

# From Southern European to Italian exceptionalism?

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## *Abstract*

Especially after the 1990s, while other Southern European countries (notably, Spain and Greece) have been completing their economic catch-up with the rest of Europe, and improved their democratic quality, Italy seems to have been lagging behind. While its economic growth has been among the slowest in Europe, Italian politics is apparently still fraught with troubles – between antipolitics and corruption, organized criminality and populism.

The paper aims to show how the Italian case, while representing an exacerbation of problems shared by other Western liberal democracies, can be properly understood and explained by referring to a long-term international historical sociology of the country. To such end, a particular emphasis will be put on the ways transnational capital has interacted with the Italian ruling classes since the accomplishment of the unification, and a comparison will be drawn with another ‘Southern European’ country, Spain. In the latter’s case, the catch-up with the process of expansion of Western capitalism has been led by the State, which has relied on the ancient infrastructures of the monarchy and gradually opened to the inter- and transnational pressures of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Italy, on the other hand, has been constantly re-shaped through broad compromises between transnational and domestic elites, who have often failed to gain a clear social hegemony within the country. Rather than providing clear-cut conclusions, the paper aims to suggest a different research perspective on the origins, developments and traits of Italian statehood, whose structures are deeply embedded in the transnational forces which have moulded its historical and current shape. Further investigation should focus on the realignments between the ‘international’ and the ‘national’ which have occurred in the post-1989 decades, and which might shed a light on the current features of Italian statehood and politics.

This paper is conceived of as a starting point of a much broader project. Its overall aim is to assess how Italy has interacted with the expansion of the Western capitalistic ‘heartland’ over the last two centuries; and to do so by comparing the Italian trajectory with that of another large Southern European country, Spain. One of the main underlying assumptions is that in political terms there is no Southern Europe as such. ‘Southern Europe’ is here understood as nothing more than a *notion géographique*. In our viewpoint, most European and non-European countries can rather be seen as a counterpart to a broadly conceived *historical* ‘West’, an area roughly corresponding with Britain, the Netherlands, Belgium, the USA and partly France. In a nutshell, the earliest-hour industrial cradle. The ‘West’, home to the origins of capitalism, has launched several ‘offensive waves’ and has constantly expanded to include other regions of Europe and the world. In this sense, ‘Southern European’ areas are just part of a larger cluster of industrial latecomers.

The case of Italy is particularly interesting as the peninsula has usually been at the crossroads among different experiences. While sharing some aspects with other 'Southern European' countries, Italian political history has also much in common with Germany and Japan, and, after WW2, with Eastern Europe. Italy has experienced the Cold war **within**, being home to the largest Western Communist Party. In many senses, it will be argued, Italian politics is 'exceptional'. As we will see, the Spanish modern trajectory is much more linear and idealtypical.

Italy and Spain have shared important historical events, with the Iberian monarchy ruling over parts of Italy during the early modern era and Italians often providing it with credit, naval equipment, artists, and the like (let alone Christopher Columbus). Then, the vicissitudes of modernity: being Italy more rapid in joining the Western capitalistic core, but also earlier involved in the troubles of state and democracy since 1920s fascism.

Despite a long list of allegedly persistent problems (mafia, corruption, transformism, clientelism, and so on), until the 1990s Italy has been a model at least in terms of economic growth. In a few years roles have however reversed. After the breakdown of *Tangentopoli* (1992) and the subsequent stagnation, Italy has become the laggard; in the meantime Europe has witnessed the progress of Spanish democracy and the fast pace of a rapidly-growing economy. Perez Diaz's 2003 'The Spanish lesson' (translated into Italian as *La lezione spagnola*) seems to seal the 'reverse' of perspectives.

Instead of offering a comparative analysis, this paper tries to explain developments in contemporary Italy and Spain by moving from a transnational perspective. Both states have often been associated with a 'peripheral' area of Western Europe, relatively distant from the core of industrial revolution, capitalism and liberal ideas. Nevertheless, they are now members of the narrow elite of the richest world countries, let alone their long-lasting (though at times disputed) democratic stability. How far did the 'heartland' of Western capitalism contribute to shape their civil societies and institutions? To what degree, on the other hand, did Italy and Spain develop *their own* reactions to external pressures?

We aim to analyse the evolution of their 'state/society configurations' according to a neo-Gramscian perspective, which explains the structure of modern international politics by referring to the expansion of the 'Lockean heartland' of Western capitalism and to the resistance opposed to it by successive waves of contending 'Hobbesian' states<sup>1</sup>. As Karl Marx had already stated, in opposition to the English experience, 'On the continent of Europe, after Colbert's example, the process was much simplified. The primitive industrial capital, here, came in part directly out of the state treasury' (Marx, 1999, 6). In his *Quaderni dal carcere* ('Prison Notebooks') Antonio Gramsci drew on Marx and distinguished between the West, where '*tra Stato e società civile c'era un giusto rapporto e nel tremolio dello Stato si scorgeva subito una robusta struttura della società civile*', and the East, where '*lo Stato era tutto, la società civile era primordiale e gelatinosa*' (Gramsci, 1975, 866-67). To avoid a mere juxtaposition of some sort of 'idealtypes' we need however to understand how the two configurations did – and do – relate with each other.

Kees van der Pijl has emphasized the *crucial fracture* between an expanding heartland of 'Lockean', Western capitalistic countries since 17th century England, and their 'Hobbesian' contenders, such as France, Germany, Russia, Japan, where the state has driven the economic and social development.

Italy and Spain are usually understood as examples of later and 'minor' Hobbesian contenders. But to what extent? With which peculiarities? How did their configurations emerge in the context of the offensives of the Lockean heartland? It will be argued that, while Spain seems to follow a more linear Hobbesian pattern, Italy represents, in many respects, a kind of exception.

