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# Working the Margins: The Geopolitical Marking of Italian National Identity

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Many celebrated commentators on Italy, both foreign and Italian, tend to see the country as singularly lacking in much sense of national identity because of an absent or weak collective patriotic attitude.[1] Only when a common culture could be imposed from above through revolution or from below by education would Italy finally have a singular national identity.[2] The unification of Italy failed, in this construction, because national history has tended to be told through the lenses of competing political factions whose "visions" of Italy have been mutually incompatible.[3]

Such idealist accounts tend to focus on historic ideological divisions, between Catholics and socialists, between real and official Italy (the vitality of Italian society versus the non-functional character of the state) or family ties versus national identity to suggest either the absence or relative weakness of national identity compared to others such as Germany or France. In particular, relative to Germans and other nationalities, the lack of trust of Italians in other Italians and the negative attitude to central government are interpreted as evidence for the lack of a strong national identity. In one famous put-down of this genre of thinking, Silvio Lanaro laments that "admiration for foreigners has been the principal ingredient of Italian nationalism."[4]

Idealist renderings have been commonplace in discussions about the seeming lack of popular enthusiasm for the 150th Anniversary of Italian Unification in March 2011. National identification must therefore be incited because it is either good in itself or fundamental to the good working of the Republic. It does so by exhorting recognition of, as Paolo Peluffo says: "l'*epos* (collective memory), il *logos* (the language), l'*ethos* (the cluster of values), il *ghenos* (the ties of blood and kinship), and il *topos* (a territory represented in the symbolic image of the homeland)."[5] The use of Greek gives this logic a sterling genealogy yet, of course, as Alberto Maria Banti notes, neither of the final two attributes has much of anything to do with actual national histories or populations anywhere on earth.[6] Anti-immigrant sentiments and other much more practical geopolitical markers, such as the bordering of the state or the North-South antagonism, that suggest anything but this linguistic nominalism, have not been given much if any emphasis.

Nevertheless, even in taking the same linguistic tack about the presence/ absence of Italian national identity, recent polling suggests that there is in fact an immense pride on the part of an overwhelming majority of Italians in national unification and in much of what it has wrought.[7] I think, therefore, that the hand wringing about the "failure" of Italian national identity is profoundly mistaken on both empirical and theoretical grounds. Not only does it rely on idealized representations of other countries as having permanent and unquestioned national identities (Germany and France are often exhibit A) with Italy as uniquely deficient, when these representations are always and everywhere works in progress, but it completely misses the extent to which national identities are invariably the outcome of practical socio-cultural processes of membership definition and exclusion and not some sort of *Geist* or vision that descends on a populace from on high or by verbal repetition.[8]

Many Italian intellectuals are addicted to thinking about national identity in terms of time or the becoming of an ideal-type: the Nation. This is the *telos* that never arrives at its final destination. They thus neglect the extent to which thinking of yourself as Italian is much more a function of space: being or dwelling with some people and not with others in a territory subject to flux due to external pressures and internal divisions. As Banti says: "The nation is not a given of nature."[9] It has to be made out of the materials available.

## The Geopolitics of Identity

It is widely accepted that at least part of how social groups define themselves involves reference to some other group against whom *we* can be compared. Hegel argued that a self is always defined in relation to another.[10] More recently, Edward Said claimed that this self-same process operates at the level of broad swathes of humanity with the Orient famously defined (and oversimplified) in opposition to a dominant West.[11] From this viewpoint, peripheral Europe (including Italy) can be posed as an "other" for a more civilized northern Europe, the former associated with backwardness and the latter with modernity.[12] For present purposes, this way of framing the Other is both too macroscale and too lacking in sociological specificity. My preference is to see the geopolitics of national identity in relation to a more modest sociology of groups.

