

Book Reviews

Gianfranco Baldini and Anna Cento Bull (eds), *Politica in Italia: I fatti dell'anno e le interpretazioni. Edizione 2009*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 2009, pb €28.00, pp. 390, ISBN 978-88-15-13094-5.

It has become increasingly difficult in Italy to find accurate descriptions of political events followed by objective explanations. The political climate of harsh confrontation and acute polarisation that has characterised party politics from at least 2006 onwards, has also invested the press and television. As a consequence, nowadays, most of the Italian media offer conflicting interpretations of events, in line with the positions of the parties that control those media. In the 1970s Parisi and Pasquino stressed that the voters closely identified with the Christian Democratic Party or the Communist Party got their information almost exclusively from party newspapers. With the decline of ideologies and the growth of independent media, that model of information disappeared. Today, however, it seems to have come back as many Italian media publish and broadcast accounts that fit the viewpoints of the main political parties and do not help citizens to form their own opinions.

In such a situation publications that offer the scientific community and the general reader a thorough and unbiased analysis of political events are extremely valuable. *Politica in Italia*, the yearbook published by the Cattaneo Institute of Bologna, is the best source for anyone interested in Italian politics and society. Edited by an Italian and an English-speaking scholar, *Politica in Italia* – which is also published in English – provides information, background and analysis, as well as an accurate chronology of the events of the year and a rich appendix of political, social and economic data.

Each volume in the series is divided into three sections devoted, respectively, to the analysis of politics, institutions and society. The fortune of each volume, however, depends on the ability of the editors to capture the 'spirit' of the year through the selection of its main events. The year under observation – 2008 – was a very rich one from the political viewpoint, with early parliamentary elections; local elections in major towns such as

Rome; the establishment of a new government led by Silvio Berlusconi following defeat of the government of Romano Prodi after only two years in office; the reduction of party fragmentation and the emergence of a more straightforward bipolarism. Baldini and Cento Bull have done a masterful job in choosing the topics and authors of the chapters and combining different analytic perspectives. First of all, the volume not only describes the 2008 events, but places them in context, presenting the causes behind the facts; second, it examines the issues of the day but also gives room to long-term problems, and finally it includes both chapters focused on the North-South divide and others with a more state-wide approach.

In the section devoted to politics Corbetta, Newell and Di Franco all deal with the defeat of the centre-left parties in the national and local elections of April 2008. According to Corbetta, the success of Berlusconi's Popolo della Libertà (PdL) – with nine percent and three million votes more than Walter Veltroni's Partito Democratico (PD) – shows that in the Second Republic there is a 'stable dominance of the right over the left' and that Italy is an electorally right-wing country where centre-left parties can comfortably win elections only when the centre-right coalition splits, as occurred in 1996. Newell, on the other hand, examines with great insight the consequences of Veltroni's strategy to run alone against Berlusconi. From the opposition viewpoint the future appears pretty grim as not only did the PD lose the elections, but the parties outside the Government don't seem able to provide a cohesive alternative to Berlusconi. Finally, the unexpected victory of Gianni Alemanno (PdL) as mayor of Rome – after 15 years of left-wing control of this local authority – is explained by Di Franco by the demobilisation of centre-left voters in the run-off, just two weeks after the defeat suffered in the parliamentary election.

The second section of the volume is devoted to the initial policy initiatives of the Berlusconi government, with essays by Marangoni on the Government's composition and policies, by Carbone on foreign policy and by Gualmini on the law aimed at improving health and safety at work (initiated by the Prodi cabinet). The chapter by Donà assesses the issue of under-representation of women in political institutions. In 2008 when Confindustria, the main organisation representing Italian industrialists, elected a woman as president for the first time, only 21.3 per cent of the 630 elected MPs in the Italian lower chamber were women. According to the author, at the root of the gender gap in Italian politics lies the limited commitment of the political class to the promotion of gender equality. The Spanish case under the Zapatero government confirms, *a contrario*, this hypothesis.

