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8. Imagined Geographies: Political and Scientific Discourses on Italy's North-South Divide

As a secessionist movement, the Lega Nord, which promotes the formation of an independent northern Italian state named 'Padania', distinguishes itself by its professed anti-intellectualism. Its clearly populist discourse – Umberto Bossi, the Lega's leader, describes it as *popolano*, folksy – is scorned by the Italian intellectual community, which is generally hostile to the Lega. But together with its populist rhetoric the Lega has developed a framework for argument based on research in the social sciences. The highbrow version of the Lega's discourse focuses on several issues that are considered relevant within the mainstream Italian intellectual debate, such as the crisis of the Italian state, the process of European integration, and Italy's place in this process. The Lega legitimizes the secession of northern Italy by referring on the one hand to the inadequacy of the Italian state and the weakness of Italian national identity, and on the other to the territorial dimension of this weakness, namely, the sharp divide between the rich North and poor South, which it interprets as an ethnic divide between 'Padanians' and 'Italians'.¹

Social scientists are generally strongly opposed to secession, but they share many of the Lega's critiques of the Italian state. Although they dismiss the Lega's Padanian identity, many scholars interpret Italy's North-South divide as a normative dichotomy between a modern, civic North and a backward, less civic South – an opinion contested only by a minority. The political opposition between the Lega and the Italian intellectual community is thus contrasted by their often shared views on Italy's problems. In the first part of this chapter, we will discuss these parallels in the different interpretations of the role of the Italian state, and in particular in debates on the territorial dimension of its policies. In the second part, we will describe the Lega's Padanian identity, compare it with scholarly representations of North-South differences as a deeply-rooted cultural divide, and present the scientific critiques voiced in opposition to such representations. In the third part, we will analyse how these diverging interpretations of Italy's North-South divide fit into a more general evaluation of the Italian

process of nation-building. These debates shed light on the ideological outlook that produces affinities between social scientists and the Lega Nord, and they reveal the methodological problems involved in comparing societies and interpreting their differences.

Rejecting/Reforming the Italian State

From its origins, the Lega has presented itself as an anti-state and anti-establishment movement, and its secessionism is emblematic of the cleavage between it and mainstream public opinion. Even when the Lega tones down its secessionism, and proclaims its willingness to accept a federal or confederal reform of the Italian state, such proposals conceive of the state as being based on a freely established contract, whose parties maintain the right to dissolve it at any time.² This vision of the state clearly divides the Lega from mainstream intellectuals, since the latter (even if they are sometimes willing to accept a federal constitutional reform) refuse to question the unity and indivisibility of the Italian state. The right to secession is considered very definitely off-limits – the public debate on the Lega has hardly ever touched on this issue, since it is almost always assumed that secessionist proposals are illegal,³ and within the Italian intellectual community the pro-secessionist stance of the political scientist Gianfranco Miglio, for a time the Lega's ideologist, has remained exceptional. This anti-secessionism is taken for granted rather than argued about: apart from the occasional comment about the loss of international economic and political visibility and power that would accompany the formation of an independent Padanian state, references to Italian identity are apparently considered sufficient to counter secessionism.

The radical nature of this opposition, however, is mitigated by a shared critical attitude towards the Italian state. The Lega's policies in fact derive their legitimacy from the credibility of many of its critiques of the Italian state, especially as these were voiced at a time (particularly the early 1990s) when the state was undergoing a serious crisis, with the disclosure of major corruption scandals (commonly known as *tangentopoli*, 'kickbacktown') in which the political élite was deeply involved. The Lega claims that the Italian state is inefficient and too centralized. It overtaxes its citizens, its Byzantine bureaucracy inhibits private initiative, and it is dominated by political parties, a phenomenon called *partitocrazia* ('partitocracy'). Although this dominance is mainly associated with the christian democrats (*Democrazia Cristiana*, DC), who held power continuously from 1945 to 1992, in the Lega's view the recent crisis of *partitocrazia* and the dissolution of the DC has not put an end to a Rome-based system of power.

For the Lega, the Italian state is not only overcentralized, it also implements territorially differentiated policies. The Lega emphasizes the complicity between

the state and the South, claiming that the former is essentially a machine that taxes the North only to squander money in the South. The Italian state thus inhibits the autonomous development of the North, and is also inadequate in supporting the northern economy: it has not done enough to provide infrastructure for the North, nor is it helpful in supporting northern economic penetration of foreign markets. The Lega sees the northern regions as colonies of the Italian state. It actually uses the rhetoric of internal colonialism, characteristic of some European regionalist movements of the 1970s, which were generally leftist and Marxist-inspired. In his seminal book on internal colonialism, Michael Hechter has argued that the British state has consistently followed policies advantageous to England, and more particularly London and the Home Counties, and disadvantageous to the Celtic fringe (Scotland, Wales and Ireland). As a result of these policies – which he has defined as internal colonialism – the fringe regions are poorer and economically less developed, they remain economically dependent on the English core, and they are under-represented in the nation's ruling élite.⁴ The Lega uses the same phraseology in the reverse situation, as it claims that the colonial Italian state is inhibiting the development of the richer North.⁵ When condemning economic and cultural colonization by the Italian state, it often refers – as well as to the alleged discrimination against Padanian culture(s) and the over-representation of southerners in the Italian state apparatus – to the Italian welfare state, which has imposed a universal system of education and social security instead of leaving the North the opportunity to develop self-organized, private social and educational services.⁶

In the academic world, the Lega's critique of the Italian state has received a differentiated response. Its assertions of state inefficiency are considered well founded by friend and foe alike. Similar critiques have frequently been voiced by Italian and foreign scholars.⁷ Already in 1977 the American political scientist Sidney Tarrow analysed the relation between centre and periphery in the Italian state (as compared with France), reaching a conclusion similar to the one the Lega was to voice more than ten years later. He described Italy as a state where the innumerable, uncoordinated ways in which the central government intervenes in the periphery enforce inefficiency, so that the clientelistic networks typical of Italy function as unofficial substitutes for inadequate administrative structures. The political parties were heavily involved in these networks, and even the opposition parties like the PCI, the Italian Communist Party (*Partito Comunista Italiana*, now the DS, *Democratici di Sinistra*, Democrats of the Left) made use of them. Political parties thus acted as unofficial mediators between the centre and the periphery, between citizens and the state.⁸