In one classic construction along these lines, Georg Simmel argued that space is socialized and bounded on the basis of social experience and interaction.[13] Thus, the social boundaries that define groups give meaning and life to their members by configuring who is potentially inside and outside the group. "Belonging" is one register in which this process is often described. This is understood as both produced directly or performatively by citizenship criteria, everyday social practices, cultural norms, and political speech that identify what currently go for the most important social boundaries and indirectly through the ways in which ideas about nationhood, bureaucracy, historical experience, and

national character intersect with everyday social practices. The whole discourse of "national character" is particularly important in anchoring individuals to others they do not know within the national territory.[14] Of course, even while this discourse becomes second nature (*la bella figura*, *transformismo*, *clientelismo*, *arrangiarsi*, etc.), it is frequently projected onto co-nationals other than those around "here" or who are like "you." Stereotypes circulate in complex ways: creating new social boundaries within national borders as well as reinforcing old ones.[15]

In several ways, however, national borders become naturalized, national standard vernaculars become attached to territories, some behaviors and social attitudes are self-attributed to the larger national group, and the "fact" of the nation-state becomes a banality that is nevertheless unresolved because "belonging" itself is never finally settled in a world where people move, and novel political and economic arrangements undermine established social boundaries (including national borders). Often the differences between groups (nationalities, immigrants, northerners and southerners) that are most salient might seem relatively "small" to outsiders. This is what Freud called the narcissism of small differences.[16] It is the geographical proximity of the salient group difference that matters most. Are the others close by and do they challenge or threaten our collective self-image and in doing so help define it?

A vast literature has appeared in the social sciences and humanities invoking such "othering" as the central moment in socio-cultural identity formation. Typically, however, commentators focus on rather different notions of the "margins" or boundaries upon which definitions of the group are alleged to rely: from the territorial to the cultural to the representational.[17] What I hope to show is that defining cultural-political identities is rarely so easy and tidy. Rather, a number of different modalities are usually at work in defining who is inside and who is outside the group in question and these can wax and wane in significance by time and place. Geopolitical marking of identity, as I term it, then, involves not just defining the territorial container for the group against contiguous neighbors, but also reflects the most persistent internal divisions and everyday experiences that are seen as imperiling the cross-generational transmission of the collective identity through the decay of the practical-based but imaginative meanings that bring it to life.

Identities are created through the stories people tell themselves and others about their experiences. In this way, people come to see themselves as part of larger collectivities with common, even if geographically divided, histories. People present themselves to one another in terms of stories and tell stories about one another. These narratives are attempts at creating a unified self, one that makes the self intelligible. Lives and stories are intertwined to become identities. From this viewpoint, identity is about the connection drawn between a "self" and a community of communicators or storytellers with whom one identifies.[18]

Increased communication and migration across ever-widening distances and the collapse of custom-based communities disrupt conventional identifications. Yet, it is remarkable that even in this world one can say that: "Those who share a place share an identity."[19] This is so for a number of reasons. First, because even as people strive politically to establish identities that are not necessarily place-specific, they do so within a "geographical field" of shared relevance, such as the territory of a state.[20] Second, as they struggle for a single national identity, people usually share other identities, of which the most important are usually those of the people among whom they live. People have multiple identities and loyalties that derive from the overlapping social worlds in which they live their lives—local, social class, ethnic, religious, and so on. Third, communication, social interaction, and reactions to distant events are all filtered through the routines and experiences of everyday life. For most people these are still geographically constrained. Even if not always strictly localized, "shared social spaces" still define the limits for the social appropriateness of given identities.[21] Finally, "imagined geographies" are important within many identities, such as that of African-American with its roots in African diaspora, slavery and the southern US, and contemporary expression in the "black ghetto," and migrant identities of diasporic groups caught between different social worlds as well as the imagined nation of people you will never know but with whom you believe you share a certain affinity and a common destiny. Places are thus shared, if only in the imagination.

