Original Article

The Italian anomaly?

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Abstract In Italy, the term 'anomalia' is used by critics of the Italian political system to lament the alleged lack of maturity and modernity of the country. In other countries, such as Great Britain, the United States and France, the term 'exceptionalism' is used to highlight, often in a complimentary way, the particularity of the country. This article reviews some of the uses of the term in Italian politics particularly with regard to the hegemony – for the first 40 years or so of the so-called First Republic – of the Christian Democratic Party and the weight of the Italian Communist Party. This tends to highlight problems of coalition-making and alternance of parties in government instead of the true 'anomaly', namely, the existence of an unusually strong criminal organization, the mafia or the problems affecting the Italian model of development.
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Anomalies and Exceptions

To paraphrase Tolstoy:

> Happy countries are all alike; every unhappy country is anomalous in its own way.

In November 2010, the international press, which seldom discusses Italy seriously, provided ample coverage of the Bunga Bunga affair. To some, perhaps to many Italians, this was yet another source of embarrassment, a new manifestation of the *anomalia italiana*. Thus, wrote a well-known journalist, Giuseppe D'Avanzo, in *La Repubblica*, 2010: 'In un altro Paese appena rispettoso del canone occidentale il premier già avrebbe dovuto rassegnare le dimissioni. Siamo nell'infelice Italia …'.

One of the anomalies of Italy is that problems affecting the country are quickly transformed not so much in a problem to be resolved but in an

'anomaly' that enables commentators to stress how different their country is from all other countries, that whatever is happening in Italy could not happen elsewhere, and how, if it did, it would be resolved rapidly and efficiently – an instance of the well-known Italian 'esterofilia' – a variant of what Gramsci called the cosmopolitanism of Italian intellectuals. It is, in fact, a well-known characteristic of Italian intellectuals that of exhibiting marked anti-Italian traits, judging their compatriots somewhat lacking in moral fiber. This trait has been recently mapped out with remarkable ability by Silvana Patriarca (2010) who points out that such views exist even in texts purporting to acclaim Italian superiority in all things. Thus, Vincenzo Gioberti's *Del primato morale e civile degli italiani* (1843) praises Italian civilization, particularly in its Catholic incarnation, but damned Italians, particularly those belonging to the privileged classes, for their 'excessive love of money and pleasure, the frivolity of customs, the slavery of intellects, the imitation of foreign things, the bad ordering of education' and the lack of 'public and private discipline' (Patriarca, 2010, p. 25). Such whinging has never stopped. Just over 20 years after achieving unity, in a letter of 1884 Francesco Crispi was complaining that 'We are heading towards decadence without ever having scaled the heights of greatness … . Look at the people around you. The majority are listless and indifferent, as if politics were none of their business. Others are skeptical and mistrustful … they think that nothing can be done, because if they tried, they would not get any support … . Amidst all this culpable negativity … it is the unscrupulous who profit, and rule the country as an imperceptible minority' (Duggan, 1995, p. 427). And to the Chamber of Deputies he complained that 'We unfortunately have this vice in Italy: that every citizen turns to the government for the slightest thing … . Nobody more than me would like … to see the system of self-government that is the glory and strength of England, introduced in Italy too' (Duggan, 1995, p. 430).

Many French were alarmed by the policies and behavior of their president, Nicholas Sarkozy, and many Americans were equally embarrassed and alarmed by George W. Bush, but few French or Americans complained that Sarkozy or Bush could not exist in other countries or that their existence is proof of the backwardness of France or the United States or of their anomaly.

However, in Italy, to express the view that Italy should be more like other countries is common not only among dissatisfied intellectuals and dissidents of all hues but by establishment commentators and leading politicians. Thus, Massimo D'Alema (1995), once a leader of the post-communists, wrote a book in 1995 called *Un paese normale*, his ambition for Italy; a collection of essays by the late Enzo Biagi recently published by Rizzoli was given the title of *Consigli per un paese normale*; on 4 August 2010, Dario Franceschini, a former leader of the opposition Democratic Party, declared in the Chamber of Deputies

