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Comment: “What is Alive and What is Dead in the Risorgimento?”

Adrian Lyttelton

First of all, I would like to say that like Lucy Riall, I welcome Paul Ginsborg’s book as timely, original and thought provoking. I found the discussion illuminating and very wide-ranging.

Salviamo l’Italia (2010) has a very clear purpose, expressed in its title. Its orientation towards the problems of Italy’s present and future distinguishes it clearly from orthodox works of history. It is worth noting that the celebration of Italy’s 150th anniversary of unification (March 17, 2011) almost inevitably prompted the question: “What is there to celebrate?” This question could not be answered without some kind of assessment of the impact of the past on the present. From very different perspectives, both Emilio Gentile (2011) and Sergio Romano (2011) have tried to answer these questions. Of course, if one were to reason in terms of historical causality, one would have to examine what lies between the liberal state and, as Riall suggested, the heritage of Fascism, not to speak of the foundation of the Republic. But I would defend Ginsborg on this, and I would agree that the rediscovery of the Risorgimento—self-confessedly a highly personal and selective rediscovery—could help illuminate the problems of Italy’s present and its possible futures. One could paraphrase the title of the famous article by Benedetto Croce on Hegel (1915)¹ and say that Ginsborg asks the question: “What is alive and what is dead in the Risorgimento?”

Why look to the Risorgimento? Because it was the period that succeeded in founding the national public sphere, however limited, and a national state. It was a period of remarkable achievements, though also of some notable failures. The past may be another country, and I certainly agree with Alberto Banti that it must be appreciated in its diversity. So then, we must ask why and how it is still alive for us. Why does it still generate heat as well as light? It still arouses conflicting passions, and some of its memories and myths are still active. If you read L.P. Hartley’s novel *The Go-Between* (1953), which begins with the now famous quote, “The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there,” you discover that the past can provoke traumas which, if not resolved, can radically condition and restrict our actions. But the past is also the course of memory and identity, for collectivities as well as individuals. I would add that this is indeed the case in contemporary Italy, but it is certainly an instance in which we would be right to see Italy as an example of a more general phenomenon, identified long ago in an article by Stanley Hoffman (1979).

We are faced by a culture—I mean Berlusconi’s—which tries to create the image of a continuous present. We need only to look to the Vodafone TV ad campaign “Life is now” on Italian national television, which features the Italian footballer Francesco Totti,² and which radically shortens our perspectives on the past. Berlusconi’s historical perspective does not seem to encompass anything before its own lifetime. Even Fascism

¹ For the complete text of this translation available on line and no longer under copyright restrictions see: <http://www.archive.org/stream/whatislivingandw00crocuoft#page/n5/mode/2up>.

² <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MLQgg21jLW0>.

is not so often evoked as eluded or minimized. History can be an antidote to a mass culture that obscures any consciousness of where Italy has come from and where it is going. The past, as Silvana Patriarca has suggested, can be indispensable for a critique of the present and as a source through which we can rejuvenate our values. Public debate in the United States does not treat Lincoln or the Founding Fathers as irrelevant. So I really welcome Ginsborg's book, not least as a way of dramatizing Italy's problems without making them appear insoluble.

I would agree with Alberto Banti that we do need to preserve a sense of historical distance, and to ignore facile parallels with the present. I would particularly stress that we need to recognize that the men and women of the Risorgimento spoke a different language, which we have, so to speak, to translate. I agree, too, that the religious language of the Risorgimento needs to be demystified. We need a secular concept of the nation, although it must be one capable of evoking emotion and loyalty.³ But I am not convinced that the men and women of the Risorgimento have nothing to tell us about politics and morality, or that they present only models of discourse that we should suspect and deconstruct, as Banti sometimes seems to suggest. I don't find Banti altogether consistent. He seems to be saying that the Risorgimento is antiquated and has therefore become a way of thinking and feeling with which we cannot in good faith identify, while he also suggests that the revival of Risorgimento rhetoric can awaken dangerous memories and associations, both in its traditional and in its parodic forms. In 1994, the revival of traditional nationalism and its association with Fascism could be a subject of legitimate concern, when the neo-Fascist MSI was still discussing the revival of Italian claims to Istria and Dalmatia, but not now, after the Congress of Fiuggi (1995), in which Gianfranco Fini, as Chairman of National Alliance Party (AN), took the decisive step towards breaking with the Fascist past. A dissident neo-Fascist Right still exists, but its importance is marginal, and old-style nationalist rhetoric has scarce appeal. The *Lega Nord* (Northern League) must not be allowed to set the terms of political discourse, and ignoring the "nation of the Risorgimento" is likely to increase rather than decrease the danger of an ethnic reflex action in the North, as well as that of Southern victimhood.