In the case of Italian national identity, for example, the irredentism or claim to lost territory often associated most closely with the northern and eastern land borders, but also seen as in eclipse in recent years, is sometimes invoked as an important element in Italian national identity.[22] Other commentators tend to emphasize a Europe to Africa axis with northern and southern Italy assimilated, respectively, to the two continents, and Italian identity seen as potentially, but decreasingly, suturing this essential divide.[23] Finally, and most ascendant these days, foreign immigrants, particularly those most culturally or racially distinctive, can be viewed as driving both a resurgent Italian identity and the birth of a novel northern or Padanian identity, both framed as "new" in their effects because historically Italy is seen as a land of emigration rather than one of immigration.[24]

My survey of the three ways in which Italian political identities have been defined geopolitically is embedded within an argument that the recent salience of immigration should not be read as representing a total eclipse of the others, so much as the reinstatement of an older emigration/immigration imaginary in a context in which the others, although weaker than in past times, nevertheless still have powerful effects within and beyond Italy. I claim that the making of all Italian political identities, especially the national one, has involved from the outset, in the mid-nineteenth century and earlier, three geopolitical moments. These function as forces acting on an object, forces of discursive emphasis that have waxed and waned in relative historical significance: cartographic anxiety

about the borders with adjacent nationalities, above all to the north and east; the emigrant/immigrant imaginary, or Italy as a land of emigrants largely unreceptive to immigrants with a vast diaspora possibly yearning for the homeland beyond Italian shores; and the Europe/Africa-Mediterranean axis or North-South division between separate and frequently hostile cultural worlds as a distinctive source of anxiety about Italy's internal cultural heterogeneity. These geopolitical processes are also by no means unique to Italy, even if the specific path certainly is.

## Cartographic Anxiety

The term "cartographic anxiety," first coined by Sankaran Krishna in reference to the making of Indian national identity, conveys the sense of a perpetual doubt about the stability of national borders and hence the sense of danger lurking in their vicinity and beyond.[25] Many academic accounts of national identities, in focusing exclusively on, say, vernacular literacy, ethnic symbolism, or national self versus other, assume that once an exclusive national identity is achieved it is readily perpetuated within the national population. A border is then defined *around* the national groups in question. This is to miss what is precisely one of the main sources of national-identity formation: since it is perpetually in question, national identity has to be constantly re-invented through the mobilization of national populations (or significant segments thereof). Borders, because they are at the edge of the national-state territory, provide one clear focus for this collective uncertainty.[26] The borders thus define the nation, not the other way around.[27]

Defined strictly while at the same time remaining in perpetual question, nation-state borders provide the center of attention for more generalized elite and, often, popular anxiety about what still remains to be achieved by the state for the nation.[28] Neither the journey to nation-statehood nor the anxiety it engenders, however, is *directly* defined by the borders themselves. They in fact reflect the aspirations and fears of an everyday nationalism in which whole populations are thought of—and they think of themselves—as if they move and think as one. In this construction, the "national economy" and the "national character" are likewise presumed to represent a transparently obvious collective identity and interest associated intimately with a culturally homogenizing and territorialized national space. It is this reified discourse, therefore, that needs explaining, not so much the specific positioning of the borders per se.[29]

Since Unification, the Italian version of this discourse has had a number of dimensions to it. One concerned the historic situating of Italy in the Mediterranean and the openings/limits that this provided for a greater as opposed to a lesser Italy.[30] At various moments from the 1890s down until the collapse of Fascism in 1943, the dream of a Fourth Shore or expanded and imperial Italy excited various political leaders and movements. Whatever the outcome of this, the maritime identity of Italy has been an inherent part of the national imaginary.[31] This reappears today in the crisis over the arrival of refugees by boat

from North Africa and in the sense of vulnerability to political instability in and around the Mediterranean.[32]

