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Review Article

Political Debate, Social History, and the Italian *Borghesia*: Changing Perspectives in Historical Research*

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In Italy the term *borghesia* has been used rhetorically in political and ideological debate for over a century. Thus its use has had so little connection with scholarly rigor that perhaps it is unwise to use it in a historical context. This is of course equally true in other contexts than Italy: the term, intimately linked with modern European civilization, has a long and complex cultural history. From an origin perhaps in *Burg* or *burgus,* French has derived *bourgeoisie,* German, *Bürgertum,* Spanish, *burguesía.* English, which lacks a related term, speaks of the "middle class" or adopts the French *bourgeoisie* in a more limited sense. Nor is the term habitual in the social sciences, which perhaps should warn us that it is more relational than objective and that its meanings, buffeted by the waves of changing fortune, have shifted through history. The term first arose in the Middle Ages, and it returned in France between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It flourished in the mid-nineteenth century, thanks largely to Marx, who used it in global opposition to the term *proletariat*—retaining, however, the somewhat pejorative tone attached to the word by reference to a mimetic behavior system typical of Old Regime France, a tone that persisted in all the nineteenth-century literature on the subject.[1]

The ambiguity inherent in this term and its rhetorical and ideological use are thus common phenomena on the European scene, but this is particularly true in Italian historiography, where the term is used extensively. There are a number of reasons for this. In particular, clashing ideologies have always been an inherent part of Italy's national identity, given that Italy's national unity is a relatively recent creation and has always been the subject of lively debate. In any event,

* Preceding versions of this text were discussed in February 1989 at the Freie Universität, Berlin, Arbeitsbereich Wirtschafts und Sozialgeschichte; in New York at Columbia University, Seminar on Modern Italy; and in Chicago at the University of Chicago, Modern European Studies Workshop, in October 1990.

[1] I have attempted to give an idea of the nineteenth-century career of the term in a study ("Borghesia, Bürgertum, bourgeoisie: Itinerari europei di un concetto") written for Jürgen Kocka, ed., *Borghesie europee dell'Ottocento* (Venice, 1989), a much-reduced Italian edition of Jürgen Kocka, ed., *Bürgertum im 19. Jahrhundert: Deutschland im europäischen Vergleich,* 3 vols. (Munich, 1988). Contributions to this volume will be cited here from the German edition. For an important contribution to thought on the nineteenth-century use of this term, see Philip Nicholas Furbank, *Unholy Pleasure: The Idea of Social Class* (Oxford and New York, 1986).

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there is a close connection between political and ideological debate in Italy over problems of historical interpretation, which means not only that historiography is extremely politicized (a point stressed by the idealistic tradition) but also that current Italian political ideology makes frequent reference to historical events in the nation's past.

In this framework, the term *borghesia* has a strategic function in the debate concerning modernity and modernization in Italy. All the political groups that were in opposition to the political system of the nineteenth century (and whose opposition dominated subsequent public opinion)—beginning with the radicals and anarchists of the last century and ranging from Catholics and socialists to communists and Christian Democrats in our own day and including the revolutionary fascists—all considered the nineteenth-century liberal regime *borghese*. They meant by this that it was the social and economic regime of the capitalistic middle classes, that it was thus to some extent foreign to local tradition, and that it brought a new harshness and a new spirit of exploitation into social and economic relationships. Although the ideological orientations that shared this opinion varied greatly, it is clear that the term was largely synonymous with *capitalistic* (in the Marxian sense).

If the ruling classes of Italy were accused of being *borghesi,* however, they were also accused of not being *borghesi* enough. Throughout the history of unified Italy, the political opposition has been against "bourgeois civilization" in general, but it has also criticized the governing classes for not being sufficiently modern. Intersecting traditions of both the Right and the Left blamed "un difetto di borghesia"—a bourgeois failing, but also a failure to be bourgeois—for what they held to be the unsatisfactory outcome of the Risorgimento. Much the same occurred later, when liberal Italy was criticized for giving way before fascism, and still later, in the republican era, with criticism of the disequilibrium that accompanied industrial modernization. Something similar happened in Germany when debate concerning the origins of nazism gave a negative cast to the concept of *Sonderweg*. Obviously, judgments of this sort contrast the observable situation in the various "second comer" countries to models constructed by the culture of the time on the basis of the experience of the dominant countries, England and France in particular.[2] Furthermore, in the case of Italy, dependence upon foreign models of modernization is an integral part of the history of public opinion, beginning with the French invasion at the end of the eighteenth century, when the term *passive revolution* was used polemically to signify the "derivative" (thus the incomplete and distorted) nature of the transformations that took place.[3]

In these borrowings and projections, the various facets of the concept of *bourgeoisie* were derived from stereotypes that centered on each particular national experience. Thus, in France, *bourgeois gentilhomme* alluded to a

[2] For a discussion of the "English model" and its uses in the debate on Germany, see David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of Germany History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford and New York, 1984).

[3] The term *passive revolution,* coined by Vincenzo Cuoco in connection with the Neapolitan republic of 1799, owes its more recent fortune to being picked up again by Gramsci. See John A. Davis, ed., *Gramsci and Italy's Passive Revolution* (London and New York, 1979).

life-style and to habits and values imitated from aristocratic and lordly circles, whereas the connotation of a spirit of innovation and an economic mentality derived from the model of the Calvinist entrepreneur, and so forth. Sociological texts have influenced these cultural premises, starting with the popularizing writings of the Manchester economists and of Samuel Smiles, who was much read and imitated in Italy,[4] and including the Marxist writers as well as German and then American sociologists. Werner Sombart's *Der Bourgeois* (published in English as *The Quintessence of Capitalism*), which sought the roots of a model to compare with modern bourgeoisies in the Middle Ages, was particularly influential in Italy.[5]

Thus a variety of meanings cohabit within the "bourgeois universe," combining notions of exploitation and class conflict with innovation and a spirit of initiative, a conservative image of the gentleman with vague "vestiges of feudalism." Feudalism is in fact another nineteenth-century ideal type that contributes—by opposition and superposition—to the definition of the concept of bourgeoisie. As we shall see, it is especially inappropriate to use feudalism to explain the Italian case, since doing so requires external models—in particular, those constructed by the Marxism of the Second International to fit the German experience, which included nineteenth-century institutional, economic, and cultural phenomena of a "feudal" type or, more accurately, of a type associated with landed lordships.[6] Thus we could say that the Italian *borghesia*—considered in the Marxian sense as the capitalistic class that had the governance of the country—was accused of not being bourgeois enough both because of the role that traditional landownership played in it and because, in a Weberian sense, it lacked a genuine capitalistic spirit. Precisely because of these characteristics, however, it betrayed typically "bourgeois" attitudes in its life-style.

[4] On this phenomenon, see Guido Baglioni, *L'ideologia della borghesia industriale nell'Italia liberale* (Turin, 1974); and Silvio Lanaro, *Nazione e lavoro: Saggio sulla cultura borghese in Italia (1870–1925)* (1979), 2d ed. (Venice, 1990).