Let's start with a brief overview of the neo-Gramscian interpretation of such themes. We will then move to the 'combined' histories of the two countries in the modern era, in order to finally assess their characteristics and the implications for both political history and theory.

## Lockean heartland and Hobbesian contenders

In van der Pijl's work<sup>ii</sup> is first of all crucial the 'core fracture' between a Lockean heartland of states and their Hobbesian contenders. In the Lockean 'state/society complex' the bourgeoisie shapes institutions and policies according to its interests and, as a class, tends to expand and build a transnational civil society. Such a complex took shape in England before the Glorious Revolution (Teschke, 2003; Wood, 2003), and later in the United States, which became the core of a great industrial expansion towards all continents, with the support of a common language, an ideology of freedom from state authority, and a sense of mission, mainly relying on ancient Puritan values (van der Pijl, 2006, 13). Though in some periods the state has played a distinctively autonomous role, especially in the USA<sup>iii</sup>, in general terms private interests have been the driving force of society.

Throughout the modern era the original Anglo-American heartland has been challenged many times by 'Hobbesian' European<sup>iv</sup> contender states (France, Germany, Russia, plus Japan, in the Second World War). Here the state leads the development of the modern economy and society. Public agents take on the responsibility to catch up with the Lockean heartland. The first contender to English leadership was the French absolutist monarchy, which aimed at enhancing the Crown's power through territorial accumulation, while supported by a mercantilist ideology. Hobbesian states have been shaped by revolutions; sometimes bourgeois ones – as in the French case; more often 'revolutions from above' – see Germany or Japan; in both instances revolutionary vanguards drove the process in the interest of the bourgeoisie, but ended up constituting a state class with its own power aims, and bureaucratic instruments (van der Pijl, 1998, 78-80).

What about the relations between the two models?

'Precisely because France happened to be closest to the English experience in time and space, it could not stray away from the lead given by the British. In an embrace as close as the one between these two countries, there is very little freedom for the weaker party to experiment in terms of ends; although it will be forced, by the same logic, to rely on different means. It must perforce close the gap with the "first mover" in order to prevent being dispossessed and subjected, and it did so by a revolution from above, using the state as a lever to accelerate social development' (van der Pijl, 2006, 9-10).

In other words, external pressures – combined with domestic socioeconomic conditions – have *induced*, if not *forced*, most countries of the so-called 'West' to catch up with the evolution of the heartland and to usually do so in a Hobbesian fashion. Especially to avoid deterministic explanations, it is crucial to understand how different areas have reacted to similar challenges. While on the one hand we can clearly envisage a general pattern of capitalistic expansion, on the other the role played by historical and geographical peculiarities, as well as by local capital, cannot be discounted. The cases of Italy and Spain are particularly interesting for both countries entered the heartland as second comers, but they did it in different ways and they coped with the external challenges according to their peculiar historical constellations.

In broad terms, both Italian and Spanish histories are characterized by three successive phases:

1. A 'long march' towards the heartland, mainly promoted by the state according to a Hobbesian pattern;
2. After a few years, a strong Hobbesian reaction, with the empowerment of authoritarian or totalitarian regimes;
3. The end of such regimes, and the (as yet) definitive inclusion into the heartland.

In Italy phase 1 lasts from 1800 to 1915; phase 2 coincides with the fascist regime (1922 to 1943); phase 3 begins with the end of World War Two and the choice of the Western camp (1947). Spain entered phase 2 somewhat later (in 1939) and ended its isolation in 1959, though remaining an authoritarian regime until the Franco's death. The 1978 democratic Constitution marked the accession to the heartland.

In broad terms, since its unification (1861) Italy has been featured by a complex blend of Hobbesian and Lockean elements; even though the state has taken the initiative to organize civil society, the latter's relative strength, owing to the existence of an early accumulation of local capital, and the former's recurrent weak legitimacy have often undermined the capability of the *Stato* to deliver efficient services. In Spain the role of the state seems far more important, also to explain later economic achievements. In many respects, as we will see, Italy is a kind of outlier. Neither Lockean, nor properly Hobbesian. In the long run, a kind of 'exceptionality' clearly comes out – and an accurate analysis of its international history can offer clear and precise explanations.

We will now start by considering the 'long march' towards the heartland: in Italy, in the period stretching from Napoleon to the First World War; in Spain, in a 'long nineteenth century' ended with the Republic's birth in 1931.

## The Italian long march (1800-1915)

Split into several states, subject to Austrian control, Italy is left behind the core of industrial development, centred in Britain, Belgium, France, and later Germany. Even after the unification, it still remains a 'latecomer', be it for the lack of a democratic-bourgeois revolution, as stressed by Gramsci and Marxist historiography (Sereni, 1971), be it for the problem of the 'original accumulation of capital', as underlined by Rosario Romeo (1998) and liberal scholars.

Recent research has highlighted further aspects (Riall, 1994), among which two are particularly relevant.

First, in the early 19th century both in the North and the South emerges a spontaneous and 'local' kind of capitalism which is different from its traditional Anglo-Saxon version. Especially in Lombardy, agricultural surplus and trade allow for the rise of a 'diffused' pattern of industrial development, centred on silk and wool and linked to international markets (Cento Bull, 1993; Cafagna, 1989). Protoindustrial firms are usually run by families in the countryside, with which they enjoy strong ties. Further investigation (Petrušewicz, 1989) has shown how there were market-oriented *latifondi* also in some Southern areas, like the allegedly backward Calabria. A similar pattern would re-appear in the late 20th century, especially in the 'industrial districts' of the Third Italy (mainly the North-Eastern and central regions of the country).