The section devoted to society deals with many different and important topics such as the education reform (Gasparoni), immigration and citizenship in the northern region of Veneto (Andall) and the Alitalia privatisation process (Amyot). Two of the chapters are especially worth

focussing on, as they show how local political elites can play a role in the mismanagement of long-standing Italian problems. In her chapter Maino examines the troubles that affect the health-care system and their causes, such as expenditure cuts, corruption and the spread of regional partitocracies – due to the reforms that have given the regions and the parties at the regional level financial and administrative responsibility for the health-care system. Pasotti too analyses a problem with deep roots: the so called ‘waste crisis’ that has affected Naples and the Campania region. Her careful study of the decision-making process leads her to stress several factors behind the emergency, such as clientelism, the lack of technical expertise of the regional executive, the political divisions at the local level, and the role of organised crime.

In my opinion the menu of topics provided and the way they have been tackled by the various authors, makes this edition of *Politica in Italia* a very interesting book to read for both Italian scholars and citizens looking for unbiased accounts of what is going on in their country. In their outline, Baldini and Cento Bull stress how the basic choice of the new Berlusconi cabinet has been to govern the new and old fears of voters – fears previously nourished by the centre-right parties themselves – mainly with symbolic and inexpensive policies. For instance, measures such as the ‘security package’, aimed at fighting crime and illegal immigration, or the solution found for the waste problem in Campania, gained Berlusconi immediate popularity, making it possible to put off the more expensive and conflictual structural reforms announced during the electoral campaign. Readers of this excellent volume should keep this point in mind when it comes to evaluating day-to-day Italian politics.

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Tom Behan, *The Italian Resistance: Fascists, Guerrillas and the Allies*, London: Pluto Press, 2009, pb £18.99, pp. 320, ISBN 978 0 7453 2695 5.

The role of the Italian Resistance in Italy’s change of sides in World War Two was an important one. Its guerrillas held down significant German and RSI forces and sometimes took the strategic initiative; without them Allied victory in Italy would have been much more difficult. At the time, their nature was a politically contested one, with different groups belonging to different political movements. This contest has continued since, as the political forces represented in the partisans have contended, usually, but not always, more peacefully in the Italian political arena. The story of the Italian Resistance is thus well worth telling and Tom Behan has done it in a readable and accessible way.

The book is in two parts, a more or less chronological account that provides background for a second part of more thematic studies, on female fighters, the partisan republics, urban 'terrorism' and the relationship of the Resistance with the allies, which, as the author rightly says, was a highly uneasy one. The problem for the Resistance was that the Western Allies were suspicious of its revolutionary nature and tried to curb its activities, for example, in the operations to take Florence. But even Stalin was unhelpful, having consigned Italy and Greece, at least for the time being, to the Western sphere, so he could consolidate his power in Eastern Europe. Strong foreign Communist parties were always regarded with considerable doubt by the Chief in Moscow and he rarely seemed to mind their enemies killing them; it saved him the trouble. Much to the annoyance of even parties to their right, the mainstream Moscow-run Communists held back the Resistance from revolutionary activities against the Italian Government recognised by the Allies.

The author writes clearly and gives the reader a good description of the various elements in the Resistance and what they did. He spoils it, however by his total inability to keep his considerable leftist political prejudices out of the analysis. When my wife had a glance at the book, without any prompting from me, she was most disappointed to find it 'just a piece of Communist propaganda'. It is more than that but the author is indeed very one-sided and one begins to wonder about the validity of his account, even when it is probably sound. In many ways the book seems rather old-fashioned. It was quite a nostalgic experience reading it; its tone took me back thirty or more years.

One does not have to be an enthusiast for Mussolini, or agree with all Berlusconi's attempts to redeem his reputation, to put the Fascist regime in some perspective against contemporary totalitarianisms. A dictatorship, whose Special Tribunal, according to Behan, imprisoned for political offences just short of 4,600 people over a decade and a half is hardly in the same class as Stalin's or Mao's regimes of mass murder. The position of the Jews was indeed deteriorating in Italy in the early 1940s but I was surprised to find no reference to the Rab internment camp where Jews were held separately from the Slovenes and Croats (the main victims of the regime), were protected by their Italian captors and were eventually able to join the Resistance, forming a 'Rab Brigade' before reinforcing other units. This story clearly did not fit the author's prejudices. Also, it is frankly deliberately misleading to refer to the notorious Risiera di San Sabba camp as 'Italian'. It was so in location only, having been created by the Germans.