The emergence of the Lega has again drawn the attention of public opinion and social scientists to the importance of sub-national government in Italy. Books on the issue, such as the one published in 1993 by the American political

scientist Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work* (based on research that predates the Lega), have attracted vast media coverage.⁹ Putnam's research has shown clearly that local and regional governments have greater legitimacy and are considered more trustworthy than central government, particularly in northern Italy. Within Italy, both the *tangentopoli* crisis and the Lega's successes have in fact prompted a myriad of generally federalist proposals for institutional reform of the state, but their intention to counter the Lega's secessionist stance has prevented a calm debate on the issue. Although most proposals for federalism refer to the inefficiency of the Italian state on the one hand, and a concern for a regional government at once more efficient and closer to its citizens on the other, the Lega's presence has left its mark on the debate on federalism and has steered discussions on the issue towards Italy's North-South divide and the territorial dimension of the policies of the Italian state.¹⁰

In arguing that the Italian state's policies have a territorially differentiated impact, favouring the South, the Lega refers in the first place to the way money in southern Italy has been invested. Until recently, it claims, control of state spending in the South was exercised by politicians more interested in maintaining clientelist networks than in stimulating the development of their region, and in fact their clientelist logic led to a wilful neglect of public services – since the generalized availability of such services would undermine their own position as gatekeepers offering access to them. This judgement on (past) spending in the South is almost unanimously accepted, and has lent credibility to the Lega's representation of northern Italy as a cow perpetually milked by the Italian state in order to subsidize southern parasitism. The Lega in fact assimilates parasitism to the welfare state – an amalgamation facilitated by the parasitic characteristics the Italian welfare system has effectively developed (the most notorious instance being fake disability pensions)¹¹ – and it argues that the productive and dynamic North has no need of a universal system of social protection. Privatized social protection should be based first and foremost on inclusion in the labour force – 'workfare' instead of welfare.¹²

As an alternative to the Italian state, the Lega proposes self-government for regional entities relying on their own territorial economic resources, and it believes that the conditions for such self-government are present in northern Italy.¹³ This being so, the modern, productive North is ready for inclusion in the competitive environment of the European Union, in a Europe of the regions, while the Italian state and the South, both allegedly parasitic, lack this modernity. In its more radical statements, the Lega proposes the exclusion of southern Italy from the European Union, an exclusion rhetorically emphasized by regarding the Italian state and the South as African. In its more moderate moments, and particularly when addressing an intellectual audience, it confines itself to prescribing a drastic neo-liberal economic cure for the South, to redeem it from its parasitic past.¹⁴

Many social scientists would agree with the Lega's opposition between a modern northern society and a South and an Italian state characterized by their backwardness.¹⁵ Particularly in the years before Italy was accepted into the European Monetary Union in 1998, anxieties about Italy's backwardness being an impediment to its integration into Europe were frequently voiced in similar terms to – and with the same arguments as – the Lega's. This convergence between mainstream concerns and the Lega's representation of the policies of the Italian state comes to light in discussions on the latter's distributive policies. The image of a modern northern Italy, financially exploited by the state to subsidize the South, has become a commonplace reproduced by social scientists both in Italy and abroad.¹⁶

The veracity of such an interpretation is hardly ever checked. A closer examination of the redistributive policies of the Italian state, however, even on the basis of the data given by the Lega, already makes it possible to draw a much more nuanced picture. Four northern regions certainly receive the lowest per capita spending: Lombardy, Piedmont, the Veneto and Emilia-Romagna. But those that receive the largest amount of money per capita, even according to the Lega's data, are the special-status regions, with the northern Valle d'Aosta and Trentino-Alto Adige heading the list.¹⁷ The southern mainland regions admittedly receive more than the four northern regions mentioned above, but the amount is substantially the same as that received by several central regions included in the would-be Padanian state, and less than northern Liguria. While the Lega may have a *prima facie* justification for claiming that several northern regions contribute more than they receive, its representation of the redistributive policies of the Italian state as being marked by a North-South divide can only be regarded as misleading.

Social scientists who have analysed the territorial dimension of the redistributive policies of the Italian state confirm this more nuanced picture. The *intervento straordinario* ('extraordinary intervention') for the development of the *Mezzogiorno* (southern Italy), often used as an argument to demonstrate the profits the South has derived from the state – was, overall, a substitute for normal contributions, rather than a supplement to them. Including other aspects of redistributive policies, namely welfare allocations, does not fundamentally alter this result. The higher amount received for disability and subsistence pensions in the South is counterbalanced by the proportionally larger number of labour pensions in the North. In general, it is difficult to establish with certainty which part of the country benefits most from redistributive policies.¹⁸

Notwithstanding the nuanced results of research on the redistributive policies of the Italian state, and even of the data produced by the Lega, the Lega's view of the North as being fiscally exploited by the Italian state in order to subsidize the South has become a commonplace, used without much thought even by many

social scientists and intellectuals. This viewpoint also marks proposals for full fiscal autonomy (or *federalismo fiscale*, 'fiscal federalism', the term currently used in Italy), i.e. the possibility for each region to keep its income entirely for itself, since they almost always intend to free the North from contributing to the South.¹⁹ Such rejections of the principle of inter-regional redistributive policies are generally informed by a neo-liberal rejection of welfare policies, but the more widespread assumption that the North is a victim of national fiscal policies has enhanced the intellectual and political credibility of such proposals.

The debate on the redistributive policies of the Italian state reveals the viewpoints shared by the Lega and mainstream intellectuals and scholars. The Lega's appearance on the scene has in fact led to an overall paradigm shift, from a traditional scholarly interest in the Southern Question to a contemporary focus on the Northern Question. Even though the Lega's secessionism is rejected, the Lega itself is nevertheless regarded as representing the dismay of northern Italians at the inefficient state and southern vices. The ideological predominance of neo-liberalism has undoubtedly helped to give legitimacy to the Lega's arguments against the welfare state and redistributive policies that favour the South.²⁰ The Lega has thus benefited from the intellectual disengagement of the 1980s, and the dismissal of the Gramsci-inspired leftist tradition, which was much more attentive to the Southern Question. But its arguments derive additional legitimacy from the past, and particularly from (widely-held) assumptions about the devious ways in which state money has been wasted in the South, which gives them credibility outside neo-liberal circles. In this way, the emergence of the Lega has reinforced the collective tendency to belittle the problems confronting these regions, which is reflected in the shift in interest towards the Northern Question.²¹ Although it can easily be argued that southern Italy continues to face much more serious problems than the North, there is nowadays relatively speaking a neglect of the Southern Question. Notwithstanding this northern focus, however, discussions and analyses of Italy's problems are still conceived within a national framework, like the solutions that are proposed – an approach the Lega rejects.

A Padanian Identity and Italy's North-South divide

Unlike mainstream Italian intellectuals, the Lega sees the flaws of the Italian state as a symptom of the non-existence of an Italian nation. As a legitimization for secession, the Lega argues that northern Italians have a distinct Padanian identity. In the Lega's representation of a Padanian nation, three different elements can be discerned: a definition of the Padanian people which underlines ethnic differences between Padanians and Italians, a civic definition which focuses on the his-

torical and cultural differences between northern and southern Italians, and finally, a definition of northern Italy as an aggregate of peoples who share a history of struggle against the all-invading power of central governments.