'Non viviamo in un paese normale'; the former President of the Republic, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi (2010), published a book, at the end of 2010, with the sad title of *Non è il paese che sognavo*. Recently, Carlo Donolo (2011) has published *Italia sperduta* where he laments not only that Italians have no civic sense but that their ignorance is such that they are not even able to work out what their true interest is. And Guido Crainz (2009), in the six hundred notes that adorns the two hundred pages of text of his *Autobiografia di una repubblica* cites a large number of commentators from across the political spectrum, including Ernesto Galli della Loggia, Claudio Magris, Michele Salvati, Ezio Mauro, Eugenio Scalfari Massimo Riva, Indro Montanelli and Sergio Romano all lamenting the conditions of Italy and its 'anomalia'. Of course, pessimism can pay. Here is Eugenio Scalfari, in distant 1987, who writes, astonished by the television phenomenon of Adriano Celentano (Cited in Crainz, 2009, p. 156):

> Celentano farà scuola. Ha messo in moto un meccanismo, ha reso visibile il fascino ipnotico della televisione, ha dimostrato che una massa cospicua di italiani è inerme, disponibile alla suggestione di un guru attrezzato per la bisogna, stufa e arcistufa dei farisei di sempre e dei sepolcri imbiancati. Qualcuno prima o poi perfezionerà l'esperienza, la volgerà a un fine mirato e politico.

Usually, the exercise of 'discovering the anomaly' consists in highlighting a negative aspect of Italian society and politics, establishing that it either does not exist or does not exist to the same extent in some other comparable countries and calling it an anomaly. Anyone can do that, even a journalist. For instance, Great Britain tops the league of cocaine users, beating Spain, the United States and Canada. Italy is just above the EU average; Germany just below and France well below. Is that a British 'anomaly'? (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, 2010).

The exercise can be useful but its methodological weakness is that it assumes a norm, a standard, a model that simply does not exists. Moreover, the range of countries Italy is supposed to be anomalous from is fairly limited. It includes, probably, some of the countries in Western Europe and well-established social democracies such as the Scandinavian countries whose population is far smaller. It usually includes Germany, France and Britain, although this is not always made clear, and seldom smaller well-run democracies such as the Netherlands or Austria or Switzerland. The concept of anomaly implies that there is a normal path or at least a normal point of arrival. In reality, the 'anomalia' is often an invocation urging Italy and Italians to adopt an idealized model rather than an effective analysis of why the problem exists in the first place. Today, very few historians believe in what is obviously an ideological construct. However, the term and its variants has a distinguished ancestry.

One can cite Machiavelli, who contrasted the strength of France to the weakness and disunity of Italy that led to the famous exhortation in the final paragraph of *Il principe*.

One could cite Giacomo Leopardi (1824) in his *Discorso sopra lo stato presente dei costumi degl'Italiani*:

> Le classi superiori d'Italia sono le più ciniche di tutte le loro pari nelle altre nazioni. Il popolaccio italiano è il più cinico di tutti i popolacci. Quelli che credono superiore a tutte per cinismo la nazione francese, s'ingannano. Niuna vince né uguaglia in ciò l'italiana. Essa unisce la vivacità natural … all'indifferenza acquisita verso ogni cosa e al poco riguardo verso gli altri cagionato dalla mancanza di società … .

One could cite Carlo Cattaneo in a text of 1839 (a preface to the first series of the journal *Politecnico*) where he declares emphatically that 'l'Italia debba tenersi sopratutto all'unissono coll'Europa, e non accarezzare altro nazional sentimento che quello di serbare un nobile posto nell'associazione scientifica dell'Europa e del mondo' (Bobbio, 1960, p. 233). One could cite other numerous examples from the literature of nineteenth-century Italian nationalism. But here I want to note briefly how other countries perceive their own anomaly, which they usually call 'exception'.

The French, for instance, have often referred to *l'exception française*. The term was used in the past, with pride, to underline that it was in France that the universality of the principles of human rights was first established with the Déclaration *des droits de l'homme e du citoyen*. This assertion is part of the construction of a national identity as, in practical terms, human rights have not been defended in France with any greater zeal than in many other comparable countries, and have often fared far worse. Later, the *exception* was used to suggest that French culture had illuminated the world. This might have been true in the past, but, patently, it has not been so at least after the Second World War and certainly not after the 1960s. As Christian Saint-Étienne (1992, p. 23) wrote 'Mais on pourrait difficilement soutenir que la France illumine encore le monde de son génie littéraire'. More recently, the *exception française*, just like *l'anomalia italiana*, has been redefined, but, again, without any pejorative intent by some Gaullist politicians such as Philippe Séguin (1994, p. 51), who, while conceding that every country was exceptional, decreed that France was even more exceptional since 'Être Français …, c'est se sentir responsable non seulement de la France, mais, au-delà, d'un certain équilibre du monde. Et je suis de ceux, je vous le dis au risque de vous surprendre, qui pensent que la France doit prendre en charge toute la misère du monde'.