Behan's account of the post-war impact of the Resistance goes right up to the present day, as he sees the extreme right as its continuing enemy and a continuing leftist resistance struggle as necessary. I learned a lot about the MSI, its successor the AN, and their influence – but began to wonder what it really had to do with the important basic topic. When the

author concludes by associating the World War Two partisans with a young leftist shot in an anti-G8 riot one begins to wonder if, quite literally, partisanship has been taken a little far.

Being a student of strategy and war rather than Italian politics, I learned much that was useful and interesting from this book. One very significant point that comes out of it worthy of more study is the dire effect of strategic bombing on Italian morale and cohesion. Sir Arthur Harris always said his Bomber Command had bombed Italy out of the war and, from the reaction to its campaign described by Behan, he might well have had a point. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the great prophet of Air Power, Douhet, was an Italian.

This is an interesting and perhaps even significant book, both in the historiography of World War Two and the literature of Italian politics. Readers of other than Marxist persuasion are however recommended to drink mint tea while they read it. The beverage reduces high blood pressure!

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Gianfranco Pasquino and Fulvio Venturino (eds), *Le Primarie comunali in Italia*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 2009, pb €9.00, pp. 296, ISBN 978-88-15-13091-4.

The issue of primary elections, meaning the competitions parties hold to select the candidates who will then represent them at a subsequent general election, is one of growing interest for political scientists, especially for those based in or focussing on Italy. As a recent innovation in the Italian political system, primaries have been introduced to a country that is notoriously deficient in terms of non-electoral forms of political participation, one in which the transformation of electoral systems – through, for example, the introduction of the direct election of mayors, as well as the presidents of the provinces and the regions – has undoubtedly led to a heightened degree of ‘personalisation’ of politics.

Le Primarie comunali in Italia focuses on the primary elections organised by the centre-left between 2004 and 2007 for the selection of mayoral candidates in eighty Italian municipalities, almost equally distributed between North, Centre and South. The book also presents a number of case studies based on a standard questionnaire administered to voters in specific municipalities, namely, the cities of Aversa (considered in chapter 2, by Bolgherini and Musella) Chioggia (ch. 3, by Gelli), Alghero (ch. 4, by Seddone and Pala), Genova (ch. 5, by Italia, Morini and Orzati), La Spezia (ch. 6, by Venturino), Palermo (ch. 7, Anastasi), Isernia (ch. 8, Petrarca), Belluno (ch. 9, Gangemi) and Fasano (ch. 10, by Gelli, Mannarini,

Legittimo and Talò). These primaries were 'asymmetric' because, as explained in chapter 1 of the volume written by Fulvio Venturino, they were organised by the centre-left coalition and found no reflection in terms of anything organised by the centre right. This is very different to the situation typically pertaining in the United States – in many ways the 'homeland' of primaries – where they are the usual method of selection of the candidates for *both* sides. This asymmetry is not without consequence: it contributes to the context in which the other side makes its strategic decisions concerning the nature of its political offer, allowing it, for example, to choose its candidate based on the profile of the one representing its opponent. This, according to the authors, results in a kind of disadvantage for the candidate emerging victorious from the primaries (the so-called *primary penalty*).

The literature does not speak with a single voice on this: other authors contend that candidates participating in primary elections in fact gain an advantage, one that results from the massive mobilisation primaries may induce. That is, candidates gain from the activism and from the greater media exposure associated with primaries – both of which may enhance their performance at the subsequent general election. So, what has been the effect of primaries in the Italian case? The study makes it impossible fully to resolve the issue: Venturino, in chapter 1, maintains that the organisation of primaries is an advantage for the candidate so selected (and for the coalition that supports him) as long as there are more powerful competitors. Moreover, primary elections must be genuinely competitive; otherwise, the effect is essentially neutral: there is neither a bonus nor a penalty.