Although these three definitions are partly compatible, the difference between them is symbolized in the approximate territorial delimitation of the would-be Padanian nation-state. In its geographically most extended version, as expressed in the declaration of independence of 15 September 1996, Padania includes all the Italian regions north of Rome – an economic and political demarcation of the territory characterized by what the Lega regards as the northern culture of economic efficiency and civic virtues – and excludes all the regions with an allegedly southern culture (for the Lega, this includes Lazio, the region around Rome). Such a division, however, poses severe problems for the Lega when it comes to constructing a homogeneous identity, since the central regions included are culturally (and especially in their dialects) closer to the rest of Italy than to the northern regions, while their border with the South also appears to be an artificial construct. The Lega also, therefore, presents a smaller version of Padania corresponding to a geographical entity: Italy north of the Apennines (traditionally a natural border), centred around the plain of the river Po (to which the name Padania refers), which includes the most competitive regions of northern Italy (Lombardy, Piedmont, Emilia-Romagna and the Veneto), and which is also culturally more homogeneous, with its dialects in particular differentiating it from the rest of Italy.²²

In proposing a Padanian identity, the Lega also accepts the existence of regional sub-identities. In its proclamation of independence, it defines Padania as an aggregate of regional nations, each of which corresponds to a currently existing Italian region. Such an affirmation of regional sub-identities has enabled the Lega to include its original components, regionalist leagues. Notwithstanding its acknowledgement of these sub-identities, however, regionalist particularism is a threat to the Lega's organizational homogeneity and to its all-inclusive northern focus. Regionalism is strong, particularly in the Veneto, whose dialect and references to the glorious past of the Venetian republic allow a Venetian identity and the construction of a regional tradition to be affirmed with a certain credibility.²³

To affirm the existence of a commonly shared northern identity, the Lega therefore attempts to construct a common history of northern Italy. For example, it has presented the history of the Lombard or Padanian people as an exemplary tradition of struggle against a centralized, predatory state – a narrative that enables it to include historical personalities like Saint Ambrose (archbishop of Milan in the fourth century), and events like the struggle of the twelfth-century Lombard League against the emperor Frederick Barbarossa. In this re-deployment – in a regional and anti-centralist vein – of themes borrowed from national

history, Umberto Bossi and the Lega can easily represent themselves as the heirs to a heroic civic tradition.²⁴ The Lega has nevertheless considerable difficulty in putting forward a generic northern history, and its frequent references to the Lombard League can do little to hide the fact that such moments of northern political unity have been extremely rare, if not unique. The alternative – presenting regionalized versions, often centred around a particular city-state like Milan or Venice – is historically more plausible, but entails the risk of introducing divisive issues, particularly in a region where local identities are still strong.²⁵

While historical constructions of Padanian identity attempt as far as possible to incorporate the whole of northern Italy, ethnic constructions of the Padanian community focus on its smaller version, Italy north of the Apennines. According to this version, these regions are inhabited by a homogeneous community, marked by its pre-Roman Celtic inheritance, which has throughout its history maintained a common culture and a sense of community.²⁶ Such an interpretation reflects wishful thinking rather than a scientific reconstruction of the history of northern Italy. Cultural and, in particular, political divisions characterized the history of these regions until the unification of Italy in 1860. To the extent that a common identity existed before independence – an identity confined to the social élite and the intelligentsia – it is clear that this identity was Italian. Other references to a common, Padanian culture are likewise inconclusive: decorative styles and culinary habits are local or regional, not ‘Padanian’,²⁷ and Catholicism does not distinguish Padania from the rest of Italy. At best, it can be claimed that the regions north of the Apennines form a geographical unit and have related dialects, distinct from those in the rest of Italy.²⁸

The Lega’s affirmation of a Padanian identity is certainly the issue that creates the sharpest divide between it and a large majority of the intellectual community. Intellectuals and scholars generally have not even bothered to refute what they regard as nonsense, and confine themselves to sarcastic dismissals. The Lega’s reconstruction of regional identities is likewise deemed artificial. Although scholars agree that local and (sub-regional) provincial identities have always been strong, they argue that regional identities – except in the special-status regions – have weak historical roots, with the partial exception of the Veneto.²⁹

While the Padanian ethnic and historical identity are summarily rejected, the Lega is much more successful in presenting a northern civic identity, focused on the image of the virtuous *popolo produttore* (the ‘producing people’). The Lega describes northern Italians as economically enterprising people who are competitive on the global market but who nevertheless remain rooted in their communities. They possess a Calvinist work ethic on the one hand, and Catholic moral and family values on the other. Their attachment to tradition and local identity is combined with openness to the outside world, and this finds its expression in their common Padanian identity and their integration into the European Union.

This description of the Padanian people echoes the contemporary interest of social scientists from Italy and abroad in what is called the Third Italy, the regions of northern Italy outside the Milan-Turin-Genoa industrial triangle. In recent decades, these regions have undergone a rapid process of industrialization characterized by the preponderance of small and medium-sized enterprises with local roots. Throughout the Third Italy, highly specialized industrial districts have become strongly competitive on the national and international markets. Social scientists tend to underline the endogenous and auto-propulsive dynamics that sustain these local systems (and thus their independence of the Italian state), and to highlight their roots in local culture. They focus on the economic successes of these industrial districts, and neglect the negative social side-effects of such a development model. Their idealized descriptions, by now rife in academic literature, are deployed by the Lega to offer a positive image of northern Italians as *il popolo produttore*.³⁰

While social scientists generally consider the Lega's claim for a national Padanian identity a bluff, they often accept its contrast between a virtuous, productive and economically thriving northern Italy, with its hard-working inhabitants, and the South, marked by the influence of organized crime, economic backwardness and parasitism. The differences between northern and southern Italy on which the Lega bases its discourse can be traced back, at least in part, to hard facts – the southern economy *is* undoubtedly less competitive than its northern counterpart, unemployment *is* much higher in almost all southern regions, and organized crime does have mainly southern origins, even if it cannot be assimilated to the South as a whole. Since the North-South divide has proved to be persistent, Italian – and to a lesser extent foreign – intellectuals and scholars have attempted to offer an explanation for this divide.