The most recent version of the *exception française* suggests some kind of cultural purity, and particularly a resistance to so-called Anglo-Saxon cultural

imperialism. This is, of course, mere rhetoric as there is no more popular resistance to American culture in France than anywhere else, but the point is that French commentators, unlike Italians, think that being anomalous or exceptional has positive connotations. They usually lament with much chagrin that France is no longer *exceptionelle*. As Christian Saint-Étienne puts it '… il faut inventer une nouvelle exception francaise' (Séguin, 1994, p. 28). Others, with greater realism and skepticism but also with some regret, write, as did François Furet, Jacques Julliard and Pierre Rosanvallon, in their *La République du center* (1988), 'ce que nous sommes en train de vivre, c'est tout simplement la fin de l'exceptionnalité française … Nous rentrons dans le rang' (Saint-Étienne, 1992, p. 27).

France too, of course, like other countries, has anomalies. One could, for instance, point, at least in the nineteenth century, to its exceptionally low birth rate and its consequent almost non-existent rate of emigration, and this was seen as a problem largely after the defeat of 1870. It is also true that, at least in the nineteenth century in some French intellectual circles, there was an inferiority complex *vis-à-vis* the British economy, and the French school of economic liberalism (see, for instance, Frédéric Bastiat's *Harmonies Économiques*, 1851) constantly sang the praise of British economists and free trade champions such as Richard Cobden. However, again, none of this was regarded as an anomaly. What is anomalous about the discussions on the Italian anomaly is that the country is usually perceived as a laggard state 'in ritardo' and as abnormal with respect to an imagined European norm.

Nationalist discourse in Britain also suggests that there is something special with British development but the verdict was traditionally always favorable. It was gently satirized by Dickens in his last published novel *Our Mutual Friend* (1864–1865) where Mr Podsnap, a rather pompous character, explains with some condescension to a French gentleman that 'Sir. We Englishmen are Very Proud of our Constitution, Sir. It Was Bestowed Upon Us By Providence. No Other Country is so Favoured as This Country'. The French gentleman enquired how did other countries do. And Mr Posnap replied (gravely shaking his head) 'They do, Sir, I am sorry to be obliged to say it, as they do'. In a more serious vein, this attitude was celebrated in what came to be known as the Whig Interpretation of history and whose most famous representative was Thomas Babington Macaulay author, in the middle of the nineteenth century of a multi-volume *History of England*. Macaulay was accused, a little unfairly, of presenting British history as an inevitable progression toward ever greater liberty and enlightenment, culminating in modern forms of liberal democracy and constitutional monarchy.

Equally, self-satisfied and self-congratulatory is the idea of American exceptionalism. The exception changes, the self-satisfaction remains. For John Winthrop, who led English Puritans into Massachusetts, America was a gift of God, a new Jerusalem, a 'for we shall be as a City upon a Hill, the eyes of all

people are upon us' (1649). This was a speech much quoted in America and used repeatedly by Ronald Reagan including his last speech from the White House in 1989. Winthrop, of course, thought of himself as an Englishman; Americans and America did not yet exist (Hodfson, 2009, p. 125). For Jacksonian democrats, it was a country with a 'Manifest Destiny', inevitably propelled to acquire all the lands from the East Coast to the West Coast. There were critics too, at least in the twentieth century, who constructed American exceptionalism as designating the lack of a socialist movement (Werner Sombart), the absence of a sturdy welfare system, the 'abnormal' (by European standard) religiosity.