I believe that recent celebrations of the 150th anniversary, whose failure was widely feared, actually showed a strong emotional backlash against the League's hostility to the symbols of the nation-state. I thought that the Center-Left, for once, caught the popular mood of patriotic celebration with slogans like Pier Luigi Bersani's "Beyond the Divisions, there is a United Italy." The defense of Italian unity against the League was intelligently married to the defense of the Constitution against Berlusconi; so I think that, among other things, we can see in the successful mobilization of voters in the recent local elections, and, even more remarkably in the referendums, the affirmation of a kind of "constitutional patriotism." Here I should like to recall that, if the nineteenth century constitutions were very far from the Republican constitution of 1947, it was during the Risorgimento that constitutional government for the first time became a widely shared objective in Italy, and this development was hardly less important than that of the national ideal. The most valuable heritage of the Risorgimento is the constant association

³ On Mazzini's "political religion," see Levis Sullam (2007). For the relationship of the "civil religion" of nineteenth century nationalism in Italy to the "political religion" of twentieth century totalitarianism, see Gentile (1997).

between the cause of national independence and that of political liberty. They were linked by the ideas about the development of civil society and a national public sphere. The concept of a society civilized by the exchange of ideas as well as goods was inherited by the Risorgimento from the Enlightenment. Martin Thom (1995, 271-305) has shown the strong continuity of these ideas, especially in the writings of Giandomenico Romagnosi whose concept of *incivilimento* (the civilizing process) was essential for Cattaneo. I would add that Romagnosi was widely read in Sicily as well as Milan. One of the magic phrases of the Enlightenment was “the spirit of association,” which could be invoked alike by the founders of joint stock companies, by the liberal nobility and bourgeoisie in their clubs and reading circles, by the Congresses of Scientists, and by Mazzini. For Mazzini, indeed the idea of association was “sacred,” and formed part of a triad with Humanity and Progress, which should replace the old triad of Equality-Liberty-Fraternity. Brotherhood (*fratellanza*), and Association were roughly equivalent for Mazzini, and the artisans’ societies of which he was the patron were called *fratellanze*.

I don’t really agree with Banti when he argues that the distinction between patriotism and nationalism is not a valid one. It is true that in Italian discourse the term *patria* became charged with an emotive force that makes the distinction difficult in linguistic terms; but if we don’t use the word “patriotism” we must find an equivalent. Maurizio Isabella (2009), in his excellent study of the Italian exiles of the 1820s has talked about “cosmopolitan nationalism.” Mazzini himself distinguished quite clearly between “the principle of nationality,” which of course he championed, and “a narrow, mean and jealous nationalism.” He denied that he was a “nationalist,” because he believed in the emancipation of the nations as a necessary stage in the emancipation of humanity. He always thought of his action in European terms, and championed the cause of Polish nationalism with particular fervor (Mastellone 2000). I would second Ginsborg’s insistence on the importance of the volunteer tradition (though, of course, in a contemporary context it needs to be demilitarized), and I would add that what is particularly impressive about the volunteers of the 1820s and the later generations of Garibaldian and Mazzinian volunteers, is their willingness to fight in the cause of other free peoples. Garibaldi first won fame while he was fighting for the independence of Uruguay from the Argentinian dictatorship of the Rosas. After Italian unification, Garibaldi considered fighting for the North in the American Civil War, and actually did fight for the French Republic in the closing stages of the Franco-Prussian War. His rapturous welcome in London in 1864 was not just due to a generic admiration for his heroism, but to his international reputation as a champion of universal suffrage and women’s rights (Riall 2007, 97-108).