By emphasizing the North-South contrast, the Lega has in fact drawn fresh attention to a debate as old as, if not older than, the Italian state: even before unification, eminent politicians had expressed reservations about incorporating southern Italy (until 1860, the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies) into a unified state, and throughout the history of the Italian state the North-South divide has remained a crucial element in its political geography. The Lega explains the contrast between a 'productive' North and a 'parasitic' South by the cultural characteristics of northern and southern Italians, and particularly the strong work-centred culture of the former and the absence of such a culture in the South. The Lega stops short of biological racism, and acknowledges the possibility that southerners may redeem themselves from their defects by adopting northern virtues. At times, when addressing itself to an intellectual audience, or when attempting (particularly in 1993) to attract a following in central and southern Italy, the Lega has even (up to a point, but never completely) de-territorialized the opposition between productive and parasitic Italians.³¹

Overall, the Lega's imaginary geography, in which northern Italy is conceived as a more modern and morally superior society, corresponds to the predominant mode of interpretation of Italy within the intellectual community. Scholarly representations of Italy that follow this pattern, however, reveal the methodological risks inherent in this approach. They have a tendency to exaggerate systematically differences between northern and southern Italy, and thus to idealize northern Italy, as is demonstrated by mainstream representations of the industrial districts of the Third Italy. Pride in northern Italy's past, its medieval communal traditions and its crucial contribution to the Renaissance is certainly justified, but there is a clear tendency to downplay the less positive aspects of the North's past and present. Characteristically, the northern origin of Italian fascism is seldom discussed, and Putnam for example, in his reconstruction of the civic traditions of the North, neglects this issue.³²

Descriptions of the South, on the contrary, readily focus on its negative qualities. This process was enhanced by the emergence of the Lega, which started a vogue for trashing the South in the Italian media.³³ A characteristic example is the journalist Giorgio Bocca, a prominent member of Italy's cultural establishment, who in 1990 published a book entitled *La disunità d'Italia* (Italy's Disunity) which describes southern Italy as a country devoid of civilization, dominated by organized crime. This corruption, he claims, threatens to contaminate the North, since the state has already degenerated thanks to southern mores, but fortunately the Lega represents the sane forces of resistance.³⁴ Viewing the North-South contrast as a moral divide is in fact a traditional way of interpreting Italy. Back in 1962, the historian Luciano Cafagna referred to the long-standing tradition of *antimeridionalismo* (anti-southern points of view), the tendency of northerners to regard the South as corrupt and the state itself as infected by this corruption.³⁵

The hegemony of the 'northern' approach is revealed in its use by foreigners, assumed to be unprejudiced. Robert D. Putnam's *Making Democracy Work* purports to explain the differential in efficiency between regional governments (much more efficient in the North), and does this by referring to cultural differences. He contrasts the co-operative and civic culture of the northern Italians with the 'amoral familism' of southern Italians, i.e. their exclusive defence of the interests of the nuclear family.³⁶ Like several other contemporary scholars in Italy and abroad, he holds the defects of southern culture responsible for its backwardness. Assumptions about the flaws of southern culture also appear in recent research on the entrepreneurial capacities of northern Italians, which often takes it for granted that such capacities are much weaker or non-existent in the South.³⁷ These authors admittedly refuse to interpret differences between the North and the South as an ethnic divide. Putnam, for example, explains the gap in efficiency between the North and the South by path dependence: a virtuous circle has created a modern, civic and economically successful North, a vicious

circle a backward South. But by rooting this path dependence in a long historical tradition, in Putnam's case by interpreting northern virtues as deriving from the medieval Italian city-states and southern vices from the feudal realm of the authoritarian emperor Frederick II, such explanations reify the North-South opposition, and thus in turn lend legitimacy to a political discourse that in fact redefines such differences in ethnic terms.

The opposition between a virtuous North and a South lacking in these virtues is by no means accepted by all social scientists. Scholars from southern Italy, or those who focus their research on southern Italy, have continually voiced their criticism of stereotyped negative representations of the South and the unilateral vision behind them. In a methodological critique of such representations, Carmine Donzelli, a prominent student of southern Italy,³⁸ has given an overview of the empirical and methodological errors social scientists commit in representing the South. Their errors tend to be predetermined by their dichotomous vision of Italy, and they therefore underline the negative qualities of the South, which mark its Otherness. Positive aspects of the South are neglected, while any continuity between the North and the South is too quickly overlooked. They describe the South as an eternally backward society, and generally downplay the monumental changes that have taken place there, particularly since the second world war. The South is too readily portrayed as a society beyond salvation, an inferno – an image Donzelli contests in the title of his article, in which he compares the South with purgatory, thereby offering it the possibility of redemption, and thus improvement.³⁹

In this context, it is not surprising that scholars studying southern Italy have been the ones most involved in discussing the meaning and interpretation of Italy's North-South-divide. Their reflections are of particular interest, since they highlight the political significance of interpretations of this divide. In his introduction to his *Breve storia dell'Italia meridionale* (A Short History of Southern Italy), published in 1993, at the pinnacle of the Lega's success, the historian Piero Bevilacqua affirms the importance of avoiding distorted and stereotyped representations of southern Italy. He deplores the fact that the media still use traditional, generally negative representations of the *Mezzogiorno*, and neglect the important contribution of a new generation of historians and social scientists to an understanding of the South. Those who systematically put forward stereotyped representations of the South bear a moral and political responsibility for northern secessionism, since their contributions have given legitimacy to the Lega's unilateral vision of Italy.⁴⁰

Bevilacqua contrasts the subjectivity of the media with the objectivity of scientists. The historian Gabriella Gribaudi highlights instead the role of social scientists in reproducing negative stereotypes of the South, which southerners themselves have often accepted. Mainstream social scientists perceive the South as backward, and they adapt, reinterpret or ignore empirical data that cannot be fit-

ted into this framework.⁴¹ Referring to the ethnic conflicts in Eastern Europe, she notes that interaction does not automatically lead to understanding, and the intellectual debates on Italy's North-South divide confirm this opinion. There is no institutional or language barrier to divide scholars from northern and southern Italy, and scientific publications criticizing stereotyped representations of the South are easily accessible. Scholars nevertheless continue to reproduce such stereotyped visions, even though the methodological errors behind them have repeatedly been denounced, and the emergence of the Lega has shown that they are in danger of being politically manipulated. The facility with which northern Italian intellectuals and outsiders reduce the South to a homogeneous and inferior Other can in fact, as the anthropologist Jane Schneider argues, be regarded as an Italian version of Orientalism – the construction of a stereotyped and homogenizing discourse on the Other in order to affirm one's own cultural superiority.⁴²

Diverging Visions of the Italian State and its History

While the mainstream interpretation of Italy's North-South divide can be seen as grounded in a stereotyped opposition, it derives its relevance from being the hegemonic discourse on Italy. Its attachment to the Italian state separates this 'northern' discourse from the Lega's secessionism, but they both interpret Italy's North-South divide as a moral hierarchy. Their view is contested only by a minority of scholars, who criticize their stereotyped representations of southern Italy and their reified opposition between a civic and modern North and the South as the negative Other. These three points of view – the Lega's 'Padanian' outlook, the mainstream 'northern' one, and the minority 'southern' one – can be considered ideological perspectives on the Italian state and its North-South divide, all rooted in different interpretations of the history of Italy as a unified nation-state and of the Italian process of nation-building.