In Germany, exceptionalism has been a major theme of historians and social scientists. Under the name of *Sonderweg* (special path), some historians explained that the way in which Germany proceeded from the ancient regime to democracy was distinct from the path taken by other European countries and led more or less inexorably to various forms of authoritarianism and eventually to Nazism. The *Sonderweg* thesis assumed a normal way out of aristocratic rule in the footsteps of Britain and France. As the two main critics of the *Sonderweg* thesis have argued some 30 years ago, there is no 'normal' course of social and political change and that the experience of France and Britain were not any more normal or abnormal than those of other countries. Furthermore, those who used the term *Sonderweg* before the defeat of Hitler endowed the term with a positive value (Blackbourne and Eley, 1984). The Third Reich led to the transformation of the *Sonderweg* from an illuminated norm into an aberrant deviation. Who to blame for the rise of Nazism? Was it the militaristic Prussian mind so different from its mellow Rheinische counterpart? Was it Germany's inability to have had a proper bourgeois revolution or at least a decent 'hegemonic' bourgeoisie able to stand up against its aristocracy. This had been Max Weber's choice when he complained that Junker feudalism ruled over ministers and capitalists who were far too eager to be fobbed off with aristocratic titles. Ralf Dahrendorf (1968, pp. 54, 70, 97, 272–273) exclaimed in his *Society and Democracy in Germany*: Why could not Germany be more like England? But English followers of Weber also complained that the British bourgeoisie was equally in awe of the nobility. Intellectuals are always dissatisfied with their own bourgeoisie, never hegemonic enough, and with their own proletariat, never revolutionary enough.

That the absence of a decent bourgeois revolution was somehow responsible for subsequent problems was a view also held in Italy, notably by the Left, in both its Marxist and liberal variants. If only Italy had had a revolution *à la française* … as if it is not a matter of history that only France had the French revolution. In addition, Italy did not even have a proper agrarian reform – Gramsci attributed this to the weakness of the bourgeoisie, his critic Rosario Romeo to a material impossibility (*Risorgimento e capitalism*, 1970). Another cause of alleged anomalies was the late achievement of Italian nationhood. But late with respect to what? After all, Italy achieved unity in the same

century as Germany, Romania, Belgium, Norway and the United States (if one takes into account the actual conquest of the West and the victory of the North in the Civil War). Others suggested that Italy had been too modern too early, having had banks before the 'right' historical time, the Renaissance before the Enlightenment, and Machiavelli and Guicciardini before Voltaire and Hume, Locke and Rousseau. Or, on the contrary, Italy has remained backward because of enduring Catholicism and defeated Protestantism.

Later it was said that Italy suffered from 'familismo amorale', (the controversial thesis of Edward C. Banfield in *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*, 1958) or excessive 'campanilismo' – another way of saying that Italians do not have the sense of the state, or the sense of the nation, as one is frequently told in Italy by Italian themselves.

To put it simply, in Italy the term anomaly is always used to suggest 'backwardness'; in other countries, countries that are seen by many Italian as models, there are no anomalies, there are exceptions – usually something to be proud of or a profound difference in the path taken.

Italy, unlike other countries, wants to be normal not exceptional.

So what is the Italian 'anomaly'? As used in the language of the post-war period, it signals a substantial *political* anomaly. This is significant as the economic and social transformation Italy underwent in the 30 years after the end of the Second World War enabled the country to converge toward what was assumed to be the European norm. The balance between agriculture and industry, the growth of the tertiary, the level of wages, the size of families, educational development, the level of prosperity all pointed to a gradual bridging of the gap between Italy and Great Britain, between Italy and France, and between Italy and Germany. Structurally speaking, the country became less anomalous. In 1958, the country was certainly the poorest of the six that formed the original nucleus of the European Community, but in the subsequent 5 years, the years of the *miracolo economic*o, the gap was partially bridged and it continued to be bridged. Of course, one can take numerous socio-economic indicators, compare them with a European average, isolate those which are below the average and discover numerous anomalies. As it is in the nature of averages that some countries must be below it, this is not a very interesting exercise *per se*. To make it interesting, it would have been necessary to establish some causal links. But this was seldom done. The attention was concentrated on the differences between Italy's political development and that of other countries.

Italian Anomalies

The first major discussion of Italy's political anomaly was Giorgio Galli's *Il bipartitismo imperfetto. Comunisti e democristiani in Italia* published in 1967.