[5] Sombart used the French word *bourgeois* in his title to distinguish, within the world of the *Bürger*—the burgher, or city-dweller—the merchants, entrepreneurs, and capitalists from both the old and new middle classes (*Mittelstände*) and the humanistic middle class (*Bildungsbürgertum*). He sought the roots of his model in the class of merchants, entrepreneurs, and bankers that made the cities of medieval Italy famous, which enabled him to state that the capitalistic spirit had first developed in Italy. Obviously, this past grandeur might suggest to Italians that the "failure of the bourgeoisie" was a decline rather than an immaturity, with quite different psychological connotations. Werner Sombart, *Der Bourgeois: Zur Geistesgeschichte des modernem Wirtschaftsmenschen* (München-Leipzig, 1913), first translation in English, *The Quintessence of Capitalism: A Study of the History and Psychology of the Modern Business Man*, trans. and ed. M. Epstein (1915; reprint, New York, 1967).

[6] The most influential representative of this school in Italy was the Marxist historian Emilio Sereni, whose analysis of Italian agrarian and financial capitalism made consistent use of the notion of vestiges of feudalism. Sereni has strongly influenced Marxist economic history, in particular concerning the history of agrarian structures (Sereni's specialty). His school should be distinguished from the branch of Italian Marxism originated by Gramsci, which is more interested in institutional, political, and cultural phenomena. The fact that the works of both men appeared after World War II tends to make us forget that when they were written (in antifascist circles in the 1930s—in Gramsci's case, in prison) there was no contact between the two authors. Sereni noted this parallel and the differences in his inspiration and Gramsci's in the preface to the new edition of his *Il capitalismo nelle campagne (1860–1900)* (1947; reprint, Turin, 1968).

All this could lead to strange conclusions. Piero Gobetti, a writer and liberal-socialist politician later assassinated by the fascists, reached the conclusion that after World War I the middle classes in Italy were *piccolo borghesi* and that it was instead the communist, revolutionary working class that demonstrated the true bourgeois spirit.[7] Later, the fascist author of a book on the bourgeoisie (a concept he explicitly borrowed from Sombart) wrote that the Italian bourgeoisie, which was predominantly rural in the nineteenth century, was "the negation of the bourgeoisie."[8] Even fascism, then, could be considered either the realization of an "authentic" modern bourgeois revolution or the victory of the reactionary sectors of the bourgeoisie. It is hardly surprising that writers used the term to apply to their own class only in an anticonformist or iconoclastic sense.[9]

It appears, then, that the same word could express economic development and limitations to that development, the growth of a modern nation through the Risorgimento and its inherent fragility. It is hardly surprising that in 1930 Benedetto Croce, after reading the recent works of Groethuysen and Sombart, protested that the concept of bourgeoisie had a "merely metaphorical, imaginative, and expressive function" and was ambiguous, misleading, and loaded with antiliberal attitudes.[10] Croce had no way of knowing that the term, with all its contrasting meanings, would be revived after World War II with the new Marxist and Catholic dominance of historiography. The streets of Italy periodically filled with workers and students joining forces against "il potere borghese," while journalists denounced the "weakness" of the Italian *borghesia.* It was during that period that the antibourgeois leadership—principally the Catholics in the ruling class, but they had the socialists and communists at their side—accomplished Italy's definitive capitalist revolution, giving the country the particular bourgeois style (both entrepreneurial and hedonistic, open to the market but reliant on the state) that characterizes Italy today and gives it a "modernity" that scholars have only recently attempted to describe with appropriate instruments.

Revisionism

If our intent is to discern a concrete social group, it is misleading to begin with the concept of *borghesia,* which belongs above all to the history of culture, of literature, and of political ideology. Furthermore, historical research has for some

[7] Piero Gobetti, *La rivolutione liberale: Saggio sulla lotta politica in Italia* (1924; reprint, Turin, 1948), p. 137.

[8] Nello Quilici, *La borghesia italiana: Origini, sviluppo, e insufficienza* (Milan, 1932), p. 300.

[9] In general, relational terms denoting lower status on a hierarchical scale (lower middle class, petty bourgeoisie, etc.) are not used for self-definition. In our case, a stigma is attached to the entire concept of *borghesia,* which only exponents of the rightist (at times fascist) opposition embrace. It was in an iconoclastic and anticonformist spirit that in 1950 the journalist Leo Longanesi founded a political weekly entitled *Il borghese,* a review that soon adopted a profascist *piccolo-borghese* orientation and that often criticized the customs of the *grande borghesia.*

[10] Benedetto Croce, "Di un equivoco concetto storico: La borghesia," in his *Etica e politica* (1930), 2d ed. (Bari, 1943), pp. 321–28.

time concentrated on a revision of the concept—if not a decisive repudiation of it, as in French cultural circles.[11]

Repudiations and revisions had a choice between two strongly divergent roads: on one hand lay the deconstruction of texts and a relativization of the various meanings of the term, on the other, refuge in quantitative analysis of social groups, as Labrousse suggested. It is a shame that these roads lead so far apart, because the one cannot easily do without the other. Textual revision without reference to documents only adds a new chapter to the literary history of the term, whereas quantitative analysis without theoretical support is not always clear on what questions it seeks to answer, which leads to unsatisfactory results.

Many studies of this sort are less concerned with responding to a historical question than with proving the need for polemical revision of previous ideological assumptions; hence they are to some extent simply a speculative reversal of those assumptions. This is certainly the case in Labrousse's appeal for concreteness, which sprang from debate on the bourgeois character of the French Revolution and the class nature of social conflict in the Old Regime and was, in the last analysis, a reaction against Marxist constructions. Thus the result of such studies was indirect, a consequence of the fact that more space and more intense reflection were dedicated to the various social subjects under observation than had been the case in the general systems of an ideological matrix. What springs to mind is the fable in which the treasure a father claims is hidden in a field consisted in the result of his sons' assiduous plowing as they looked for it after his death. The "winners" in this exercise were the social subjects and perspectives that had been considered "losers." In the paradigmatic cases of the processes of development—in England, for example, or in France—that this revisionism has tended to investigate and reevaluate, the persistence of values, attitudes, or interests considered typical of the past is often regarded with open sympathy.[12] In Germany, contrary assumptions prevail to some

[11] The French historian Ernest Labrousse opened a new phase of social studies in France with his drastic statement at the International Congress of Historical Sciences in 1955: "Define the bourgeois? I disagree. Let us rather recognize—on the spot, in its sites, in its cities—this city species and place it under observation. . . . Inquiry first. Observation first. We will see about a definition later" ("Voies nouvelles vers une histoire de la bourgeoisie occidentale au XVIIIe siècle," in *Comitato Internazionale di Scienze storiche, X Congresso, Relazioni* [Rome, 1955], 4:467).

