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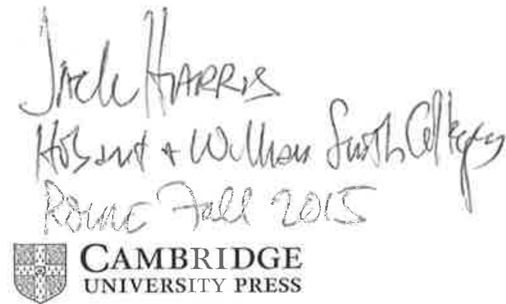

ANNA CENTO BULL

2

Social and political cultures in Italy from 1860 to the present day

Introduction

It is almost inevitable for historians to look back upon the past with an eye on the present, partly because they are influenced by later developments, and partly because contemporary debates relating to culture, politics and society actively lead them to reconsider past events in a new light, bringing out analogies with and meanings for the present. The collapse of Communism and the end of the Cold War have accentuated this tendency. This is not surprising, since the most pressing issues facing Italy today, namely, regional disparities, the need for electoral and institutional change (the creation of a 'Second Republic'), clientelism and corruption, and national unity itself, can be considered as the resurfacing of unresolved problems. Now that the period dominated by the Cold War can be encapsulated within a precise time span, and the transition to a Second Republic is proving less smooth than might have been expected in the early 1990s, it is as if Italy's political agenda is being directly linked to concerns which predate that period and go back to the process of unification. One of these debates focuses on questions of nationhood and identity, questions which Italy is asking together with the rest of Europe, since, almost inevitably, such matters become prominent at moments of great political change. Nevertheless, in Italy these questions seem to revolve specifically around the country's failure to create a collective national identity. According to the sociologist Roberto Cartocci, Italy's present-day task is still the one d'Azeglio succinctly summarized after unification in his famous saying: 'Italy is made; now the Italians must be made.'[1] Closely related to this is the issue of clientelism and corruption, which

also appears as a constant of Italian history since unification, and which is judged to stem from the poor degree of legitimacy of the Italian state.

Current debates on nationhood, clientelism and familism are once again privileging a long-term view of historical change. As Putnam wrote, with reference to the uneven performance of the Italian regional system: 'Institutional history moves very slowly. Time is measured in decades.'[2] This view of history has been successfully applied to other fields, including political parties and party systems, social and political cultures and economic structures. The tendency of scholars of contemporary Italy to look backwards has now met with a comparable tendency on the part of historians of nineteenth-century Italy to look forward:

> The new research has begun to sketch out elements of continuity that link Liberal Italy not to Mussolini's Fascist state but to the Italian republic that took shape after 1947 [. . .] the new Italian historiography has established new perspectives that will widen the debate on the course of contemporary Italian history both synchronically and diachronically, opening the ways to broader comparative exploration and bringing into new focus the elements of continuity in the longer-term formation of the state and society in Italy.[3]

Alongside this long-term view of history, recent studies of Italy also seem dominated by a pre-eminence of culture over structure. In particular, the nature and functioning of the country's economic and political set-up are judged to depend on the prevailing collective orientations of its citizens. Interpersonal trust and co-operation underpin successful socio-political institutions; conversely, distrust and particularism largely explain institutional malfunctioning. In a way this approach is not surprising, precisely because cultural values and beliefs change only gradually. 'Once established, these orientations have a momentum of their own, and may act as autonomous influences on politics and economics long after the events that gave rise to them.'[4] Culture, however, at least in the form of a group's aspirations and collective will, is also seen as capable of imposing a rapid pace on political change in the face of socio-economic continuity. What the two viewpoints have in common is the idea that socio-economic, political and cultural change need not be synchronized. On the contrary, there can be serious dislocations between them. This can be seen clearly in the

case of Italy. The starting-point of a history of modern Italy is generally the country's unification, achieved in 1860 and completed in 1870 with the conquest of Rome. These dates, which used to indicate the end of one historical period and the beginning of another, are now considered arbitrary. The drive towards unification, once interpreted as a cumulative and converging process involving economic, social and cultural change, has now been redimensioned and largely reduced to the powerful attraction the myth of Nationalism and national identity exercised over a relatively small intellectual minority.[5] Economically and socially, but also culturally if we exclude the modernizing élites, there was much continuity after 1860 with the pre-unification period. This meant continuity with the regional states which had previously made up the peninsula, leading to the existence of significant divisions within the newly formed nation-state.

Subnational divisions can have different origins and natures: they can be class- or religion-based, or they may reflect the urban/rural dichotomy. Such cleavages may play a significant role within a nation (one only has to think of an urban/liberal versus a rural/conservative society); however, typically, they tend to be fairly uniformly distributed across the national territory. There can, however, be cases where religious allegiances or the rural/urban dichotomy split a country into two or more geographical divisions. There are also territorial/cultural cleavages, which are often related to internally cohesive local and regional communities, bent on defending their shared culture and identity in opposition to the nation-building efforts of a new unitary state. Class, religious and territorial cleavages are not neatly compartmentalized but interact with and even reinforce each other in various ways. A nation will be the more successful at fostering a common sense of identity among its people, the more it 'defuses' the danger posed by the existence of its internal cleavages, in particular, by preventing them from developing into rigid politico-ideological divisions.

The point I want to make is that, after unification, Italy can be characterized as a country where dramatic political change clashed with the relative inertia of pre-existing regional processes of development, and where, therefore, territorial/cultural cleavages were especially strong. My analysis of the period 1860 to the present takes this view as its starting-point and looks at the complex interaction between culture and structure against a background of both continuity and change.

Socio-economic structures and political cultures after unification

Italian unification was achieved late compared to other European countries. Once the process started, however, it developed fairly rapidly. Favourable international circumstances, especially in the decade 1850–60, contributed to its successful outcome. It has even been claimed that 'Italian Unification had little to do with Liberal or Nationalist plans [. . .] Unification was a product of French and Piedmontese territorial ambition.'[6] This judgment is too harsh; however, the patriots were undoubtedly a small minority, divided between the socially and politically moderate Liberal current, headed by the Piedmontese Count of Cavour, and the democratic and Republican wing, led by Mazzini. The predominance of the northern-based moderate Liberals gave the movement a degree of cultural and ideological homogeneity, even though Liberalism itself had been put into practice only in Piedmont, in the years preceding unification. The result was that a fairly homogeneous subgroup found itself presiding over a non-homogeneous country.

The primary task of Italy's new Liberal rulers consisted in the construction of a sense of nationhood, a task made very difficult by the fact that only a small percentage of the population spoke Italian (as opposed to regional dialect), and could read or write. The élites were able to communicate with each other and the process of Italian unification had largely been the result of their efforts, with some participation on the part of the lower-middle class and the urban-based artisans, but only sporadic – and by no means welcome to the élites – participation of the rural masses, who formed the vast majority of the population. The cultural distance between the élites and the masses was one factor militating against nationhood. However, socio-economic structures also differed widely within Italy and cut across both the élites and the masses, accounting for strong regional and subregional cultures. These regional differences can be briefly described.

In the hilly areas below the Alps and in central Italy share-cropping was the dominant land-tenure system. Share-cropping families were generally extended ones, usually under the authority of a male head. Seasonal emigration abroad and employment in the textile sector for women and children complemented work done on the land. The main cultural trait associated with the peasantry in this type of structure is family-centred social stability. Relations between share-croppers and landowners were largely characterized by a culture of paternalism, which often involved a third party: the Church and the parish priest. In the eyes of the landowners this was a highly desirable system, guaranteeing both industrial (mainly textile) and rural production and, above all, social peace.

In the Po Valley, share-cropping was also fairly widespread; however, a process of proletarianization of the share-croppers had already begun. This was the most fertile area of Italy, where the development of a system of capitalist intensive farming with large tenant farmers employing landless labourers was accompanied by innovative irrigation and drainage schemes. Specific cultural traits developed among the region's peasantry: collective strategies alongside family strategies, a potential for the creation of stable workers' organizations, but also greater social instability. As for the tenant farmers, they favoured change to a larger extent than the landowners in the other regions. There was little trade-off in this area between productivity and social peace. As a result, relations between labourers and tenant farmers were characterized by direct confrontation. Up to the 1880s it was Anarchism, based on the idea of spontaneous rebellion against authority and the state, which dominated the political culture of the local labourers and impoverished share-croppers. Later it was Socialism, with its emphasis on trade-union organization and municipal government, which prevailed.

In the South, the latifundia system, consisting of very large estates extensively cultivated and absentee landowners, was the dominant socio-economic model. The peasants were land hungry, rather than landless, since they often possessed a tiny plot of land, which was insufficient to meet their needs. They were therefore employed on the latifundia on an irregular basis. This involved long-distance travel, the use of rudimentary tools, and working in isolation. Associated with the latifundia system was a peasant culture of instability, fear and mutual distrust, where interpersonal contacts were often limited to the village, a large agglomeration of houses lacking the most elementary forms of hygiene and where humans mixed with animals. This culture is often referred to as 'semi-feudal', a rather inappropriate term given the transition of the latifundia system to a market-oriented economy. Nevertheless, the term does convey a sense of the social distance between landowners and peasants, as well as an idea of the often destructive, short-lived, 'pre-modern' violence of the peasants. Brigandage, a mixture of social revolt and widespread banditry affecting the southern

regions between 1861 and 1866, is the most famous example of this type of violence. Far from expressing any specific social or political demands, the unrest showed a destructiveness which increased in brutality the more the peasants' hopes for land redistribution following unification were thwarted.

Clearly, regional differences in 1860 were considerable. We cannot speak of *one* landowning class or of *one* peasant class. To the subnational inter-class divisions, therefore, we need to add regionally and even locally based intra-class cultural differences. The Italian governments after unification had to strive for the formation of a national identity by trying to reconcile the masses to the élites (the *paese reale*, i.e., the vast mass of the population excluded from citizenship, to the *paese legale*, the legal and institutional system devised for a small minority), but also the élites to themselves. That the masses too were composed of vastly different social groups mattered less in the early decades, since these cleavages had not yet fed into political groups and/or demands. Potentially more dangerous was the split between Church and state, symbolized by the Italian troops entering Rome by force on 20 September 1870 and by the Pope, Pius IX, declaring himself a prisoner of the Italian state. The Catholic Church commanded support among all social groups and could have organized a political force in open conflict with the governing Liberals. Instead, the Pope forbade all Catholics to participate in the political life of the new state, thus opting for a policy of isolationism. On the other hand, the Church–state divide and the supranational nature of the Catholic Church deprived the ruling élites of a powerful unifying *national* culture, in contrast to those Protestant countries, such as Britain and Scandinavia, where the Church had been successfully integrated into the nation-state.

In this context, Italian Liberalism enjoyed a fragile but politically unchallenged existence in the first decades after unification. The suffrage was extremely restricted, since only 2% of the population, or 600,000 adult males, had the right to vote. Despite this, two political parties managed to emerge, the Right and the Left, which had their roots in the pre-unification division between those who favoured a monarchical and Liberal Italy, and those who supported Mazzini's ideals of a Republican and democratic state. As was to be expected, given the restricted suffrage, the two parties did not differ substantially in terms of the social origins of their supporters. Rather, they reproduced the territorial divisions between the country's élites.

The governments of the Historic Right (1861–76), led by Prime Ministers of Piedmontese origins (such as Urbano Rattazzi and Giovanni Lanza), or from Tuscany and Emilia (such as Bettino Ricasoli and Marco Minghetti), represented primarily the landowning classes of the North and Centre. They believed in the rule of law, long-term education of the lower classes and, somewhat reluctantly, administrative centralization. The last policy was largely embraced as a result of southern brigandage and the grave danger of national disintegration that this appeared to pose for the new state. The government was worried about brigandage turning into an organized political revolt in favour of the deposed southern monarchy, and decided to intervene with drastic measures, including the imposition of martial law. In other words, the abrupt awareness of deep territorial and social divisions and the fear that these could translate into centrifugal political forces convinced the ruling élites that if 'harmonization' was not to come as a spontaneous process of social and cultural bonding, then it had to be imposed from above. It is ironic, therefore, that when the governments of the Historic Right fell, this was largely as a result of the continuing strength of subnational boundaries, particularly of regional divisions within the élites. It was a split between the Piedmontese and the Tuscan members of Parliament that precipitated the fall in 1874, while the pressure exercised by the southern deputies to end their exclusion from government also played a part.