This postulated a European norm, an imaginary perfect two-party system and Italy's failure to adapt to it because the presence of a large communist party made it impossible or difficult for the opposition to become government. The thesis was enormously popular and has been widely used for well over 30 years, all the more surprising as it made unwarranted assumptions about European norms. The so-called perfect two-party system was at best something that existed in Great Britain and in the United States. When the book was first published, there had been no real alternance in France, and, if anything, the French political system was far more anomalous than that of any other democratic country in Europe: the advent of *De Gaulle*, after all, was a unique case in post-war West European history: a change of regime in a democratic country without significant civil unrest or a major war (unless one wants to call the Algerian War a major war). Nor had there been significant alternance in Austria where, when Galli wrote his book, a coalition between the two main parties had been established on what seemed then a permanent level. Nor was there much alternance in Sweden, dominated by a single party. Even in Germany there had been no alternance until 1966 even though the main opposition party was not a communist party but the ultra-respectable SPD. One could have made exactly the opposite case from that of Giorgio Galli, namely, that 'bipartitismo imperfetto' was the European norm and that a fully functioning two-party system was an Anglo-Saxon anomaly. This, of course, had been pointed out by many critics shortly after the book was first published, something which Galli could have found out for himself by simply spending a quiet afternoon reading a few books. In a subsequent edition, Galli admitted, with disarming honesty, that what he thought was obvious was not, in fact true: 'quello che sostenevo era valido soltanto per l'Inghilterra … . La Francia e la Germania non avevano mai avuto un sistema bipartitico; Austria e Belgio conscevano solo governi di coalizione; i paesi scandinavi avevano anch'essi un partito permanente di governo: la socialdemocrazia; l'Olanda aveva più partiti dell'Italia'. Galli (1975, p. 8) declared that he owed some gratitude to his critics but it did not modify his views regarding the anomaly of Italy, namely, a political system unable to provide an alternance of governments.

Behind the anomaly of the 'bipartitismo imperfetto' there was another anomaly, which was its cause: the existence of a large Italian Communist Party made the alternance impossible and 'forced' the Christian democratic party to rule uninterruptedly, colonize the state machine, be open to bribery and corruption. Of course, lengthy period of rules occurred in other countries, including some with no large communist parties (Japan, Austria and parts of the United States), some with large (France) and the colonization of state jobs was frequent if not normal in Japan, Austria, the United States and, to some extent, France. The obvious reason why there was no alternance in Italy is that the communist opposition was never able to obtain a majority either on its own or with a

coalition partner. In 'normal' countries, this is exactly what happens when one does not win elections. And even when socialists and communists might have had a (very slim) majority, the socialists preferred to be in alliance with the Democrazia Cristiana (DC), a position that they kept even when the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI) renounced communism in 1989. Only briefly did the socialist party refuse to support the DC, in the mid-1970s, when it was led by De Martino and indeed, in those years, there was, if not a real alternative government, at least a government somewhat different from the ones that had ruled Italy for so many years, namely, the so-called Historic Compromise experiment of 1976–1979.

The 'bipartitismo imperfetto' thesis was narrow: it focused on changes in government or lack of them but not on changes in policies. The Italian political cycle, at least for 33 decades or so after the war, was not out of sync with that of many other European countries:

(i) A period of radical reformist policies in 1945–1948 (as, for instance, in Great Britain and France).
(ii) A period of conservative centrist policies during the 1950s (as in Germany, France and Great Britain).
(iii) A period of reformist center-left policies in the 1960s (almost everywhere except in France).

With the passing of the years, the anomaly thesis focused on one central aspect: the lack of alternance as, by 1992–1994, when the Italian party system began to implode all other democratic European countries had a significant change in governing coalition, including Spain, Portugal and Greece, countries that had been under various forms of authoritarian regimes. In France, the turning-point of 1981 seemed to confirm the view that strong communist parties were the main obstacle to alternance, for Mitterrand's victory occurred only when it was quite clear that the main party of the left was the *Parti socialiste*.

Italy has appeared to have become a normal country since 1993 – at least in terms of changeovers in coalition government. Berlusconi won in 1994, in 2001 and in 2008; the center-left won in 1996 and 2006. Ernesto Galli della Loggia may exaggerate when he writes that the 'artifice' (the maker) of the Italian two-party system was Berlusconi, but he is not entirely wrong (Galli della Loggia, 2010, p. 133). Yet the 'anomalia' is far from finished. Quite the contrary! Leaving aside the folkloric element constituted by the presence, at the helm of government, of such a bizarre and grotesque individual, there remain other more important factors which, if we are going to use the word, could really be called 'anomalies'.

- **First Anomaly**: In no country in Europe, with the possible and partial exception of France in 1958, has the party system of any West European

country imploded in the way the Italian system did in the wake of Tangentopoli in 1992–1994.

