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SALVIAMO L'ITALIA?

AN INTERNATIONAL ROUNDTABLE

held at the

**UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY/
NYU VILLA LA PIETRA CENTER, FLORENCE**

on

Friday, March 4, 2011

Moderators:

Randolph Starn (University of California, Berkeley, History and Italian Studies)

Lucy Riall (Birbeck College, University of London, History)

Participants (Florence)

Paul Ginsborg (Università degli Studi di Firenze, History)

Alberto Maria Banti (Università degli Studi di Pisa, History)

Silvana Patriarca (Fordham University, History)

Participants (Berkeley)

John Agnew (UCLA, Geography)

Lucy Riall

Randolph Starn

Clip 1 (0:00-0:23)

Welcome and Introduction: Randolph Starn

Presentation of *Salviamo l'Italia* by Paul Ginsborg: Lucy Riall

Welcome and Introduction: Randolph Starn

This year's 150th anniversary of Italian unification has inspired, not to say provoked, a great deal of reevaluation and often lamentation about the Italian national past, present, and future. As an opener for our "Italian Futures" issue we have invited a truly stellar group of major players in these debates. Lucy Riall, whose books on the Risorgimento and new nation have made her an indispensable partner, has played a planning role from early on and has warmed us up with a seminar, office hours, and lecture this week as a Visiting Professor in Berkeley's Chair of Italian Culture. John Agnew, up from UCLA, is a political geographer with special interest in modern Italy, including his co-authored *Berlusconi's Italy: Mapping Contemporary Italian Politics* (2008). Turning across pixels and electrons, Silvana Patriarca, on leave in Italy from Fordham University, is the author

of fundamental and incisive studies on the uses and abuses of ideas about Italian national character, especially in the nineteenth century. Alberto Maria Banti, Professor of Modern History (Storia Contemporanea), at the University of Pisa, has published a series of paradigm-breaking and paradigm-making books on 19th and 20th century Italian political culture, most recently, this year in fact, *Sublime Madre Nostra: La nazione italiana dal Risorgimento al fascismo*. Last and far from least, it's a special pleasure to have Paul Ginsborg with us; the occasion could not have been right without him as one of the most influential historians and outspoken democratic activists and one of the newest citizens of Italy. His new book *Salviamo l'Italia* was, in fact, a major inspiration for organizing the panel, and it will lead us into our discussion. Readers of this issue will have the written guide to the discussion that follows and subsequent comments on the proceedings by one of modern Italy's most thoughtful and distinguished historians, Adrian Lyttelton.

Here is the game plan. Lucy Riall will begin by presenting Paul's book and drawing out some of its implications for thinking about the past, present, and future of the Risorgimento project of national unification. Then we'll have comments from Alberto Banti, Silvana Patriarca, and John Agnew, followed by any responses Paul would like to offer. We'll then move into a second round after 50 minutes or so to 45 or 50 minutes of more or less free rejoinder and conversation among the panelists. Finally, we'll invite comments and questions from the audience. Together with Professor Lyttelton's comments we should have by the end at least some answers to the three questions we circulated to the panelists in advance.

1. In this 150th anniversary year, with so much evaluation, reevaluation, and controversy devoted to the Risorgimento, what is viable (or not) among its various strands for reflection about the future?
2. What resources (leadership, civil society, historical experience, Euro- or Global pressures, etc.) are available (or not) for thinking productively about Italian futures now?
3. What are the prospects for creating a new history of Italy, or are future histories likely to follow conventional national rather than transnational or post-national paradigms?

Lucy Riall Presents Paul Ginsborg's Salviamo l'Italia

Riall begins by saluting Paul Ginsborg's book as extraordinarily timely, important, politically engaged, and indeed bravely personal. Concise but wide-ranging from 19th-century visions of Italian unity to the crises of the moment in their political, social, and economic dimensions, the book can be thought of as a dialogue with the men and women of the Risorgimento. Chapter One answers its deliberately provocative question ("Is Italy Worth Saving?") with a positive, though not uncritical account of their ideals of progress, their symbols and language, their patriotism (which he would distinguished from

nationalism in its more aggressive forms), and their sense of Italy's place in the modern world. With the overarching and controversial theme ("Italia Mite," a term that can mean "mild," "gentle," "modest" but does not lend itself to easy translation), Chapter Two explores four qualities in the Italian past and in the ideals of the Risorgimento that might be renewed in Italian civic life: self-government; the European "vocation" of Italy; equality; and "mitezza" itself. Chapter Three identifies four major ills afflicting Italy: "a strong church in a weak state"; clientelism; "the recurrence of dictatorship"; "the poverty of the Left." Chapter Four points to the resources, past and present, that might be mobilized to "save" Italy from these afflictions and the deeply disturbing and dangerous situation today: (a) traditions of volunteerism that were critical to the Risorgimento; middle-class, and especially a younger generation's potential for productive engagement; (b) new leadership and alliances based on a strategy of multiple, strategically positioned reform efforts (a Gramscian "war of position," not the "war of maneuver" sanctioning violence).