To deconstruct Italian national identity, the Lega argues that the Italian state has been unable to create an Italian nation. On unification, in 1860, national sentiments were weak, and present only within a small élite. The famous statement made at the time by the prominent politician Massimo d'Azeglio, 'now that Italy is made, we need to make Italians' (incidentally often quoted by the Lega), testifies to the sense of mission felt by the post-unification élite, but also its isolation. Historians for example have emphasized the élitist nature of the unification process, and the inability or unwillingness of the post-unification élite to integrate the popular classes into the new state, or to take their aspirations into consideration. Recently, some historians have also argued against the traditional historiography of the *Risorgimento* (the process of national unification), which described the Italian state as its inevitable outcome. They deny the

centrality of the process of nation-building, which in their view was only one of the possible outcomes of the political struggles of Restoration Italy. The emergence of the Lega has, moreover, again drawn attention to the strong regional diversity within Italy during the *Risorgimento*.⁴³

The Lega combines an affirmation of the artificiality of the *Risorgimento* with the removal of the sacred aura surrounding its heroes, King Victor Emmanuel II, Cavour, Garibaldi and Mazzini. Although public opinion does not readily accept this denigration of national symbols, the Lega's polemics against the process of unification coincide with a more general preoccupation with what went wrong with the *Risorgimento*, and particularly with the process of forming the Italian state.⁴⁴ Many of the latter's defects have their roots in unification. According to Tarrow, its peculiarities are a consequence of how it was organized after 1860: a centralized system of prefects to control the population was weakened by limiting the scope of their responsibilities (mainly political and social control), with, as a consequence, overlapping intervention by a multiplicity of government bodies, and overall inefficiency.⁴⁵ The British historian Denis Mack Smith has argued that the unclear division of power between the king and the parliament was instrumental in limiting political responsibility and increasing corruption.⁴⁶

Although academic debates on the *Risorgimento* have revised the Italian nationalist hagiography, they have rarely questioned the existence of the Italian nation as such. Generally speaking, the present-day existence of an Italian identity is taken for granted, and the undeniable attachment to Italy expressed up to now even by the more Lega-minded regions gives this assumption credibility.⁴⁷ The linguistic unification of Italy, the spreading of the use of standard Italian side by side with or instead of regional dialects, is perhaps the most visible sign of the roots the Italian nation has put down.⁴⁸

Italian intellectuals share this loyalty to Italy, and the Lega's anti-Italian rhetoric has in fact led to a renewed interest in Italian national identity. The historian Mario Isnenghi has pointed out that, with the emergence of the Lega, scholars have consciously re-oriented their research programmes towards rediscovering the content of such an identity. Hence their interest in periods that marked the formation of the Italian nation, such as the *Risorgimento*, the first world war, the Resistance movement of 1943-1945 and the post-war foundation of the Italian republic.⁴⁹ But more often than not these debates bring out the controversial character of such events. Analogously, partisans of a positive, civic identity for Italy quite often have a defensive attitude to such an identity, and tend to despair of its feasibility. This defensiveness demonstrates the weakness of Italian national identity: its exaltation takes the form of a passionate masochist nationalism, the proclamation – at once proud and shame-faced – of the defects of Italians.⁵⁰ The attachment to national identity is thus combined with uncertainty about its content.

The core of the weakness of Italian national identity lies in its relation to the Italian state. As the American political scientists Sidney Almond and Gabriel Verba already noted almost forty years ago, the content given to this identity is seldom political. Italians appreciate their country's culture, art and literature, and voluntarily praise its beauty. But they seldom extend such a positive appreciation of their country to its political institutions, towards which most of them react negatively.⁵¹ Although it has been in existence now for more than a century, the Italian state has been unable to create an active sense of common togetherness based on civic values. When the historian Ruggiero Romano traces an Italian identity back to the late medieval period, this identity includes the unpunished arrogance of the leading classes, the delicate nature of public relations, and consolidated forms of corruption.⁵²

Within Italy, there is a strong tendency to interpret problems such as the defects of the state or the lack of civic virtues as signs of the country's backwardness. Italy is perceived as being insufficiently modern, despite empirical evidence to the contrary, such as its economic strength and the high figures for consumption and life expectancy. The need for modernization is a central issue in the political and intellectual debate in Italy, and its predominant interpretation identifies modernity with the United States and Western Europe.⁵³ Intellectuals readily interpret Italy's deviations from this model as a lack of modernity and, in a revealing parallel with the North-South dichotomy within Italy, they contrast Italy's real or alleged vices with a stereotyped and sociologically unrealistic ideal model, which is assumed to exist outside Italy.⁵⁴ Following a long-standing tradition, mainstream scholars often explain Italy's backwardness by the corrupting influence of an allegedly deviant or barbarian South. Anxieties about Italy's international status certainly explain the tenacity of such interpretations, since by locating backwardness in the South they redeem northern Italy as a modern, European region.

This outlook is vehemently opposed by scholars who reject the stereotyped identification of the South with backwardness. These have produced an alternative interpretation of the role of the Italian state. Without denying the part played by endogenous cultural factors, they argue that the state was crucial in reproducing the oft-denounced flaws of southern Italy and the North-South divide. The so-called barbarian revolts of southern Italians after unification can in their view be explained by the harshness with which the new state imposed itself. Likewise, corruption in the South has always occurred in connivance with northern interests, and with the active collaboration of the state. Since the second world war, the state has played an important role in modernizing and developing the South, but its intervention has reproduced (albeit in a different form) many of the old problems that used to beset southern Italy. If southern Italy today has a social structure that is less responsive to civic culture and economic

development, this is mainly the result of the efforts of the state apparatus – and particularly the christian democrats, who dominated until 1992 – to maintain a structure that was advantageous for their own interests.⁵⁵

To counter images of southern backwardness, students of southern Italy affirm its integration into Europe, its modernity and its normality.⁵⁶ The problems of the South are not caused by its backwardness – rather they reveal the risks inherent in the processes of economic development and modernization.⁵⁷ Even when these scholars discuss the particular features of the history of the South, including its negative aspects, they point out that its problems are those of Italy as a whole, resulting from the particular nature of the Italian state.⁵⁸

Mainstream social scientists, however, tend to view the state as favouring the South (as the unverified allegations regarding its distributive policies showed), they minimize its role in reproducing the South's problems, and analogously ignore its support of the economic development of the North.⁵⁹ In a study of state subsidies to small-scale industrialists, Linda Weiss has pointed out how the growth of small industry in northern Italy has been encouraged by policies that promote it strongly while offering little support to small-scale entrepreneurs in the South.⁶⁰ This fact, however, is generally not acknowledged in scientific literature, where the development of local systems is usually described as an auto-propulsive, endogenous movement. Many researchers appear to take it for granted that positive developments in Italy are caused by the autonomous mechanisms of the market, while negative developments are due to intervention by the state. Such a view can easily be given a territorial projection, associating the North with the former, the South with the latter, and thus lending scientific legitimacy to the Lega's North-South divide. Like the Lega, these researchers combine (often justified) critiques of the Italian state with a misinterpretation of its policies, an ideologically-coloured denial of the actual territorial dynamics of these policies.