- **Second Anomaly**: In no country in Europe, probably in the world, is the man who controls almost half of broadcast television also the man who is the Prime Minister and in no country in the West has the Prime Minister been indicted so often by the magistrates. Yet there was a strong tradition of political control over broadcasting during the first republic (the DC, above all, but also the Socialist party and to some extent even the Communist Party). And some degree of control existed also in France under De Gaulle. It might have been greater in Italy but not a qualitative difference.

I am not sure we should call these 'anomalie' but the crucial point is that the 'Berlusconi' anomaly is causally connected to the first, namely, the implosion of the party system. This created a vacuum that could be filled by a person who was not a traditional politician, who was known and popular, who was independently rich, and who had enormous influence in the media. It could have been Adriano Celentano, or Arnold Schwarzenegger, but it was Silvio Berlusconi.

The eccentricities of Berlusconi should not stand in the way of a mature consideration of what other changes have occurred in Italy as a result of Tangentopoli for it was not only the party system which was renewed but the political elites. Bossi, Berlusconi, Fini, even Ignazio La Russa are different political animals from Andreotti, Fanfani, Rumor, Zaccagnini and Moro.

This change has led Gianfranco Pasquino and Marco Valbruzzi to try an innovative experiment: instead of comparing Italy with the so-called mature democracies, why not compare Italy with countries that have undergone a relatively recent transition from dictatorship such as Greece, Portugal and Spain. Surely, the trauma of moving from a brutal dictatorship to a western democracy should be greater than the adjustment necessary to move from one democratic party system to another? (Pasquino and Valbruzzi, 2010, pp. 183–199). Well, the news is not good. The party system in Greece, Spain and Portugal appears more consolidated than that of Italy. Besides Italy, explain Pasquino and Valbruzzi (2010, p. 197), remains 'a country where too many citizens do not abide by the rules and the authorities are unable to enforce them satisfactorily'.

This is a more serious matter than the number of coalitions, the succession of prime minister (much diminished during the Second republic) and the instability of its parties – instability that is likely to grow instead of diminishing as no one knows what will happen when Berlusconi and his party will be no more.

The discussion on political anomalies would do well to relate it to the serious problems that affect the peninsula and of which few Italians are unaware. What are these problems?

By a judicious use of available statistic, we could find plenty of anomalies. For instance, surveys show that Italian men do less housework than in most OECD countries, or that Italy has lowest percentage of women in the labor force or in Parliament (not just lower than Finland but lower than Greece). Italy is placed 74th in the World Economic Forum Gender Gap Report for 2011, after Ghana, Bangladesh and Botswana. Or that more cars are stolen in Italy.[1] Or that Italy spends less on culture than anyone else in the OECD, including Greece and Portugal, or that the take-up rate of broadband connections is lower than in any comparable country (in terms of GDP per capita). Or that Italy invests less in education than any OECD country except for Slovakia (*La Stampa,* 2010). Or that on the Corruption Perception Index established by Transparency International, Italy, in 2009, scored worse than South Africa, Namibia, Bhutan or Botswana (Transparency International, 2009).

However, I will focus on two really serious 'anomalies', which are, in reality, major problems.

These are:

(i) The enduring power and extent of organized crime in Italy, unparalleled in Western Europe and far more powerful than anywhere in advanced countries including Japan (the power of the Yakuza does not approximate that of Cosa Nostra, Camorra and the 'Ndrangheta). This is a far more serious Italian anomaly than the number of governments or the lack of alternative government. Once it was believed that in vast areas of the south *potere mafiose* and *potere democristiano* were coterminous because no change was possible in Rome. This seems to be untrue. In spite of the end of DC power and an alternance of parties in government, the power of the mafia has continued to grow unabated. Insofar as we can ascertain from the data available, the turnover of the three criminal organizations has increased some 500 per cent in the years between 1993 and 2009 (Barbagallo, 2010, p. 269). And this at the time when the Italian economy has been stagnant (Barbagallo, 2010, p. 234). And in April 2009, the Procurator of the Republic in Naples, Giandomenico Lepore declared that, in his estimation, some 30 per cent of local politicians were accomplices of the camorra – an affirmation that in any other country in Western Europe would have cause a major scandal (Barbagallo, 2010, pp. 239–240).[2] Nor is this a phenomenon that concerns the South: the economic and cultural capital of Italy, Milan, is deeply involved in the kind of corruption, drug dealing and racketeering, which has made the southern Mafia famous (Barbacetto and Milosa, 2011). There is a question, which may not be directly related, but it concerns the spread of organized illegality: Italy, alone in Europe, has had a serious terrorist problem connected not with issues of national identity and aspirations (such as