In 1876 the New Left (so-called to distinguish it from Mazzini's old Democrats) was securely in government, under the leadership of Agostino Depretis, a Piedmontese who had taken part in the 1860 Garibaldi expedition to Sicily. The Left had now moved a long way from Mazzini's ideas, and was mainly in favour of a loose, pragmatic, down-to-earth political programme, as opposed to Mazzini's idealistic and Romantic vision of a nation where 'the people' were united and indivisible. The governments of the New Left (1876–87) took on board the interests of the southern landowners and of the professional classes. The latter were numerous throughout Italy but were especially influential in the South. Depretis was able to devise a specific solution to Italy's social and cultural divisions, namely, the parliamentary practice known as *trasformismo*, which consisted of gaining a majority in Parliament on the basis of private agreements with individual deputies or groups of deputies. Thus political Liberalism in Italy assumed a peculiarly 'distorted' character. There was no alternation of parties in power, only reshuffles

within the established majority, with groups of deputies alternately joining and leaving the majority. *Trasformismo* was heavily criticized at the time as a source of corruption and political stagnation, but it was obviously a direct consequence of the fragmented character of Italy's ruling and middle classes which required of its political leaders skills of mediation and power-broking, rather than the ability of purposeful leadership stemming from a unitary vision of the state. This was reflected in the social composition of Parliament and governments after 1876, when landowners and members of the military élite were gradually replaced by professional politicians, mainly lawyers and journalists, who were especially adept at persuading and mediating. *Trasformismo* was in this context a recognition that the new Italian state lacked legitimacy in the eyes of the middle classes as well as in the eyes of the peasant majority. The extension of the suffrage in 1882, enfranchising almost 7 per cent of the population (slightly more than 2 million adult males), had, if anything, aggravated the situation. An increased electorate meant increased demands on the state.

From Crispi to Giolitti: old and new cleavages, 1887–1914

With Francesco Crispi, Prime Minister from 1887 to 1891 and again from 1893 to 1896, we enter a new period of Italian history, characterized by a determined effort to forge a national culture based on patriotism and colonialism. Political compromise and *trasformismo* faded into the background, replaced by authoritarianism and militarism.

Compared to his predecessors' unifying projects, Crispi's was less problematic in relation to the élites. The introduction of protectionist tariffs in 1887 was due largely to the perceived need to accelerate Italy's economic development and promote industrialization. Nevertheless the tariffs also united the élites by favouring northern industrialists, the landowners and tenant farmers of the Po Valley, and wheat producers (including the southern landowners, who were also given fiscal incentives to compensate for export losses). They all now had a financial stake in the Italian nation.

In relation to the lower classes, however, Crispi's political and cultural vision was complicated both by economic crises and by the formation of two subnational political cultures, Socialism and political Catholicism. The Socialist subculture was strongest among the impoverished share-croppers and landless labourers of the Po Valley, where it started to absorb the Anarchist tradition, whereas the Catholic subculture developed among the share-croppers of Lombardy and the Veneto. Each subculture put up a defence of the local/regional society against the processes of modernization, urbanization and proletarianization, seen as endorsed by the Liberal state. The Socialists offered their supporters the protection of increasingly effective workers' leagues and later developed farming co-operatives. The Catholics guaranteed the continuation of paternalistic practices, promoting self-help measures, rural banks and charity schemes among the northern share-croppers. The development of these two subcultures reinforced subnational boundaries in two ways. On the one hand, it led to the creation of two mutually exclusive ideologies. Socialism was strongly anti-clerical, partly because it inherited the anti-clerical tradition of the regions which had historically been part of the Papal States, and partly because it developed almost as a religious movement. Catholicism was both anti-Socialist and anti-Liberal; indeed, Pope Pius IX had condemned both doctrines with the publication, in 1864, of the *Syllabus of Errors*. On the other hand, while seemingly blurring the territorial conflict, the ideological conflict actually provided it with clear-cut collective identities and symbols based upon an idea of community. Admittedly, the type of community constructed by universalistic ideologies such as Socialism and Catholicism is supposedly devoid of a territorial context, but, in concrete historical terms, it has often coincided with a territorial community. Thus, for industrial workers in urban areas, the 'Socialist community' tended to equate with both a class and a territorial unit (a factory, a neighbourhood, a suburb), while for agricultural workers in the Po Valley it became increasingly equated with a region. It is not a coincidence that the Italian Socialist Party itself, founded in 1892, was born out of a fusion of distinctly regional Socialist movements.

Crispi's attempted solution to these growing class (and regional) divisions was to appeal directly to the lower classes over the heads of their political representatives. Had the economy been on an upward trend, and had his expansionist and colonialist foreign policy been successful, his strategy might very well have proved workable. As it was, the defeat of the Italian army at Adua on 1 March 1896, during a military expedition against Ethiopia intended to turn that country into an Italian protectorate, brought humiliation and embarrassment to the government, and forced Crispi to resign, thereby signalling the end of his vision of a strong unitary state.

After Adua, there followed four years of uncertainty and instability, with direct class conflicts and disagreement within the élites as to which political strategy to implement. The state repeatedly resorted to ruling by force, as when the army opened fire upon demonstrators in Milan in May 1898. However, it was unable to stop the opposition – Socialists, Republicans and Radicals – from increasing its votes at the general elections of 1897 and 1900. Internal divisions became even more prominent when, on 28 July 1900, the king, Humbert I, was assassinated by an Anarchist. With the left-wing Liberal Giovanni Giolitti (Prime Minister, with only brief interruptions, between 1901 and 1914) the country returned to a renewed and refined system of *trasformismo*. The system was extended to political parties as well as to deputies and groups of deputies. Unlike Crispi, Giolitti accepted that political relations with the lower classes had to take place through the medium of their representatives: Socialist and Catholic trade-union and political organizations. As for the Socialist Party, Crispi's iron rule and the state's repeated use of force at the turn of the century convinced many of its leaders, as well as its founder, Filippo Turati, of the need to collaborate with left-wing Liberals and settle for a 'minimalist' programme of social and political reforms, including universal male suffrage, proportional representation, civil liberties, nationalization of public utilities, and social and protective measures for workers.

What allowed *trasformismo* to resurface was economic growth. Between 1896 and 1913 Italy experienced her first industrial take-off. The economy grew at an annual rate of around 6 per cent between 1896 and 1907, while new sectors, such as the engineering, chemical, metal-working and hydro-electric industries and the banking sector, rapidly expanded, leading to the development of the so-called industrial triangle of Turin, Genoa and Milan. Economic growth allowed Giolitti to mediate on a much larger scale than in the days of Depretis. His aim was to modernize Italian society and narrow the wide gap between the various social groups within the general framework provided by protectionism. Giolitti was genuinely convinced that the state had to maintain an impartial role in labour disputes, but also that it had to adopt a much more proactive attitude towards the workers. To this end he established a Ministry for Labour in 1902, and encouraged prefects to think of their function less in terms of law and order and more in terms of devising ways to alleviate and improve social and economic conditions. The Socialists were granted many of the economic and social reforms they advocated. They were also rewarded with, and largely settled for, concessions for their followers (such as farming co-operatives subsidized by the state and centrally funded public works), as well as local and regional political power. The Socialist Party's political constituency, in fact, was somewhat limited. The Party was caught between its aspiration to represent the interests of all workers and its fear that the southern peasant masses and women represented deeply conservative groups, which were not 'ready' for emancipation. Despite a growing Feminist movement at the turn of the century, the Socialist Party refused to demand the vote for women or press for the introduction of divorce. The Socialist Party's influence was limited largely to male skilled workers, landless labourers and proletarianized share-croppers. Women textile workers, numbering more than one million in the 1890s, were generally unorganized or had started to join Catholic organizations. As for the Catholics, they were also offered, and accepted, concrete rewards for their followers, together with an understanding that the government would not introduce anti-clerical legislation. In their northern strongholds the Liberal deputies began to be replaced by Catholic-approved ones.

In the South, however, the government's alliance with the absentee landowners meant that the state remained a guarantor of the existing social structure, with only minimal concessions to the lower classes. Here the disorganized character of the peasantry allowed Giolitti to rely upon the use of force. Mass emigration abroad also came to the rescue, representing an individualistic response embedded in the culture of isolation and insecurity of the southern peasantry (and to a lesser extent in the family-centred culture of the share-cropping regions). Giolitti made full use of the southern deputies, just as his predecessors had done, exploiting to his advantage the mutually exclusive nature of Italy's socio-political cultures. Thanks to his pivotal role and to the regional entrenchment of his opponents, Liberalism continued to dominate national politics.

Towards the end of the Giolittian period, however, all three political cultures, namely, Liberalism, Catholicism and Socialism, had become regionalized, with a fourth, Nationalism, aspiring to become the new, truly national culture. Italian Nationalism started as a cultural and literary movement, particularly around the Tuscan-based review *Il Regno* ('The Kingdom', 1903–5), developing into a political association in 1910. Its ideology and aspirations, at first varied and confused, became

increasingly well defined, with the aim of detaching the idea of the nation from its Liberal-democratic cradle. In particular, individual and political liberty became subordinated to the need to turn the nation into a powerful and cohesive body. Indeed the close link between Liberalism and Nationalism which had characterized the Risorgimento was turned by the new movement into one of cynical expediency, no more than a clever tactic to achieve unification.

Nationalism's aim was to overcome both territorial and class cleavages. To the subnational and supranational 'communities' constructed by the Socialist and Catholic ideologies, it opposed an imagined community which explicitly coincided with the nation. It strove to overcome the class divide born out of the industrialization process by developing a national 'industrial' culture and appealing directly to both employers and employees with the vision of a corporatist and productivist state, as well as with the allure of colonial expansion. The desire on the part of the Nationalists to overcome class divisions should not make us overlook the fact that their idea of the nation was deeply class-based and undemocratic, being conceived not as a community of citizens, but as providing the middle classes with a powerful political instrument and cultural identity in an age increasingly dominated by class conflicts.[7] Around this core project the Nationalists wanted to create a new, conservative and openly anti-Socialist political alliance, to which 'pro-national' Liberals and Catholics would eventually turn. Within the envisaged nation of unequal citizens, the lower classes, particularly industrial workers, were offered a politically subordinate, though materially advantageous, position. Industrial workers, however, did not appear very receptive to Nationalism's advances, remaining loyal to the Socialist and Catholic subcultures. In addition, Nationalism failed to take account of rural Italy. Nonetheless, the new movement succeeded to a large extent in modifying the political climate of the country.

Changes in Italian society during the Giolittian period help us to understand the new cultural and political climate. At the turn of the century, Italy was predominantly a rural country. Manufacturing industry was relatively well developed in the North; however, it was predominantly made up of textile production and only partially built around modern mechanized plants. Protectionism encouraged the growth of heavy industry, linked to the state and to the new German-style 'mixed banks', which carried out the dual role of commercial and merchant

banks. A new, more aggressive and determined generation of industrialists emerged, who came to consider Giolitti's mediating skills and non-interfering attitude in labour disputes as a hindrance to Italy's economic development, particularly following the slowing down of industrial growth after the general depression of 1907–8. The hardening of the employers' attitude was paralleled in the Socialist camp by the dominance of the intransigent wing of the Socialist Party at the 1912 National Congress. Changes in the internal composition of the labour force, with a shift away from well-paid, highly trained skilled workers towards a more standardized, lower-paid unskilled workforce, contributed to a weakening of the reformist wing of the Socialist Party and Trade-Union Confederation and the concomitant emergence of a revolutionary Syndicalist wing.

The confrontational and increasingly anti-government stance of both employers and workers' organizations marked the end of Giolitti's version of *trasformismo*. Giolitti turned to all his opponents for support. In 1911 he went to war with Turkey to conquer Libya, in an attempt to placate the Nationalists. The war was both popular and successful, but it had the effect of strengthening the resolve of the Nationalists and alienating the Socialists. In 1912 a new electoral law was introduced, based on almost universal male suffrage, as a concession to the Socialists. The following year general elections took place and Giolitti resorted to an electoral pact with the Catholics. Thanks to this alliance, the Liberals remained in command of a comfortable majority. However, they had to rely increasingly on the South and its corrupt clientelistic cliques of deputies. They also lacked a wide network of supporters across the country, something which the Nationalists, on the other hand, were openly striving for, with some degree of success, particularly in the North. The Liberal 'Party' was a rather loose amalgam of different tendencies and currents as well as individual personalities, and it also included a group of young Liberals who had strong sympathy for the Nationalists.