Ginsborg’s book readily acknowledges the plurality of the Risorgimento, the different outcomes that the men and women of the time envisaged, and he states his own preferences clearly without disguise. I endorse what he has to say on the distinctiveness of the Italian tradition of communal self-government. I think he has even been excessively modest in describing Cattaneo as the representative of a “marginal” aspect of the Risorgimento. Certainly this is true for 1859-60, but not, I would argue, for the period up to and including 1848, when federalism, in various forms, was in the mainstream of Italian national thinking, and when Milan had a far more important role in its development and diffusion than Turin. Here I think that Riall’s suggestion that we should distinguish between the moment of unification and the longer, more various and

complex strands, which went to make up the Risorgimento is particularly apposite. In 2011, of course, the searchlight was bound to illuminate the former rather than the latter. I would add that while one is considering anniversaries, I find it surprising that in Italy the 150th anniversary of 1848 attracted so little attention, in contrast with Germany, where 1848 was widely celebrated as a moment when a democratic alternative to the course actually taken by unification seemed possible. The Italian “1848”—which is shorthand for the whole period from 1846 to 1849—was no less remarkable than the German, indeed perhaps more so. As Simonetta Soldani originally noted at the 1998 Conference organized by the Centre for European Research at University College London and the German Historical Institute in London on the changing meanings of 1848, the 1998 anniversary showed that “1848 can no longer arouse collective attention.... The old stereotypes were dead and nothing had replaced them. It was a flight from the roots of our own recent history...that is rapidly swallowing 1848 in the quicksand of indifference that threatens to estrange us from ourselves” (2000, 145). We cannot simply look on 1848 as a failure or simply as a prelude to 1859-60. On the contrary, it was then that it became clear that Italy was not just a “geographical expression” and that political independence and even unification were probable in the long term. More specifically, the neglect of 1848 threatens to obscure the indigenous roots of Italian democracy, the European significance of the Risorgimento, and the existence of widespread mass participation in the national movement. I believe, in agreement with Riall and Ginsborg, that the commonly accepted definition of the Risorgimento as the work of elites or “virtuous minorities” is inaccurate. In the past this posture served as an ideological justification for excluding the masses from political participation.

Cattaneo pointed out that the vast majority of the casualties in the *Cinque giornate*—the Milan rising against the Austrians in 1848—came from the popular classes, and not from the bourgeoisie or even students. That elite leadership was essential is of course true, but hardly surprising or exceptional. In 1848 the mobilization of the masses was far more general than in 1859-60, and even if it was prevalently an urban phenomenon, there were moments when the rural population was also involved. As the question of the participation of women in the Risorgimento has justly been raised by Ginsborg and Riall, I would cite the instructive contrast between the intellectually ambitious writings of Cristina di Belgioioso in the 1840s, culminating in her unique and acute comparative study of the revolutions in Milan and Venice, and the much greater caution that she displayed in the 1860s, when female protagonism aroused much more suspicion (Belgioioso 1977). Undoubtedly the great disappointment of 1848, which was to make the task of winning the support of the peasants for the new nation state immensely more difficult, if not impossible, was the irreparable breach between the national movement and the Church. In retrospect, this may look inevitable; but this does not mean that previous attempts on both sides to reconcile liberalism with Catholicism should be ignored. The absence of reference to the Liberal-Catholic strain in this year’s public discussions in the media was surprising and unfortunate. For *laici*, as we all are in this discussion, it is, I believe, both difficult and necessary to see the Catholic problem from the inside, to understand the dilemmas of a Manzoni or a Rosmini, and even the reasons behind the total closure to modernity of Pius IX. I would like to add that in the last case understanding does not imply sympathy.