Ireland and Spain/Basque) but with subversion from left and right. This terrorist threat, far from being sporadic as in Germany, lasted for approximately 20 years (1969–1989) and did not entirely disappear even then. Ernesto Galli della Loggia blamed it on various Italian sub-cultures (*socialismo massimalista*, *fascismo*, *comunismo gramsciano* and *azionismo*), which he claims envisaged violence as an instrument for the solution of political problems (Il Corriere della Sera, 2007). But why this did not occur in Germany, land of Nazism? Why not in France, with its history of colonial repression, the legacy of the resistance, communism, Jacobinism and the cult of the French Revolution? Or in Spain where the bloodiest civil war in twentieth-century Western Europe took place?

(ii) The first problem could be called an 'anomaly', but its gravity suggests that it is a tragic problem. The second is not an anomaly at all, but something more serious. This is Italy's economic backwardness. In terms of GPD per capita, Italy is not backward at all. On the contrary, it is at the same level as most other advanced economies of Western Europe (it was 80 per cent below them, 150 years ago when the country was unified) (Malamina and Zamagni, 2010, p. 5). And its tertiary sector is more or less in tune with that of the main West European countries (much higher than Germany and Japan – still strong manufacturing economies – but below Canada, the United States and Great Britain.[3]

However, the percentage of non-agricultural self-employed, that is, the so-called lavoratori autonomi was the highest in the OECD countries in 1996 after Greece (26.9 per cent for Italy, 33.6 for Greece). This is not a novelty. In 1970, this sector in Italy was at 24.4 per cent of total non-agricultural employment (again second only to Greece). In France, in the years 1970–1996, it declined from 12.5 to 8.4 per cent, in Denmark from 13.4 to 7.8 per cent, in Germany from 10.3 to 9 per cent (in spite of unification), in Belgium it went up a little (from 15.2 to 16.1 per cent) and in the United Kingdom it doubles from 6.7 per cent in 1970 (when it was the second lowest after Sweden) to 12. 8 per cent in 1996. Table 1

A reduction in the numbers of self-employed is a classic sign of the development of the concentration of the economy (this is, for instance, the case of France), but it is also a sign of the rapid tertiarization of the economy (and decline of manufacturing) and the growth of the financial and IT sector (this is what happened in Great Britain). All this confirms Italy as a country of unusually small capitalism with almost 60 per cent of its manufacturing firms employing fewer than 50 employees (Colli, 2010, p. 44).

Of course, the small and medium enterprise model, often family-oriented, used to be one of the few anomalies that were regarded positively – the much-vaunted Third Italy (*Terza Italia*). But time changes and what was good in one historical

Table 1: Quota autonomi nei settori non agricoli

	1970	*1977*	*1984*	*1990*	*1996*
Austria	12.7	9.7	7.9	7.9	8.6
Belgium	15.2	14.1	15.8	16.4	16.1
Denmark	13.4	10.8	9.4	8.6	7.8
Finland	6.9	7.2	9.0	10.0	—
France	12.5	10.7	10.5	9.3	8.4
Germany	10.3	8.5	8.3	8.4	9.0
Greece	—	30.9	32.1	32.4	33.6
Ireland	10.8	11.2	12.1	14.0	13.2
Italy	24.4	22.1	25.3	25.6	26.9
The Netherlands	—	8.7	8.7	9.1	10.7
Norway	8.6	7.8	8.5	7.0	5.8
Portugal	13.1	15.3	16.9	18.2	21.0
Spain	21.2	19.7	23.1	21.0	21.4
Sweden	6.2	4.5	4.7	7.4	9.3
The United Kingdom	6.7	6.8	10.3	12.4	12.8
The United States	7.6	7.4	8.0	7.8	7.4
Japan	22.4	20.8	19.3	17.0	13.9
Canada	7.0	7.0	7.7	7.7	9.7
Australia	9.6	11.9	12.6	13.5	12.9

Source: OECD

period may be bad in another. In the twenty-first century, the Italian family-size enterprise is a problem. And this is not only an economic problem but a political problem for it is this backward, provincial, narrow-minded capitalism, which is the backbone of Italy's right. Berlusconi and Bossi are their natural idols.