At the start of the new century, therefore, Italy was no nearer the formation of a national culture than it had been in 1860. Indeed, at the political level there had been something of a setback. Whereas Italy's secularized middle classes had previously been represented by only one party, they were now split between the Liberal Party and the Nationalist Association. Nor had class-based cleavages superseded territorial ones. This was to a certain extent inevitable, since industrialization only

affected some areas of the country and regional rural structures persisted in others.

The First World War provided Nationalism with an important platform. The Nationalists believed that participation in the conflict would impose a sense of identity and a strong discipline upon all Italians, thereby justifying a return to an authoritarian style of government. To this end the Nationalists rallied around the 'interventionist' cause against those who advocated neutrality. They managed to become the fulcrum of an alliance which included ex-Socialists like Mussolini, revolutionary Syndicalists, right-wing Liberals and Catholics and representatives of big business, as well as some democrats like Salvemini and reformist Socialists like Bissolati, who believed that the war represented a fight between democratic and authoritarian nations. An *alternative* political alliance to Giolitti's coalition system was therefore in place in 1914–15, although it lacked a mass following. When Giolitti resigned in 1914, his political system came to an end. He was replaced by the Liberal conservative Antonio Salandra, whose government engaged in secret negotiations with the Triple Entente in March 1915, leading to the Pact of London, which guaranteed Italian intervention within three months. Thanks to the activism of the Nationalists, who were able to stage a series of public demonstrations in favour of intervention in the war in May 1915, parliamentary opposition was successfully neutralized. The Pact was ratified and Italy declared war on Austria-Hungary in May 1915 and on Germany in August 1916.

Just as Giolitti's strategy had resembled, on a much larger scale, Depretis's *trasformismo*, so Nationalism recreated the political climate which had brought Crispi to power under the banner of a unifying authoritarian agenda. There was one crucial difference, however, from Crispi's arrival in government. This time it was not just *trasformismo* that was discredited, but Liberalism itself. By actively encouraging his political opponents and even his own Liberal Party to become entrenched around sectoral/territorial interests, and by allowing the parliamentary system to become equated with cheap compromise, a weak executive and a lack of direction, Giolitti had revealed Liberalism, Socialism and Catholicism as incapable of putting forward a national political programme. The seeds had been sown for a nationalization of Italian political culture outside the Liberal-democratic framework.

Italian Fascism: the creation of a homogeneous national culture?

Two opposing conceptions of the nature of the war and its implications for Italy's domestic as well as foreign politics continued to divide the 'interventionist' front during the conflict. According to people like Salvemini and Bissolati, the war would strengthen the democratic movement and institutions, whereas the Nationalists saw the war purely in imperialistic terms, hoping that it would lead to a more authoritarian state. Inevitably perhaps, given the need for a strong executive to direct the war effort, there was a trend towards the type of state envisaged by the Nationalists. Thus committees made up of representatives of the political, military and industrial establishment were empowered to make decisions behind closed doors. The trend had appeared justified in the face of military setbacks, and social and political unrest at home.

After the First World War the most pressing political issue was how to 'revitalize' Parliament and adjust the political system to the rapid transformation of the country into a mass society. In the South, traditional political alliances appeared shattered: thousands of peasants invaded large estates, asking the government to fulfil promises of land distribution it had made during the war. In northern and central Italy the sharecroppers showed increasing militancy, and strikes and other forms of protest became widespread. Trade-union membership soared. These were not problems unique to Italy. Almost everywhere in Europe existing political systems had to adapt to the deep social changes brought about by the war and respond to the increasing demands for political representation by the working classes. Other countries, however, such as Great Britain, achieved a relatively smooth transition to a post-war settlement. In Italy, the changes were too abrupt to permit such a smooth transition, and the country's political system was too immature to 'absorb' the new divisions, while the decision-making process had shifted further away from Parliament during the war.

Another reason why Parliament was not able to mediate between the various demands put forward by conflicting social groups was that the two political parties which at first most benefited, in terms of members and votes, from the social changes brought by the war – the Socialist Party and the newly formed Catholic Party (Partito Popolare, 'Popular Party') – were not interested in taking the initiative and transforming the old Liberal political system into a parliamentary democracy based on

mass parties. Neither wanted to form a coalition government by collaborating with the other, for two main reasons. First, the ideologies of the two parties were incompatible. Secondly, they both spoke largely for a regional constituency, and failed to think in terms of national politics. In 1919 the Socialist Party was the nearest thing Italy had to a modern mass party. Yet even this party was taken unawares by the political mobilization of rural social groups. Furthermore, the Socialist Party had developed a dual nature, being divided internally between a reformist wing, which looked back to the Giolittian system, and a revolutionary wing, which looked forward to a Soviet-style revolution. The Catholic Party, founded in 1919, was also a 'mass' party, at least when compared to the Liberals, but it was even more regionally based than its main rival, and lacked the necessary expertise and cohesion to make Parliament work on a new basis. It was divided into three currents: the left wing, representing the interests of the small landowners and share-croppers of the northern regions; the right wing, representing the interests of the large landowners, whose paternalism was being threatened by the increasing militancy of their share-croppers; and the centre, which spent most of its energy trying to keep the party together. In addition, the Catholic Party did not enjoy the full backing of the Vatican, which considered it both too radical and too secular, thereby depriving it of an important source of legitimacy.

The mutual exclusiveness of the Catholic and Socialist subcultures, and the worsening of the class-based cleavage in both the rural and the industrial sectors, opened the way for Fascism. Mussolini was quick to grasp the potential of the Nationalist programme for achieving political power, but he was also aware of the need to appeal to rural Italy and to respond to the mobilization of both industrial and rural workers. Nationalism was by no means dead after the war. The myth of 'mutilated victory' – in other words, the feeling that Italy was being unfairly treated at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 – refuelled Nationalist feelings and discredited the Liberal ruling class. The division of public opinion between interventionists and neutralists persisted after the war, keeping alive those right-wing, anti-parliamentary, anti-Liberal groups which had successfully allied themselves with big business before the war.

Mussolini respun the web of these alliances around his own Fascist movement, which had been founded in March 1919. More importantly, in the autumn of 1920, his party developed into a mass party of the right. In the Po Valley, in particular, it broke the Socialists' hold over labour, collaborating with landowners and large tenant farmers, promising support for those middle strata which were seeking upward social mobility, and making a systematic use of violence against recalcitrant labourers. This is known as 'agrarian Fascism', and, interestingly, it was a regional phenomenon. Consciously or not, Fascism exploited the territorial character of its political opponents, and dealt separately with each one. By concentrating on attacking the Socialists and conspicuously sparing the Catholic movement, Fascism could appear as an ally of both the Catholics and the Liberals. When Giolitti briefly resumed office in 1920, he assumed he could safely play the right against the left, and turned a blind eye to Fascist violence. He also formed electoral pacts with both Nationalists and Fascists at the 1921 elections, attempting to revive his old strategy of bringing extra-parliamentary political movements within the Liberal framework. The strategy backfired badly.

The idea of doing away with parliamentary mediation and compromise, of creating a strong authoritarian state bent on imposing national unity through a hierarchical and highly disciplined society, in short the idea of doing away with the Liberal institutions altogether, had become increasingly appealing to some sectors of the establishment. Fascism thus became the successful solution to Italy's post-war crisis. The way it came to power shows that it was to a large extent allowed to succeed by default. The Liberal governments after Giolitti continued to fail to act against its violence, while Mussolini promised a return to law and order. The new Pope, Pius XI, elected in February 1922, distanced himself even further than his predecessor from the Partito Popolare, and appeared to signal his approval of a government which would include the Fascists. Industrialists and landowners viewed Fascism's anti-Socialist tactics with favour. In this context, the famous 'March on Rome' of 28 October 1922, whereby the Fascist 'squads' were to take over control of the city, was an essentially peaceful affair rather than a coup d'état, and the king himself asked Mussolini to lead a coalition government.

Fascism seemed to possess all the ingredients for succeeding in imposing a national culture on Italy. By reintroducing protectionism in 1925, it recemented the socio-economic élites on a long-term basis. By destroying Socialist and Catholic organizations in their respective strongholds (the latter, with similar tactics to those employed in the Po Valley, in 1923–4), it incorporated their followers into its own structures. Thus Fascist unions replaced Catholic and Socialist ones, a Fascist after-work organization was established, and sport and leisure associations

became largely a Fascist prerogative. By allying with the Church as a result of the Lateran Agreement of 11 February 1929, Fascism gained legitimacy and neutralized Catholic public opinion. The rift between Church and state was officially over, and the 1929 Plebiscite marked this new phase with the Church openly inviting Catholics to support the régime. Finally, with the introduction of a rudimentary welfare state in the 1930s, Fascism extended the role of the state with the aim of reducing the importance of the Church and making families more dependent on public agencies. And yet its unifying project failed.

There are at least three reasons why Fascism achieved only a superficial homogenization of Italian society and culture. First, economic factors. Following the revaluation of the lira in 1927, there was a partial recession in the late 1920s, followed by the much more serious crisis of the early 1930s. The formation of an inter-class industrial culture, which Fascism had borrowed from Nationalism, depended quite heavily on industrial workers participating in the benefits of industrial expansion, particularly in a regime which ruled out free unions and strikes. Despite disagreements among historians, it seems safe to say that industrial wages, from 1927 up to the mid 1930s, at best remained stable and at worst decreased substantially, leaving workers at most lukewarm towards Fascism and the idea of industrial collaboration for the sake of the nation. Second, the myth of the land and of rural Italy, perhaps incautiously embraced by Fascism, and leading to promises of 'land to the peasants' and highly publicized policies such as the 1925 'battle for wheat' to make Italy self-sufficient in grain production, was increasingly exposed for what it was – just a myth. In particular, the strategy of supporting upwardly mobile small farmers and share-croppers in their quest for land turned sour, again as a result of the recession, with many newly created small landowners falling increasingly into debt in the late 1920s and 1930s. Third, welfare state provisions were only modest in scope and bypassed large sections of society, while the shift to a nuclear family partially dependent on state support was both slow and patchy, allowing social networks and family strategies to remain dominant, and leaving the state in the position of a distant actor.

By 1943 Fascism was totally discredited. A deeply unpopular intervention in the war on the side of Germany and badly fought military campaigns brought down Mussolini in July 1943, after the Allies had landed in Sicily. Following Mussolini's downfall, the king, Victor Emmanuel III, nominated Marshal Badoglio as the new Prime Minister, while the ex-Duce was arrested. Badoglio initiated talks with the Allies, signing an armistice on 3 September which was announced on the 8th, but which was not preceded by any military preparation for war against Germany. Leaving the Italian army in disarray and the population in deep confusion, the king and Badoglio fled to Brindisi, under the protection of the Allies. On 12 September, Mussolini was liberated by the Germans from his prison on the Gran Sasso mountain, taken to Germany, and finally brought back to Italy on 23 September, where he set up a Fascist republic – the Repubblica Sociale Italiana – around Salò, on Lake Garda. The Republic attracted the support of the most fanatical Fascist leaders, and from the beginning was openly and brutally managed by the Germans. The country ended up divided between the South, which was under the Allied military government, and the Centre and North, occupied by the Germans and experiencing a Resistance movement dominated by Communist partisan organizations. This movement was viewed with distrust by the Allies, particularly Great Britain, which favoured continuation with the pre-Fascist moderate Liberal system rather than any radical democratization of the country. Collaboration between the partisans and the Allies was therefore uneasy; as early as 1944, the Allies began preparing for the post-war period, which meant taking seriously into consideration the political future of Italy and especially the possibility of a Communist-led revolution. The ideological conflict within Italy was merging with the ideological conflict between East and West.

Italy's political cultures after 1945

After the collapse of Fascism, Italy's superficial gloss of homogenization disappeared to reveal persisting cultural and structural differences. The old Catholic and Socialist subcultures resurfaced in the north-eastern regions and in the Po Valley respectively, against a process of deterioration of the rural structures out of which they had originated in the late nineteenth century. Such a process had started under Fascism, and was to accelerate in the 1950s and 1960s. In these regions the economic and social structure was undergoing change, while the political culture remained largely unchanged. Even though Socialism in the Po Valley was being increasingly replaced by Communism, the two ideologies performed a similar function, in that each was organized around a territorial network and offered supporters a strong collective identity. The dislocation between structure and culture, however, was more apparent

than real. The Catholic and Socialist/Communist subcultures, in fact, not only successfully adapted to socio-economic change, but also actively seconded the aspirations of the rural share-croppers and labourers, by offering them the possibility of social mobility through small-scale, small-business capitalism. The result was a fairly homogeneous socio-economic structure in both regions, accompanied by persisting political and ideological divisions.