The second dimension has been how the geographical expression "Italy" has been converted through the making of Italian statehood into a seemingly culturally-politically coherent territorial nation. This has partly relied on creating a literary-cultural genealogy and the spread of a vernacular Italian language that ties the distant past to the present, however geographically distant much of that past was to most parts of the current territory (from Dante's Florence to Calabria, for example).[33] However, the process has also been about creating a stereotypical Italian (helped on by foreigners) and a "national character" to go with it.[34] More importantly in my view has been the mapping of "Italy" as a cartographic entity that we simply take for granted which has given the discourse of cultural homogeneity its basic currency.[35] Even though we know that all kinds of material and cultural "flows" move backwards and forwards across this space and its borders, we persist in uniting the map of the state with that of the putative nation to give it a figurative unity as a nation-state.[36] Mapping "Italy" has been crucial to the entire process of "unification." This mapping was necessary to make Italy become a real actor in a world of so-called nation-states, as in Mark Neocleous's final point: "the map is crucial to the recognition of the state as an international subject, for an unmapped state is an unrecognized one and vice versa. A 'state' without an internationally recognized territory is no state at all; like the pirate, the mercenary and the terrorist, it is 'off the map'."[37]

In terms of bordering the Italian nation-state, it was to the north and east that the most problematic borders were emplaced.[38] From Unification until 1945, these were central to the unfinished character of Italy. This was partly a question of how well the other borders were defined. As Mark Thompson says, "Think of Italy: the clearest borders in mainland Europe. From Sicily by the toe, past Naples and Rome, up to Florence and Genoa, that long limb looks like nothing else on the globe. Further north, the situation is less distinct." [39] This was where, in striving for an Alpine watershed and to redeem pockets of Italian speakers, most of all during World War I and in its aftermath, Italian national identity would be forged. The Italian Front in that war was fought across the mountains and on the karst to the northwest of Trieste.[40] This was where the conscripts from all over Italy sacrificed themselves for the national "homeland." Mark Thompson's book, *The White War*, is a brilliant narrative account of how a minority of Italians had long focused on these lands, the Südtirol, Istria, and the Dalmatian coast, as vital to completing the Italian project.[41] The author shows how World War I provided a pretext for turning this goal into a collective purpose by mobilizing a national army and giving a rallying cry to those for whom local, regional, social, and religious attachments were often more significant than the national. Just as Italian Unification to date had been an accretion of territories from 1860 on, so the war would finish the project.

This was successful up to a point.[42] Yet as is well known, some territories remained unredeemed in the treaties negotiated after the war and were important in underpinning the bitterness of some Italians about the outcome of World War I, particularly of those who had fought and feared that the task remained unfinished. From one viewpoint, the rise of Fascism as a movement had one of its origins in the irredentist imperative of post–World War I Italy. The so-called Dalmatian Question, particularly the position of Italian speakers in Istria and on the islands and towns of the eastern Adriatic, was an important focus of Fascist attempts to reclaim populations for Italy and to demonize local Slavs as interlopers in a historically "Italian" realm. The picture on the ground was often much more complicated with ethnicity and language not always functioning as good guides to political identities. In pre–World War I Venezia Giulia (without Fiume), Italian speakers were a bare majority of the population. During Fascism, however, efforts were made to Italianize the newly acquired territories by, among other measures, Italianizing place names and family names.[43]

The disastrous outcome of World War II, from a Fascist perspective, left a large number of Italians stranded on the wrong side of the border with a now-expanded Yugoslavia, once the border was adjusted around Trieste and down the Dalmatian Coast in the late 1940s. Going into exile in Italy and elsewhere in the late 1940s and early 1950s, this population of around 150,000 provided a source of stories about victimization by the victorious Yugoslavs and a sense of loss to the homeland that has continued to elicit considerable public sympathy, albeit intermittently and mainly on the far-right of the Italian political spectrum, down to the present day.[44] The end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, allied to the arrival in the Italian government of those political forces on the far right sidelined during the First Republic, particularly Gianfranco Fini's *Alleanza Nazionale*, brought into focus once more borders whose lines had been frozen since Yalta, thus reviving what had seemed (outside exile circles, at least) the settled question of Italy's eastern border. Even in the 1990s, MSI (the precursor party to *Alleanza Nazionale*) militants in Rome sold t-shirts with maps emblazoned on them showing the pre–World War II borders around Trieste and the Dalmatian Coast.