The second core element is the rise of a relatively strong Hobbesian polity in Piedmont. Hobbesian, for the economic catch-up as well as the unification of the country are mainly driven by the Savoy dynasty and Prime Minister Camillo Cavour's far-sighted policies. A liberal, aiming at market enlargement to at least Northern Italy, and a skilful diplomat, Cavour achieves both Italian unity and a rapid growth of its North-Western regions, where the construction of a thick railways network and the promotion of industry answer to both economic and political objectives. The nature of the newly-born state is however *dual* since the beginning. Italian unification has been strongly supported by transnational capital and the connections between Cavour, Italian bankers (such as Bastogi from Leghorn) and speculators and their powerful counterparts in Paris (Rothschild, Péreire) and London

(Hambro) have been widely studied and documented (Cameron, 1957; Romeo, 1990). The new kingdom is the outcome of a convergence of interests between foreign (especially British) capital and geostrategy, Piedmontese Crown and commercial landowners, merchants and moderate intellectuals from other Italian regions, especially Tuscany.

Rather than a bourgeois 'revolution', Italian unification is a revolution *for* the bourgeoisie: its exponents are hardly representative of industrial interests and, as Gramsci points out, there are no Italian economic forces as such; Piedmont just creates the conditions for them to emerge (Gramsci, 1971, 121ff.). Among the eight Prime Ministers of the 'Historic right' (1861-76), four represent the new, 'enlightened' landed aristocracy (Cavour, Ricasoli, Minghetti and Lanza); two are professionals (lawyer Rattazzi and doctor Farini); two generals (LaMarmora and Menabrea). The subsequent three leaders of weakly progressive 'historic Left' (Depretis, Cairoli, and Crispi; 1876-96), once followers of Mazzini and Garibaldi, have little experience with business and industry. More than a 'state class' – as in the French and German experience – they give voice to a tiny group of moderates, which fails to achieve a hegemonic position within Italian society, and would rapidly disappear against the social mobilization beginning at the turn of the century<sup>v</sup>.

In other words, the early Italian state (1861-96) emerges as a Hobbesian polity, but *strongly dependent on foreign support and without any hegemony on a still liquid Italian society*. Despite the left's efforts to embark on massive infrastructural and military expenditures, results are modest. In 1896 per capita Gdp is barely the same as in 1861 (Toniolo, 1990, 4); the annual rise in manufacturing has been just 1% (Toniolo, 1990, 7); steel output – despite a peak in 1889 with 158,000 tonnes – is meaningless if compared to 3.6 million in the United Kingdom, 2 million in Germany, 626,000 tonnes in France (Mitchell, 1998: 466).

Why doesn't the country enjoy the benefits of 'relative backwardness' as described by Gerschenkron, or 'combined development', following Trotsky (1972, 26-7)?

The key explanation, among the many which have been put forward, lies in the nexus between an international scenario dominated by the rise of colonial empires and a domestic one controlled by a narrow political elite. Such elite – like a proper Hobbesian state – is sieged on all sides [...cannons planted against their neighbours round about...]: at home, by the Church, rioting anarchists and socialists; abroad, by the world recession (1873-96) and the rising interimperialistic tensions. There is little room for manoeuvre and Crispi's attempt to shift to the German camp ends up in a failure. Italy depends on both Western and German capital and raw materials and can hardly afford a fuller autonomy.

The combined result is a blocked state, which strives to resist its opponents until the end of the century, and almost shifts towards an authoritarian solution in the years 1898-1900.

After 1900 important changes do however occur. Their seeds are located in few elements which have been injected in the last years of the previous decade, again thanks to a combination of liberal sectors of the governing elite and transnational capital. A key-role has been and is played by liberal Prime Minister Giovanni Giolitti (1842-1928).

A Piedmontese liberal in the wake of Cavour, he has pragmatically understood that Italy's growth depends on transnational capital flows. During his first mandate (1892-93) he has already re-shaped a still backward banking system, by founding the Bank of Italy, which becomes the single issuing institute in the country, and two other financial actors, which would play a crucial role in its industrialization: the Banca Commerciale Italiana (Comit, 1894), whose shares are held by German, Swiss and Austrian bankers, and Credito Italiano (1895), controlled by German, Italian and later French capital.

The first decade of the Twentieth century is then characterized by a real industrial take-off, and a leading role is again played by Giolitti himself: it's the so-called '*età giolittiana*' (1901-13). Gdp growth is estimated at 2.7% in the years 1896-1908, and 2.8% in the following five (Toniolo, 1990,

7); important firms – Ansaldo, Pirelli, Montecatini, Edison, FIAT, among others – emerge in the same period.

The moderate core of the post-unification state opens to new forces, both domestically and internationally: Catholics, reformist socialists, and fractions of the working class are partly integrated; welfare legislation is inaugurated. Italy enters the Lockean heartland, while at the same time maintaining some distinctively Hobbesian elements (De Grand, 2000): tariffs are kept and expansionist foreign policies still pursued, especially to comply with the interests of the state-owned component of Italian capital, involved in heavy industry and steel.

By the beginning of World War One, Italy has actually joined the core of the world economy, and its narrow Hobbesian institutions have gained consent in several social sectors.

What about nineteenth century Spain and its path towards industrial capitalism? Let us move to the Iberian peninsula.

## Spain, from Napoleon to Primo de Rivera (1815-1930)

Spain – unlike Italy – has been united under a monarchy since 1492 (Anderson, 1974). Once home to a magnificent empire, stretching over four continents, nineteenth century Spain suffers a long and apparently endless relative decline. After the loss of her American colonies (1823), spoiled and marginalized by British and French competitors, the monarchy goes more and more under a despotic degeneration (Trotsky, 1931).