After 1945, however, the subcultural and territorial nature of political Catholicism and Communism had become less prominent due to the increasingly national and international roles these two parties and their ideologies were playing. In the case of the Communist Party, participation in the Resistance movement, its organizational role in the southern peasants' agitations of the 1940s, and the abandonment of its anti-clerical tradition, greatly contributed to overcoming the territorial and sectoral limitations of the pre-Fascist Socialist Party. The newly formed Christian Democratic Party also enjoyed a national standing. Unlike the pre-Fascist Partito Popolare, it enjoyed the full support of the Vatican, since it was politically moderate and its leaders had been formed within the ranks of trusted Catholic organizations. It also gained the backing of influential conservative élites, and in the 1950s it replaced the southern landowners and deputies with a centralized party machinery. Italy, at last, appeared on the way to overcoming its regional divisions, with both the Catholic and Communist movements enjoying support throughout the peninsula. Class-based subcultures, on the other hand, were just as strong as in the past. However, in this, Italy was not alone. Indeed, the immediate post-war period in Italy was characterized by a spirit of national consciousness and solidarity, in the name of anti-Fascism. Between 1945 and 1947 the country was ruled by governments of national unity, with the participation of all the anti-Fascist parties, including the Socialist and the Communist Parties. In an atmosphere of compromise and collaboration between the various political forces, a Republic was established in 1946, a Constitution was agreed during 1947, and an electoral system based on proportional representation and universal suffrage was introduced. Yet the general elections of 18 April 1948 were marked by direct confrontation between two electoral and ideological blocks. Communism and anti-Communism, dictatorship and democracy, East and West, anti-clericalism and clericalism (one of the Catholics' slogans was 'Either with or against Christ') dominated the political debate, splitting Italy into two opposing camps.

What made Italy an anomaly compared to other Western European states was the Cold War and the K (Communist) factor. The problem was that the Socialist Party had not evolved into a Social-Democratic party but into a Communist Party enjoying close links with Moscow. In the eyes of the Italian political right and its American allies, the Communist Party was simply a tool in the hands of the Soviet Union, implanted from the outside rather than rooted from within. This had two important consequences. The first was the tacit understanding that the Communist Party had to be excluded from government at all costs. This led to a political system in which there was no alternation in power between two parties or coalitions of parties. The Christian Democratic Party occupied the centre ground of the political spectrum and was permanently in government, in coalition with smaller parties situated either to its right or to its left. The second consequence, closely linked to the first, was that the identification of 'the enemy', compared to the Resistance period and the immediate aftermath of the war, shifted perceptibly from Fascism to Communism. Thus Italy developed a schizophrenic identity and the state became simultaneously the anti-state. Its official culture remained anti-Fascist, celebrating the Resistance, the new republican and democratic institutions, and the new Constitution. The 'covert' culture was anti-Communist and in important respects anti-democratic, bent on preserving Fascist laws and policies, delaying the implementation of the Constitution, making use of Fascist elements in the intelligence services, allying with secret and/or illegal organizations such as the Mafia and Freemasonry. In the 1970s suspicions grew that the state itself – or at least important sections of the state – were behind the so-called 'strategy of tension', consisting of a series of bomb attacks against innocent civilians in public places, which was designed to disseminate disorder and terror in the country with a view to imposing authoritarian rule.

To return to Italy's official and visible culture, it was only with the 'economic miracle' of the late 1950s and early 1960s – when Italian industry expanded at an annual rate of 8 per cent and exports almost doubled – the growth of consumerism, the development of the media and particularly that of television, that a secularized, modernized, standardized society and culture began to take shape. It is indeed possible to view Italy's development between the 1950s and the 1980s as a linear process whereby the subnational boundaries increasingly faded and the integration of the lower classes into the nation-state was finally achieved. The

1970s, in particular, were years of increasing liberalization and secularization of Italian society, with new social and pressure groups demanding greater civil liberties and new rights for women. Divorce and abortion were legalized and new laws relating to the family were passed. Admittedly, the student protests of 1967–8, originating from the failures of the education system but soon turning into a frontal attack against the political system, the industrial workers' struggles for higher wages and rights in the autumn of 1969, as well as 'red terrorism' in the 1970s, were all inspired by revolutionary and anti-capitalist ideologies and do not point to social and cultural integration. Nevertheless, they can also be seen as the last remnant of a revolutionary Syndicalist, anti-parliamentary and anti-Liberal tradition, or, alternatively, as representing confused aspirations for greater democracy. In any case, by the 1980s, the force of protests and agitations had already waned, and the power of the unions had decreased. 'Proletarian' culture had lost much of its appeal, and a new culture based on personal success and individual values had emerged.

In keeping with the linear interpretation outlined above, the decades from 1960 to 1990 would appear to have been characterized by a serious dislocation between the political system, which was blocked because of the Cold War, and the Italian economy and society, which were experiencing great change. After the rigid ideological confrontations and authoritarian style of government of the 1950s, the political system did, in fact, attempt to change, with the 'opening to the left' in 1963, i.e. the transition to centre–left coalitions which included the Socialists. One of the objectives of this transition was precisely to widen the social basis of consensus for the democratic system by implementing a programme of social reforms. There was, however, resistance to the new course in both Italy and the USA, which led to covert operations (such as the threatened coup d'état by General De Lorenzo in 1964) to reverse the political trend towards the left, considered as a dangerous path towards the legitimation of the Communists. In the 1970s the political system again appeared on the verge of substantial changes, when the Communist Party enjoyed a surge in popularity and distanced itself from Moscow, going as far as accepting Italy's membership of Nato. These were the years when Enrico Berlinguer, the leader of the Communist Party, launched the idea of a 'historic compromise' with the Christian Democrats. Again, covert operations intensified and terrorism was used to stop the governmental shift to the left. The use of covert operations in the 1970s shows how long-standing the legacy of the Cold War was in Italy. The 'opening to the left' of 1963, the 'historic compromise' of 1976–9, and the return to centre–left coalition governments in the 1980s, on the other hand, show how that conflict had also given way to a particular *modus vivendi* between the parties, almost like a renewed version of *trasformismo*, defined by Lijphart as 'consensual democracy'.[8] By this term Lijphart refers to a political system where rigid ideological and cultural divisions lead the political forces towards a mutual understanding and an attitude of compromise, which, in turn, leads to political immobilism. It also led to systematic clientelism and corruption, involving hidden networks of power, including Freemasonry and the Mafia.

It is also possible, however, to take the view that Italy's cultural standardization since the 1950s masked the re-creation of regional socio-economic structures and value systems. In a pioneering study, the sociologist Arnaldo Bagnasco identified not one but three Italies: the North-West, characterized by conurbations, large industrial plants and a well-developed services sector; the North-East and Centre, characterized by small-scale industrialization and the persistence of primary and social networks; and the South, externally modernized but economically underdeveloped despite massive state intervention.[9] The North-West presented a more pluralistic and individualistic political culture; the North-East and Centre the resilience of traditional subcultures; the South was still in the grips of a culture of clientelism and patronage.

The end of the Cold War and the ensuing apparent collapse of the traditional ideologies of Catholicism and Socialism/Communism have recently brought great changes to the country, but they have not resolved the basic dilemma outlined above. Is Italy a country which has developed an increasingly homogeneous society and culture, and now needs only to establish a majoritarian political system to end its anomalous status among Western democracies, or, on the contrary, is it still greatly divided economically and socially, and also politically, at least for the foreseeable future?

Beyond the Cold War: Italy in the 1990s

Political developments in Italy since the fall of the Berlin Wall, which freed voters from the perceived need to support the Christian Democratic Party as a bulwark against Communism, do not help us to

answer the question outlined above. After the demise of traditional political ideologies, and the dénouement of the Italian state's culture of deception and corruption thanks to the 'Clean Hands' investigation, which unveiled systematic bribes and kickbacks involving political parties and private and public companies, political change has been both rapid and contradictory.

The success of an entirely new party, Forza Italia ('Come On Italy!'), founded by the media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi at the 1994 political elections, would appear to support the interpretation that Italian voters now express their preferences on the basis of party programmes and candidates, rather than ideological allegiances. At another level, it seems however that it is precisely the end of the Cold War and the collapse of traditional ideologies that have exposed the subnational, territorial character of Italy's political cultures. The rise of the regionalist and secessionist Northern League in the north-eastern regions, previously dominated by the Catholic subculture, the continuing success of the ex-Communist Partito Democratico della Sinistra ('Democratic Party of the Left') in the Po Valley and the central regions, the strength of the ex-Fascist Alleanza Nazionale ('National Alliance') in the South, point to persisting political divisions along territorial lines.

The two interpretations outlined above are based upon opposing views of both social and cultural change, yet they are not necessarily in contradiction. We have moved a long way from the idea that economic and social modernization is a uniform process, bringing with it cultural homogenization. Whereas today's mass media and global-communications technologies reinforce both individualism and the development of a national (but also increasingly global) culture, they may also strengthen the local dimension. In other words, globalization will not lead to the break-up of local and regional communities; indeed, subnational boundaries, of a socio-economic as well as of a cultural nature, may acquire a new salience. However, perhaps the time has now come to acknowledge that Italy is not an anomaly in this respect and that a homogeneous national culture is as elusive in Italy as it is in most other Western states, which have to contend with social fragmentation, ethnic divisions, spatial subcultures and differing economic structures.

The question, rather, is whether the subnational cultures need necessarily feed into the political system. The concept of trust can help us understand whether this is likely to happen. As we have seen in the course of this chapter, Italians have derived their interpersonal trust largely from territorial and ideological, indeed quasi-ethnic, feelings of belonging to a community other than the nation-state. When this has not happened, trust has remained restricted to the family, leading to particularism and clientelism. By contrast, the Italian state enjoys a low degree of legitimacy, and relations between the citizens and their political institutions are characterized by a lack of trust. Poor legitimacy of the political system and corruption go hand in hand. Admittedly, regional differences have contributed considerably to this lack of legitimacy; conversely, trust and solidarity vary greatly across the country. Nonetheless, the devastating impact of the Cold War on Italy's quest for national solidarity has perhaps been underestimated. It prevented the democratic state from raising the level of trust in the country and acquiring a new legitimacy.

After the Second World War, Italy, like West Germany, had the opportunity of achieving a successful transition to a Liberal-democratic state, integrating its working classes and gradually reducing territorial imbalances. The creation of a national identity and inclusive citizenship could have stemmed from a genuine commitment to the new republican Constitution. The existence of a strong Communist Party within Italian borders, and the Cold War, prevented any such development. The supranational nature of the political conflict between East and West produced for Italy the paradoxical outcome that its subnational boundaries were artificially strengthened, rather than de-emphasized. Regions which had much in common, in socio-economic terms, such as the North East and the Centre, remained sharply divided politically and ideologically. The South became a battleground between Communism and anti-Communism, until it was 'colonized' by the Christian Democratic Party, which increasingly used the special regional agency set up in 1950 – known as the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno – for clientelistic purposes rather than to promote sustainable economic growth. The state developed a dual identity but pretended that only its official face existed. Citizenship was understood in exclusionary terms. Given the nature of the Italian state during the Cold War, it appears therefore that lack of trust on the part of Italians towards their state was both rational and justified, rather than simply a cultural trait inherited from the past.

Now that the Cold War has finally ended, the Communists have become ex-Communists and the Fascists ex-Fascists, the country has another chance to develop into a democratic state for *all its citizens.* This, however, necessitates an end to the culture of deception on the part of

the state, and to cynicism on the part of the citizens, as well as a shared acceptance of clear and transparent democratic rules. Here the signs are somewhat mixed. On the one hand, ideology plays a much lesser role in Italian politics today, and there is a new commitment from various quarters to both economic and political liberalism. Two coalitions of parties have at last alternated in power, the centre–right forming a government in 1994, the centre–left in 1996. The latter was able to take effective measures to reduce the country's excessive deficit and successfully negotiated entry into the European Monetary Union. On the other hand, there has been a certain hastiness in drawing the curtains over the First Republic. More importantly, various attempts by the centre–left government since 1996 to reach widespread agreement for modernizing and revitalizing Italy's obsolete political institutions have so far failed. There is a general consensus that the country has not yet achieved a successful transition from the 'First' to the 'Second' Republic.