The burst of revisionist publication in the late 1990s and early 2000s questioning the role of popular Resistance in liberating Italy from Fascism between 1943 and 1945 also involved "rediscovering" the crimes committed against Italians at the end of World War II at the eastern border.[45] This brought back memories of the historic border dispute to those well outside the borderland and with no personal connection to it. In and around Trieste, stories about past violations and expropriations came alive at the time in the early 2000s when Slovenia (now split from the former Yugoslavia) was a candidate for entry into the European Union. Though this did not disrupt the process, it did serve to prompt memories of the border and its significance in defining Italian national identity.

Perhaps most importantly, the intermittently politicized border issue serves to elevate the question of national identity above all other potential identities. As Pamela Ballinger has said with reference to local Italians and exiles in and around Trieste, "the legacies of World War II and the Cold War are increasingly read through a narrative of genocide privileging ethno-national identities over other identifications (like those of class or other political ideologies)."[46] As long as these memories are alive and framed in this way, the border question, however weakened in its hold nationwide, nevertheless has scope for revival. Cartographic anxiety such as that inherent in the entire history of the Italian national project is not easily assuaged.

## The Emigrant–Immigrant Experience

The self-image of Italians down until the 1980s at least was of a nation that exported people rather than imported them. Italian governments long rued the inability of the Italian economy, particularly in the South, to provide an adequate living for large numbers of people. They worked from the late nineteenth century onwards to create a sense of Italianness among those who emigrated, if with varying degrees of success.[47] As is well known, people from Italy became an important source of settler populations around the world. As late as the 1960s and 1970s, large numbers of Italians emigrated to Germany and Switzerland. Since the 1980s, this collective image has been challenged by, on the one hand, dramatic decline in birth rates and population growth among native Italians, and, on the other hand, a significant growth in the population of immigrants, initially from North Africa and countries like the Philippines, but increasingly also from Latin America, Eastern Europe, and West Africa.[48] There is an obvious economic logic to this switch from emigrant to immigrant nation, but it is the socio-political consequences that have been most salient. Many Italians seem unaware of how much the future of the Italian economy and, more specifically, their pensions and looking after aging parents depends on the influx of foreigners.[49]

At first sight, the degree to which negative attitudes towards immigrants have been manifest in Italy, particularly in the largest cities and in the North, is surprising. Numerically, the level of immigration is less than that in many other European countries and in the United States. At 9.4 percent of all official residents in 2013, Italy is in the lowest category compared, for example, to Germany with 11.9 percent and 14.3 percent in the US, as well as many smaller countries with much higher percentages of immigrants (e.g. Switzerland with 28.9 percent).[50] Nevertheless, the speed of increase has been notable. Most immigrants have arrived since the late 1980s. I think that this may account in part for the extent to which a generalized anti-immigrant narrative has become so powerful within Italian national politics. At the same time, the actual impact of immigrants also can be exaggerated. Many immigrants come for only short time periods and most rarely turn their legal residency status (mainly acquired through amnesties

to illegal immigrants) into naturalization and citizenship.[51] The current citizenship regime privileges people of Italian descent over those born in the country to immigrants, thereby blocking upward social mobility.[52] The family or blood-based nationality law reflects in large part the self-image of Italy as a country of emigrants.[53] The Italian diaspora, as with so many other emigrant diasporas such as the Irish, Turkish, Jewish and Greek-Cypriot, represents distant outposts of the Italian nation beyond the borders of the national territory per se.[54] At the same time, the presumed temporary nature of much immigration and the lack of integration of immigrants, particularly of the second generation, helps turn immigrants into groups that do not belong in those many places in Italy that remain essentially provincial in their sense of belonging.[55]