The study of primary elections in Italy raises an interesting question if, as Pasquino does, one considers the matter from the point of view of the functioning of the Italian political system generally. The central issue is whether the primaries have improved (or are improving, or will improve) the quality of Italian democracy. Pasquino's thesis, presented as the conclusion of the book, is written from a comparative perspective and with an eye to the future. He is cautiously optimistic (unlike other authors such as Melchionda or, more recently, a number of French political scientists): primaries may actually improve Italian democracy by virtue of what they do to encourage four desirable qualities, namely, mobilisation, participation, legitimacy, and communication.

Pasquino does not gloss over the fact that in some cases primaries in Italy have been used by weak and de-legitimised elites to avoid the burden of decision-making regarding the selection of candidates (the 'hot potato' argument) and then to drive the same process from the outside by their endorsements. Nor he is silent on the fact that the primaries have largely failed to deliver what was promised for them in terms of the noble purpose of renewing the political class. Finally, Pasquino never hides the fact that to

date, empirical analysis indicates that primaries in Italy have not broadened participation or stimulated the involvement of citizens outside the ranks of centre-left voters, supporters and sympathisers.

Yet despite the several criticisms that can be made of them in the Italian case, primaries may improve the quality of democracy in that country because as Pasquino notes, none of them has ever failed for the lack of voter participation. It is thus fair to say that it is worth continuing along the path they have laid out, keeping in mind that those who believe in them will also need to commit themselves to resolving the problems to which they will eventually give rise. Overall, then, the book represents a useful instrument for Italian political actors. Focussing, as it does, on an unexplored topic and pin-pointing a number of theoretical and methodological issues related to the theme, the book is also an important contribution to scientific debate.

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Carlo Ruzza and Stefano Fella, *Re-inventing the Italian Right: Territorial politics, populism and 'post-fascism'*, Abingdon, Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2009, hb \$115.00, pp. xxi + 272, ISBN 978-0-415-34461-6.

The authors take on a task that is both formidable and timely. Formidable, because it involves explaining and analysing for a mainly Anglo-Saxon readership a political system which between 1945 and 2001 produced fifty-eight governments dominated by a centre-right party in alliance with a centre-left party, without an alternative 'government-in-waiting' party that the British and the Americans are used to. This arrangement was sustained by a network of preferment and back-handers that make the recent British MPs' expenses scandal look like a raid on the petty-cash tin by comparison. When this system imploded with the Tangentopoli scandal in the mid 1990s and calls for a cleansing of the Augean Stables, the resultant political space was filled mainly by a media tycoon, who had been heavily implicated in the deals of the previous regime, successfully creating and leading a right-wing grouping which united an ethno-nationalist separatist party based in the North of the country, and a neo-fascist party whose strength lay in the South of the country, under the umbrella of a neo-liberal 'party of business' based in Rome – a party of whose influence both the other parties had been profoundly suspicious.

The task is timely because, while there are many features of the change that are uniquely Italian, many others exemplify trends that are common to Western European and post-communist Central European liberal democracies. That is, they are all part of what Stuart Hall called 'the

great moving Right show', namely: a waning of support for universalist ideologies like Marxism and Catholicism; the growth of a consumerist attitude to politics; suspicions and fears of the effects of globalisation, leading to increased support for far-right formations espousing law-and-order and control of immigration; mistrust of the 'old' political parties and the politicians who led them, and much reinvention and shedding of old ideological 'baggage' by established parties in an effort to keep up with the trend.

It is a tribute to the authors that, within the confines of a relatively slim volume, they describe and analyse these political tectonic plate movements in the context of the Italian Right in a clear and concise style without sacrificing relevant historical detail or analytic subtlety. They analyse both supply side factors – reinvention, reorganisation, leadership charisma, rhetoric and use of the media – and demand side factors – consumerism, secularism, suspicion of the external 'other' and of politics and politicians in general. It is a central hypothesis of the book that the parties of the Right were both closer to the new priorities in their ideology and rhetoric and better able to respond so as to profit from them. One is barely able to resist the conclusion that the Right is simply 'better at politics' than the Left and Centre in Italy. Were Machiavelli still around he would be proud of them.