[12] Although in the case of the social history of popular strata the sympathy for the preindustrial world can be tinged with either conservative or radical attitudes, conservative sentiment seems to prevail in connection with bourgeois elites. This is the spirit in which the American scholar W. David Rubinstein has worked on patrimonial Victorian elites. In his most recent publication, a collection of important essays on the subject, he presents himself as "a foreigner to Britain, a natural-born Tory and conservative" (*Elites and the Wealthy in Modern British History: Essays in Social and Economic History* [New York, 1987], p. 5). Rubinstein further states that his study "reveals a Britain which was much more 'conservative' in its evolution than many historians would credit" (p. 11). The Stones arrive at much the same conclusion in their discussion of the "myth" of the "perennial openness of English landed elite to penetration by large numbers of the newly enriched bourgeoisie." They conclude: "By and large, the power, wealth, and even status of the landed elite survived more or less intact until 1880" (Lawrence Stone and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone, *An Open Elite? England, 1540–1880* [London and New York, 1984], pp. 284, 282). In France, the quantitative approach and a conservative orientation coincide explicitly in the most recent overview of the question, Adeline Daumard, *Les bourgeois et la bourgeoisie en*

extent: since, after the experience of National Socialism, *Sonderweg* has been viewed as a sort of "feudalization" of bourgeois groups, recent social historians have attempted to verify this thesis, emphasizing the places and manifestations of a "bourgeois autonomy." Studies have examined the social origins of industrialists, for example, or the social cohesion of their matrimonial ties, the social choices of their children, and so forth, concluding that, at least in quantitative terms, "the upper bourgeoisie and the nobility proceeded on two separate tracks."[13]

No matter who momentarily occupies the central position in this ideological battlefield, it is littered with the rubble of most of the ideal types that were constructed concerning modern capitalism and the feudal Old Regime during the nineteenth century. Only in this rubble can we discern the questions that historians intended to put to the sources: What was the level of autonomy of the elite strata that emerged as the nineteenth century progressed, as compared to those of the Old Regime? What functions did they fulfill in the imperialistic phase of nineteenth- and twentieth-century history? What were the relationships between the various strata of the bourgeois world, in particular between the middle and high bourgeoisie or the old petty bourgeoisie and the new one? Did group identity depend upon material elements, institutional ones, or ones of a symbolic nature? And what consistency existed, in the many historical instances, among these diverse elements? In other words, can one assume necessary connections—as some theories of modernization would have it—between the development of economic, civil, cultural, and political institutions?

These are the problems that have emerged from the turbid debate over the nature of the Italian *borghesia*. Scholarship has proven slow to offer clarification, however. The aim of the pages that follow is to delineate a few of the paths that Italian historiography has taken.

Italian Nineteenth-Century Elites: Landed Bourgeoisie or Patriciate?

One of the chief accusations directed at the Italian *borghesia* is certainly its numerical exiguity. Calculation was first attempted as soon as national statistics

France depuis 1815 (Paris, 1987). Other authors seem to be moving in the same direction, however, as Jean-Pierre Chaline, *Les bourgeois de Rouen: Une élite urbaine au XIXe siècle* (Paris, 1982).

[13] This is the opinion of Hartmut Kaelble, "Französisches und deutsches Bürgertum im Vergleich," in Kocka, ed., *Bürgertum im 19. Jahrhundert* (n. 1 above), 1:119. For this type of study, see also Toni Pierenkemper, *Die westfälischen Schwerindustriellen, 1852–1913: Soziale Struktur und unternehmerischer Erfolg* (Göttingen, 1979); Hansjoachim Henning, "Soziale Verflechtung der Unternehmer in Westfalen 1860–1914," *Zeitschrift für Unternehmergeschichte* 23 (1978): 1–30; Hartmut Kaelble, "Wie feudal waren die deutschen Unternehmer im Kaiserreich?" in *Beiträge zur quantitativen vergleichenden Unternehmensgeschichte*, ed. Richard H. Tilly (Stuttgart, 1985), pp. 148–74; Youssef Cassis, "Wirtschaftselite und Bürgertum, England, Frankreich und Deutschland um 1900," in Kocka, ed., *Bürgertum im 19. Jahrhundert*, 2:9–33; Dolores L. Augustine-Perez, "Very Wealthy Businessmen in Imperial Germany," *Journal of Social History* 22 (1988): 299–321, in which the author sees "a strong commitment to capitalism and a strong sense of identity" in the frequency of family relations among the Germany commercial elite (p. 315).

became available following Italy's political unification in 1861. The overall population of the kingdom was at the time around 25 million inhabitants. Working on the earliest data provided by the new tax on "mobile wealth," one socialist jurist, Pietro Ellero, calculated in 1879 that 250,000 Italians—including women and children—had enough income from capital investment or sufficient real estate holdings to live decorously; one-fifth of these (about 50,000) were the truly wealthy *alta borghesia*. Ellero observed that they were probably "fewer in number than gentlemen—that is, than the citizens whose families were listed, at the end of the last century, as nobles in the councils of our thousand communes."[14]

Although today it has been shown that these data were strongly underestimated (for reasons of tax evasion), the overall number of wealthy persons could not have been high. If we examine the socioprofessional categories listed under "proprietors" in the 1871 tax census (industrialists, priests, state employees, etc.), we find figures similar to those calculated some years ago by an economist, Sylos Labini, according to whom the *borghesia,* properly speaking, ranged from 300,000 to 350,000 persons between 1881 and 1921. That is, there were about 200,000 property owners, entrepreneurs, and owners of business concerns and about 100–150 thousand in the liberal professions.[15]

In the early twentieth century scholars used probate documents in attempts to compare the extent of private wealth in Italy and other lands. Private fortunes, middling and great, turned out to be few in Italy. One of these economists, Francesco Saverio Nitti, calculated that in Italy there were 1,500 "millionaires," as compared to 15,000 in France, 11,000 in Germany, and 30,000 in England.[16] Nitti wrote that the evidence belied the Marxist prediction of progressive impoverishment, but the general "tendency of median incomes to rise and of minimum incomes to diminish in number" also could not be found in Italy, either in terms of income or in terms of wealth: "The *borghesia,* which is the soul of modern civilization and the true factor of development, forms slowly and is rather a bourgeoisie of landed proprietors and professional people than a bourgeoisie of industrialists."[17]

This bourgeoisie constituted about 1.8 percent of the population immediately after Italian unification, a figure nearly equal to the political electorate, which was only slightly more than one million voters in 1882. I should note that public opinion, later echoed by the historians, long complained of voting restrictions, citing the small electorate as an example of deliberate "closing" of the political elite. Close analysis has shown, however, that the political elite was in favor of enlarging the electorate (obviously in order to enlarge their own consensual base), but it was not easy to do so while maintaining the liberal constitutional framework without extending the vote to the illiterate (who made up more than 70 percent of the population). No matter how low the property requirements for voting were set or how generous substitute criteria were, it was difficult to find an acceptable broader

[14] Pietro Ellero, *La tirannide borghese* (Bologna, 1879), p. 30.

[15] Paolo Sylos Labini, *Saggio sulle classi sociali* (Bari, 1974), p. 155.

[16] Francesco Saverio Nitti, *La richezza dell'Italia* (1905), now in his *Scritti di economia e finanza* (Bari, 1966), vol. 3, pt. 1:155.

[17] Ibid., pp. 247, 284–85.

electorate. The "civic stratum" of the population—even in its broadest definition including clerical workers, some craftsmen, and the wealthiest peasants—was already included in that 2 percent of the population.[18]

The categories adopted for the classifications used in the nationwide census that was launched immediately after unification in 1861, when the country was still undergoing civil war, tell us something of the social profile of this elite. The upper levels were asked to indicate whether their chief source of income was a *professione* or a *condizione*. The first, which presumed some work activity, included the notion of *proprietario;* the second was defined as *possidente,* a notion of independent wealth close to that of a rentier or gentleman. (The forms stated: "whoever exercises no profession and lives on income will be called capitalist or retiree or *possidente,* according to the case.")