One of the consequences of this outdated economic model is a pronounced technological backwardness, a consequence, at least in part, of the 'institutional failure to develop an efficient national system of innovation and the lack of property trained human capital'; the absence of a modern infrastructure for business – a problem that has plagued the Italian economy for decades and required an unusually high level of state intervention (Colli, 2010, pp. 55–56).

Italy is thus at the bottom of the league of what is called the 'knowledge economy', a concept that includes forms of capital not embodied in matter, assets that do not have a tangible form such as intellectual capital, the cognitive abilities of the workforce. Italy's share of manufacturing exports from high-tech industries is only 11 per cent, whereas in France it is twice that and in the United Kingdom it is three times.[4] It is thus not surprising that the *Global Competitiveness Report 2010–1011* ranks Italy at the 48th place, although it may be surprising that Montenegro does better. The OECD report of 2005, which examined various modern skills in Norway, Switzerland, Bermuda, Canada,

Italy, the United States and the Mexican State of Nuevo Leon, was damning for Italy. For instance on the scale which assessed the ability to make text-based inferences by locating several pieces of information in a text – a level deemed to be a minimum for persons to understand and use information for tasks that characterize the emerging knowledge society and information economy – found out that more than two thirds of Norwegians are at least at this level. This falls to approximately 60 per cent of persons in Bermuda and Canada, just under 50 per cent of persons in Switzerland and the United States, but is at only around 20 per cent in Italy and 11 per cent in Nuevo Leon (OECD, 2005, p. 35).

This is a state of affairs that has been signaled, repeatedly, by Italian economists and scholars including economists at the Bank of Italy from Ignazio Visco, its deputy director, to Pietro Cipollone and Paolo Sestito (Visco, 2009, 2011; Cipollone and Sestito, 2010).

Italy is trapped in an old export specialization model based on the kind of mid-level technologies that the Chinese can do cheaper and increasingly better and will be able to do in the future, and its share of world export has been in constant decline since the late 1970s and is now back to the levels of the early 1950s (Vasta, 2010, p. 152). Successful Italian firms have left and are leaving Italy: Benetton produced almost 90 per cent of its clothing in Italy; by 2005, it was down to less than 30 per cent. Geox, the shoemaker, and Luxottica, the world's leading maker of glasses, are increasingly produced abroad. Half of the so-called 'Italian' fridges, cookers and washing machines are made in China (The Economist, 2005). Ninety per cent of Pirelli production is made out of Italy.

The seriousness of the low share of export is made even more serious by Italy's high level of dependency on imported oil, far greater than the OECD average. EU data for 2008 show that the average for the EU 27 countries is 53.8 per cent. Italy imports 86.8 per cent. Only Cyprus, Malta, Luxemburg and Ireland import more. Germany imports 61.3 per cent, France 51.4 per cent and the United Kingdom 21.3 per cent.[5] This is, of course, an old problem aggravated by the decision not to invest in nuclear energy.

Historically speaking, the two anomalies I have highlighted (organized crime and economic backwardness) are far more important than the political problem of parties and government formation, unless a strong connection can be made between the economic backwardness, organized crime and political problem. In the decades before the 1980s, this connection could be made relatively easily as it was assumed that such problems had to be resolved by state power and state intervention. In the era of neo-liberalism and weak states, the link is far from evident and it explains at least in part not just the inability of the center-right to act decisively but also the difficulties that any reforming administration would face in Rome. Although as a historian I am reluctant to make forecast, it seems to me that pessimism is a more realistic position than optimism.

About the Author

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Notes

1 www.oecd.org/dataoecd/28/6/42672218.pdf and World Bank, Genderstats, 2004 figures see www.devdata.worldbank.org/. For Parliament 2005 figures, see data in Peter Baldwin (2009) for car theft OECD Factbook (2006) cited in Baldwin p. 81. For gender gap, see www.reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-2011/
2 www.internapoli.it/articolo.asp?id = 15165.
3 Source: OECD figures.
4 OECD data quoted in Brinkley (2008). Also www.theworkfoundation.com/assets/docs/publications/41_KE_life_of_nations.pdf
5 See figures at Europe's Energy Portal, www.energy.eu/

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