From the demand side the authors chart, based upon survey evidence, attitudes which reveal a kaleidoscope of priorities and values which are often contradictory (e.g. amongst Northern League supporters, a desire for self-rule and protection based upon hostility to 'Rome' and 'sponging Southerners', together with a desire to benefit from the material improvement of a unified economy operating in a global market). However certain priorities characteristic of right-wing thinking emerge across the board, particularly fear of the effects on the economy and on national or regional identity of immigration; law and order, and 'anti-politics'. In a separate chapter the authors construct and argue for a model of populism as the ideology which best describes the leitmotif of those who support the right – identifying 'core' and more specifically Italian 'peripheral' factors – and acts as an analytic tool for the more detailed analysis of each of the component parts of the Berlusconi-led coalition in three subsequent chapters. They return to the theme of populism in the concluding chapter.

From the supply side, three dominant qualities emerge – flexibility, consummate communication skills, and personal charisma. Flexibility is demonstrated by a capacity to re-invent values and policies, exemplified by the dropping of separatism as a central plank by the Northern League and the toning down of ethno-nationalistic rhetoric generally, and the discarding of its fascist roots by the National Alliance (Alleanza Nazionale, AN), formerly the more overtly neo-fascist Movimento Sociale Italiano (Italian Social Movement, MSI). In contrast to Britain, The Netherlands and

Austria, the former extreme right has segued into the mainstream by discarding certain slogans and ideas and joining Berlusconi's People of Freedom (Popolo della Libertà, PdL) grouping. The authors chart changes of rhetoric and priorities as a response to changing electoral priorities through a 'frame' analysis of each party's literature.

Use of the media is much enhanced by the fact that Berlusconi owns most of it, but one cannot but be impressed by the skill with which he has used it. The book rightly emphasises the choice of style of language as an important factor in attracting votes in more direct communication with the electorate. The authors demonstrate how what the Australians call 'dog-whistle politics' – based upon sound-bites which seem ridiculously over-the-top to liberal intellectuals but are seen not literally but symbolically as sending the right message to potential 'anti-political' voters – are effectively used by all three leaders. Similarly, the ability of the three to appeal to different sections of their audiences by saying several contradictory things at once is demonstrated. In Bossi, Fini, and above all Berlusconi, the right have been fortunate in having charisma aplenty. I am reminded of a Roman taxi driver who, when Berlusconi took over from Prodi remarked to me of Berlusconi, "Yeah, he's a crook, but at least he's not boring like the other one."

My personal caveat about the book would be that I still find the notion of 'populism' as an ideology, rather than as a catch-all term for a rag-bag of attitudes and rhetorical styles, unconvincing and a weak analytical tool. My prejudice should not, however, deter a potential reader from using what is a clear, economical and insightful analysis. Were I teaching Italian politics, it would be in the 'obligatory' section of my students' reading list.

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Ilvo Diamanti, *Mappe dell'Italia politica*, Bologna: il Mulino, 2009, pb €16.50, pp. 256, ISBN 978-88-15-13156-0.

Ever since the beginning of the republican era one of the most distinctive features of Italian politics has been the continuity and the marked concentration of the vote for certain national parties in given areas of the country. This cannot surprise the historian, given the proverbial fragmentation of the centres of power in the Italy of the post-imperial era and the delay with which the nation-state building process was brought to a conclusion. Nevertheless, in analyses of Italian electoral behaviour, territorial cleavages have for several decades had and to some extent continue to have special importance, always greater, among other things, than that attributed to the variables of class voting. Ilvo Diamanti's book,

Mappe dell'Italia politica, analyses how the relationship between politics and territory has evolved – where territory is understood as the site of political participation, identity, representation, integration and regulation – combining the methods of electoral cartography with the theoretical instruments of political sociology. Presenting tens of electoral maps of the peninsula subdivided by province, the author shows that the geographical distribution of the support going to the main political parties in Italy remained the same throughout the 'First Republic' (that is, from the elections of 1948 to those of 1992) and that the nationalisation of the vote in the era of Silvio Berlusconi is still limited and not without contrasting tendencies.