Ginsborg warns against the dangers of politicization, but here I would welcome some clarification. His own interpretation of the Risorgimento is inevitably political, although I would add that fundamentally it is even more a moral interpretation. So where does he draw the borderline? When does politicization become unacceptable? Certainly when, as too often in the Italian historiography of the First Republic, it is evidently linked to the consolidated ideology of a particular political party or “area.” One of the problems about returning to the values of the Resistance, which Banti suggests as an alternative source, is that they have been peculiarly exposed to this kind of politicization. Nor can the Resistance easily be decoupled from the Risorgimento. There was a keen debate among anti-fascists about the relevance of the Risorgimento to the Resistance, but on the whole I think that the dominant tendency was to seek elements of similarity. I also agree with Banti, however, that it is important to revive the memory of the Constitution, not so much as just a document, but also as the product of a remarkable effort to achieve national concord despite fundamental ideological differences.

A query from the floor during the roundtable by Dylan Riley⁴ understandably questioned the absence of economic history and policy from the discussion. I would agree with Ginsborg that when it comes to economic policy, the Risorgimento is of little help. This is partly because the economic transformation of Italy has been extraordinary if one takes the 150 years as a whole, and politics has often lagged behind. Nevertheless, I should like to make one or two comments. First, I would call attention to the surprising intellectual hegemony of the *liberisti* (believers in free enterprise and free trade). This had its roots in the Risorgimento (if not earlier), with the polemics against the protectionism of the old, pre-unification states, particularly in the Kingdom of Naples. Even so, before 1848 Massimo d’Azeglio and other liberals promoted the agitation for an Italian customs league, along the lines of the German Zollverein, as a step towards national unity. Carlo Cattaneo was also an enthusiast. What is remarkable, then, is that after unification the *liberisti* continued to hold the high intellectual ground, even after the turn toward tariff protection. Italy had no champion of “national industry,” comparable to Friedrich List or Alexander Hamilton, and consequently all forms of state intervention lacked legitimacy. For this reason we cannot turn to the Risorgimento, or even the post-Risorgimento, for guidance on the vital question of the role of the state in the economy and its limits.

Carlo Cattaneo has often been considered the epitome of the “modern man” of the Risorgimento. Certainly his scientific and technical culture was remarkable; but in his important work on the political economy of the Risorgimento, Roberto Romani subjected Cattaneo’s economic thought to a very skeptical examination. Romani recognized Cattaneo as “the only Risorgimento author still considered as a valid source of inspiration for reflections on contemporary affairs,” but he emphatically excluded Cattaneo’s economics from this positive evaluation. Cattaneo’s enthusiasm for industrialization was not founded on serious knowledge of political economy, but on “the philosophy of Dr. Pangloss,” i.e. an ingenuous belief in the unlimited benefits of progress (1994, 16). However, we can see a positive side in Cattaneo’s refusal to consider economic progress in isolation from social and political progress. In his writings on the city he distinguished sharply between cities like his beloved Milan, or Florence, which had been centers of

⁴ [Editors’ note: see Dylan Riley’s article, “Hegemony and Democracy in Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks*,” in the second issue of the present volume.]

culture and government as well as industry, and the new industrial towns of England such as Birmingham or Manchester. Even Cavour, a notably hardheaded economic operator who was accused by his opponents of conflicts of interest, never reduced progress to a simple question of economic growth. This refusal to consider economic growth as an end in itself, or to isolate the economic sphere from the development of institutions and of civil society, is a valuable legacy of the Risorgimento that can still be an inspiration after the last twenty years of market fundamentalism.

One of the enduring problems about connecting the past to the present is that the present doesn't stay still. Even since this roundtable discussion took place the ground has shifted. Finally, we have seen real evidence in the local elections and, still more remarkably, in the referendums, of a real revulsion of large parts of the electorate against Berlusconi, his government and his party. I have to say that I was not initially convinced by Paul Ginsborg's idea of "*L'Italia mite*" as politically viable, but Giuliano Pisapia's victory in mayoral election in Milan last May has convinced me that he may be right. Even though Pisapia came from the radical Left, as a candidate he projected an image of reasonableness and honesty. The Italian public shows signs of being tired of the politics of insult, defamation and *prepotenza*. I am much less happy about how this rebellion can find a satisfactory long-term political expression. Ginsborg's question: "What then?" remains all too relevant. The problem seems not so much one of identifying the resources available in civil society as in finding an adequate model of leadership, both individual and collective. The *Partito Democratico's* (Democratic Party) caution both on electoral reform and on the abolition of the provinces (which was in its agenda) seems to me altogether excessive, and both the absence of a clear political line and the tendency of all the leaders of the Center-Left to expend their energies on competing with each other arouse a strong feeling of déjà vu. We have been here before: in 2005 the Center-Left squandered a sweeping victory in the regional elections. All one can say is that, this time around, things might be different. Perhaps what we need is a virtual Young Italy, led by Roberto Saviano.⁵ So far, as usual, Berlusconi has shown himself more aware of the new world of Internet communication than the official leadership of the Center-Left. But since his domination has been founded on television, the new media objectively weaken his monopoly. The opposition leadership could in fact learn something from the Risorgimento about the need to utilize and create new forms of association, and about how to construct networks and exploit gaps in the official communications system.