More important, I would suggest, however, has been the political consequence of the overall transformation in the imaginary of an Italy of localized folk, some of whom have had to leave to take up opportunities elsewhere, but whose patterns of everyday life have not for centuries been disrupted by the mass immigration of people with different and distinctive cultural traits. I think that it is this dualist imaginary of Italy's recent past —an emigrant nation without immigrants to integrate—which accounts at least to some extent for the vehemence of much of the rhetoric about immigrants in Italy. Particularly in the North, the source of the most violent anti-immigrant rhetoric and activities, the appeal rests initially and finally on the disruption of local social norms and practices associated with immigrants. This recapitulates an older hostility to southern immigrants (*via i terroni*) but in the context of more deep-seated cultural differences and a collective sense of demographic decline and group survival. Polls show that Italians on the whole overwhelmingly see themselves as a white, Catholic nation rooted in Italian soil; in Cole and Saitta's words, as "a monochrome society […] that truly cannot imagine itself as multicultural."[56]

The rhetoric of the *Lega Nord* (Northern League) most clearly appeals to this sense of collective insecurity. The *Lega* is a northern political movement based on the belief in the North/South opposition as a cultural reality and committed at various times in its history to either northern separatism or a peculiar differentiated federalism beneficial more to northern than to southern regions.[57] Though at one level simply a public re-articulation of pub or bar talk xenophobia, the *Lega* has become increasingly attached to a political vision that sees immigrants as an aspect of a destructive globalization that undermines the cultural particularities of the northern Italian local communities it claims to represent. Immigrants are blamed for crime increases even as crime rates actually go down and Islamic immigrants pose a threat to local Christian mores when Christian practice is in free fall.[58] Like so many of its features down the years, the *Lega*'s anti-immigrant rhetoric can be attributed to an instrumental strategy for distinguishing itself from Berlusconi's various parties with whom it has been in electoral competition.[59] This rhetoric also has a more substantive base well beyond the *Lega* in the sense

of an incapacity to cope with a new Italy in which, for obvious demographic and economic reasons, immigrants will have to be a more significant part of the population. From Bergamo in the North, to Rome in the Center, and across economic sectors, immigrants are becoming an ever more vital part of the socio-economic fabric of Italy.[60] Until the traditional stereotype of an Italy that exports rather imports people is politically challenged and replaced with an alternative imaginary of immigrants as a vital element in revitalizing Italian economy and society, the emigrant/immigrant imaginary in its current form will continue to bedevil Italian national identity.

## The Europe–Africa Axis and the North–South Duality

The imitation of a northwestern European nation-statehood began at Europe's southern margins in Greece and Italy at first through local initiative, but eventually through the stimulation and recognition of the European Great Powers. In one well-known respect, Europe's eastern and southern margins constituted a resource "periphery" for the capitalist "core" of Western Europe. Yet a philosophical geography already posited such regions as lacking in the attributes needed for self-confident, locally generated statehood. These had little if anything to do with economic development per se but reflected the cultural taint of despotism and backwardness and, in the case of southern Europe, the need for a renewed *reconquista* for an idealized "Europe" incorporating places that were clearly identified as the very seats of that European civilization. In other words, in the "mind of the Enlightenment," to use Larry Wolff's evocative turn of phrase,[61] and as expressed by such intellectual luminaries as Montesquieu and Hegel, and in the words of Roberto Dainotto: "The South is what Europe, simply, *was*."[62] If in one interpretation, in particular that of Montesquieu, a fallen South stood in need of rescue by a progressive North, in another, for example that of Rousseau, the South represented an "older" Europe that had to be reincorporated to fulfill a European identity grounded in "multiplicity."[63] In both cases, to complete Europe as a region defined as a multiplicity of states and as a balance of power, these southern places were to be the showcase in which the initial universalizing of the European model of statehood would take place.