The old ruling classes – the king, the landed nobility, the Church – even after being deprived of their wealth, carry on to ‘...preserve their old pretensions’ (Trotsky, 1931, 6). In the 19th century, the key ‘state class’ is the army, which represents the unity of the country and plays at times a modernizing role with frequent *pronunciamientos* – especially as far as the rather progressive artillery is concerned (Trotsky, 1931, 3-4).

In the century’s second half a certain industrial growth is spurred by a combination of foreign (French and German) capital and local (Catalan and Basque) entrepreneurship. At the same time the central state, operating within a Hobbesian context, keeps tariff barriers up, especially to defend Basque steel and Catalan textiles (Holman, 1996, 43-4). Economic growth is however modest, especially in comparison to the European core countries. Despite better starting conditions, thanks to the availability of raw materials such as copper and lead, Spain is overtaken by Italy after the ‘Giolittian spurt’ (1901-15).

The Spanish surge begins some years later and is clearly combined with the ‘assault’ of Western capitalism within the context of interimperialistic rivalry.

Heralds of the heartland are the Americans, who in 1898 crush Spain in the Cuban war, which is followed by other defeats in Moroccan conflicts. The ruling class is thus forced to reflect on its decline and the risk of being swept away by the new forces of capital and imperialism. Events have a deep impact especially on progressive intellectuals, who start supporting the idea of economic and political regeneration, according to European, mainly German, models: the ‘regenerationists’. Secondly, workers, organized in anarchist Unions, begin striking and rioting, and a massive rebellion occurs in 1909 in Barcelona (the *semana tragica*). A rising industrial bourgeoisie (especially in the Basque lands and Cataluña) feels then the limits of economic nationalism.

Tensions increase after World War One and its terrible economic effects on the whole of Europe.

At the onset of de Rivera's military dictatorship (1923-30), the social scenario is dominated by three groups (more-or-less coextensive with social classes). First, the landed nobility, part of the military, and the Catholic Church, which control the central state. Especially landowners from Castile and Andalucía support nationalistic and isolationist policies. Spain must follow its own traditions, and stay outside the European modernizing project (Bernecker, 2000). Secondly, the rising industrial bourgeoisie, which depends on the state for its wealth sources and aims at controlling the internal market – rather than looking for technological advancement or profit. Thirdly, an unstable middle class, orientated to modernization through the state and in a Spanish way. *Europeizar* becomes a key-word, but mainly with regard to the 'means' – not to the 'ends'. Spain must preserve its historical identity. Joaquín Costa (1846-1910) advocates for a radical European-like modernization, also through a repression of oligarchs and corruption *con mano de hierro*, and even invokes an 'iron surgeon' (*cirujano de hierro*) to rescue the nation from its troubles.

José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1950), on the other hand, strongly calls for the rule of a select minority, to defend the degenerated and corrupt country from the burst of the masses into the political struggle, be they the representatives of communism, emerging fascism, or technocratic American fordism.

Once again, the army plays the decisive role. In 1923 the long-awaited Leviathan arises: general Miguel Primo de Rivera. After decades of isolation, Spain attempts to catch up with the other European states, and in its own way.

Supported by the military, industrialists, conservatives, parts of the middle class, Rivera seizes power and proposes himself as the *cirujano de hierro*. During his dictatorship, industrial production boosts thanks to a program of public works and the establishment of state-led monopolies in such sectors as oil and energy. Despite his imitation of some of Mussolini's solutions, Primo de Rivera is no fascist dictator – as recognized by Trotsky (1931, 99-100) and Spanish communist Andrés Nin (1932). He styles himself as a *super partes* modernizer, while in fact crushing unions and workers' movements, but neither pursues nor actually achieves a totalitarian grasp on Spanish society. Fearing an institutionalization of the regime, most sectors (especially in the bourgeoisie) which have previously supported him leave Primo alone in 1930. Forced to resign, he abandons a changed and more complex society, now ready to enter the great international competition. 1930 Spain has apparently achieved the economic level of 1915 Italy, though in a more distinctive and linear Hobbesian fashion.

## Back to Italy: Mussolini's hobbesian state; a model, more than a contender

Whatever its origins, social grounds, international connections, funding sources, historical evolution, Italian fascism is here important as a model of a characteristic Hobbesian state; a model which will be borrowed by Nazi Germany and, as regards some economic policies, even (as it has been suggested) by F.D.Roosevelt's New Deal (Guerin, 1973, 23); a model where militarism, nationalism, totalitarianism, and a contending attitude towards both socialism and (theoretically) big 'plutocratic' capitalism are combined and intertwined. Empirical analysis shows how fascist policies have undergone several changes, sometimes according to pragmatic choices; and in the end fascism would not succeed, overthrown in the slaughter of World War Two.

In this context fascism is seen as a mainly international phenomenon. Its origins are rooted in at least two foreign elements: the First World War, with its devastating legacy for both capital – the problem of industrial reconversion – and labour – unemployment and deprivation; the spread of

socialism, from the Soviet Union to Hungary, Germany and Austria, with their successful, failed or aborted revolutions (1917/20). The new regime is first the outcome of the difficulties met by Italian society after its accession into the big international capitalistic game. Upper and middle classes seem unable to resist the challenges arisen out of the war, the spread of socialist ideas and the international competition.

On the domestic front, Mussolini's *fasci* have enlisted the support of industrial and agrarian capital, who see them as a tool against protests in factories and the countryside; at the same time, however, their rise wouldn't have been possible without the existence of a pauperized, disorientated, politically unaddressed petty bourgeoisie, which, pace Daniel Guerin and antifascist Luigi Salvatorelli (De Felice, 1970, 157-60), built up the 'mass bases' of the movement.

