction of national identity in nineteenth-century Italy. Making a diligent use of the archival material in hand, Lang proposes that “Vatican supporters advocated conversion because they wished to ensure that the newly emerging nation-state remained culturally and religiously Catholic.” (p.3) In order to evince her point the author refers to a rich array of literary and legal sources to this extent, and in her book refers to Inquisition trials, conversion stories, novels, and newspaper stories. The book is organised along three parts based on how the author used her sources and empirical evidence. These parts are Inquisition Trials, Novels, and finally the Catholic Press.

The author provides evidence regarding how conversion relates to the Catholic Church’s search to dissipate the Jewish population of Italy and how the Church uses conversion of the Jewry to re-establish itself after the end of Napoleonic Era in Italy. The account Lang provides is impressive: her depiction of events is a suggestion in regard to the background of *Shoah*. However, while the author mentions that the Jews were granted equal rights during the Napoleonic Era in the Italian peninsula, Lang does not comprehensively and explicitly relate the process of conversion of the Jewry to the making of the nation state in Italy. The argument of the book – which is highly thought-triggering and original – could have been more solid had the author dedicated a short but compact section clarifying the significance of the Jewish population of Italy. Rather than offering an explicit section on the role, and the population figures and distribution of Jewry in Italy, Lang presents a passive Jewry who benefited out of the Napoleonic Era in Italy whose contribution to the ideological trends of the era not clearly-stated. As for the latter section of the

book regarding how the Vatican juggled the liberal and Catholic ideas about the unification of Italy, it would have been a laudable effort had the author, for instance, chosen to specify the role of the Italian Jewry in promoting liberal ideas. It would have certainly helped the reader to understand why the Vatican targeted the Jewry and used proselytisation as a nationalist process – beyond the fact that the Jews represented the religious and ethnic Other. Methodologically, the book brings together archival material and literature. The book is a skilful and cogent effort of the author to guide the reader through its rich material, which presents various the literary works of Alessandro Manzoni and Bresciani among others. The second part of the book, hence, is very interesting thanks to the author’s effort to expose the reader how the converted themselves also adopted the narratives of conversion, Roman Catholicism as well as Pauline Christianity. The author also provides impressive methodological insights into using literature towards research in political history. Future students of culture and history as well as other fields of social sciences will surely benefit from Lang’s incisive methodology to this extent. Hence, while the book at the first glance appears to be specific in its scope to Papacy and Italy, it still is a particularly useful text in effect to research in nationalism studies, cultural history, religious history, literature and politics.

Thanks to its methodology, argument and rich resources, the book is a useful reading for graduate courses in History, Politics, Literature or even Theology. “Converting a Nation” can also offer an insightful reading for specialised undergraduate courses such as Literature and Politics or Italian Politics. I would, therefore, strongly recommend Lang’s book for the consideration of experts in the field.

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