In the meantime, however, the need to "save Italy" has taken on a new dimension and a new urgency with the financial crisis. If we are to think productively about the Italian future we cannot ignore economics, and it is certainly a weakness in our discussion that we have tended to do so. Of course, the tendency to view Italy's problems in exclusively economic terms must be resisted. Uncertain leadership over the Greek question in part provoked the recent financial crisis, but Berlusconi did not help to reassure the markets by denouncing his own Minister of the Economy, Giulio Tremonti, as "not a team player." And then, he did not even turn up on time for the crucial Brussels meeting on the Greek debt. No serious attempt to tackle the problems at the root of the economic failures of Italy during the last decade can be attempted while Berlusconi remains in power, but we need to consider carefully what elements of his system are likely to survive him.

⁵ <http://www.robertosaviano.it/>.

I am surprised, if I heard him correctly, that Ginsborg should have referred to Berlusconi's rule as a "dictatorship." Certainly we should be vigilant and alive to the danger of creeping dictatorship, but I think that other formulations like "an authoritarian form of democracy," or "plebiscitarian rule" are more accurate in describing the present situation in which, after all, Berlusconi is unable to conceal the decline in his popularity. The Spanish language has a nice term, which unfortunately cannot be reproduced in Italian: a *dictablanda*. Elsewhere, Ginsborg has very well identified the peculiar danger of *berlusconismo* in its insidious nature (2003). I would argue that it is precisely because it is not a dictatorship, and does not (or fortunately, cannot) use force to stay in power that it is harder to awaken a moral reaction that will challenge the unspoken assumptions of the system. Large numbers of people—though less than before—still believe that Berlusconi's monopoly position in the media is the legitimate result of free enterprise. Here I agree with John Agnew that a comparative perspective would be valuable. From a residually British perspective, I would like to say that I appreciate the title of an editorial article by Brian Cathcart on British politics that I read in the *Independent* some months ago: "Thinking Italian: UK is like Berlusconi without the Whores" (2011). Since then the Rupert Murdoch affair has erupted, and finally the dangers to democracy and to individual freedom inherent in the overwhelming and underestimated power of the media magnates have been revealed in all their brutality. One of the most disquieting parallels between England and Italy has been the revelation that parts of the state apparatus (in England, Scotland Yard, in Italy the secret services, *Guardia di Finanza*, etc.) have acted as accomplices in the media's campaigns of defamation and in the cover-up. But, of course, there are differences. Murdoch's ultimate manufacture of private scandals was undertaken in the interest of sales. Instead, Berlusconi's *macchina del fango* (mud-sliding machine) was directed against specific political opponents, and, recently, he has devoted a large part of his time to trying to restrict media coverage of his own sex scandals. Even the now defunct *News of the World* would have had a hard time inventing anything so sensational. Murdoch may have exercised a kind of veto power over successive British governments since 1992, but he has not been able to govern directly. Therefore, the political reaction, though late in the day, has been rapid and effective. Cameron has had to distance himself from Murdoch and his acolytes.