Riall shares Ginsborg's hopes and determination not to give in to a cynical fatalism and to hackneyed narratives of Italy's history as condemned to repeated and irredeemable failure. Even so, she has reservations about the notion of Italian "mitezza" and calls for more attention to some themes that she feels have been insufficiently emphasized in the discussions occasioned by the 150th anniversary of Italian unification. Both "mitezza" and the violent aspect of the Risorgimento stressed by Alberto Banti, Riall would argue, must be factored into our analyses. In any case, we must be attentive not just to the "exceptionalism" of Italy but to its history in comparative perspective and in its interconnections along east-west and north-south axes. The position of the Catholic Church needs to be brought more fully into our historical narratives. And what about fascism, which has been largely overshadowed by the Risorgimento in this anniversary year: has the Risorgimento become a kind of metaphor for and evasion of questions of causality and continuity that connect it with fascism?

Clip 2 (0:23-0:42)

Panelists' Comments on *Salviamo l'Italia*

Part I: Alberto Maria Banti and Silvana Patriarca

Alberto Maria Banti observes that Paul Ginsborg views are not shared by much of Italian public opinion and poses two fundamental questions. First, why should we focus now on marginal components and figures, such as Carlo Cattaneo, of the Risorgimento? As in romantic nationalism elsewhere in Europe, particularly in Germany, ethnic exclusiveness, sacrifice and martyrdom, and warrior values were hallmarks of the Risorgimento's ideologies and ideals. The distinction between a benign patriotism and an aggressive nationalism does not work for Italy and, probably, elsewhere; arguably, it is nationalism that engenders patriotism, not the other way around. Cattaneo and his liberal positions look much closer to the 20th than to the 19th century and the Risorgimento's mainstream. Second, why look to the Risorgimento for values that can inform our actual situation? It

was a 19th-century phenomenon, far removed from the culture and society of today, including those we might consider most progressive. If we do want to look to the past, we would do far better to look at the period from 1943-1948, to the *Resistenza* and the Constitution, which are arguably the transformative years in the making of today's Italy.

Silvana Patriarca welcomes Ginsborg's hopefulness about Italy in the face of so much cynicism and even despair. His emphasis on the complexity and many-stranded character of the Risorgimento is important and indeed needs to be explored further, e.g., with respect to the participation of women, the role of young people, and the range of emotions it inspired. These elements have been relatively neglected and should be recovered for the present and the future. We can think of the Risorgimento as "a season of political mobilization" that was not limited to the elites or the familiar figures of our conventional narratives. Recovering the variety of aspirations, commitments, and hopes invested in the Risorgimento experience should be an antidote to merely presentist or entirely negative views of its significance for contemporary Italy.

Clip 3 (0:42-0:52)

Panelists' Comments on *Salviamo l'Italia*

Part 2: John Agnew

After observing that the Ginsborg book reminds him of the energies, hopefulness, and sense of political experiment of the post-Risorgimento period itself, John Agnew proposes, as a student of present day Italian politics, to bring somewhat different perspectives to bear on the discussion.

First, he would invite a more comparative perspective to counter the tendencies toward "exceptionalism" that are so prevalent in discussions of Italy's problems and prospects. The shallow, performative, largely passive character of politics is hardly just an Italian phenomenon. The media are often rather too exclusively blamed—and are certainly a good target considering Berlusconi's media empire; however, a "narrow electoral view of politics," with voters as consumers, is more fundamental and, again, not at all limited to Italy. This, Agnew suggests, is one of the overarching themes of Paul Ginsborg's book. His question would be how distinctive this is and whether it can be corrected by going back to the past?

Second, a useful "recipe for understanding the Italian past" might go beyond fixed national and territorial perspectives to consider, rather, failures to create a unified public sphere. A number of reasons for this might be and often have been cited: the imposition of a forced, artificial unity from the start; the variable repertory of local political styles (cf. Simona Piattoni [2005] on the radical differences in clientage from one part of Italy to another even in the southern regions) as a counter to and a consequence of unification; the "shifting archipelago of Italian politics" that has been a principal obstacle to achieving a national consensus; the pluralism of local allegiances and the, seemingly paradoxical but in fact related, appeal in Italy of a European and international outlook.

As for the future, any new “Risorgimento” has to acknowledge the limits of the national and patriotic outcome of the last one. Some form of real federalism (vs. sloganeering about “fiscal federalism,” which means decentralization if it means anything at all), together with a commitment to a reinvigorated EU, might be one of the most promising paths to advocate for Italy’s future.

Clip 4 (0:52-1:07)

Paul Ginsborg Responds

Paul Ginsborg concedes that he could not do justice to the trenchant comments and criticisms just offered, even if his book were 1,000 pages not 130. He notes that a fundamental motivation for the book that he wrote, as against the one(s) others might have him write was to try to answer the questions raised but left unanswered by Giulio Bollati in his book *L’italiano* (1983): what is the role of Italy in the modern world? Not at all an easy question, insofar as Italy has “misbehaved or been absent,” but a question that *Salviamo l’Italia* seeks to recast: what from among the progressive possibilities latent in Italian history, particularly in its would-be unifying moment, can be productively recovered for the present and the future, particularly now, in “this nastiest of moments” in the history of the Republic?