From the march on Rome to 1929, big capitalism maintains a firm grasp on Italian society. Mussolini needs recognition, both in Italy and internationally, and liberal professor Alberto De Stefani, appointed Finance Minister in 1922, represents a key-link with the Confederation of the Industrialists. With low fiscal imposition, privatizations, international distension, and loans from J.P.Morgan (The Economist, December 1925), fascism obtains support from Italian industry while remaining anchored to the Lockean heartland.

After the 1925 authoritarian shift and the Great Depression, a turn to a more interventionist and pervasive state takes place. As underlined by Salvemini, '[Fascist leaders] no longer depend, as they did from 1921 to 1926, on the money of private capitalists...The Fascist Party is no longer an organisation of mercenaries in the service of capitalism, but has become an independent force...It is not the first time in history that mercenaries have become their masters' masters' (1938, 421). Though he acknowledges that capitalists have still 'many strings in their bow', his analysis of the increased influence played by an emerging state class of high civil servants, chieftains, and bureaucrats, gives account of a clear Hobbesian shift in the second half of the 1920s.

At the same time, the crisis engendered by the Great Depression offers Mussolini the opportunity to penetrate even deeper into the economic system. The collapse of credit institutions such as Comit and Credito Italiano allows the state for the creation of a large conglomerate – the IRI (Istituto per la Ricostruzione Industriale, 1934) – which holds several activities under public control, with the aim of providing room for debate, coordination and compensation of interests between the state and private corporations.

On the other hand, big private capital, embodied by Turin carmaker FIAT, has since the early 1920s enjoyed pragmatic relations with Mussolini, and after the Hobbesian turn of the 1930s, is able to obtain even more protection. Tariffs and other barriers are raised and foreign competition, especially from American producers, diverted.

In the mid-1930s the perspective of a colonial war sounds attractive for both the state and the main entrepreneurs. Ethiopia becomes a chance to re-gain legitimacy and profits after the Depression. The alliance between the new bureaucratic state class and the 'corporate liberal' fraction of capital, mainly interested in cost-cutting new colonies, promotes the military activism of the late 1930s. Crude steel production rises to 2.3 million tons in 1938, while the number of annually produced vehicles moves from 45,000 (1933) to 71,000 (1938) (Mitchell, 1998). Protectionist measures are taken and prove a severe restraint on a raw materials-importing economy.

The precariousness of the balance between industry and the regime, international competition and transnational interests would clearly appear in the World War Two.

At its onset Italy is unprepared. The liberal internationalist fraction of capital, led by Alberto Pirelli, carries on interacting with its European and Atlantic counterparts, in the attempt to find a compromise. After the early military defeats in Africa, Greece, and Russia (1940-42), and Anglo-American bombings in the North, Italian capital gives up its loyalty to Mussolini. The 1943 coup which marks the end of the fascist regime is supported by part of the international big business, the



military, and the Crown. Liberal capitalists aim at an armistice with the Allies, countering the new wave of strikes in Northern factories, and tackling the Soviet challenge which is now coming from Moscow and closer Yugoslavia. In the long run, fascism has proved unable to comply with the interests of the most advanced, that is, internationalized, fraction of Italian capitalism. The country has now to find new concepts of accumulation and control.

## Spain's Hobbesian thrust under Franco (1936-1975)

The Spanish trajectory after 1930 shares several aspects with the post-1918 Italian one. The new democracy, whose basis are laid down in the 1931 republican Constitution, has to face the mounting pressures of workers' movements, trade unions and parties – partly the result of the rapid industrialization under Primo de Rivera; furthermore, in the difficult context of world economic recession, Soviet rise and Nazist challenge. As in the Italian (and German) case, a Hobbesian solution seems necessary.

After years of harsh confrontation, strikes, and uprisings (especially in Asturian mines, 1934), the surge of the military, led by Francisco Franco (Preston, 1995), is for the second time in thirteen years the signal of a 'revolution from above' (1936). Franco's coalition is nevertheless new in many respects. A notable fascist fraction, led by José Antonio Primo de Rivera, son of Miguel and founder of the *Falange*, supports the vision of a strong, authoritarian and all pervasive (in a word, totalitarian) state, according to the principles of authority, hierarchy, and order (Payne, 1999, 93). Fascism is now in power in Germany and Italy, and militarily and financially helps Franco's rise. Together with the *azules* other two forces support him: the military and the Catholic Church, with their traditional authority over Spanish society, especially in such areas as Castile and Andalucía, still controlled by powerful conservative landowners.

Despite the tough resistance of socialist and democratic forces, the Right wins, after three years of a bloody civil war and with decisive help from Italy and Germany.

During the Second World War, Franco holds a pragmatic position, and avoids entering the struggle, despite Hitler's threatening insistence. After the implementation of a state corporatist regime, expressed by the 'Vertical Syndicates', Franco is forced to move towards a less fascist<sup>vi</sup> and more pragmatic regime, in the light of the demands of parts of the military and the Axis' defeats after 1942.

Isolation and autarkic policies mean poverty and backwardness, which the new Hobbesian regime, mainly controlled by the military element, can hardly justify by making reference to world Masonic plots. In the opening context of the 1950s the Spanish state is forced to give voice to the market forces, and Franco chooses accordingly. In 1957 the economy is clearly lagging behind. Motor vehicles production amounts to ca. 30,000 units, compared to almost 400,000 in Italy. Autarkic policies have left the country at the bottom end of Western European economy. To survive politically and catch up, Franco needs a group of experts and a plan – preferably within his governing coalition. Catholic *Opus Dei* technocrats are the key-choice. Under their supervision, in 1959 a *Plan de Desarrollo* (Plan of Development) is adopted, one year after a similar attempt in far richer France. In a few years, economic results are excellent, especially thanks to foreign investment, tourism, and remittances from emigrants. The Franquist state partly loses its ideological and military traits and re-affirms itself in a more pragmatic way.