The reform of the RAI and an effective anti-trust law that will not only break Berlusconi's monopoly but providing guarantees of pluralism and competitions in the future should be a high priority for the opposition. Less obviously, I believe that the Left's opposition (in England as much as in Italy), will be ineffective unless it challenges the dogmas of profit and audience share, and re-establishes the duty of public television to provide a public service to inform and to educate. Once upon a time, the commercial sector had to some degree to conform to the standards set by the public sector; now it is the other way around. The specific Italian problem, however, which I don't think finds exact parallels in other European democracies, is that reformers find themselves between Scylla and Charybdis, that is to say between the mindless pursuit of profit and a party spoils system, with all its potential for the manipulation and restriction of information, and for high-cost clientelism. At the moment, we have the worst of both worlds. Again, only a new type of leadership can provide a satisfactory solution. The Left has been far from innocent.

Part of effective political leadership must be the recognition that there are no prefabricated solutions. I agree with Ginsborg that summoning up the spirits of the Risorgimento should be part of an effort to restore idealism to the Italian public life, but in present circumstances this effort will not get very far without a healthy dose of realism. This is particularly evident if one considers Italy's relationship to Europe. This is not an easy period for believers in Europe. The decline in idealism and the growth of national egotism is reminiscent of the mood after 1848. All the great figures of the Risorgimento looked to Europe. Their aim was not just to achieve Italian independence, but also to restore Italy's central place in Europe. There is a clear line that runs from the European Mazzini—who insisted that liberty was for all oppressed peoples, not just for the Italians, and that the end of political action was the creation of a harmonious union of free peoples—as from Cattaneo's more concretely defined vision of a “United States of Europe,” up through Altiero Spinelli's European federalism. Perhaps no major European nation, in spite of Fascism, has contributed more than the Italians to an ideal vision of Europe as it should be. But Ginsborg is absolutely right to contrast this European idealism with the rather dismal record of absence and ineffectiveness that Italian governments have generally displayed when great European questions are being discussed.

In the Berlusconi years, Italy's role in Europe has been decidedly inferior to that of Spain. This is a failure of collective will and of decision-making capacity. It is more deplorable if one remembers that individual Italians—Romano Prodi, Mario Monti, Emma Bonino, and now Mario Draghi—have played a distinguished role within European institutions. So, I think that there the lessons that most need to be learned are those of Cavour: how to defend the interests and the rights of Italy with the major European powers; how to imitate the best practices of Europe in economics, technology and administration; how to be bold and pragmatic in promoting economic and civil progress; how to overcome provincialism; and above all how to win the trust of fellow European leaders for serious and responsible governance. I would add that we could learn something also from the post-unification pessimism of Pasquale Villari, who in the aftermath of the war of 1866 pitilessly analyzed the cultural and economic weaknesses that prevented Italy from playing an effective role in international affairs.

Unfortunately, at the present time, thanks to Berlusconi, but not only to Berlusconi, many of the stereotypes about “Italian vices” that Silvana Patriarca (2010) has so skillfully analyzed once again have a wide circulation. The real and dangerous novelty, moreover, is that Italy can no longer afford to ignore them. Cavour and his successors understood that there could be no true political independence without economic independence. Today we talk, rightly, about interdependence, but there is a basic level of autonomy that must not be compromised. The results of losing it can be seen in Greece and Ireland. I am not suggesting the likelihood of a disaster scenario, but the loops of influence and autonomy is already evident. What the Germans, the French, or the Dutch think about Italy can have a direct impact on the Italian economy. To have a role you need a reputation. The July 18th cover of *Der Spiegel* featured an Italy being rowed out to sea by a Berlusconi dressed as a gondolier, flanked by two half-naked sirens (*Der Spiegel* 2011). Inside, an article entitled “The Sweet Poison of Berlusconi: Italy's Downward Spiral Accelerates” contains pages of accurate and devastating analysis. It concludes that Berlusconi “launched a cultural counter-revolution that politics will take a long time to

recover from.”⁶ Interestingly, the one hopeful note at the end of the article refers to the success of Roberto Benigni’s performance of the Italian national anthem “*L’Inno di Mameli*” also known as “*Fratelli d’Italia*” at the 2011 Festival di San Remo.⁷ Italy has a European vocation, and also a Mediterranean vocation, which are historically important and original; but they have been habitually suffocated by inward-looking obsession with the details of the Italian political game. Italian governments, moreover, have a hard job in establishing their credibility when they promise reforms, and this goes for the Left as well as the Right, although both the Amato government and the first Prodi government did much to restore confidence in the viability of Italy’s economic and political systems. The Left will have to be self-critical, and to show more courage in dealing with its friends as well as with its enemies. It will not be easy.