This was a fairly ambiguous linguistic distinction—then as now—and it was hard to apply. It mixed class and status (in a Weberian sense) in a way difficult to adapt to the profession-based categories of later sociology, and it is easy to see why census data have seldom been used by scholars. This distinction was in fact rarely used, and the elites tended to define themselves with the generic term of *possidenti.* This occurred, for example, on the electoral lists, on which many could have listed themselves according to either their profession or their titles—their wealth or their income. The official classifications themselves tended to subordinate specific professional designations to that of *proprietario,* so that in 1871 we find 361,977 *proprietari* and 18,665 *proprietari esercenti industrie manifatturiere* (property-owner/industrialists), but also 5,215 "property-owner/functionaries" (lawyers and notaries), 5,859 "property-owner/priests," and so forth. Thus focused around the generic notions of *proprietario/possidente* (with little or no distinction made between capitalistic or entrepreneurial sources of income and the independent wealth of a gentlemanly rentier), the elite sought distinctions on the symbolic plane that followed parameters without legal value. In the south of Italy, for example, the honorific titles "don" and "signor" typically alluded to a mix of social prestige, power, and wealth.[19]

These considerations all point to the particular importance of property ownership in the social panorama of nineteenth-century Italy. They are confirmed

[18] The greatest attempt at reform heretofore enacted (and which was accused of partially perverting the entire system) brought 7 percent of the population into the political electorate in 1882. On the problems brought on by this move, see Raffaele Romanelli, *Il comando impossibile: Stato e società nell'Italia liberale* (Bologna, 1988), pp. 151–206.

[19] For a detailed analysis of the significance of these titles in a small Sicilian community during the first half of the nineteenth century, see Paolo Pezzino, "Autonomia e accentramento nell'Ottocento siciliano: Il caso di Naro," *Annali della fondazione Lelio e Lisli Basso—ISSOCO* 19 (1987–88): 15–94. Pezzino writes, "The title of 'don' was never acquired in the course of only one generation. . . . The condition of 'don' thus always connoted either an already acquired status position (as in the case of the nobles) or a status acquired with studies . . . or a patrimony accumulated by the family of origin that nonetheless (usually with the investment of one member of the family [who was] made to study and directed toward a post or a profession) in time permitted a conversion of wealth into prestige" (p. 71). The titles of "don" and "signore" are treated in another study of a Sicilian community of the same period, Enrico Iachello, "Potere locale e mobilità delle élites a Riposto nella prima metà dell'Ottocento," in *Il Mezzogiorno preunitario: Economia, società, istituzioni,* ed. Angelo Massafra (Bari, 1988), pp. 915–34.

by several ongoing studies on the configuration of wealth using probate records, this time based on the original documents.[20] One of the principal coefficients considered in this sort of study is the proportion of landed property within total wealth in the estate, given that the "normal" trend on the pan-European level was a gradual increase in personal wealth (bank deposits, investment in stocks and state bonds, etc.). Here the figures for Italy show a clear difference with respect to France: whereas in Paris and other French cities real estate declined from about 50 percent of total wealth in the mid-nineteenth century to about 30 percent at the beginning of the twentieth century,[21] in Italy real estate holdings still accounted for 50 percent of total wealth at the latter date and in some cases continued to be as high as 75–80 percent up to World War I. As a sort of counterproof of these data, the study of the diffusion of capital invested in stocks and in banks shows that it remained fairly limited even during and after the first boom of the 1870s.[22]

These data help us to understand better Ellero's remarks on the civil identity of the city *borghesia* and *patriziati* and Nitti's statement that the Italian *borghesia* was made up of landed proprietors. Obviously, however, this is not enough to persuade us of the "lack of modernity" of that property-owning elite. Early studies have concentrated on the period of the French Revolution, when state properties were put up for sale. An intense circulation of lands ensued and the number of noble landowners declined. Italy differed radically from France, however. In France such sales had revolutionary origins and involved expropriation from the nobility; in "Jacobin" regimes in Italy—which were in no way Jacobin—the motivation was predominantly fiscal and the sales regarded only demesnial and ecclesiastical holdings. This means that in many cases it was the old landed nobility who bought such lands, thus extending their own holdings, and they did so just when the revolutionary process gave them ownership in the "bourgeois" sense, thus reinforcing their power. Individual instances show enormous variation, however, and there were great differences between northern and southern Italy in both previous landholding patterns and the importance of the so-called *eversione della feudalità* (overthrow of feudalism). Sicily, for example, was untouched by the revolutionary process.

[20] On the problems of the utilization of these sources in Italy, see Alberto Mario Banti, "Una fonte per lo studio delle élites ottocentesche: Le dichiarazioni di successione dell'Ufficio del registro," *Rassenga degli archivi di stato* 43, no. 1 (1983): 83–118, "Les richesses bourgeoises dans l'Italie du XIXe siècle: Exemples et remarques," *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome, Moyen Age, Temps Modernes* 97, no. 1 (1985): 361–79. For the first applications of these questions to Italian cities, see Alberto Mario Banti, "Richezza e potere: Le dinamiche patrimoniali nella società lucchese del XX secolo," *Quaderni storici* 56 (August 1984): 385–432 (on Lucca), and *Terra e denaro: Una borghesia padana dell'Ottocento* (Venice, 1989) (on Piacenza). Preliminary notice of further ongoing work was presented at the annual meeting of the Social Sciences History Association, Minneapolis, October 1990, and included Anthony L. Cardoza, "The Limits of Fusion: Aristocratic Reaction and Industrial Elites in Late Nineteenth-Century Turin"; and Raffaele Romanelli, "Urban Patricians and the Shaping of a 'Bourgeois' Society: Wealthy Elites in Florence, 1862–1904."

[21] See Adeline Daumard, ed., *Les fortunes françaises au XIXe siècle* (Paris and The Hague, 1973), p. 159, table 9.

[22] A pioneering study in this regard is A. Polsi, *Alle origini del capitalismo italiano: Banche e banchieri dopo l'Unità* (in press).

What relationship can be established between these changes and capitalistic transformations in agriculture? Many studies of the history of landed property during the first half of the nineteenth century show that in Italy, as in England, the greatest innovators were the aristocrats; conversely, historians have reproached the new "bourgeois" property owners with not having a fully capitalistic mentality. In 1961 the Marxist historian Renato Zangheri, studying the region around Bologna (which was among the more advanced areas), wrote, "The new bourgeois property owners brought to country areas a spirit of enterprise unknown to lordly landownership, but they were attracted by the latter toward a semi-feudal conception of property and profits. . . . The great Bolognese proprietors who sought the means of agricultural progress in the Restoration after 1815 were informed concerning modern technology, debated problems of the market, [and] demanded reforms, whether they were bourgeois or nobles. . . . On the other hand, they firmly rejected any idea of the division of landholdings and all proposals for the capitalistic transformation of the means of production."[23]

It is misleading, however, to state that the presence of nobles made this complex situation in any sense "feudal."[24] In the long term, Italian society in the modern age has been characterized by precisely the lack of powerful feudal orders and the existence of a strong, unified nobility, by the urban and mercantile roots of many urban patriciates, and by the close connection between Italy's many small and midsized cities and towns and their surrounding countryside. It is thus a world that reflects the traditions of the communes and the signorie more than that of the feudal system. Furthermore, although Italy saw phenomena of "feudalization" between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Enlightenment reforms operated to inflect them, in many cases anticipating the innovations of the French period. The fact that in Italy there was no genuine revolution of the French type is an essential part of any explanation of the persistence of many elements from the past, but the fact that the revolutionary period was to some extent "absorbed" into preexistent structures reveals the compatibility between those structures and the new nineteenth-century patterns into which the traditional aristocracy and the emerging bourgeoisie fitted perfectly.[25] Thus in Italy there were no forms of "alliance" among groups of the feudal aristocracy and the emergent bourgeoisie,

[23] Renato Zangheri, *La proprietà terriera e le origini del Risorgimento nel Bolognese,* vol. 1, *1789–1804* (Bologna, 1961), p. 150.