Conclusion

Looking back over 140 years of Italian unification, one is tempted to conclude that the whole problem of the creation of a national identity in the face of strong subnational boundaries has been approached in two fundamental ways. The first approach has consisted in the imposition of an authoritarian state (governments of the Historic Right, Crispi's period in office, the First World War and Fascism, and, to a lesser extent, the 1950s). The second approach has consisted of mediation and compromise, often degenerating into clientelism and corruption (governments of the New Left, the Giolittian age, Christian Democratic rule from the 1960s to the 1980s). In the first case, the emphasis was on imposing a national symbolic boundary through the authoritarianism – in the absence of the authority – of the state; in the second, on accommodating existing subnational boundaries. Economic, as well as political, factors appear to have influenced the choice of one or the other strategy. Thus recession and financial constraints seem to have corresponded to an authoritarian approach to politics, while expansion and growth have facilitated compromise. Neither strategy aimed specifically at raising the level of trust in the country. This was attempted in the period immediately following the Second World War, but was thwarted by the outbreak of the Cold War. Now Italy has another chance, but in a climate which lacks the moral imperative of the 1940s and under pressure from various quarters to conceal, rather than learn from, the mistakes of the First Republic. In this context, the therapeutic effects of electoral and institutional reforms may be impaired, and the inertia of traditional approaches to Italy's socio-cultural disunity may yet block the new paths opened by the end of the Cold War.

NOTES

1. Roberto Cartocci, *Fra Lega e Chiesa*. (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1994), p. 50.
2. Robert Putnam, 'La dolce vita is Finally Over', *The Independent*, 10 March 1993.
3. John Davis, 'Remapping Italy's Path to the Twentieth Century', *Journal of Modern History* 66 (1994), pp. 291–320 (p. 320).
4. Ronald Inglehart, *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society* (Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 17.
5. Lucy Riall, *The Italian Risorgimento. State, Society and National Unification* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).
6. Pamela Pilbeam, *The Middle Classes in Europe 1789–1914* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1990), p. 278.
7. Franco Gaeta, *Il nazionalismo italiano* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1981), pp. 99–128.
8. Arend Lijphart, *Democracies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).
9. Arnaldo Bagnasco, *Tre Italie* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1977).

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PETER BONDANELLA

11

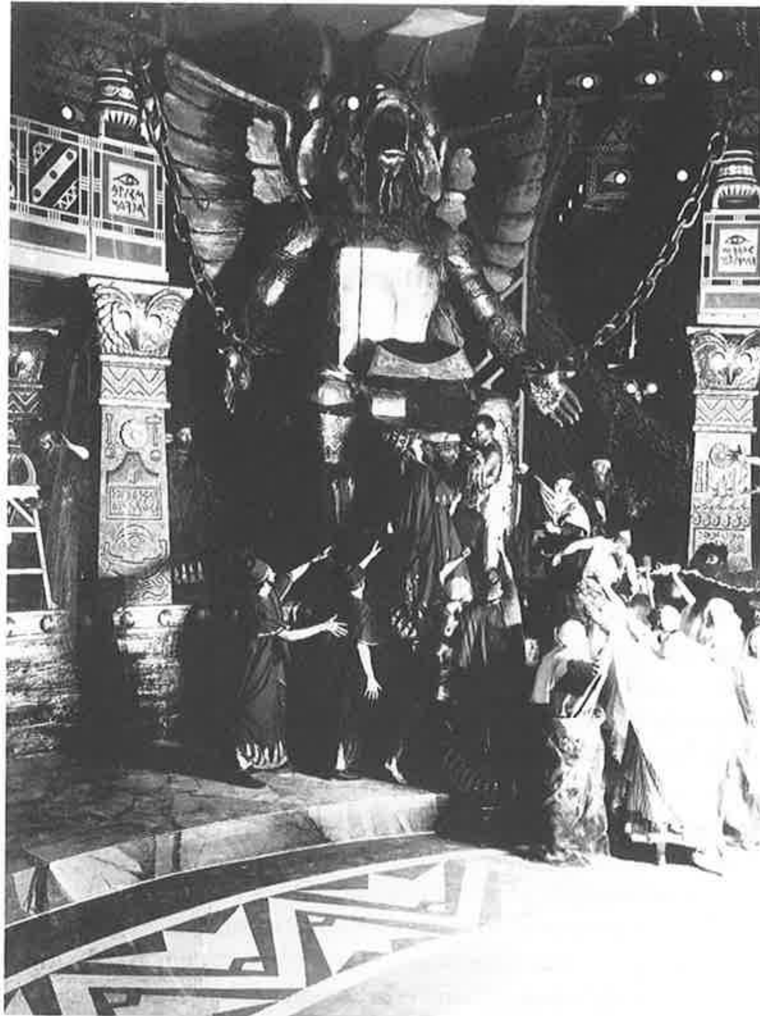
Italian cinema

Italian silent cinema

On 11 November 1895, Filoteo Albertini applied for a patent on the Albertini Kinetograph, and between 1909 and 1916, the Italian silent cinema represented a major force in world cinema before the hegemony of Hollywood was firmly established. Albertini produced the first feature film with a complex plot – *La presa di Roma* ('The Taking of Rome', 1905) – a treatment of a patriotic theme, the annexation of the Eternal City to the new Italian state in 1870. The next year, a major production company, CINES, was founded, which enabled Italian films to capture the world market for a brief period. While Italian silent films reflected a variety of genres – Roman costume dramas, adventure films, comedies, filmed drama, even experimental, avant-garde works – the industry's most popular product was the costumed film set in classical antiquity. The period's greatest director was Giovanni Pastrone (1883–1959), whose majestic silent classic *Cabiria* (1914) established the popularity of the feature film with its depiction of the Second Punic War and influenced D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance* (1916).

The coming of sound and the Fascist era

After the end of the First World War, foreign competition almost destroyed the Italian film industry, forcing production to drop from 200 films in 1920 to fewer than a dozen works in 1927. A few years later, sound was introduced to Italian audiences with *La canzone dell'amore* ('The Song of Love', 1930), directed by Gennaro Righelli (1886–1949) from a short story by Luigi Pirandello. Mussolini himself received a private showing



1. Giovanni Pastrone's *Cabiria* (1914): Maciste (Bartolomeo Pagano) rescues Cabiria from sacrifice to the Carthaginian god Moloch.

of this first venture into the talkies in Italy, a reflection of how important cinema was to his regime. During most of the 1920s, Italian cinemas (numbering some 3,000 at one point) could only import works from abroad. When the Italian government moved to block the American monopoly within the peninsula, Hollywood studios withdrew from the Italian market. No longer forced to face overwhelming American economic pressure, local production boomed. During the Fascist period, over 700 films were produced in

Italy, most not really 'Fascist' films at all but primarily entertainment and documentary.

Outside Italy, little was known of Italian cinema during the Fascist period, and this ignorance created the erroneous idea abroad that post-war Italian film rose miraculously from the ashes of the war and anti-Fascist culture. Many important contributions laying the groundwork for the post-war creative explosion (including the technical and aesthetic preparation for the birth of Italian Neorealism) must be credited to the pre-war period. The Fascist regime played a major role in this development. The government built one of the world's great film complexes, Cinecittà ('Cinema City'), which Mussolini himself inaugurated in 1937. The regime also founded an important film school, the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia ('Experimental Centre of Cinematography', 1935). Both institutions are still in operation today and constitute the backbone of the present industry. Several important film journals – *Bianco e nero* ('Black and White', the official organ of the Centro) and *Cinema* (edited at one time by Mussolini's son Vittorio) – helped to spread information about foreign theories and techniques through translations and reviews. Most of the great directors, actors, technicians and scriptwriters of the Neorealist period received their training during the Fascist period, and some post-war figures, such as Roberto Rossellini (1906–77), made their first films in the service of the Fascist government.

Two directors stand out during this period: Mario Camerini (1885–1991) and Alessandro Blasetti (1900–87). Camerini's stylish comedies stressed role-playing in society, and first brought together Vittorio De Sica (1902–74) as an actor and Cesare Zavattini (1902–89) as a scriptwriter in a classic comedy, *Darò un milione* ('I'll Give a Million', 1935). Long before De Sica became identified as the director of post-war Neorealist classics scripted by Zavattini, he was the most popular actor and singer in Fascist Italy. Camerini's comedies – the best of which were those with De Sica, such as *Il Signor Max* ('Mr Max', 1937) – established a level of craftsmanship and witty sophistication that rivals the best products of contemporary Hollywood studios. Blasetti was the first Italian director in the sound period to make use of non-professional actors and on-location shooting in the pursuit of film realism (all supposedly original inventions of post-war Neorealism). These stylistic features are evident in his masterpiece *1860* (1934), a patriotic film about Garibaldi, the original version of which linked Garibaldi's soldiers to Mussolini's Blackshirts much as anti-Fascist partisans would later link Garibaldi's Redshirts to their own guerilla forces wearing red neckerchiefs.

2. On the outskirts of Rome, Mussolini begins construction of the largest film studio in Europe, Cinecittà ('Cinema City'). Underneath his image as a film director is the propaganda slogan 'Cinematography is the most powerful weapon', a remark made by Lenin, whom Mussolini admired.

Blasetti's *Vecchia guardia* ('The Old Guard', 1935) does provide heroic depiction of Mussolini's rise to power with a documentary style glorifying the March on Rome. Yet Blasetti also made one of the most beautiful and fanciful of all pre-1945 films, *La corona di ferro* ('The Iron Crown', 1941), in which ornately stylized studio sets testify to the technical prowess reached by Cinecittà and whose dominant theme was a hymn to peace. His *Quattro passi fra le nuvole* ('A Stroll in the Clouds', 1942) prefigures the poetic style of De Sica's Neorealism.

Italian cinema during the Fascist period was nationalistic and patriotic, much like every other national cinema, including Hollywood. Only about a dozen of all the feature works produced during the régime's lifetime can really be said to embody Fascist ideology or to have been produced with political ends in mind. The Fascist régime preferred a cinema of entertainment, and exerted its ideological control predominantly through newsreels and documentaries rather than through fiction film. The search for a realistic documentary style in Italian cinema began not with the post-war Neorealists but with directors enjoying Mussolini's favour. For example, in *L'assedio dell'Alcazar* ('The Siege of the Alcazar', 1940) by Augusto Gennina (1892–1957), the story of

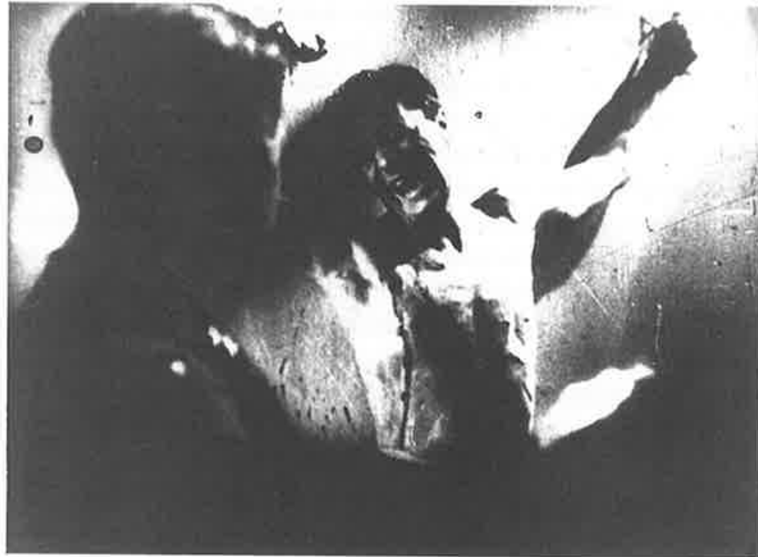
the heroic defence of the Toledo fortress by Franco's Fascist troops during the Spanish Civil War, there is a fascinating combination of fact and fiction, documentary style and fantasy, that would be continued in the major documentaries shot for the Italian armed forces by Francesco De Robertis (1902–59) and by a young Rossellini. Rossellini shot three important pre-war films that may be called his 'Fascist' trilogy: *La nave bianca* ('The White Ship', 1941), *Un pilota ritorna* ('A Pilot Returns', 1942) and *L'uomo dalla croce* ('The Man With a Cross', 1943). They employ the hybrid style later made famous by post-war Neorealism: on-location shooting, documentary photography, many non-professional actors and fictionalized historical plots.