A major barrier to this prospect of achieving a European nation-state in Italy was the presence of cultural traits that could be construed as non-European or backward. These were seen as undermining the possibility of a cultural homogeneity that would successfully map a European-style nation onto the territory of the state. Attachment to kin and locality rather than to nation, hostile attitudes to a distant and exploitative state, instrumental conceptions of national politics, and the primacy of religious and other non-territorial affiliations have all been identified as crucial traits in undermining the achievement of a thoroughly Italian nationhood which, it is assumed, necessarily requires a high degree of cultural uniformity.[64] Italian Unification brought together a set of city-states and regional

states that had acquired distinctive economic, political, and cultural profiles over many centuries.[65] No singular event affecting the entire national territory within a short span of time, like industrialization in England or the Revolution in France, provided the basis for a common historical experience that could be managed to create a strong sense of a common national landscape image or a set of common cultural and political institutions with popular legitimacy.[66]

Indeed, unification was more an external imposition than a popular phenomenon across much of the peninsula.[67] Much of the South, and parts elsewhere, were incorporated as the result of military conquest rather than popular revolt. The papacy resisted well beyond the bitter end, finally succumbing only when given its square mile within the city of Rome as an "independent state" in a deal made with the Fascist regime in 1929.[68] Taken together, these varied factors, external imposition on a previously politically fragmented and provincial population with powerful forces actively resisting unification and without any great unifying cause beyond unification itself, have often been seen, by Italian and foreign commentators alike, as fatefully undermining or restricting civic trust while encouraging an instrumental more than a consummatory attitude towards national politics.[69] Under the Piedmontese regime following unification, the model for what was required came from the France of the years following the Revolution. "Nationalizing" the masses required extensive cultural engineering, not least in making national images and symbols central to people's identities. Mass elementary education and militarization through conscription became the widely adopted strategies to overcome other primary affiliations with the national one. In Italy, local peasants would be transformed into Italians as their compatriots in France had been into the French, to paraphrase Eugen Weber.[70]

In Italy, this approach ran up against the particular problem that many in northern Italy saw themselves as already part of the established "Europe" and considered the South to be a drag on the overall project of unification.[71] This perspective has been present from the start and, though weakening somewhat in the mid-twentieth century, has undergone a tremendous revival in recent years. This phenomenon is usually seen as having multiple sources, spanning from the perceived failure of efforts at developing the South economically, through the challenge to the central state from organized crime with deep roots in parts of the South, to the invention in the late 1980s of the *Lega Nord*. In turn, so-called neo-Bourbons in the South, particularly in Naples, saw the 150th Anniversary in 2011 as an occasion for funereal discontent about being "Italian."[72]

Such notions as "Africa begins at Rome" and that the North is the goose that lays the golden eggs that are then consumed in the South animate *Lega Nord* propaganda but are in fact longstanding tropes about the division of Italy into two parts: a European North and an African South. Late nineteenth-century Italian criminology, for example, emanating from the North, identified criminality with stereotypical southern physiognomies. This racialization of the North–South

difference has continuing resonance. Influential novels and memoirs have long portrayed the South as mired in superstition and beyond the reach of the state. As reported by Carlo Levi about his Fascist exile in Basilicata, southerners often knew more about the distant lands of their emigrant relatives than they did about their putative co-nationals to the North.[73]

Later events such as the way World War II ended in Italy have reinforced the North–South division. Much of the South (and Sicily) was liberated fairly quickly from the German occupiers. In the North, however, a protracted Civil War among the Germans, the remnants of the Fascist regime, and various partisan groups, as well as the slow northward march of Allied forces, led to a set of rivalries and memories about Fascism and resistance to it that survived the war. These memories seemingly reinforced the sense of a country with a larger divided memory that has long been reflected in such phenomena as the long-standing greater support for monarchist and Fascist politicians in the South and the presence across the North of monuments and plaques commemorating the events of 1943-45 that are completely absent in the South. The large-scale migration of southerners northwards in the 1950s and 1960s to work in the factories of the Northwest worked to reduce some of the mutual incredulity. At the same time, it also foregrounded even relatively minor cultural differences, in eating and speaking, for example, as representing signs of much deeper but "hidden" differences. Signs of signs, as Umberto Eco would have put it.