[24] Some scholars have even stated that for fifteen centuries and until the late nineteenth century Italian economy had a "feudal character." See Ruggiero Romano, "Una tipologia economica," in *Storia d'Italia,* vol. 1, *I caratteri originali* (Turin, 1972), pp. 255–304, quotation on p. 302. Arno J. Mayer, *The Persistence of the Old Regime: Europe to the Great War* (New York, 1981), makes a substantially similar argument. Mayer's book had a cool reception in Italy (see Raffaele Romanelli, "Arno Mayer e la persistenza dell'antico regime," *Quaderni storici* 51 [December 1982]: 1095–1102; and the remarks of S. J. Woolf, Alberto Caracciolo, Claude Fohlen, and Innocenzo Cervelli, "L'ombra dell'ancien régime," *Passato e presente* 4 [1983]: 11–34).

[25] It is not by chance that in Italy, unlike Germany or England, all *juridical* distinction between the bourgeoisie and the nobility disappeared in the liberal Constitution of 1848 (which was in many ways extremely conservative). On this point, see Giorgio Rumi, "La politica nobiliare del Regno d'Italia, 1861–1946," in *Les noblesses européennes au XIXe siècle* (Milan and Rome, 1988), pp. 577–93.

as there were in Germany but, rather (as in France if anywhere), an amalgamation of bourgeois and noble notables whose catalyst "was naturally found in the ownership of landed property, the new escutcheon that substituted for birth as a sign of social distinction"—thus Carlo Capra wrote in a fundamental survey of scholarship that stated the need to "disassociate the concept of bourgeois society from that of capitalistic society, and to characterize the former on the level of institutions and dominant values."[26] I might note that only in this way did Italian historiography begin to accept into the field of social history the thought of Antonio Gramsci, whose elaboration of the theoretical concept of "hegemony" resulted precisely from his reflection on the central social position of the restricted property-owning elite that had taken over guidance of the Risorgimento.[27]

All of this provides a key to the inherent ambivalence in the notion that in Italy the *borghesia* had many nonbourgeois, gentlemanly characteristics but nevertheless acted, as a general class, like a bourgeoisie. And those nonbourgeois characteristics did not prevent it from guiding the capitalistic innovations—on occasion extremely advanced ones—that were introduced in Italy at the end of the nineteenth century. Studying one of these cases, Alberto Mario Banti has shown that networks of familial relationships and political alliances enabled one group of nobles of mercantile origin to acquire the knowledge and the capital needed to effect a number of radical agricultural innovations in the early 1900s; these networks eventually made the group into one of the most striking expressions of the agrarian capitalistic bourgeoisie.[28] Only an assessment of the Italian situation according to German sociological models of French and English derivation—in many ways inapplicable to Italy—makes it seem systematically "lacking," "imperfect," and "limited." It is only recently that this comparison was seen as unsatisfactory; and upon that realization, an investigation was launched in which the same mixture thought to constitute Italian bourgeois society was demonstrated on the basis of the pertinent documentary evidence.

Another topic under recent investigation is association as a typical form of bourgeois social arrival. The same prevalently "property-owning" configuration of the Italian bourgeoisie can explain the limited vitality of the phenomenon of association in comparison to other European models: the greater part of the relational networks in Italy concentrated around the "gentlemanly" figures of the notables without spreading to larger social circles. During the first half of the nineteenth century, the lack of a representative regime and of political liberties in the constitutional framework in Italy contributed to this situation. Even at the end of the nineteenth century, however, the elite was slow to organize into

[26] Carlo Capra, "Nobili, notabili, élites: Dal 'modello' francese al caso italiano," *Quaderni storici* 37 (January–April 1978): 12–42, quotations on pp. 20, 18.

[27] The widespread popularity of Gramsci in Italian Marxist historiography has in fact produced ample reflections in the field of political history but not in those of economic and social analysis, where the classical Marxist canons best represented by Emilio Sereni prevail (see n. 6 above).

[28] Alberto Mario Banti, "Strategie matrimoniali e stratificazione nobiliare: Il caso di Piacenza (XIX secolo)," *Quaderni storici* 64 (April 1987), pp. 153–73, *Terra e denaro* (n. 20 above), and "I proprietari terrieri nell'Italia centro-settentrionale," in *Storia dell'agricoltura italiana*, ed. Piero Bevilacqua, vol. 2, *Uomini e classi* (Venice, 1990), pp. 45–103.

parties or stable political groups. One study on land ownership in the Po Valley in the latter nineteenth century insists on this point.[29] Thus it is doubtful, in the current state of scholarship, that one could state (as has one contemporary representative of ideological discourse concerning the Italian *borghesia*), that "the lack of generally shared values and of interpersonal relations made lasting by some form of associative network seems a constant of the Italian scene."[30] In reality, the launching of a series of scholarly investigations in this field suggests the existence of a reality that is much more fully articulated and differentiated, and it confirms the need to shift from a simple imposition of external cultural models onto the Italian situation to specific analyses of particular contexts.[31]

The Challenge of Unification: The State

If the concept of "feudal vestiges" fits the Italian scene poorly, the same might be said of the concept of "feudalization," used in the case of Germany to indicate the process by which some factors that promoted the growth of the industrial bourgeoisie were aided and abetted by the forceful intervention of the state and by a related subordination of bourgeois energies to the values and the power of the aristocracy.

In Italy the two terms *state* and *aristocracy* should be kept clearly separate. It is impossible to speak of the autonomous, well-defined power of a feudal aristocracy in Italy. It is undeniable, however, that state intervention played a primary role in the processes of bourgeois affirmation after unification. The topic has been much discussed, and it has been established that in the short term

[29] Maria Malatesta, *I signori della terra: L'organizzazione degli interessi agrari padani (1860–1914)* (Milan, 1989). On the problem of political parties, which lies beyond the scope of the present study, see Paolo Pombeni, ed., *All'origine della 'forma partito' contemporanea: Emilia Romagna, 1876–1892: Un caso di studio* (Bologna, 1984); Paolo Pombeni, *Introduzione alla storia dei partiti politici,* 2d ed. (Bologna, 1990), chap. 6.

[30] Silvio Lanaro, *L'Italia nuova: Identità e sviluppo, 1861–1988* (Turin, 1988), p. 28.