Conclusion

Overall, scholars in Italy reject the Lega's secessionism and two of the main arguments that sustain it – the existence of a Padanian nation, and its view of the state as based on a freely established contract whose parties maintain the right to dissolve it. But they generally share its negative vision of the Italian state, and concur with its interpretation of Italy's North-South divide. The weaknesses of the Italian state have certainly facilitated the Lega's task, since they enable it to place its secessionist proposals within a framework of critiques of the state's dysfunctioning, which even its most ardent opponents consider credible. To give such critiques a secessionist dynamic, the Lega has embedded them in a discourse that combines an

affirmation of Padanian ethnic identity with economic ideas close to neo-liberalism. By presenting northern Italy as a community ready for integration into the global economy, and contrasting it to the archaic Italian state, the Lega offers a theme to which public opinion and mainstream scholars are sensitive. Both make use of a stereotyped interpretation of Italy which reconstructs the virtues of the North as culturally given, and the action of the state as an external fact, linked with southern vices. The case of Italy demonstrates how such a hierarchy can be converted into a nationalist ethnic discourse, in which the presence of an inferior Other can legitimize secession and the breaking of the bonds of national solidarity.

Mainstream social scientists share with the Lega Nord an outlook in which differences between the two parts of Italy are interpreted as a polarity, an opposition which is given a normative value. This outlook is grounded in strongly-felt concern about the country's alleged lack of modernity and anxiety over its international status, reinforced by the view of many foreign scholars who regard Italy's modernity as borderline. Relegating backwardness to the South, emphasizing the positive characteristics of northern Italy (particularly the ones that have attracted laudatory comments abroad, such as the industrial districts of the Third Italy) then becomes for Italians, and particularly northern Italians, a strategy for asserting more firmly their country's favourable position among modern states and for legitimizing its inclusion in the European Union.

The parallels between the thinking of the Lega and that of mainstream social scientists and intellectuals result from a shared imaginary geography, whereby countries and regions are classified according to their degree of modernity. This classification predetermines the observations made by scientists, and biases their judgement in favour of the more modern North – or, at an international level, the United States and Western Europe. It enables them to downplay the complexity of the processes that have produced, and continue to reproduce, regional differences. The Italian debate thus reveals the importance of avoiding a stereotyped and biased representation of regions and nations, and the need for self-conscious reflection on the terms and methods used in inter-regional comparisons. It also shows, however, how an imaginary geography and the ideological value attributed to it can shield social scientists from embarking on such a reflection.

Notes

- ¹ Throughout the text, I refer to the 'South' and the 'North' as symbolic categories corresponding to the Italian categories 'Il Sud' and 'Il Nord'. They may be understood as the equivalents of nations, and they are hence given a capital S and N respectively. The terms 'northern Italy', 'southern Italy', 'northern Italians' and 'southern Italians' simply refer to regional distinctions, and are therefore in lower-case.

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'South' and 'North' also refer to geographical entities, although the 'South' is the better defined unit (it includes the regions of Sicily, Sardinia, Calabria, Campania, Puglia, Basilicata, Abruzzi and Molise). Besides the northern regions (Valle d'Aosta, Piedmont, Liguria, Lombardy, Trentino-Alto Adige, Veneto, Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Emilia-Romagna) the 'North' may include some central regions (Tuscany, Umbria, Marche), although one central region, Lazio (where Italy's capital, Rome, is located), is systematically not included in the North.

- ² Gaspare Nevola, 'La politica della secessione', *Rivista italiana di scienza politica*, Vol. 28, No. 1, 1998, pp. 119-156, and especially p. 145. The Lega's programme is set out in Umberto Bossi and Daniele Vimercati, *Vento dal Nord*, Milano, Sperling & Kupfer, 1992; Umberto Bossi and Daniele Vimercati, *La Rivoluzione*, Milano, Sperling & Kupfer, 1993; Umberto Bossi, *Tutta la verità. Perché ho partecipato al governo Berlusconi. Perché l'ho fatto cadere. Dove voglio arrivare*, Milano, Sperling & Kupfer, 1995; and Umberto Bossi and Daniele Vimercati, *Processo alla Lega*, Milano, Sperling & Kupfer, 1998. For an overview of the Lega's history, its political viewpoints and its programmatic changes, see Ilvo Diamanti, *La Lega. Geografia, storia e sociologia di un soggetto politico*, Roma, Donzelli, 1995; and Roberto Biorcio, *La Padania promessa*, Milano, Il Saggiatore, 1997.
- ³ Nevola, *op. cit.*, p. 127.
- ⁴ Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism. The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1536-1966*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975.
- ⁵ The Lega's use of the rhetoric of internal colonialism appears to be a legacy from its origins, when it was sponsored by the autonomists from the Valle d'Aosta. Bossi occasionally refers to authors who have theorized on internal colonialism, such as Robert Blauner (Max Ottomani, *Brigate rosse. A Sud e al Nord del senatore Bossi*, Napoli, Tullio Pirante Ed., 1992, p. 108), without discussing their theories.
- ⁶ Pier Paolo Poggio, 'Il naturalismo sociale e l'ideologia della Lega', in Giovanni De Luna (ed.), *Figli di un benessere minore. La Lega, 1979-1993*, Scandicci, La Nuova Italia, 1994, pp. 137-196.
- ⁷ E.g. Sabino Cassese, *Lo stato introvabile. Modernità e arretratezza delle istituzioni italiane*, Roma, Donzelli, 1998; and Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1990.
- ⁸ Sidney Tarrow, *Between Center and Periphery. Grassroots Politicians in Italy and France*, New Haven Conn./London, Yale University Press, 1977.
- ⁹ Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work. Civic Tradition in Modern Italy*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1993.
- ¹⁰ Proposals for a reform along federal lines certainly do not always share the Lega's focus, and several proposals for federalism, particularly from the centre-left, actually emphasize regional collaboration, and particularly co-operation between Southern and Northern regions. See e.g. Vannino Chiti, 'L'Italia fra federalismo vecchio e nuovo', *Nuova Antologia*, Vol. 132, No. 2204, 1997, pp. 39-63. The current debate, however, remains marked by the Lega's stance, as is shown by the emphasis on the issue of fiscal federalism (see below).
- ¹¹ For a discussion on the Italian welfare state, and particularly the circumstances that caused its parasitic excrecence, see Giulio Scaramellini, Elena dell'Agnese and Guido Lucarno, 'I processi redistributivi', in Pasquale Coppola (ed.) *Geografia politica delle regioni italiane*, Torino, Einaudi, 1997, pp. 337-400.
- ¹² Poggio, *op. cit.*
- ¹³ Alessandro Casaccia, 'Illusioni antistataliste e realtà neostataliste', *Nuvole*, No. 12, 1996, pp. 57-60.
- ¹⁴ Bossi and Vimercati, *La Rivoluzione, op. cit.*, pp. 194-196; Giancarlo Pagliarini, 'Le ragioni della Lega', *Nuvole*, No. 12, 1996, pp. 35-48, especially pp. 44-48.