So Alberto Maria Banti is right. The book focuses on minority and marginal positions in the Risorgimento. Of the four qualities it identifies, “mitezza” may be perhaps the most ambiguous and controversial, but not because it’s original. Norberto Bobbio employed it in a famous essay, “Elogio della mitezza,” of 1994 in which he writes: “il mite è l’uomo di cui l’altro ha bisogno per vincere il male dentro di se” (20; “the ‘mite’ is the man another person needs to overcome the evils inside himself”). The idea that this quality changes peoples’ minds for the better is of course partly a Christian one, but it may be found in Beccaria and in the experience of the Risorgimento, even in Garibaldi. It may prompt new ways of writing about Italian history that seem especially important to remember after the violence of the distant and recent past. The threat of the present is not just a recurrence of authoritarianism, in Lucy Riall’s paraphrase, or of what Ginsborg does not hesitate to call dictatorship. Alberto Banti is right again about the darker sides, the “figure profonde” running through the Risorgimento and beyond through fascism: they are there in the book, precisely because, with Silvana Patriarca, Ginsborg agrees that one must not “flatten the past.” He could of course have written about the *Resistenza* or the Republic, but he chose to write about the Risorgimento, partly to look in a different light at the “deep structures” in Italian history, and partly as a kind of *ricorso* to his earliest work on the generation of 1848, particularly Daniele Manin (1979). In any case, “marginal” figures sometimes have a new life as “central,” just as the one-time protagonists of our histories may recede to the wings.

Clip 5 (1:07-1:36)

Discussion by Panelists

Riall points out the sharp difference of opinion about the Risorgimento and its relevance today and asks whether Banti would care to comment.

Banti elaborates on his earlier points: the disturbing core of violent nationalism in the Risorgimento; the importance of the *Resistenza* and socialist and leftwing traditions in general for the values that Ginsborg attributes to the Risorgimento. The dangers now are a newly virulent form of nationalism in the Lega Nord and the nationalistic responses it has incited, not the Berlusconi phenomenon.

Riall suggests that the differences of opinion about the Risorgimento might be reconciled by distinguishing the many-sided movement aspiring to Italian unity from the actual form that national unification took. In any case, the really interesting question raised by Banti's negative view is why Italians are still so obsessed with the events of 150 years ago and more.

Starn intervenes as an early modern historian to point out that the ideal of a return to the past to redeem or progress in the present is a recurrent theme in Italian history and suggests that the modern variations on this theme analyzed in Silvana Patriarca's *Italian Vices* (2010) actually encompass the clash of viewpoints and values in the discussion so far.

Patriarca emphasizes again blanket generalizations about the Risorgimento—its nationalism, patriotism, violence, sources of support, etc.—should be avoided. The movement can be distinguished from its outcome, and there are democratic elements of both that can be rightly be drawn out for present purposes.

Ginsborg admits that one obvious reason for writing the book was the anniversary year, but it is not meant to be a book “for or against” the Risorgimento. It should be underlined that the Lega falls far short of an electoral majority in its strongholds and that the impression that positive values of the Risorgimento have failed is in important respects due to the failures of the parties of the Left to represent and mobilize them

Agnew observes that the disconnect between the kind of civic mobilization recently seen in Italy and the weakness of the parties on the Left is a crucial problem today. This partly due to biases in media coverage and partly to political maneuvering that converts politics into a cynical game separate from the real interests and concerns of the people. Running against Berlusconi has the perverse effect of keeping him always at the center of attention. For the message of the Left to be effective it will have to be positive, with a vision of the future, perhaps a “true federalism” as advocated in Paul Ginsborg's book.

Clip 6 (1:36:00-1:56:00)

Questions from the Audience

Questions from the audience concerned: 1) the issues of economics and of party politics, particularly of an ineffectual Left, for Ginsborg's argument (Dylan Riley, University of

California, Berkeley, Sociology); 2) the sense in which Berlusconi simply represents long-standing cynicism and practices of overregulation and evasion in Italy (Brandon Schneider (University of California, Berkeley, Ph. D student in Italian Studies); 3) the avenues for communicating academic analysis and historical research to a much broader public (Angelo Cagliotti, University of California, Berkeley, Ph.D student in History).

Clip 7 (1:56:00-2:05:00)

Conclusions: Lucy Riall

Riall concludes with necessarily brief observations on the present and future of the historiography of the Risorgimento and the present and future of Italy as these very large issues have emerged from the discussion. She points to the sense of complexity acknowledged by the panelists and suggests that the real disagreements which exist seem likely not to block further discussion and research but to open it up. To communicate beyond the stereotypes and fixed positions in Italy and about Italy is a major task. We cannot know what the future holds for Italy, but it will face immediate and alarming challenges in the wake of the Berlusconi regime, as well as the long-term problem of constructing a sustainable relationship between leadership and civil society.

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