[31] The French derivation of these first studies is evident. Such topics were introduced in Italy with the anthology (containing no studies regarding Italy) edited by Giuliana Gemelli and Maria Malatesta, *Forme di sociabilità nella storiografia francese contemporanea* (Milan, 1982). New contributions have subsequently been published: Maria Malatesta, ed., "Special Issue: Sociabilità nobiliare, sociabilità borghese," *Cheiron,* vols. 9–10 (1988); M. Ridolfi and F. Tarozzi, eds., "Special Issue: Associazionismo e forme di socialità in Emilia-Romagna fra '800 e '900," *Bollettino del Museo del Risorgimento* (Bologna, 1987–88); and Maria Teresa Maiullari, ed., *Storiografia francese ed italiana a confronto sul fenomeno associativo durante XVIII e XIX secolo* (Turin, 1990), which concerns confraternities, corporations, and worker sociability. Robust local traditions of labor history and political history have often been subject to historiographical suggestions from beyond the Alps, as in Maurizio Ridolfi, *Il circolo virtuoso: Sociabilità democratica a rappresentanza politica nell'Ottocento* (Florence, 1990). For a suggested transfer of the phenomenon into its proper milieu of the "history of public opinion" and the history of bourgeois society (with an eye to the German experience), see Marco Meriggi, "Associazionismo borghese tra '700 e '800: Sonderweg tedesco e caso francese," *Quaderni storici* 71 (August 1989): 589–627. Meriggi has more recently edited (with Alberto Mario Banti) a special issue of *Quaderni storici,* vol. 77 (August 1991), entitled "Associazioni di élite nell'Italia del XIX secolo."

political unification in 1861 did not create opportunities for the middle classes, whose limited activities at first continued to operate within traditional local markets or to follow the modest flow of preexisting international trade. However, political unification did lead to vastly increased public spending, in particular on public works (primarily the railroads), which brought a concomitant increase in taxes and in the public debt. In this way the state came to play an essential role in mobilizing resources and in financial exchanges, and that had decisive economic effects.

Caution is called for when this assumption is transferred from macroeconomic history or political history to the history of social groups. It is possible that in many cases both fiscal pressures and the attraction of state protection of financial investments depressed the private sector and on the whole contributed to fortifying the profit mentality of the landed bourgeoisie in Italy.[32] But the now traditional interpretation, that this led to "an extremely rapid growth in the political influence of the classes that held personal wealth," thus eventually discouraging productive investment,[33] has not yet been supported by pertinent studies on the nature or the administration of the wealth of the Italian *borghesia*.[34] Furthermore, the idea that all this derived from the particular protectionist mentality and inclination to trust the state on all occasions that some scholars see as typical of the entrepreneurial class in Italy is even less supported by documentation.

Then there is the problem of the expansion of public administration and the excessive influence of the bureaucratic class. This current image is so undisputed that documentary verification has never been suggested. It is hard to say to what extent this is due to a cultural phenomenon recurrent in European liberal sentiment: the aversion to an expanded role for the state, an aversion that, in the case of Italy, is seen as reinforced by the unpopularity of certain Gallic *dirigiste* characteristics in the Italian administrative system and, ultimately, by the turn to authoritarianism in fascism. Some years ago one scholar of public administration questioned the idea that the Italian bureaucracy was ever bloated and stated that

[32] I have discussed this opinion in "La bourgeoisie italienne entre modernité et tradition: Ses rapports avec l'Etat après l'unification," *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome, Moyen Age, Temps Modernes* 97 (1985): 303–23.

[33] Sereni (n. 6 above), pp. 61–62. Sereni continues, "The state's continuing need to take advantage of the capital market led to an extremely rapid growth in the political influence of the classes that held personal wealth. The political balance of power between landed property and personal property that existed at the time of unification soon changed to the clear advantage of the latter more than proportionally to the increase in its economic efficacy." Vera Zamagni states, furthermore, that "the low capacity of accumulation of the agricultural sector prevented a sizeable increase of non-agricultural activities, which ended up in a preference toward financial investments by existing capital not reemployed within agriculture" ("The Rich in a Late Industrialiser: The Case of Italy, 1800–1945," in *Wealth and the Wealthy in the Modern World*, ed. W. D. Rubinstein [New York, 1980], pp. 122–66). The one Italian contribution to this volume of comparative studies differs from the others in its lack of data.

[34] See, however, the studies cited in nn. 20 and 22 above, in particular Polsi (n. 22 above), which will offer a preliminary description of the stock market in Italy. The traditional history of agrarian enterprises has rarely considered the late nineteenth or the early twentieth century.

the polemics that periodically raise the question have little to do with the actual size of the administration.[35] Objective parameters for measurement are lacking, however: at what point can one say that a bureaucracy is superabundant?

On the other hand, certain cultivated bourgeois circles undeniably exerted pressure on public administration that was linked to phenomena of intellectual underemployment and to the economic fragility of urban elites. This certainly occurred in a number of different periods, even in the economically more advanced regions,[36] but southern Italy was prototypical for its particular economic, institutional, and cultural conditions, to the point of bringing on a rapid and nearly total southern infiltration of the administration of the Italian state. The tendency of people in civic life to utilize the administration as well as, more generally, the historical role of administrative and juridical mediation in the kingdom of the two Sicilies give this phenomenon a quite special cultural flavor, which popular opinion has superimposed on the bureaucratic condition along with a sort of anthropologically coded and unproductive parasite mentality. Only the force of this image as "normal" can explain why no study has even been undertaken of the administrative class in southern Italy or even of the class of lawyers, notaries, and jurists to whom the stereotype has been applied and who undeniably occupy a fundamentally important place in the overall configuration of middle-class strata in southern Italy.[37]

But if to some extent (an extent that is by no means clear) one can say that the Italian *borghesia* had particular "bureaucratic" connotations, it is nonetheless certain that the bureaucracy itself never had any specific power as a social stratum, as it did in France or in Germany, where the bureaucratic class inherited a spirit of hierarchical and authoritarian service that can be linked to the culture of the Old Regime and perhaps even to "feudal" culture.[38] Nothing of the sort took place in Italy, particularly in central and northern Italy, where the functionary was traditionally not so much the ruler's man as a notable in his own right. In

[35] Sabino Cassese, *Questione amministrativa e questione meridionale: Dimensione e reclutamento della burocrazia dall 'Unità ad oggi* (Milan, 1977).

[36] Marco Meriggi, *Amministrazione e classi sociali nel Lombardo-Veneto (1814–1848)* (Bologna, 1983), attributes great importance in the formation of an opinion hostile to Austria to the demonstrated inability of the administration to satisfy the requests for employment coming from the cultivated bourgeoisie of the provincial cities. On the phenomenon of intellectual unemployment in general and regarding a later period Marzio Barbagli, *Disoccupazione intellettuale e sistema scolastico, 1859–1973* (Bologna, 1974), is still a basic text. It is available in English as *Educating for Unemployment: Politics, Labor Markets, and the School System—Italy, 1859–1973,* trans. Robert H. Ross (New York, 1982).

[37] For a study that discusses this topic (but does little except note this lack), see Hannes Siegrist, "Die Rechtsanwälte und das Bürgertum: Deutschland, die Schweiz und Italien im 19. Jahrhundert," in Kocka, ed., *Bürgertum im 19. Jahrhundert* (n. 1 above), 2:92–123. See also Paolo Macry, "Notables, professions libérales, employés: La difficile identité des bourgeoisies italiennes dans la deuxième moitié du XIX siècle," pp. 341–59, and Paolo Frascani, "Les professions bourgeoises en Italie à l'époque libérale (1860–1920)," pp. 325–40—both in *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome, Moyen Age, Temps Modernes,* vol. 97 (1985).

[38] For a comparison of the Italian and the German bourgeoisie in this connection, see Marco Meriggi, "Italienisches und deutsches Bürgertum im Vergleich," in Kocka, ed. *Bürgertum im 19. Jahrhundert,* 1:141–59.

those regions throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century the high-level bureaucrats, at least, belonged to the same propertied ruling elite as the political and parliamentary class we have already identified as Italy's "general class."

The History of the Entrepreneurs

When Italy became an industrial country the problem of the bourgeoisie changed radically, and for the first time entrepreneurs entered the historical picture. The historical perspective clearly changed in the 1950s when, among other things, the history of the industrial age was accepted as an academic discipline.