Opening to the international markets means also loans from the IMF and American financial aid. In the years 1957-75, per capita Gdp moves from 35.7 to 60.3% of the American one (Heston, Summers,

and Aten, 2002). Spanish society undergoes profound changes: a new and enriched middle class, in principle favourable to democracy, begins emerging, while the bourgeoisie seems not contrary to more liberal and possibly democratic changes. Franco appoints Juan Carlos de Bourbon as his successor (1969) and, despite his distrust of liberal principles, sets the stage for possible future reforms.

Pragmatism, good economic performance – and the ruthless suppression of oppositions, especially the communist one – help the Spanish state to resist and pave the way for the future democratic transformation. In contrast to Italy, it would enjoy a relatively high degree of legitimacy, also owing to the decline of strongly ideological positions, and would effectively manage the transition process towards democracy. The Spanish way to capitalism and liberal democracy is thus clearly state-driven and marked by a gradual opening of her public institutions to the liberal and democratic principles.

While part of the army and the extreme right remain loyal to authoritarian politics, the Communist Left (PCE, Partido Comunista Español) chooses the way to reformist Eurocommunism. The broad agreement between moderate forces is also made possible by the ability of the king and the first democratic premier Adolfo Suárez, who gathers a wide consent on the 1978 constitutional project. The rapidity, success, and peacefulness of the transition testify to the ‘increasing social cohesion of the Spanish bourgeoisie’ (Holman, 1996, 62) as well as to the relative solidity of a state apparatus which has led the development of civil society throughout the 1950s and 1960s and is now able to open to the forces of democracy. A strong element of distress would however soon come from the international arena: the decades of global neoliberalism are quickly approaching.

In the birth year of Spanish democracy (1978) Italy is shaken by the murder of Christian democrat leader Aldo Moro. The *miracolo* has faded away. Let’s go back to Italy, the collapse of its fascist regime and its schizophrenic path to the ‘global era’.

## Italy and the *miracolo economico* (1948-68)

A quite clear perspective on the future of Italy emerges in US post-war planning in 1942 (O’Sullivan, 2007). Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles advocates for a liberal state, to be included in a larger European co-operation framework. The liberal internationalist, Lockean vision is here particularly relevant. The frontrunners of the new political class are free trade advocates such as Alcide De Gasperi, Carlo Sforza (a leading exile in America) and Luigi Einaudi (Professor of Economics in Turin and former correspondent of ‘The Economist’). Together with them, a group of supporters of stronger state intervention is accepted and deemed important in a country ravaged by poverty and with a massive communist presence. A key role is thus played by the leaders of the Partito d’Azione (Action Party), who enjoy important links with the state-controlled banking system.

The two principal choices which pave the way for the accession of Italy into the ‘Western core’ are: 1. the institution of a merchant bank, Mediobanca (1946), with the task of re-organizing the financial infrastructures according to international parameters; 2. the appointment of liberal-minded politicians in the high state ranks – De Gasperi as Prime Minister, Einaudi as Governor of the Central Bank and then President, and others.

Strained by the inception of the cold war, the country is however profoundly divided. Once again, such divisions accrue to an ‘exceptionalism’ which marks a difference with Spain and other ‘Southern European’ countries. Decisive 1948 elections, fought in a climate of tension and under much-debated American pressure, are largely won by DC, with 48.5% of the valid votes.

The Communist Party (PCI, Partito Comunista Italiano) and its more moderate socialist allies are excluded from government: together they represent at least 31% of votes, according to the 1948 ballots. The cold war penetrates Italian society and the ruling coalition is driven to occupy most public positions, according to a 'militarized model' (F. de Felice, 2005), and a 'state within the state', made up of a party and its vassal allies, comes slowly to the fore. In a broad sense, it's an 'American party', stretching from convinced liberals (Einaudi, the Sicilian economist Corbino, De Gasperi himself) to more interventionist republicans and social democrats (like Ugo La Malfa). All of them share anyway a commitment to the market and the rejection of communist positions. The economic system is reshaped around Mediobanca, which includes since its beginnings liberal technocrats educated in the cosmopolitan environment of the Banca Commerciale Italiana during the regime years.

At the international level, De Gasperi seeks support from the Western allies.

Italy joins the NATO and is among the founders and strongest promoters of the European Communities. Foreign trade and American aid boost a tremendous economic change: the so-called *miracolo*, especially in the years 1958-63. Just a couple of data: crude steel output rises from 2.1 million tons in 1948 to 17 million in 1968; motor vehicles' production from 59,000 to almost 1.7 million, in the same period (Mitchell, 1998).

Such *miracolo* owes much also to relative backwardness, cheap labour and internal migrations, with tragical effects in terms of displacement, alienation, and exploitation; but precisely in this respect the Christian democrats play the second card, the domestic one. To enhance the legitimacy of the 'moderate' Republic, they first open to public intervention.

Besides the IRI, which builds a thick network of motorways and modernizes the steel sector, a new state corporation, the ENI (Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi), led by charismatic Mattei, achieves a prominent international position in the oil field, and promotes a blend of populist, anti-American and 'socialist' ideas, to some degree supported by the leftist wing of Christian democracy.

The second domestic step is the co-optation of the socialists, who, after years of preparation, join the government in 1963. Among the supporters of the new 'Centre-left', FIAT, now closer to progressive PRI (Republican Party), PC-maker Olivetti, and Pirelli, which share a Fordist vision, that is, the necessity to 'include' workers in order to definitively get rid of the Communist threat and trade unions battles<sup>vii</sup>.

After twenty years of republican governments Italy is an astonishingly richer country, but still full of contradictions. It has experienced a 'cold civil war' (Lepre, 1993) and citizens have opted for the two main parties – DC and PCI – as their source of identification, rather than the nation-state itself. The governments' attempts to include the moderate left, build a strong state-owned sector, and meet the demands of the most international fraction of capital are challenged by mounting pressures from below. In 1968 the state comes under the joint attack of workers and students. New political responses are needed.