But beyond the descriptive aspect, what is more interesting about this book is the continuous reflection on how territory can be used to interpret the dynamic relations between the political system and civil society, between parties and citizens, between the national government and the local community. Diamanti highlights clearly three different historical phases of the republican era, phases which, according to his analysis, reflect three different models of the relationship between politics and territory. The first phase is called 'politics on the ground'. This is the Italy of the 1950s through to the 1970s, where the central 'red belt' (Emilia and Tuscany) dominated by the Communist Party, and the north-eastern white belt (especially Veneto) hegemonised by the Christian Democrats, stand out. It is, therefore, the age of the large mass parties whose promotion of social integration enables them to act, in these regions, as the bridge between national-level institutions and the so-called 'territorially based political subcultures'. In the Italian sociological literature, subcultures inform models of the relations between politics and territory organised both around associative networks and the cultural traditions of the workers' movement and the Catholic world respectively. Despite the fact that the socio-economic structure of each area came to reflect, especially in the 1980s, a similar model of the productive system, one centred on the small enterprise (the 'Third Italy' of the sociological analyses of Arnaldo Bagnasco, to be juxtaposed to the large-scale industry of the North West, and to the Italy of the southern regions) the political consequences were very different. On the one hand, the PCI succeeded, in the red belt, in gaining credit as the party of the local institutions, able to regulate the processes of economic modernisation and thereby to bequeath to the political parties that succeeded it (the PDS, the DS, the Ulivo and the PD) an almost undiminished supremacy, even though it was one that was increasingly confined to the electoral arena. On the other hand, the DC, which came to be increasingly identified as the party of central government, lost its hold on the territory of the white belt, where an emerging stratum of small-scale entrepreneurs, the self-employed and private-sector workers came to feel increasingly 'central economically but peripheral politically'.

The growing salience of the centre-periphery cleavage therefore signalled the waning of the white belt and the beginning of a new phase, the phase of 'territory against politics'. This is the context in which the Northern League establishes itself, emerging explosively at the beginning of the 1990s to give life to a new political-territorial entity, the 'green belt' (after the colour of the symbol adopted by Bossi's party) whose boundaries are essentially the same as those of the old white belt. Before distinguishing itself as the party of public security and xenophobic attitudes, in fact, the League established itself as the party that would mobilise on the basis of territory, using it – as a productive resource as well as a source of identity – to express opposition to the central state and the national political system. Territory thus became 'a message used against politics'.

The third phase, the phase of 'politics without territory', corresponds to the emergence of Forza Italia, the personal, mass-media oriented party, having few territorially-based cultural or organisational roots and a more explicitly national vocation, confirmed by its lower level of concentration of votes in specific areas of the country (notwithstanding the presence of some electoral strongholds such as Lombardy, Campania and Sicily). The author devotes an entire chapter to 'the blue Italy', showing too that the territorial ties of 'the party with no territory' were entrusted, by Berlusconi, to the activities of a local political class largely derived from the parties of the First Republic (the DC and the PSI) and from the exchange relationships with powerful, local economic interest groups.