Initially, the problem was to pinpoint the origins of the industrial take-off at the beginning of the century. Studies first focused on "macroimpulses" of a structural nature, among which the Italian *borghesia*'s talent for innovation was conspicuously absent. As early as the 1930s, in the same book that defined the Italian middle class as "the negation of the bourgeoisie," Nello Quilici attributed the current "rebirth" of that class to three combined forces: the money sent back by emigrants; foreign investments; and, within Italy, the activities of Jewish entrepreneurs.[39] This was a somewhat naive picture, but later one of the first academic historians who studied the "formation of an industrial base" in Italy, Luciano Cafagna, spoke of "a complex and well-articulated development . . . made possible by the action of two sources of macroimpulses, the state and large banks, who openly destroyed the previous basic equilibrium, in part galvanizing preexistent energies, in part mobilizing new ones."[40]

Attention then focused on those "preexistent energies." In his portrait of Italy's economic take-off, Cafagna stressed the point that state intervention involved fiscal maneuvers and public works and did not touch the entrepreneurial field. Private entrepreneurs played an essential role in the economic boom, especially the large numbers of small-scale entrepreneurs with small, widely scattered ventures. Cafagna declared, "All this limited the advantages of concentration, but at the same time such diffusion meant that there was a more widespread readiness for economic ventures, which is one of the most difficult factors in industrial development. It could probably not have been overcome but for the fact that in the more advanced regions of the [industrial] 'triangle' there was a long-standing tradition of small concerns, especially in the textile field."[41] This was the start of a reevaluation of many proto-industrial activities in northern Italy, beginning with the silk industry, traditional in the region and fundamental to its economy.

At this point, attention turned to the phenomena of "modernity," which were seen, however, as governed by strong constraints and limited to a restricted

[39] Quilici (n. 8 above), pp. 368 ff.

[40] Luciano Cafagna, "La formazione di una 'base industriale' fra 1896 e 1914" (1961), now in his *Dualismo e sviluppo nella storia d'Italia* (Venice, 1989), pp. 323–57, quotation on p. 351.

[41] Luciano Cafagna, "Italy, 1830–1914," in *The Fontana Economic History of Europe,* ed. Carlo M. Cipolla (Glasgow, 1962), 4:319. This article was first published in Italy in 1977 and now is included in Cafagna, *Dualismo e sviluppo nella storia d'Italia.*

geographical area that was almost "a small state": "To a certain extent, the process of industrialisation of the three north-western regions of Italy was conducted like that of an autonomous small country."[42] It was stressed at the time that Italian industrial development was rooted in a strong dualism that not only opposed the industrial triangle Genoa-Turin-Milan to the rest of the country but also kept industrial culture at a distance from the capital and from politics, the symbols of the concrete reality of national unity. Interest in the history of entrepreneurship (along with the more traditional interest in the labor movement) was undoubtedly directly connected with the contemporary economic "boom" in northern Italy. Moreover, it was in the universities of the "triangle" where most of the work on this topic took place and where the leading entrepreneurs were treated to studies ranging from rigid "class" criticism to a more detached, scientific approach and even to biographies of an apologetic nature.[43]

Whatever individual scholars' motivations might have been, the overall result was a reevaluation of the contribution of bourgeois initiative to economic development in Italy. Valerio Castronovo has recently declared, "The state was not the sort of demiurge of Italian industrialization that has often been pictured. In the wearisome efforts that enabled the Italian economy to catch up with the general growth of the capitalistic system, entrepreneurs and technocrats represented something more than simple secondary figures, if for no other reason than for their organizational innovations and their ability to adapt to changing conditions."[44]

Who, then, were these entrepreneurs? Major industrialists were obvious choices for study, but curiosity about them also corresponded to a particular interest in heavy industry. Naturally, one of the first industrialists to merit a biography was the pioneer of the automobile, Giovanni Agnelli, the grandfather of the Giovanni Agnelli who heads the firm today. The elder Agnelli was the son of a wealthy landowner in the silk business in Turin who had acquired a patrician villa in the nearby mountains. In his early days a cavalry officer and mayor of "his" mountain village, young Agnelli frequented the meetings of a small group of fanatics interested in automobile racing as an elite sport—"aristocrats and entrepreneurs, professional men and public administrators"[45]—and in 1898, with their aid, he founded the Fabbrica Italiana Automobili Torino (FIAT).

[42] Cafagna, "Italy, 1830–1914," 4:324.

[43] One of the most prolific of these authors wrote works that differ significantly in tone. See Roberto Romano, *Borghesia industriale in ascesa: Gli imprenditori tessili nell'inchiesta industriale, 1870–1874* (Milan, 1977), *I Caprotti: L'avventura economica e umana di una dinastia industriale della Brianza* (Milan, 1980), *I Crespi: Origini, fortuna e tramonto di una dinastia lombarda* (Milan, 1985), and *La modernizzazione periferica: L'Alto Milanese e la formazione di una società industriale, 1750–1914* (Milan, 1990). For a different treatment of the same textile industry, see Giorgio Roverato, *Una casa industriale: I Marzotto* (Milan, 1986); and Piero Bairati, *Sul filo di lana: Cinque generazioni di imprenditori: I Marzotto* (Bologna, 1986). For an overview of the textile industry, see D. Bigazzi, *La storia dell'impresa in Italia: Saggio biografico* (Milan, 1990).

[44] Valerio Castronovo, *Grandi e piccoli borghesi: La via italiana al capitalismo* (Rome and Bari, 1988), pp. xi–xii.

[45] Ibid., p. 76.

This portrait does not perfectly coincide with the ideal type of the entrepreneur, à la Weber, nor does it recall Samuel Smiles's heroes. More than an Italian William Morris, Agnelli was in fact a typical nineteenth-century *borghese-possidente* who had substituted a passion for automobiles in place of a fondness for horses. Furthermore, according to his biographer, his was a nineteenth-century history prototypical of Italian industrial capitalism for its duality, for "the interweaving of business profits and income from [his] position" with "the greatest opening toward the international market and the most advanced technology and, at the same time, the most sullenly closed protectionism and sectorialism; [for] an alternation of liberating and innovative advances and hierarchic and elitist tendencies; [for] the most daringly cosmopolitan projections and reliance on old neighborhood alliances."[46]

The overall connection between the older propertied bourgeoisie and industrial enterprise in the age of the "end of the notables" and the agrarian crisis still needs to be clarified. In any event, it was in that world that the industrial adventure originated, because many Italian entrepreneurs either had been exposed to it or, if they came from more modest trades backgrounds, soon conformed to its model in an immediate and almost natural "gentrification" that had no need to wait out the canonical three generations.

Aside from Agnelli, there was also a somewhat anomalous figure who soon attracted the attention of historians. He was Alessandro Rossi, a man less well known than Agnelli and who died in 1898, one year before Agnelli founded the FIAT company. The leading Italian industrialist in the wool industry in the nineteenth century and a staunch supporter of industry, Rossi initiated technological and organizational advances, transforming the industry he had inherited from his father into a large-scale corporation as early as 1870. But he did not move the plant from its old location in the Veneto countryside, and, in the interest of combining the work ethic with religion and with the virtues of family and living in the country (each worker's house had a kitchen garden, e.g.), he built a company town that he planned to the last detail.