## Spain after Franco: in the global era (1978-2008)

With the establishment of liberal democracy Spain 'officially' joins the Lockean heartland. Though many problems have not been solved, and new ones have emerged, the last thirty years tell us of a 'success story' of economic growth.

Spanish economy is now the ninth-largest in the world and in the last decade its annual expansion rate has been over 3.6% - well above the European average. Such growth has occurred in a period

marked by the difficult winds of globalisation, neoliberal adjustments, tough international competition and decline of welfare. The Spanish state has been able to adapt to the new scenario, and navigate through dangerous waters. To understand why, at least four possible explanations can be proposed.

First of all, the role of the king. *Rey* Juan Carlos has embodied the continuity with the past and the unity of the country in its newly democratic clothes. Especially in the early stages (1975-82) he has gained international reputation thanks to his action in support of democracy and resistance against the attempted military coup of 1981 (the *golpe Tejero*).

A second and crucial element has been the clear political direction given by the Socialist leadership, represented by youthful PSOE (Partido Socialista Obrero Español) premier Felipe Gonzalez. His main aim has been the accession to the European Communities; the goal has been achieved in 1986 and has brought about both economic restructuring and aid through funds from the Communities themselves. Europe has become 'the cardinal and transcendent thought' (Sanchez de Toca, in Holman, 1996, 196) to orient Spanish politics. After joining, Spain has continued a struggle to enhance both economic and political cooperation within Europe – especially during the Gonzalez era (1982-96).

Thirdly, the ideological flexibility of the PSOE and the political system itself. Especially after the consolidation of the PP (Partido Popular, People's Party) as the main opposition force, Spain has been enjoying a tendentially bipolar system, which has allowed the conservatives to return to power in 1996 and then witness Zapatero's victory in 2004 and 2008. Furthermore, flexibility has allowed for the establishment of good relationships between the main parties and the business community. At the onset of the PSOE era the banking system was based on the platform of the so-called *Siete Grandes*, established in 1971 as an informal forum of the largest private banks (Holman, 173ff.). The aim of the PSOE – the creation of two large European actors through mergers and acquisitions – has been shared by the most internationally oriented fraction of the banking system, the representatives of public companies, and the exponents of big transnational capital. Although Gonzalez did not achieve such objective, under the following Aznar governments (1996-2004) two giant players have emerged: the BSCH (Banco Santander Central Hispano) and the BBVA (Banco de Bilbao Vizcaya Argentaria) – often labelled as 'new conquistadors' due to their aggressive strategies on international markets.

A fourth key-element can be envisaged in the capacity of the PP (in power from 1996 to 2004) to carry through measures of liberalization, privatization, and de-regulation in the context of increasing involvement in international markets. Sectors such as services, tourism, and construction have largely benefited – and are still benefiting – from those policies.

Despite the above-mentioned evidence in support of the relative strength of the Spanish institutional structure and its Hobbesian ability to create and shape a business friendly environment, in several sectors state control seems to be slowly fading away. Among them, the spread of criminality, from micro to macro levels; ETA terrorism, and the rise of Basque and Catalan nationalism, an expression of the richest and fastest-growing regions of the country, apart from the Madrid community; the risk of economic recession which might be caused by a bubble in the construction market. A catalogue of shadows which obscure the achievements of the last years.

## Italy in the global era: from a divided to a privatized state (1968-2008)?

In the late 1960s the Italian 'state/society configuration' enters a crisis from which it has apparently not recovered. Peculiarly Italian problems add in fact to the storms caused by growing

interdependence and globalization since the 1970s, especially after the oil crises and the subsequent Atlantic 'neoliberal wave'.

At the beginning of the 1970s, the still fragile legitimacy of the Italian state requires new steps.

DC President Aldo Moro and PCI Secretary-general Enrico Berlinguer have understood the need to achieve a *compromesso storico* (historical compromise), in order to overcome the main ideological divide and establish a more effective and legitimate system of democratic governance.

While part of the DC moves rightwards, especially before issues such as divorce, abortion, and the new family laws (1975), Italy is shaken by years of red and black terrorism, rising internal tensions and fractures, international oil shocks; and when the institutionalization of some kind of agonistic political system seems possible, Moro himself is kidnapped and murdered (1978).

Whatever the interpretation of the role of international agents in the event, Moro's murder means the end of the after war experience. While the PCI is now semidetached from the Soviet allegiance and the DC strives to turn towards modernizing policies, the void is temporarily filled by the new socialist leader, Bettino Craxi, who aims to overcome the past divisions and build up a more effective government, somehow tailored on his charismatic qualities and centred on a moderate liberal/socialist force. As long as the communists are still excluded, the political system remains blocked and falls deeply into the hands of the parties and their acolytes (the *partitocrazia*).

While frequent devaluations of the lira give breath to a mainly export-led economy, 'rule by the parties' brings about corruption and massive public expenditures, and an already divided state is further split and fractured. The neoliberal whip used by Ronald Reagan, the profound differences between the partners in the European Communities and the Maastricht parameters themselves call into question the weakness of socialist reforms, the ill-managed welfare state and in the end a whole political system (1992)<sup>viii</sup>.

After the 1992 collapse Italy has assisted the rise of new and problematic divides. On the one hand, the 'Centre-left' – which pushed the country into the Euro area in 1998 – includes representatives of the moderate wings of the old parties, especially former communists and progressive Christian democrats and enjoys deeper links with the transnational and European business elite. On the other, the 'Centre-right' – in power in the years 2001-2006 – draws on strongly antipolitical forces (Mastropaolo, 2000), such as the Northern League and Silvio Berlusconi's *Forza Italia* and gathers support among Italian-based small-and-medium size enterprises. No coalition has so far carried through the widely-debated structural reforms which might give breath to an economy that has been one of the slowest-growing in Western Europe for many years.