I shall be brief in my predictions for Italy’s future. There are too many unknowns to make predictions plausible. The anniversary debate has inevitably focused attention on Italy’s specificity. There is a need now for more comparative study, which should define better what is truly specific and what, instead, Italy shares with other economies and societies. *Berlusconismo* is a distorted version of modernity, or post-modernity, and needs to be studied as such. First, on the positive side, I think that in the last twenty years Italian historiography has become more adventurous and more diverse. A positive effect of the crisis of the “first Republic” was the emancipation of historiography from the parties. For a brief time in the 1990s it seemed as if the closed worlds of Italian historians had opened up and that a freer and livelier debate was possible. The “national question” became the object of serious study. Here, Silvio Lanaro (1992) was a precursor in reflecting on the attenuation of a sense of nationality even as “Italy and the Italians” were increasingly subject to analysis and commentary. He linked this to the fears provoked by globalization and to the electronic media’s weakening of “secondary agents of unification,” such as political parties or public intellectuals. Other “taboo” subjects like the role of the monarchy came under examination. More recently, Banti has been a leader in renewing the study of the Risorgimento, which had become a closed field, where innovation was discouraged.

Presently, these positive advances of the recent past seem to be at risk. There are many excellent historians in Italy, but the institutional mechanisms which encourage free debate between historians of different schools, and, most importantly, which include their research students, are still weak, though even here there has been some improvement. Above all, under Berlusconi, the neglect of the universities, combined with the permanence of closed systems of cooptation, are driving more and more of the best young scholars, in history and in allied fields, to find work abroad. This may have the incidental advantage that they will involve Italy more directly in international historical debates, just as the exiles of the Risorgimento did much to “Europeanize” Italian culture. But there is still too great a tendency toward inward-looking history and political science that ignores the possibilities of comparison, though I wouldn’t want to suggest that this is a uniquely Italian problem. In addition, a striking feature of Berlusconi’s “cultural counter-revolution” has been the relegation of history to a marginal role in the public media.

⁶ <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/0,1518,775092,00.html>.

⁷ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3KYtRdVYxTA&feature=related>.

I agree with John Agnew that the absence of serious discussion of federalism is surprising and deplorable. What strikes me in the contemporary fields is the lack of reference to the experience of other countries that have more or less successful federal systems, notably Spain and Germany. Historically, the comparative study of center-periphery and North-South relations could help to put the political and economic problems of today and tomorrow in better perspective. Again, I think that the problems are in large part institutional rather than intellectual. A number of Italian historians, particularly of the generations now in their forties and fifties, operate naturally and effectively at an international level. But there are still too few chairs in European history and even less in the history of other continents, compared with those in Italian history. And where there are chairs, they often lack the necessary resources—books and other research facilities. Libraries should become more international, but in the present climate of neglect they have a hard time just staying open.

In conclusion, I would like to take up Randolph Starn's suggestion that revivals of the past have been a recurrent feature of Italian attempts to construct a different future. One can emphasize this point by noting that around 1800 the words "Rinascimento" and "Risorgimento" were used interchangeably. These revivals imply a dissatisfaction with the present and with the way it seems to be evolving. In Italy, I think that recently visions of the past and of the future have entered into crisis simultaneously, especially, but not only, with the crisis of Marxism. A solution is not yet in sight. It may be, however, that it is possible to "square the circle" and reconcile the recognition of historical distance with the needs of the present. By questioning certain assumptions of continuity, both in historiography and in actual historical development, we may be able to take a fresh look at the original sources, and this can help to inspire a new vision of how to do things differently. It is time to look at the thought of the Risorgimento in particular in a perspective that is not exclusively nationalist, or Marxist, or Catholic, or liberal. There are great examples in the work of historians like Federico Chabod or Franco Venturi; but since their time the gulf across which we view the nineteenth century has grown immeasurably wider as we face the realities of the twenty-first.

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