- ¹⁵ E.g. Piero Bassetti, *L'Italia si è rotta? Un federalismo per l'Europa*, Roma/Bari, Laterza, 1996; Roberto Mainardi, *L'Italia delle regioni. Il Nord e la Padania*, Milano, Bruno Mondadori, 1998.
- ¹⁶ E.g. Allen Buchanan, *Secession. The Morality of Political Divorce from Fort Sumter to Lithuania and Quebec*, Boulder/San Francisco/Oxford, Westview Press, 1991, p. 115; Milica Zarkovic Bookman, *The Economics of Secession*, New York, St Martin's Press, 1992, pp. 106-107.
- ¹⁷ Pagliarini, *op. cit.*, p. 41. The author of the article, Giancarlo Pagliarini, was budget minister for the Lega in the Berlusconi government in 1994 and can thus be considered well informed. The five special-status regions – Valle d'Aosta, Trentino-Alto Adige, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Sardinia and Sicily, inhabited by ethnic minorities or characterized by secessionist tendencies – were granted autonomy after the second world war (Friuli only later, in 1964), and have a larger measure of autonomy than the other regions (which obtained regional self-government later, in 1970). The position of the four Northern regions – Lombardy, Piedmont, the Veneto and Emilia-Romagna – on the giving side of fiscal redistribution is confirmed by Scaramellini *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 349-351. These four regions clearly pay more in taxes per capita than they receive, while the other regions either receive more or break even.
- ¹⁸ A good overview of these redistributive policies is given by Scaramellini *et al.*, *op. cit.*
- ¹⁹ It should be noted, however, that the proposals for the practical application of fiscal federalism considerably diminish the radicalism of this principle, since they generally include the continuation of some forms of regional distributive policies. See e.g. Giuseppe Valditara, 'La Bicamerale e il federalismo', *Federalismo & Libertà*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1998, pp. 35-44. Such caution is informed by an awareness of the centrifugal dynamics its implementation would cause. Cf. Giorgio Ragazzi, 'Federalismo fiscale e questione meridionale', *Federalismo & Società*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1995, pp. 29-57.
- ²⁰ E.g. Bassetti, *op. cit.*; Mainardi, *op. cit.* It should be noted, however, that although the Lega is clearly influenced by neo-liberal economic theories, its vision of society with an emphasis on the Padanian community and its networks of solidarity is in many ways very different from neo-liberal doctrines.
- ²¹ Scaramellini *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 343-344; Biorcio, *op. cit.*, pp. 133-134.
- ²² The borders of even this smaller version of Padania are shifting. Sometimes it corresponds to the regions belonging to the 'North-West' and 'North-East' entities used in official statistics. On other occasions, when the cultural unity of Padania is emphasized, the right to self-determination of the linguistic minorities within these regions (particularly the German-speaking South-Tyrolians and the French-speaking inhabitants of the Valle d'Aosta) is asserted.
- ²³ Percy Allum and Ilvo Diamanti, 'The Autonomous League in the Veneto', in Carl Levy (ed.), *Italian Regionalism. History, Identity and Politics*, Oxford/Washington D.C., Berg, 1996, pp. 151-169.
- ²⁴ Guido C. Bolla and Luigi F. Imperatore, *Da Ambrosio a Bossi. Lotte per la libertà nella Padania*, Milano, Edi. B.I., 1992; Gilberto Oneto, *L'invenzione della Padania. La rinascita della comunità più antica d'Europa*, Bergamo, Foedus Editore, 1997.
- ²⁵ Stefano Cavazza, 'L'invenzione della tradizione e la Lega Lombarda. Note introduttive', in Aldo Bonomi and Pier Paolo Poggio (eds), *Ethnos e demos. Dal leghismo al neopopulismo* (Iter, No. 8), Milano, Mimesis, 1995, pp. 195-213, especially pp. 207-208.
- ²⁶ Oneto, *op. cit.*, pp. 79-93.
- ²⁷ According to Oneto (*ibid.*, p. 109), this demonstrates the unity in diversity of Padanian culture, but this argument seems specious, since it could be applied to any context.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 63-75.
- ²⁹ E.g. Adrian Lyttelton, 'Shifting Identities: Nation, Region and City', in Levy (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 33-52; Allum and Diamanti, *op. cit.*