Post-war Italian Neorealism

With the fall of Mussolini and the end of the war, international audiences were introduced to Italian films through a few great masterpieces by Rossellini, De Sica and Luchino Visconti (1906–76). Italian Neorealism underlined social themes (the war, poverty, the Resistance, unemployment); it seemed to reject traditional dramatic and cinematic conventions associated with Hollywood; it stressed on-location shooting rather than studio work, as well as the documentary photographic style favoured by many directors under the former régime; and it often employed non-professional actors in original ways. Film historians have unfortunately tended to speak of Neorealism as if it were an authentic movement with universally agreed stylistic or thematic principles. The basis for the fundamental change in cinematic history marked by Italian Neorealism was less an agreement on a single, unified cinematic style than a common aspiration to view Italy without preconceptions and to employ a more honest and ethical, but no less poetic, cinematic language in the process.

The masterpieces of Neorealism are Rossellini's *Roma città aperta* ('Rome Open City', 1945) and *Paisà* ('Paisan', 1946); De Sica's *Ladri di biciclette* ('Bicycle Thieves', 1948); and Visconti's *La terra trema* ('The Earth Trembles', 1948). *Roma città aperta* so completely reflected the moral and psychological atmosphere of the immediate post-war period that its international critical success alerted the world to the rebirth of Italian cinema. With a daring combination of styles and moods, due in great measure to brilliant scriptwriting by Sergio Amidei (1904–91) and a young Federico Fellini (1920–93), Rossellini captured the tension and

3. Luchino Visconti's *Ossessione* (1942), an unauthorized Italian version of James Cain's novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, is one of the films made during the Fascist period that would lead to Italian Neorealist style. Here the debilitating effects of an illicit love affair can be seen on the faces of Gino (Massimo Girotti) and Giovanna (Clara Calamai).



4. Roberto Rossellini's *Roma città aperta* (1945): partisan leader Manfredi (Marcello Pagliero), photographed as a crucified Christ, is tortured by the Gestapo.

5. Roberto Rossellini's *Paisà* (1946): a black GI named Joe (Dots M. Johnson) meets a Neapolitan street urchin named Pasquale (Alfonsino Pasca).

tragedy of Italian life under German occupation and the partisan struggle out of which the new democratic republic was subsequently born. *Paisà* reflects to a far greater extent the conventions of the newsreel documentary, tracing in six separate episodes the Allied invasion of Italy and its slow process up through the boot of the peninsula. Yet the grainy film, the awkward acting of the non-professional actors, the authoritative voice-over narration and the immediacy of subject-matter we associate with newsreels do not completely explain the aesthetic qualities of the work. Rossellini depicts the historic encounter of two alien cultures, resulting in initial incomprehension but eventual kinship and brotherhood.

De Sica's *Ladri di biciclette* is the finest example of non-professional acting in Neorealist cinema. While De Sica employs non-professionals,

6. Vittorio De Sica's *Ladri di biciclette* (1948): Bruno (Enzo Staiola) delivers one of the greatest of all non-professional performances as a child who helps his father locate a stolen bicycle.

on-location shooting and social themes (unemployment, the effects of the war on the post-war economy) typical of many Neorealist films, the appeal of *Ladri di biciclette* cannot be explained completely by its superficially realistic style. The mythic structure of the plot – a quest for a bicycle, ironically a Fides (Faith) brand, that has been stolen – suggests to the viewer that De Sica is not merely offering a political film denouncing a particular socio-economic system. Social reform may change a world in which the loss of a mere bicycle spells economic disaster, but no amount of social engineering or even revolution will alter the basic facts of life in De Sica's universe – solitude, loneliness and alienation.

Visconti's *La terra trema* is a far more ambitious ideological and aesthetic undertaking. An adaptation of the 'veristic' novel by Giovanni Verga, *I Malavoglia* ('The Malavoglias', 1881), it is coloured by the Marxist theories of Antonio Gramsci. In many ways, the film fits the traditional stereotypical definition of Italian Neorealism better than any other film from the same period. No studio sets or sound stages were used, and the cast was selected from the Sicilian fishing village of Aci Trezza, the novel's setting. Visconti even refused to dub the film into standard

7. Luchino Visconti's *La terra trema* (1948): deep-focus photography adds to the spatial realism of a Neorealist masterpiece.

Italian, preferring the more realistic effects of Sicilian dialect and synchronized sound. The film's visuals underline the cyclical, timeless quality of life in Aci Trezza. Visconti's typically slow panning shots with a stationary camera, or his long, static shots of motionless objects and actors, produce a formalism that bestows dignity and beauty on humble, ordinary people.

These four masterpieces by Rossellini, De Sica and Visconti, all original contributions to film language, were (with the exception of *Roma città aperta*) unpopular within Italy and achieved critical success primarily among audiences, critics, filmmakers and intellectuals abroad. One of the paradoxes of Italian Neorealism is that the ordinary people such films set out to portray were relatively uninterested in their own screen image: Italians preferred to see Hollywood products. Of the approximately 800 films produced between 1945 and 1953 in Italy, only a

relatively small number (about 10%) can be classified as Neorealist, and most of these films were box-office failures. Italian audiences were reluctant to abandon popular Hollywood codes, and a number of less original but more successful Neorealist films were able to achieve greater results at the box-office by incorporating traditional Hollywood genres within their narratives about Italian subjects. Such films as *Vivere in pace* ('To Live in Peace', 1946) by Luigi Zampa (1905–91), *Senza pietà* ('Without Pity', 1948) by Alberto Lattuada (1914–), *Riso amaro* ('Bitter Rice', 1948) by Giuseppe De Santis (1917–97) and *Il cammino della speranza* ('The Path of Hope', 1950) by Pietro Germi (1914–74) expanded the boundaries of Italian Neorealism by shifting away from semi-documentary treatments of social problems toward conventional Hollywood themes and film genres, such as the Western or *film noir*. As a result of their combination of Neorealist style with Hollywood subject-matter, such works managed a respectable performance at the box-office.

The 'crisis' of Neorealism

It soon became obvious that while Italian leftist intellectuals and social critics preferred the implicitly political and sometimes even revolutionary messages of Neorealist cinema, the public was more interested in Hollywood films or Italian films with a Hollywood spirit. Even the greatest Neorealist directors (Rossellini, Antonioni, Visconti) soon became uncomfortable with the restrictive boundaries imposed upon their subject-matter or style by well-meaning but ideologically motivated critics. In Italian film history, the transition beyond Neorealism is often called the 'crisis' of Neorealism. In retrospect, the period from 1950–53 to 1968 can be more accurately described as a natural evolution of Italian film language toward a cinema concerned with psychological problems and a new aesthetic style no longer dominated by non-professional actors, on-location shooting, documentary style and social problems. Crucial to this historic transition are a number of early works by Michelangelo Antonioni (1912–), several works starring Ingrid Bergman by Rossellini and the first films directed by Federico Fellini. In *Cronaca di un amore* ('Story of a Love Affair', 1950), Antonioni's first feature film, the director employs a plot indebted to James Cain's novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice* and to American *film noir*. But his distinctive photographic signature is already evident: characteristically long shots, tracks and pans following the actors; modernist editing techniques

8. Roberto Rossellini's *Viaggio in Italia* (1953): the marriage of Katherine (Ingrid Bergman) and Alexander (George Sanders) falls apart amidst the ruins of ancient Pompeii.

reflecting the slow rhythms of daily life; and philosophical concerns with obvious links to European Existentialism. In *Viaggio in Italia* ('Voyage to Italy', 1953), Rossellini abandons his documentary style to embrace an abstract psychological realism that also reflected the emphasis upon alienation typical of contemporary post-war European philosophy.

It was with Fellini's early films that the Italian cinema moved resolutely beyond a preoccupation with social problems, although his works certainly reflect a deep understanding of Italian culture that no other Italian director can match. In *I vitelloni* (1953), for example, Fellini provides a classic portrait of six provincial characters which a Neorealist director would have presented as an indictment of provincial backwardness. But Fellini is more interested in exploring the private fantasy worlds of his creations than he is in making polemical statements about Italian society. Fellini's concern with private fantasy worlds and his belief in transcendental experiences beyond mere humdrum reality find their greatest expression in two masterpieces, both of which were to receive an Oscar for Best Foreign Film: *La strada* ('The Road', 1954) and *Le notti di Cabiria* ('The Nights of Cabiria', 1956). In each film, Fellini moves beyond a strictly realistic portrayal of provincial life to reveal a new

poetic dimension, one motivated by a personal vision and a particular Fellinian mythology concerned with spiritual poverty and the necessity for grace or salvation (defined in strictly secular terms but owing an obvious debt to Catholicism).

New directions after Neorealism

In the decade between 1958 (a time when the so-called 'crisis' of Neorealism had clearly passed) and 1968 (a year of violent social and political upheavals all over Europe which shook Italy to its foundations), Italian cinema reached a level of artistic quality, international popularity and economic strength it had never before achieved. Film production continued at well above 200 films per year in Italy, while a prolonged crisis in Hollywood reduced American competition within the Italian market and abroad. Not only did Italy boast a number of distinguished *auteurs* (Antonioni, Fellini, Rossellini, Visconti) whose names had become household words everywhere and whose greatest films were being produced at this time, but the Italian cinema also witnessed the arrival of a second generation of brilliant young directors who had been apprentices to their masters: Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922–75), Bernardo Bertolucci (1940–), Marco Bellocchio (1939–), Gillo Pontecorvo (1919–), Ermanno Olmi (1931–), Francesco Rosi (1922–), Elio Petri (1929–82), Paolo (1931–) and Vittorio Taviani (1929–) and Sergio Leone (1921–89). Italian films regularly won major prizes at the world's most important festivals (Cannes, Venice, Berlin, New York); Italian films, their directors and their actors were the toast of international critics and film historians who privileged the so-called 'art film'; and perhaps most importantly, the industry made huge profits in the international market by exporting not only the traditional film comedies that had always been the staple product of the Italian industry, but also other genre films, such as the 'spaghetti' Western (a genre usually associated with Hollywood but which Italians revolutionized, making a star out of Clint Eastwood in the process) or the *peplum* film – costume films set in the classical period that recalled Italy's initial success with this genre during the silent period.

Film comedy

Film comedies (the so-called *commedia all'italiana*) and 'spaghetti' Westerns dominated the Italian market during this decade. The Italian

9. Pietro Germi's *Divorzio all'italiana* (1961): in the absence of a divorce law, Fefé (Marcello Mastroianni) must trick his wife Rosalia (Daniela Rocca) into committing adultery with Carmelo (Leopoldo Trieste) so that he can kill her and escape punishment.

cinema was blessed with a number of excellent comic directors, such as Mario Monicelli (1915–), Luigi Comencini (1916–) and Dino Risi (1917–). Even more important, Italian cinema boasted a wealth of great actors: Alberto Sordi (1919–), Vittorio Gassman (1922–2000), Marcello Mastroianni (1923–96), Nino Manfredi (1921–), Ugo Tognazzi (1922–90), Monica Vitti (1931–), Claudia Cardinale (1939–), Sophia Loren (1934–) and Stefania Sandrelli (1946–) – which no national cinema outside of Hollywood could match. Many critics of the left during the period denigrated *commedia all'italiana* as merely 'commercial' cinema without artistic value, just as they ignored the Italian contribution to the Western genre. Their ideological bias ignored the fact that Italian comic films often contained more trenchant social criticism than the more acceptable, ideologically oriented 'art films' of the period. The great comic films of the decade from 1958 to 1968 provide an amusing but often accurate mirror of changing Italian customs and values. They helped to force the average Italian into a greater awareness of conflicting moral standards; they attacked age-old prejudices; and they questioned the rule of inept governing élites and institutions. The film which best

reflects the combination of humour and social criticism typical of the *commedia all'italiana* is Pietro Germi's *Divorzio all'italiana* ('Divorce, Italian Style', 1961). Made before Italian law permitted legal divorce, Germi's satire of Sicilian sexual mores chronicles the comic attempts of a Sicilian nobleman to force his hated wife into adultery, so that he can murder her, receive a light sentence for a crime of honour (hence the film's title), and marry his mistress. Utilizing a complex narrative juxtaposing the director's critical view of this affair with the Sicilian's biased justifications of his misdeeds, Germi recreates the oppressive atmosphere of Sicilian provincial life that forces men and women to commit violent crimes in order to obtain sexual fulfilment.