In the last chapter the author analyses the Italy of today, an Italy which, he believes, has been overtaken by a new phase, a phase of 'politics against territory' especially since the electoral reform of 2005 (with its closed lists and parliamentarians essentially 'nominated' by the central party organisations) and the subsequent birth, between 2007 and 2009, of the Democratic Party (Partito Democratico, PD) and the People of Freedom (Popolo della Libertà, PdL) which emerged, respectively, from the merger of the Left Democrats and the Catholics of the Margherita, and the merger of Forza Italia with the National Alliance. This 'tricoloured' Italy is, for Diamanti, one characterised by two large national and 'presidential' parties, parties tending to disavow ties with specific areas but unable entirely to free themselves from the associated constraints. This is true of the PdL, which won the 2008 election by allying itself simultaneously with the decentralising Northern League and a sort of 'southern league' (the Movement for Autonomy) which, in contrast to the Northern League, demands social protection and state intervention. But it is even truer of the PD, the effectiveness of whose strategic choices attracts rather explicit criticism on the part of Diamanti. Leaving aside the 'primaries' of 2007 – an event that attracted a very high level of participation on the ground, but one that was also more a means of legitimation than of genuine selection of the leadership – the strategy of PD leader Walter Veltroni seemed oriented

to a model of symbolic and presidential communication *à la* Berlusconi, using the channels of the mass media much more than those available on the ground. If Berlusconi's television campaign enabled the centre right in 2006 to retrieve many votes by reactivating and mobilising supporters disappointed by the performance of the outgoing government, Veltroni's communicative strategy in 2008, together with the political decision to reject an alliance with the parties of the left while distancing himself from the legacy of the previous weak government of Romano Prodi, seemed to have a paradoxical consequence: the PD found that it was the predominant party only in the red belt, the boundaries of its predominance being the same as those which, in 1948, marked the areas of strength of the Communist and Socialist Popular Front. This is, according to Diamanti, the price paid by a party born with strong territorial roots, that chooses media-based models of communication at the expense of territory but that is unable to break free of the restrictions of territory itself. To use the author's own expression, it is the triumph of 'territory despite everything'.

Overall, the book is an excellent study of Italian politics in the republican era, produced by an author who is one of the most important Italian political sociologists currently alive. It is also an accessible book, one conceived for a series aimed at an audience without special expertise in the field. It is not without its negative features, such as: the absence of a socio-historical explanation of the origins of the territorial subcultures, and the dismissal in the analysis of their similarities and differences of ideological and value-related factors; the extreme brevity of the initial theoretical chapter analysing the relationship between politics and territory; the almost exclusive emphasis on political factors such as electoral systems and party strategies in the chapter-5 analysis (supplementing an earlier edition) of the most recent phase – compared to the primacy given to socio-economic and organisational factors in the preceding phases (and chapters); or again, the absence of any reference to theoretical models used to explain voting behaviour, such as retrospective voting. In twenty-first century Italy this might provide a useful alternative both to explanations based on territory and to those centred on the importance of communication strategies. But these possible limitations do not affect the quality of a book that remains what is probably the best recent contribution for anyone who seeks to improve their understanding of Italian politics.

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Daniele Albertazzi, Clodagh Brook, Charlotte Ross and Nina Rothenberg (eds), *Resisting the Tide: Cultures of Opposition Under Berlusconi (2001-2006)*, London: Continuum, 2009, hb £65.00, pp. 272, ISBN 978-08-26-49291-3

In the aftermath of the attack by Massimo Tartaglia on Silvio Berlusconi in December 2009, which left the Prime Minister needing hospital treatment after being hit by a replica model of Milan Cathedral, Massimo D'Alema, the centre-left leader, former Communist and Prime Minister, who continues to be influential in the hierarchy of the new Democratic Party, proposed, not for the first time, a new era of dialogue with the Italian premier. In the same moment, supporters of Livorno, Serie A's most left-wing football team, unfurled a banner proclaiming solidarity with Tartaglia ('Siamo tutti Tartaglia' it read). Apparently, this support was not just for the act itself, but for Tartaglia's subsequent statement that he prefers to live without television given its dominance by Berlusconi.