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- ³⁰ E.g. Sandro Fontana, *La riscossa dei lombardi. Le origini del miracolo economico nella regione più laboriosa d'Europa. 1929-1959*, Milano, Mondadori, 1998; Mainardi, *op. cit.* For critiques of these representations see Aldo Bonomi, *Il capitalismo molecolare. La società al lavoro nel Nord Italia*, Torino, Einaudi, 1997.
- ³¹ Bossi and Vimercati, *La Rivoluzione*, *op. cit.*
- ³² Gianfranco Bettin, 'Le radici della cultura civica nell'Italia divisa', *Quaderni di Sociologia*, Vol. 37, No. 5, 1993, pp. 161-171, especially p. 165.
- ³³ Sidney Tarrow, 'Making Social Science Work Across Space and Time: A Critical Reflection on Robert Putnam's "Making Democracy Work"', *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 90, No. 2, 1996, pp. 389-397.
- ³⁴ Giorgio Bocca, *La disunità d'Italia*, Milano, Garzanti, 1990.
- ³⁵ Luciano Cafagna, *Il Nord nella storia d'Italia. Antologia politica dell'Italia industriale*, Bari, Laterza, 1962, p. 332.
- ³⁶ The concept of 'amoral familism' was coined by the American political scientist Edward Banfield, who explained the backwardness of the Southern village he studied in 1955 by what he called the ethos of amoral familism, encapsulated in the adage 'Maximize the material, short-run advantage of the nuclear family; assume that all others will do likewise' (Edward C. Banfield, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*, New York, The Free Press, 1967 (1958), p. 83). In his view, this ethos inhibited the development of modernity. Both the concept itself and its generalized application to Southern Italy have been the object of heated polemics, and most commentators agree that it should be applied with caution, and certainly not unduly generalized to the entire South (see e.g. Paola Filippucci, 'Anthropological Perspectives on Culture in Italy', in David Forgacs and Robert Lumley, *Italian Cultural Studies. An Introduction*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 52-71, especially pp. 54-55; and Gabriella Gribaudi, 'Images of the South', in *Ibid.*, pp. 72-87, especially pp. 83-84 and 86).
- ³⁷ Anna Cento Bull and Paul Corner, *From Peasant to Entrepreneur. The Survival of the Family Economy in Italy*, Oxford/Providence, Berg, 1993, p. 127.
- ³⁸ Carmine Donzelli is director of the IMES (*Istituto meridionale di storia e scienze sociali*, the Southern Institute of History and Social Sciences), the most prominent research institute on Southern Italy, which publishes the interdisciplinary review *Meridiana*.
- ³⁹ Carmine Donzelli, 'Mezzogiorno tra "questione" e purgatorio. Opinione comune, immagine scientifica, strategie di ricerca', *Meridiana*, No. 9, 1990, pp. 13-53.
- ⁴⁰ Piero Bevilacqua, *Breve storia dell'Italia meridionale dall'Ottocento ad oggi*, Roma, Donzelli, 1993, pp. 10-11.
- ⁴¹ Gabriella Gribaudi, *op. cit.*, p. 84.
- ⁴² Jane Schneider, 'The Dynamics of Neo-orientalism in Italy (1848-1995)', in Jane Schneider (ed.), *Italy's 'Southern Question'. Orientalism in One Country*, Oxford/New York, Berg, 1998, pp. 1-23.
- ⁴³ For a critical overview, see Lucy Riall, *The Italian Risorgimento. State, Society and National Unification*, London, Routledge, 1994.
- ⁴⁴ Such preoccupations are shared by many historians of different political views (excluding perhaps the most overtly nationalist currents). One of the major influences in this debate is in fact Gramsci's interpretation of the *Risorgimento* as a passive revolution, almost without popular participation.
- ⁴⁵ Tarrow, *Between Center and Periphery*, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-65.
- ⁴⁶ Denis Mack Smith, *Italy and its Monarchy*, New Haven, Conn., Yale University Press, 1989.
- ⁴⁷ Two polls, held in 1996 in the regions where the Lega is strongest – Piedmont, Lombardy, the Veneto and Friuli-Venezia Giulia – have shown that in these regions only a minority of around

20-25% approves of secession. More than half of the respondents rejected secession as disastrous and morally unacceptable, while a quarter considered it advantageous, but morally unacceptable (Ilvo Diamanti, 'Il Nord senza l'Italia?', *Limes*, No. 1, 1996, pp. 15-30; Ilvo Diamanti, 'Il Nord senza l'Italia? L'indipendenza diventa "normale"', *Limes*, No. 1, 1997, pp. 297-308). If, to paraphrase Renan, a nation is a daily plebiscite, the Italian nation continues to be the dominant option, although these results certainly show that this choice has lost its self-evident character.

- ⁴⁸ Tullio Di Mauro, 'La questione della lingua', in Corrado Staiano (ed.), *La cultura italiana del Novecento*, Bari/Roma, Laterza, 1996, pp. 423-444. A few minorities in border regions have maintained their linguistic diversity, in particular German-speakers in South Tyrol, French-speakers in Valle d'Aosta, Slovenians at the north-eastern border, and pockets of Friuliese- and Ladino-speakers in the North-East. However, most of these minorities are not or are only marginally concerned with the Lega's secessionism.
- ⁴⁹ Mario Isnenghi, 'La mémoire divisée des Italiens', *Hérodote*, Vol. 89, No. 2, 1998, pp. 39-54.
- ⁵⁰ Tim Mason, 'Italy and Modernization: A Montage', *History Workshop*, No. 25, 1988, pp. 127-147, especially p. 131. This defensive attitude also has political consequences, such as the parliament's rejection in 1991 of a bill to introduce new rights for minority languages. Although this bill was not related to the Lega's secessionist proposals, intellectuals involved in re-proposing an Italian national identity, like Gian Enrico Rusconi, nevertheless campaigned for its rejection as a threat to national unity, since such a recognition could also be used to legitimize the 'Padanian' dialects (Anna Laura Lepschy, Giulio Lepschy and Miriam Voghera, 'Linguistic Variety in Italy', in Levy (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 69-80; Di Mauro, *op. cit.*).
- ⁵¹ Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture. Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1963; Lieven De Winter, Donatella Della Porta and Kris Deschouwer, 'Comparing Similar Countries: Italy and Belgium', *Res Publica*, Vol. 38, No. 2, 1996, pp. 215-235, especially pp. 231-232; Loredana Sciolla, *Italiani. Stereotipi di casa nostra*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1997, p. 52.
- ⁵² Ruggiero Romano, *Paese Italia. Venti secoli di identità*, Roma, Donzelli, 1997. See also Gian Enrico Rusconi, *Se cessiamo di essere una nazione*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1993.
- ⁵³ Mason, *op. cit.* 1988; John Agnew, 'The Myth of Backward Italy in Modern Europe', in Beverly Allen and Mary Russo (eds), *Revisioning Italy. National Identity and Global Culture*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1997, pp. 23-42. The importance Italian intellectuals attach to the issue of modernity cannot, however, be explained simply by American influence. As Tim Mason (*op. cit.*, 130) makes clear, Italian concerns about modernity are a native product, which has grown out of elements of Italian Marxism and Italian liberalism, and has incorporated elements from Italian and German philosophy and French historiography of the Annales School.
- ⁵⁴ Michael Eve, 'Comparing Italy: The Case of Corruption', in David Forgacs and Robert Lumley, *Italian Cultural Studies. An Introduction*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 34-51.
- ⁵⁵ Ginsborg, *op. cit.*; Tarrow, 'Making Social Science Work Across Space and Time'.
- ⁵⁶ Bevilacqua, *op. cit.*
- ⁵⁷ Giuliano Minichiello, *Meridionalismo*. Milano, Edizione bibliografica, 1997, p. 91.
- ⁵⁸ Donzelli, *op. cit.*; Bevilacqua, *op. cit.*
- ⁵⁹ E.g. Putnam, *op. cit.*, Fontana, *op. cit.*
- ⁶⁰ Linda Weiss, *Creating Capitalism. The State and Small Business since 1945*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1988.