Once again Italy is theatre to a variety of fractures and cleavages, and Berlusconi's takeover in the last years seems to embody a new and possibly threatening kind of statehood: after being divided and fragmented, the state got somehow 'privatized': a symbol of problems which, while to some degree shared by other democracies, are particularly evident in the Italian case. In this sense, doubtless an 'exceptional' one.

The last three decades have been deeply problematic for all Western states: not by chance the issue of the 'crisis of the nation-state', especially in Europe, has become a popular intellectual mantra, and with many good reasons. Starting from rather fragile premises, Italy has suffered from the worldwide turmoils more than other countries. New power constellations, broadly corresponding with more profound international and domestic structures, are however slowly emerging. The crucial intellectual challenge is now to investigate how the international economic re-alignments have affected and re-shaped the ruling classes and the main actors of the changing Italian scenario.

## Final remarks

While drawing a synthesis out of almost two hundred years is a complex task, some provisional and tentative conclusions can anyway be delivered.

1. In many respects, the trajectories of Italy and Spain are similar. Both countries have joined the capitalistic heartland as ‘second comers’; both have experienced long periods of dictatorship – mainly Hobbesian phases representing responses to international challenges; both have enjoyed the advantages of relative backwardness and uneven development, though in different moments.

2. From the economic viewpoint, Spain has developed later than Italy. Isolation, distance from the ‘core industrial Europe’, the long-term costs of a once immense empire might have all played a role. The Spanish catch up, started under the *Opus Dei* technocrats, has been mostly state-driven. Public institutions have proved strong enough to create a successful environment for market competition also because the ‘Communist threat’ was already over: partly annihilated by Franco; partly subsumed within the pragmatic direction chosen by Gonzalez’s PSOE.

3. On the other hand the Italian *Stato* has been often unable to achieve any form of social hegemony. Traditional explanations, dealing with familism, clientelism, local and regional identities, and so on, do not seem particularly useful. Such variables are part of the *explanandum*, rather than the *explanans*. It seems more interesting to stress how the state has usually been divided, and split, for many different reasons, which have multiplied in a period of global economy and transnationalization of politics. The Risorgimento state was mainly the result of the efforts of foreign interests and tiny Italian elites; post-war Republic has since the beginning been a ‘divided community of destiny’, as clearly highlighted by authors such as Franco De Felice (2005), Bodei (1998) and Salvadori (2007). The faltering State of the ‘second Republic’ can be read as an archipelago of forces which reacted differently to the massive global transformations of the last decades: big companies still trusting in the European and Atlantic anchor; smaller firms seeking protection from new Asian competitors; and the breakdown of a party system which has roughly been substituted for by ‘technocratic’ forces on the left and ‘populist’ on the right.

4. The role played by international pressures has been crucial throughout all stages of modern statehood. In the case of Italy, the strong Hobbesian reaction of the 1920s can be read as the effect of both World War One and the spread of socialism, which have accelerated social processes already underway in the country. The attachment to the Anglo-American heartland after 1943 has then decisively contributed to rapid economic development, but also to the reproduction of a new fracture, which has never been clearly settled. After 1989, new contrasts between the two Atlantic shores and within Europe itself have struck a blow to an already fragile statehood, based on broad compromises within and without the country.

5. In theoretical terms, those experiences confirm that the Lockean and Hobbesian configurations are basically ideal types. Reality is featured by multifaceted phenomena. Spain’s intercourse with global capitalism has been mainly coped with and led by the state. Italy, despite its centrality as a Hobbesian model under Mussolini, has been usually lacking hegemony and support, even during the *ventennio*. On the other hand, pre-unification Italy was home to an endogenous capital, whose role has often been neglected. In this sense, the whole of the modern Italian history shows that the latter has been a kind of outlier. Mainly shaped by international forces and through broad compromises, and featured by unresolved domestic fractures, Italy is suffering more than other European and Western partners the crisis of the state which has been engendered by global economic forces since the early 1970s. Some ‘exceptional’ traits of the Italian political experience do not anyway mean that the country is bound to remain a kind of European outlier, ‘sick man’ or the like. The complexities of the undeniable Italian

problems can be understood and possibly resolved only by properly tracing them to the peculiarities of its history and especially the decisive role played by the pressure of trans- and international forces.

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<sup>i</sup> See above all van der Pijl, 1998.

<sup>ii</sup> Idem, and also van der Pijl, 1996.

<sup>iii</sup> For instance, during the New Deal.

<sup>iv</sup> Industrial capitalism has mainly originated in Western Europe. Such interpretation sounds rather Eurocentric; the rise of capitalism in other world regions has been delayed by both colonialism and a blend of casual elements (especially geographical ones). See Frank, 1998.

<sup>v</sup> A pionieristic book by Farneti, a Turinese political scientist tragically passed away in 1980, focused on an empirical analysis of the Italian ruling class since 1861. According to his findings, 23% of 'historic Right' ministers were military officers; 21% landowners; 19% judges and state councillors. Within the 'historic Left' he found a relative majority of lawyers (29%), followed by civil servants (22%), and judges (16%), with a tiny 1% of entrepreneurs. See Farneti, 1989, p. 36.

<sup>vi</sup> On the non-fascist nature of the regime, see Linz, 2000, and the debate which followed, which is still ongoing.

<sup>vii</sup> See F. De Felice, 1999, for an accurate analysis of the strategy of the DC in the late 1950s.

<sup>viii</sup> See De Cecco, in Romano, 1992, and Parboni, in Graziani, 1987.