These two responses reflect the now profound disjuncture between the official 'opposition', represented for a long period by D'Alema and his associates, and the grassroots movements which have developed in the era of Silvio Berlusconi. D'Alema's proposal follows the failure of an earlier attempt at negotiation with Berlusconi in the bicamerale in 1997. More fundamentally, however, it exemplifies the long-standing failure of the centre left, notably the leading element which has successively transformed itself from the large and influential Italian Communist Party (PCI), through the Democratic Left (DS) into the leading component of the Democratic Party (PD). Its current leader Pierluigi Bersani, together with D'Alema, his patron, were both shaped by the party schools of the PCI. However, this has not yielded a consistent strategy nor a clear ideological profile. In fact, where the PCI at least had some sense of Italy's turbulent past, with an analysis of the legacy of Fascism central; and where it understood the necessity of building strategic alliances for deepening democracy, and maintaining a solid base of electoral support and party membership, the current centre left is bereft of any clear sense of political identity. This has had disastrous implications for Italy, allowing Silvio Berlusconi not only to win three elections but to impose his own values, 'Berlusconismo', on Italian society. At the same time, when new movements have appeared, such as those which grew rapidly in 2001-2002 at the height of opposition to Berlusconi's politics, the centre-left parties have failed to galvanise them. True, the PCI also had an uneasy relationship with social movements but the current centre left has failed to construct any alternative despite many opportunities and the numerous associations which have developed over the last fifteen years.

The historical and political context for this disjuncture and the contrast between the imagination and creativity of some of the new movements and the failures of the centre left in the period 2001-2006 is the subject of this illuminating collection of essays. The first section sets out the contours of Berlusconi's power, the economic changes, the media power and the postmodern trends in electoral campaigning in the more recent

period of the Berlusconi era. The second part looks at the political fall-out from 'Berlusconismo', with attempts to revive the centre and the divisions on the centre left. For a brief moment, the girotondi and no global movements provided some glimmer of hope and, as the editors say in the introduction, 'the most active opponents of Berlusconi were...often marginalized from mainstream politics, many of them joining the growing chorus of 'antipolitica' with its vivid expressions of contempt for the whole political class'.

Indeed, the most engaging and revealing chapters of the book are those which cover the variety of these new movements, making important and original contributions to understanding new forms of politics in Italy. These include the chapters on the tension between RAI, the public broadcaster and leading comedians Sabina Guzzanti and Daniele Luttazzi and on the role of film director Nanni Moretti. Over many years through a series of films Moretti has captured Italy's political crisis, notably Berlusconi's conflicts of interest embedded in his media and political roles, and the crisis of identity on the left. As he also became a significant participant in these battles, notably thanks to his leading role in the girotondi, his voice as a dissident in civil society and through cinema having been a unique one in recent years: *Il Caimano*, brought out on the eve of the 2006 election, had an apocalyptic ending that some feel remains a damning commentary on the perpetual and spiralling crisis which often seems to border on imminent conflict.

The remaining chapters provide invaluable research on topics which have previously received little attention but have profound significance for understanding the changing context of Italian politics. The web as a site of opposition in Italy has been growing in significance in recent years, with not only Beppe Grillo's effective blogging but many other cases where 'virtual' politics has engaged more traditional civil society movements. Feminist politics and lesbian and gay, bisexual and transsexual/transgender activism has taken on a new significance in Italy, challenging the cultures and traditions of all mainstream parties and some of the central assumptions of Catholic morality. Charlotte's Ross's chapter looks at the impact and alliances of some of these activist movements.

The purpose of the book is to provide critical attention for the first time to the many different types of resistance taken up by grassroots movements. As Clodagh Brook and Charlotte Ross argue in the conclusion, '...social, political and cultural resistance channels its criticisms in multiple directions, from attacking Berlusconi himself, as icon and figurehead, to the values associated with him, as seen to be epitomised in his Mediaset channels, to attacking his policies and actions and targeting elements of government (such as the LN) or institutions (such as the Church) with whom Berlusconi has sought to align himself'. The fact that they have often done so without the help of the official opposition parties, in some cases

replacing an absent opposition, will continue to be an issue of growing interest for observers over the coming period.

This is a timely collection of essays which offers further insight on Italy in the Berlusconi years as well as groundbreaking analysis of the range of oppositional groups and new forms of political activism which have grown over the last decade. In addition to students of contemporary Italy it should appeal to those with a broad interest in European politics and history.

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