The 'spaghetti' Western and the *peplum* film

The other remarkably successful commercial genre during this period was the Western, dominated by a single man: Sergio Leone. The Italian 'spaghetti' Western owes a debt to another popular genre, the so-called neo-mythological or *peplum* film, which accounted for 10 per cent of Italian production between 1957 and 1964. Set in vaguely classical times and populated by mindless musclemen and buxom damsels in distress, these works appealed to a predominantly male audience that thrived on violent action and strong, anti-intellectual heroes such as Steve Reeves (only one of a number of American actors employed by the Italian industry during this period). The *peplum* film's characteristic emphasis upon action was continued by the 'spaghetti' Western. Between 1963 and 1973, over 400 such Westerns were produced in Italy, but none of them had the impact of Leone's first work, *Un pugno di dollari* ('A Fistful of Dollars', 1964). This film revolutionized what was at the time an almost exhausted Hollywood genre by a conscious departure from what had come to be known as the 'classic' Western formula. Leone plunges us into a violent and cynical world far removed from the traditional West of John Ford or Howard Hawks. The hero is motivated by the same greed as the evil bandits, and graphic violence is accompanied by grotesque comic gags and mannered close-ups indebted to Eisenstein. A crucial artistic element is the skilful music of Ennio Morricone (1928–), who first received international recognition from his collaboration with Leone, and whose unusual sound track composed of gunfire, ricochetting bullets, cries, trumpet solos, Sicilian folk instruments and whistles became an international best-selling record. The classic Western show-

10. Sergio Leone's *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* (1966): the site of the climactic gunfight that concludes all of Leone's 'spaghetti' Westerns.

down becomes in Leone's hands a ritualistic act concluding a narrative cycle and employs a crescendo of music not unlike the conclusion of an aria in grand opera. Though few in number, Leone' s influential Western films that followed *Un pugno di dollari* were not merely hugely profitable: they also revived the most famous of all American film genres.

Auteurs and the 'art film': Visconti, Antonioni, Fellini

If film comedy, Roman pot-boilers and Western epics produced the industry's most lucrative returns, the so-called 'art films' directed by *auteurs* proved to be almost equally good investments during the decade. In fact, one of the remarkable features of this period in Italian film history was its ability to produce great art that also turned a handsome profit. Works such as Fellini's *La dolce vita* ('The Sweet Life', 1959), Visconti's *Il Gattopardo* ('The Leopard', 1962) or Antonioni's *Blow-Up* (1966) were not only major artistic creations, but also gained a large share of the international film market. Fellini's best work during the period emphasized his introspective fantasy world and brilliant, Baroque imagery, as in his masterpiece *Otto e mezzo* ('8½', 1963), and in *Giulietta degli spiriti*

11. Michelangelo Antonioni's *Il deserto rosso* (1964): the director's careful compositions within the frame underlie his abstract use of colour and form.

('Juliet of the Spirits', 1965) and *Satyricon* (1969). Visconti's best films – *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* ('Rocco and his Brothers', 1960), *La caduta degli dei* ('The Fall of the Gods', 1969) and *Morte a Venezia* ('Death in Venice', 1971) – analyse European decadence and owe a great debt both to grand opera and to the European novel. Antonioni's brilliant modernist photography finds its best expression in the black-and-white trilogy of *L'Avventura* ('The Adventure', 1960), *La Notte* ('The Night', 1961) and *L'eclisse* ('The Eclipse', 1962), and in his innovative treatment of colour in *Il deserto rosso* ('The Red Desert', 1964).

Otto e mezzo, *Il deserto rosso* and *La caduta degli dei* reflect the highly complex stylistic shifts which had occurred in the work of these three *auteurs*, each of whom had his origins in the Italian Neorealist era. Visconti usually aimed at establishing a link between his films and a broader historical context. *La caduta degli dei* provides a powerful visual metaphor for the infernal nature of moral degradation, a pathological case history of Nazi Germany underlined by the violent and hellish colours that dominate the film's visuals. In Antonioni's *Il deserto rosso*, colour photography pre-empts the central function of traditional plot and character by concentrating on the relationship between characters and their environment, represented by the machinery and contemporary technology of a modern oil refinery in Ravenna. Antonioni's colour photography is thoroughly modernist (only a single scene, a dream of a desert island, is shot in what we have come to consider as 'natural' film colour). Its hues come from the world of industrial plastics, chemicals and artificial fabrics. In some cases, the director even changes the colours of natural objects (grass, fruit) to reflect the psychological states of his disturbed characters. And he frames each shot as if he were a contemporary abstract painter, asking us to consider objects from the world of technology primarily as art forms and only later as objects with a utilitarian function. Fellini's *Otto e mezzo* embodies its creator's belief that the cinema exists primarily for the purpose of individual self-expression, not historical investigation or abstract photography: fantasy, rather than reality, is its proper domain, because only fantasy falls under the director's complete artistic control. The harried protagonist of the film, the director Guido, possesses many of Fellini's personal traits. Fellini's narrative moves rapidly and seamlessly between Guido's 'reality', his fantasies, and flashbacks to the past of his dreams – a discontinuous story line with little logical or chronological unity. The influence of psychoanalysis is obvious in the view Fellini presents of sexuality in the film, as personal

12. Federico Fellini's *Otto e mezzo* (1963): the exhausted director on the set of an alternate ending for the film that was eventually rejected.

problems prevent Guido from achieving artistic fulfilment. In no other film by Fellini was there to be such a perfect synthesis of his personality, his introspective style and cinematic bravura.

A new generation of *auteurs*: beyond Neorealism

While Visconti, Antonioni and Fellini dominated Italian cinema during the period, their international prestige coincided with the rise of an extremely talented group of younger men whose first works were indebted to Neorealism but who reflected what might be called a critical realism with ideological implications. The best examples of such precociously brilliant works are Pasolini's *Il vangelo secondo Matteo* ('The Gospel According to Matthew', 1964), Pontecorvo's *La battaglia di Algeri* ('The Battle of Algiers', 1966), Bernardo Bertolucci's *Prima della rivoluzione* ('Before the Revolution', 1964), Marco Bellocchio's *La Cina è vicina* ('China Is Near', 1967), Francesco Rosi's *Salvatore Giuliano* (1962) and Ermanno Olmi's *Il posto* ('The Job', 1961).

In *Il posto*, Olmi's use of non-professional actors and his emphasis upon expressive deep-focus shots in office interiors reflect an obvious debt to De Sica's poetic Neorealism. Rosi, following Visconti's example in his belief that film must make an ideological statement, moves beyond Neorealist presentation of 'facts' to what he terms a 'documented' method of making films in *Salvatore Giuliano*. This treatment of a Sicilian bandit's career and death is less a work of fiction than an investigation (*film inchiesta*) into the ambiguous historical circumstances of the figure. The film uncovers corrupt connections between the Christian Democratic Party and the Mafia, establishing itself as the first of many Italian 'political' films that would flourish in the period. Pontecorvo employs a documentary style in *La battaglia di Algeri*, with a narrative structure that uses flashbacks and flashforwards to provide critical commentary on the 'facts' the film presents. His careful recreation of a case history of Third World revolution owes an important debt to the early war films and techniques of Rossellini. Pontecorvo's highly mobile, hand-held cameras employ fast film stock; the telephoto lenses common in television news reporting simulate a documentary style; duplicating the negative of his film in the laboratory recreates the grainy, documentary texture of Rossellini's *Paisà*.

Bertolucci, Bellocchio and Pasolini – all influenced by the aesthetics of Brecht and the cinematic practice of Godard – exhibit a far more ambiguous relationship with the heritage of Italian Neorealism.

13. Francesco Rosi's *Salvatore Giuliano* (1962): an overhead shot of the dead Sicilian bandit opens Rosi's semi-documentary account of his life.

Pasolini accepted many of the superficial characteristics of Neorealist style – non-professional actors, on-location shooting, contemporary themes, natural lighting – but he rejected any attempt to employ cinema to present a naturalistic view of life. For Pasolini, Realism included mythology and dream. The cinematic signature he developed in *Il vangelo secondo Matteo*, a biblical film made by a Marxist atheist, can be described as pastiche, mixing the most disparate cultural and thematic materials. Bertolucci and Bellocchio present a fresh view of Italian politics in their youthful works. With *Prima della rivoluzione*, Bertolucci adapts Stendhal's *The Charterhouse of Parma* (1839) in a poetic and highly lyrical study of a young bourgeois intellectual from Parma (Bertolucci's home) who toys with Marxism but eventually prefers a safe, middle-class marriage to revolution or an incestuous love affair with his aunt. Bellocchio's artistic perspective is angry and provocative rather than lyrical and elegiac. While Bertolucci's Fabrizio retreats into the protective womb of the Italian nuclear family, Bellocchio's protagonists in *La Cina è vicina* attack the very notion of a provincial, middle-class family in a satire on Italian political corruption. The result is a political allegory attacking the compromise between the right and the left in Italy, viewed from the microcosm of a small, provincial family.

Post-1968 cinema: politics and ideology in the dramatic film

Between the upheavals in Italian society that took place around 1968 and immediately afterwards, and the mid 1980s, when a period of 'normalcy' was re-established in Italian society, a number of major critical trends can be traced in the evolution of Italian cinema. Politics and ideology continued to play a major role, moving even normally apolitical directors (such as Fellini) to treat political themes. Nevertheless, it is also fair to say that the emphasis on ideology in the cinema was also responsible for some of the most boring and pretentious cinematic works of the period that are best left unmentioned. Films that combined political themes with intriguing and original cinematic styles (hardly an exhaustive list) include: *Medea* (1969) and *Il Decameron* ('The Decameron', 1971) by Pasolini, Bertolucci's *Il conformista* ('The Conformist', 1970), Fellini's *Amarcord* (1976), Elio Petri's *Indagine su un cittadino al di sopra di ogni sospetto* ('Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion', 1970), *Padre Padrone* ('Father Boss', 1977) and *La notte di San Lorenzo* ('The Night of the Shooting Stars', 1982) by the Taviani brothers and Olmi's *L'albero degli zoccoli* ('The Tree of the Wooden Clogs', 1978).

With *Medea*, Pasolini employs the classic tragedy by Euripides as a metaphor to explore the confrontation of Western, industrialized society with the preindustrial cultures of the Third World. In *Il Decameron*, Pasolini transforms Boccaccio's panoramic portrait of the rise of middle-class, mercantile culture in an age dominated by the city of Florence into an amusing portrayal of the subproletariat of Naples and its sexual adventures. The film not only underlines the class-oriented nature of the original literary source, but also proposes liberated sexuality as a characteristic of non-industrialized cultures and uses this innocent sense of sexuality to criticize modern, Western values.

Bertolucci's *Il conformista* and Fellini's *Amarcord* provide two very different interpretations of Italy's Fascist heritage. Bertolucci employs a complicated plot with frequent flashbacks, portraying the creation of a Fascist assassin. Bertolucci's mature grasp of his craft is evident in the famous tango scene between two women, with its quickly shifting camera angles, positions, graceful motions and skilful editing, a virtuoso performance due, in large measure, to the brilliant cinematography of a young Vittorio Storaro (1940–). Fellini's *Amarcord* is much less

14. Federico Fellini's *Amarcord* (1974): sexual immaturity, for Fellini, represents one of the many ways provincial life under Fascism was shrouded in ignorance.

stridently ideological but is no less a condemnation of Fascist restrictions of individual freedom. In an unforgettable evocation of life in a sleepy provincial town, Fellini combines a nostalgic view of his childhood with a searing indictment of Italian conformity during the Fascist period.

Two directors became identified almost exclusively with trenchant critiques of Italian political life in this period: Elio Petri and Francesco Rosi. Petri's works, blending his ideological message with suspense and slick, commercial presentation, have always been popular abroad. *Indagine di un cittadino al di sopra di ogni sospetto*, winner of an Oscar for Best Foreign Film, presents contemporary Italian politics in an abstract, almost philosophical manner akin to Kafka's parables, and Petri's message applies not only to power in Italy but to power in general. Rosi's many interesting political films are less comprehensible abroad, since they contain a more specific connection to actual events in Italian daily life. The richly documented denunciations of the system which he began with *Salvatore Giuliano* are continued in a series of interesting works: *Lucky Luciano* (1973), a probing look into the link between American politicians and the Sicilian mafia; *Cadaveri eccellenti* ('Illustrious Corpses', 1975), a chilling parable of the connection between political power and corruption in Italy, adapted from a novel by Leonardo Sciascia in which

15. *La notte di San Lorenzo* by Paolo and Vittorio Taviani (1982): in recounting a story about the meeting of American soldiers and young Italians in war-torn Tuscany, these post-war directors pay homage to Rossellini's *Paisà* and their own Neorealist origins.

the image of the mafia is transformed into a universal metaphor for corrupt power all over the world; and *Tre fratelli* ('Three Brothers', 1981), a view of contemporary Italian life seen through the lives of three brothers who return to southern Italy for the funeral of their mother.