As Giorgio Ruffolo argues in his book *Un paese troppo lungo*, the Italian "southern question" has long had two aspects to it: "reclamation" or economic development and "integration" or assimilation to common national political-cultural norms.[74] These are related insofar as the latter has always been seen as depending on the former. As long as organized crime, a major focus of Ruffolo's book, continues to ravage parts of the South, then "normal" economic development will not happen, thereby reinforcing recourse to the very particularistic and clientelistic political relationships on which organized crime thrives. The negative image of the South held by many in the North as the "sink" into which northern tax money goes undermines any sense of communality shared across the two macro-regions.[75] Ruffolo looks to a revival of the national project through some form of federalism. Unfortunately, any real type of federalism (as opposed to the fantastic version invented by the *Lega*) must have a powerful redistributive element.

As many others have pointed out, this sort of Crocean-idealist appeal offered by Ruffolo has itself had a long history without much to show for it. It is based on the premise of an essential absence (going back, at least among Italian intellectuals, to Leopardi): the absence of a nation because of the long history of internal territorial and city-state divisions and the dominance of the Catholic Church. As long as this presumption is widely shared by intellectuals and by the people alike, the anxiety about the very possibility of an Italian nation will continue. Like Pinocchio, the puppet without strings engaged in senseless running, Italian

obedience to the nation can only arise out of free will, yet it never quite makes it to that "stable subject position," in the words of Suzanne Stewart-Steinberg,[76] for numerous historical reasons, not least of which has been the occupation of a long peninsula stretching from the heart of Europe towards Africa.

Of course, and in counterpoint, it is precisely the history of confronting this geography that has provided the basis for making an Italian national identity. Who else shares such a peculiar discourse of regional and local differences as the basis to similarity? Only other Italians really understand or care about *Lega Nord* slurs on the South. Ironically, therefore, the macro-regional division of Italy that appears to arrest the development of Italian national identity when seen in the idealist terms of Italy's encounter with the *telos* of history, in a geopolitical perspective provides a discourse about the nature of the country that to outsiders is very much an inside story that Italians share. Arguably, then Italy's "divided memory" of North and South is still something only Italians share.[77]

## Conclusion

To conclude, three geopolitical moments have come to define the ways in which Italian identity has been marked: in terms of borders against other nationalities (what I have termed cartographic anxiety), against immigrants in the context of a historically profound imaginary in which Italy is viewed as an emigrant country, and with respect to an internal cultural division between a Europe-oriented North and an Africa/Mediterranean-oriented South. Though waxing and waning in relative centrality over time, there seems to be no evidence that one simply replaces the others in a simple sequence, although the immigrant focus seems particularly ascendant today.

Recently, however, as noted by Ernesto Della Loggia in 2010, the entire Italian project has come into question in ways never experienced previously: from the *Lega Nord*, from southern "nationalists" angry at the *Lega*, and from what he terms "Guelphist" Catholics regretful that there was a national project in the first place.[78] What has been somewhat more constant, however, is what the famous journalist Giorgio Bocca in his "Annus Horribilis" (concerning the year 2009), written at age 90, calls the pervasiveness of "fear" of national fragility.[79] If now emanating as much from concerns about the economy than anything else, there is nevertheless a much more longstanding sense in which fear, not ideologies or utopias about cultural homogeneity and nationalization of the masses, has provided the basis to all three of the ways of "working the margins" that have characterized Italian identity marking over the past 150 years. It has been because of the perceived fragility of the enterprise that the margins have come to define the center. In this regard, Italians are by no means alone. Italians certainly have a national identity, it is just not like that of the Germans or French, and in their proportion and expression over time its geopolitical moments of definition have been uniquely its own.

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