L'albero degli zoccoli by Olmi is one of the many good Italian films financed by the state-controlled television network (the RAI), an increasingly important source of funding for Italian works or co-productions with other European national cinemas. In it, Olmi offers a patient re-creation of peasant life on a farm near Bergamo at the turn of the nineteenth century and adopts a style recalling the conventions of Neorealism, employing non-professional peasants from the area who speak their local dialect. The three-hour length of the film allows Olmi to duplicate the slow rhythms of life in a preindustrial peasant culture.

The Taviani brothers are perhaps the most interesting of the so-called 'political' directors. Their *Padre Padrone* is an autobiographical account of how an illiterate Sardinian shepherd struggled to become a professor of linguistics. The acquisition of standard Italian thus becomes a metaphor for the acquisition of full citizenship in modern Italian society. *La notte di San Lorenzo* is a post-modern reinterpretation of Italian Neorealism and its central theme, the partisan Resistance and the liberation of Tuscany in August 1944.

Bittersweet laughter: social criticism in the *commedia all'italiana*

While films with predominantly political or ideological content tended to dominate the production of 'art films' between 1968 and the mid 1980s, traditional film comedies continued to provide the backbone for the Italian industry, and were consistently the most popular works in the peninsula while frequently dealing with important social issues. Taken as a group, comedies during this era embody a black, even grotesque vision of contemporary Italian society, and the laughter in these works rings bittersweet. An excellent example of the creative combination of humour and social criticism in this modified *commedia all'italiana* is *Pane e cioccolata* ('Bread and Chocolate', 1973) by Franco Brusati (1922–93), a devastating indictment of the conditions experienced by Italian 'guest workers' in what is depicted as a racist Switzerland.

The dominant director of this bittersweet kind of film comedy is Ettore Scola (1931–), who began working in cinema as a scriptwriter on dozens of comic films produced in the 1950s and the early 1960s. In a number of memorable works – *C'eravamo tanto amati* ('We All Loved Each Other Very Much', 1974), *Brutti, sporchi e cattivi* ('Dirty, Mean and Nasty', 1976), *Una giornata particolare* ('A Special Day', 1977) and *La terrazza* ('The Terrace', 1980) – Scola employed a metacinematic narrative to treat the history of Italian cinema itself, examining not only the heritage of Neorealism (especially his model, Vittorio De Sica) but also the assumptions of the *commedia all'italiana*. *C'eravamo tanto amati* is the most complex of these films, combining a consideration of the many social and political changes which Italy has undergone since the fall of the Fascist régime with an equally comprehensive survey of major developments in the history of post-war Italian cinema.

In a series of excellent films – *Mimì metallurgico ferito nell'onore* ('Mimì the Metallurgist Wounded in his Honour', 1971), *Film d'amore e d'anarchia* ('A Film About Love and Anarchy', 1972), *Travolti da un insolito destino nell'azzurro mare d'agosto* ('Overcome by an Unusual Destiny in the Blue Sea of August', 1974) and her masterpiece, *Pasqualino Settebellezze* ('Pasqualino Seven Beauties', 1975) – Lina Wertmüller (1928–) combines an exuberant imagery indebted to Fellini with a concern for topical political issues, all set within the conventions of traditional Italian film comedy, with its vulgarity, stock characters and frontal attack upon society's values. Wertmüller's films aroused the ire of many Feminists, as

16. Lina Wertmüller's *Pasqualino Settebellezze* (1975): in order to survive in the concentration camp, Pasqualino must seduce its hefty female commandant (Shirley Stroler).

her works did not conform to what many Anglo-American academics considered to be proper for a woman's film. In addition, *Pasqualino Settebellezze*'s treatment of the Holocaust was set within a comic framework and was attacked by some critics as irreverent. Nevertheless, its portrait of the hellish life inside a concentration camp found important critical defenders, while the virtuoso performance of its protagonist, Giancarlo Giannini (1942–), made him an international star.

Another controversial portrait of the Holocaust was *Il portiere di notte* ('The Night Porter', 1974), a work by another woman director, Liliana Cavani (1936–). In sharp contrast to Feminist hostility to Wertmüller's films, Cavani's morbid portrait of a love affair between a woman in a death camp and a sadistic German officer, a relationship which is renewed in the post-war period after a chance encounter between the two in Vienna, was praised by a number of Feminist critics though

17. Bernardo Bertolucci's *L'ultimo imperatore* (1987): Pu Yi (John Lone) is driven out of the Forbidden City in an epic portrait of China's last emperor that earned Oscars in nine categories.

damned by others for its revisionist view of evil in the camps. The treatment of the Holocaust during this period in the Italian cinema that elicited almost unanimous praise (except from Giorgio Bassani, the novelist whose book was its source) was Vittorio De Sica's *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini* ('The Garden of the Finzi-Continis', 1971), a lyrical, elegiac portrait of the Jewish population of pre-war Ferrara which was awarded the Oscar for Best Foreign Film in 1972.

Italian blockbuster epics

At the height of the Italian cinema's international success, two directors – Bertolucci and Leone – produced three films that seemed more typical of Hollywood blockbusters than of Italian cinematic production. Bertolucci's *1900* (1977) describes the history of the class struggle in Italy from the death of Verdi to our own times through the intertwined accounts of two boys from different classes. It may well be described as a Marxist *Gone With the Wind*. A much more successful epic film was Bertolucci's *L'ultimo imperatore* ('The Last Emperor', 1987), the story of Pu Yi, China's last emperor who ended his days as a humble gardener. With

a brilliant flashback/flashforward structure, this work swept the board of Oscar awards for the year, winning in nine categories (including Best Picture, Direction, Cinematography, Costumes, Editing and Music), an unprecedented honour for an Italian director and for a film indebted primarily to Italian technicians. Perhaps the most fascinating epic film to come from Italy was Sergio Leone's last work, *C'era una volta in America* ('Once Upon a Time in America', 1984) – an ambitious attempt to change the generic conventions of the Hollywood gangster film as Leone had already done with the Hollywood Western, with Jewish, not Italian, gangsters.

The passing of the old guard and new faces at the dawn of the millennium

By the time Fellini received a fifth Oscar for his career, shortly before his death in 1993, Italian cinema seemed to be immersed in an economic and artistic crisis. On the other hand, its rich tradition of great directors, actors and films was universally recognized by a number of international awards. In the late 1980s and 1990s, a new generation of young directors rose to prominence within Italy and some even garnered important recognition abroad, holding out the promise of yet a third 'renaissance' of Italian cinema that would follow those of Neorealism and of the generation of Bertolucci and Pasolini. These include such figures as Maurizio Nichetti (1948–), Nanni Moretti (1953–), Gabriele Salvatores (1950–), Giuseppe Tornatore (1956–), Gianni Amelio (1945–), Roberto Benigni (1952–), Francesca Archibugi (1960–) and Carlo Carlei (1961–).

Amelio's *Le porte aperte* ('Open Doors', 1990), nominated for an Oscar, is an adaptation of a novel by Sciascia about justice in Fascist Italy. His *Il ladro di bambini* ('The Thief of Children', 1992), winner of a Grand Jury Prize at Cannes, is a moving treatment of children reminiscent of De Sica's classic Neorealist works. In *Lamerica* ('America', 1994), Amelio focuses upon Albanian emancipation from Communism and looks at a poor country (Albania) from the novel perspective of a nation (Italy) that was once poor and chronicled its poverty in Neorealist film, but is now rich and intent on exploiting the poor in Albania.

Unlike Amelio, many of the younger faces in the Italian cinema prefer the comic genre, and the variety of styles they employ is impressive. Nichetti's *Ladri di saponette* ('Soap Thieves', 1989), a brilliant spoof of De Sica's Neorealist classic *Ladri di biciclette*, employs techniques the director learned from working in television and advertising, while his *Volere volare* ('To Desire to Fly', 1991) mixes actors and cartoon characters in a technique exploited most notably in Robert Zemeckis's *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* (1987). Tornatore's tremendously popular *Cinema Paradiso* ('The Paradise Cinema', 1988) owed much of its success to its bittersweet look at contemporary Italy through the prism of its cinematic past. It was awarded a special Jury Prize at Cannes in 1988 and the Oscar for Best Foreign Film in 1989. Salvatores's *Mediterraneo* ('Mediterranean', 1991), another Oscar winner for Best Foreign Film, employs the old formula of the *commedia all'italiana* to portray the Second World War from the perspective of Italian soldiers marooned on a Greek island. While its director (Michael Radford) is certainly not Italian, everything about *Il postino* ('The Postman', 1994) has links to the Italian film industry and the perennially popular *commedia all'italiana*. The film brought actor Massimo Troisi to the attention of international audiences, but Troisi died shortly after shooting was completed for the film. *Il postino* was a smash critical and commercial success, receiving five Oscar nominations and one award, in the category of Original Musical Score. While practically unknown outside Italy, Leonardo Pieraccioni's recent comic films have made spectacular gains at the box office within the lucrative Italian market: *Il ciclone* ('The Cyclone', 1995) and *Fuochi di artificio* ('Fireworks', 1996).

Two actors who script and direct their own films, Nanni Moretti and Roberto Benigni, have enjoyed international success. With *Caro diario* ('Dear Diary', 1994), Moretti – the favourite director of Italians aged under forty – won the Grand Prize at the Cannes Film Festival for an autobiographical portrait that led some critics to label him as 'the Italian Woody Allen' for his cerebral brand of comedy. Roberto Benigni first achieved international attention as the strange Italian learning English in Jim Jarmusch's *Down by Law* (1986) and as the heir to Peter Sellers' role as Inspector Clouseau in Blake Edwards's *Son of the Pink Panther* (1993). His *Johnny Stecchino* (1991), a spoof on the gangster genre, broke all records for Italian or American grosses inside Italy. *La vita è bella* ('Life Is Beautiful', 1997), a tragicomedy about the Holocaust indebted to Charlie Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* (1940), earned Benigni special recognition at the Cannes Film Festival, three Oscars and nine David di Donatello awards (the Italian equivalent of the Oscar). It also broke every American record for box-office returns for a foreign film in the post-war period.

Like the phoenix, post-war Italian cinema seems to arise from the ashes of the past in each generation. With a younger generation boasting the talents of such directors as Benigni, Moretti and Tornatore, its artistic future during the next millennium looks promising.

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EUGENIA PAULICELLI

12

Art in modern Italy: from the Macchiaioli to the Transavanguardia

The Macchiaioli and the unification of Italy

Until the middle of the nineteenth century, the term 'Italy' was an abstract concept that intellectuals and artists since Dante had used to describe their imagined homeland rather than a political reality. The first group of artists who presented themselves as linked to the nation were the Tuscan Macchiaioli, whose emergence was made possible by the Prima Esposizione Italiana ('First Italian Exhibition') that was held in Florence in 1861, a matter of months after unification. (The name 'Macchiaioli' was taken from *macchia* which means 'sketch' or 'sketch technique'.) It was at this exhibition that, for the first time, artists who were living and working in different parts of the Italian peninsula were grouped together. As is well known, the centuries-long fragmentation of the Italian states and the numerous foreign dominations had significantly contributed to the absence of a 'national' art or culture. Moreover, the divided state of the peninsula did not facilitate exchanges between different regions. Not surprisingly, many nineteenth-century artists who, with unification, wished to expand their boundaries and horizons considered Italian life and art to be marked by cultural provincialism.

To counter this impression, after the declaration of the Kingdom of Italy which designated Florence as its first capital, the Prima Esposizione overtly presented itself as Italy's first *national* art exhibition. The exhibition made possible interaction between regional artistic schools and traditions, and created the opportunity for retracing and redefining a 'national' cultural identity. Although the Macchiaioli were a regionally based movement, redolent of Tuscan backgrounds and scenes, their work struck a national chord, and their influence and fame spread well