Rossi's concern with the well-being of "his workers" (and with the minutia of their private lives) was based in a defense of the industrialist's autonomy inspired by laissez-faire economics; hence he rejected social legislation and supported state intervention for the creation of structural conditions favorable to industrial development. As a member of Parliament he defended protectionist policies in both agriculture and industry. A skillful politician, he cultivated clientage relations, first as a deputy and later as a senator of the "Catholic party." His social outlook was Catholic, combining activist ethics with a decided paternalism, and while his speeches supported social inequality he also attempted to further worker solidarity and studied schemes for worker profit sharing.

As historians pursued their study of Rossi they found that, although he was exceptional in many ways, in the last analysis he was relatively close to the norm and provided insight into lingering ambiguities in the relationship between capitalism and tradition.

[46] Valerio Castronovo, *Giovanni Agnelli: La FIAT dal 1899 al 1945* (1971; reprint, Turin, 1977), p. xxiv.

As the studies on Rossi and his background have shown, Rossi's ideas and his economic and social strategies were deeply rooted in the textile industry of the Veneto, so much so that historians speak of a "Veneto model." Among the components of this model was the fusion of modern strategies with ideology and tradition. Rather than large cities, the Veneto had a number of small, historic cities not far from one another. The social structure was dominated by a countryside for the most part divided into small and midsized units of production that were run not as capitalistic enterprises but as *colonie*—a kind of sharecropping system. The landowners, known as *agrari,* were very much present, both in person and symbolically in the form of their homes, the famous villas of the Veneto. The church was an important part of this model, and the landowners and the church were in total agreement, not only due to the religious faith everyone shared but even more because the function of social control was entrusted to religion and to the clergy (who always supported the government in office).[47]

Many elements in this picture—a homogeneous agriculture, scattered land holdings, and a decentralized agrarian system—can be found in other regions of central and northern Italy. What made the Veneto both unique and normative for contemporary Italy were other elements that emerged more clearly over the long term—in particular, the convergence of social structure and Catholic ideology. The social ideas of Alessandro Rossi (a member of Parliament) were in essence the ideology elaborated by Catholic thought during the course of the century, which stressed the roles of religion and the church in combating the traumas and fractures and mediating the dialectics of the modern world—an area in which Italy set an example for other nations. Rossi held that Italian entrepreneurs had a particularly strong sense of social responsibility and that Italians were free of capitalistic avidity, sensitive to foreign examples but capable of adapting them to Italian needs without excessive stress.

It is tempting to draw a connection between historians' interest in Rossi and the "Veneto model" during the 1960s and the hegemony of Catholics in the political life of the Italian Republic during those same years, when the Veneto had an overwhelming Christian Democratic majority and contributed disproportionately to the formation of the governing class. There are other points of comparison with more recent historical events as well. During the 1970s and the 1980s vast areas of central and northeastern Italy (the Veneto, Tuscany, and the Marches) entered into a new productive phase, becoming so important, socially and economically, that they were dubbed the "third Italy." (The Milan-Turin-Genoa "triangle" formed the "first" Italy and the south, the Mezzogiorno, the "second.")[48] The new industries in the region, whose products ranged from household appliances to fertilizers, from clothing to luxury wines and personal computers, had, on the

[47] Silvio Lanaro, "Genealogia di un modello," in *Il Veneto,* ed. Silvio Lanaro, Storia d'Italia: Le regioni dall'unità a oggi (Turin, 1984), pp. 5–96. Lanaro defines the Veneto as a region of "relative backwardness, guided, but not wished for" (p. 69). The interpenetrating categories of landowner, noble, and capitalistic entrepreneur in the Veneto is well illustrated in the figures portrayed in C. Fumian, "Proprietari, imprenditori, agronomi," in Lanaro, ed., pp. 97–162.

[48] Arnaldo Bagnasco, *Tre Italie: La problematica territoriale dello sviluppo italiano* (Bologna, 1977), and *La costruzione sociale del mercato* (Bologna, 1988).

structural level, "low capital intensity, absence of relevant economies of scale, mature technology and slow economic progress, market competition, scattered and changing demand (for example, tied to fashion), small-scale assembly line production."[49] The "new entrepreneurs" who led this development often had craftsman or peasant origins; like their predecessors they had deep roots in their territory and in local institutions. In spite of their markedly different social origins, they were to some extent the sons of the same environment as the first entrepreneur-owners, the bourgeois and the aristocrats who often had served as tenants, sharecroppers, craftsmen, or workers.

Naturally, the historical frame of reference changed over time as well. In the 1950s historiography sought the origins of a development that was in disequilibrium but retained elements that seemed to reflect classical models (big business, heavy industry, urban development, increasing secularization, and so forth). Later, the normative efficacy of many parts of that model seemed to decline, and new developments seemed governed by elements earlier considered of limited scope: a late separation between agriculture and industry (even with a long-standing crisis in the primary sector) and widely scattered small productive units, often family-run. It is worth noting that this shift in perspective synchronized Italian studies with other revisionist trends in the field of economic history that rejected classical categories to "reevaluate" the family business, the small enterprise, and regional industry.[50]

On the specific topic of the social history of bourgeois groups, the new atmosphere has at least contributed to new thinking on the complex relationship between innovation and tradition. Agrarian and industrial paternalism, for example, is far from vestigial in Italy today. "The idea of the good father" (as a recent biography of an industrialist is entitled) long dominated industrial relations.[51] It is now common in this sort of work to stress the integration of family ties into the larger economic picture, from the hiring of workers through kinship channels to familial ties behind the ownership and management of the company. Even Rossi's construction of worker towns was not exceptional; an emphasis on worker housing as a way to integrate industrial labor into a rural social and cultural context was common among Italian industrialists of the period.[52] Such

[49] Willem Tousijn, "I piccoli imprenditori nella struttura di classe," in *I ceti medi in Italia tra sviluppo e crisi,* ed. Carlo Carboni (Bari, 1981), p. 203.

[50] A classic study concerning the nineteenth century is Charles F. Sabel and Jonathan Zeitlin, "Historical Alternatives to Mass Production: Politics, Markets and Technology in Nineteenth-Century Industrialization," *Past and Present,* no. 108 (August 1985), pp. 133–76. This and other similar studies have been particularly well received in Italy. See also Charles F. Sabel, "La riscoperta delle economie regionali," *Meridiana: Rivista di storia e scienze sociali* 3 (1988): 13–71. On the current state of family direction in large corporations, see Piero Bairati, "Le dinastie imprenditoriali," in *La famiglia italiana dall'Ottocento a oggi,* ed. Piero Melograni (Rome and Bari, 1988).

[51] Fabio Levi, *L'idea del buon padre: Il lento declino di un'industria familiare* (Turin, 1984). Levi credits the recent bankruptcy of a cotton company to having continued paternalistic management too long.

[52] For examples of planned company towns, see *Villaggi operai in Italia: La Val padana e Crespi d'Adda* (Turin, 1981). I might note that two such entrepreneurs were foreigners: Francesco De Larderel, who founded flourishing mines in Tuscany, was French, and Isacco Neumann, who

men not only constructed factory buildings, worker residences, and charitable works but also built their own city houses and country estates or acquired patrician residences, in the city or the country; the symbolic value of the latter is difficult to separate from the economic investment they represent.[53]

We need still to verify to what extent these situations were unique to Italy, given that a similar revision of "modernizing" sociological stereotypes has occurred in vast sectors of historiography throughout Europe, as studies and discussions about paternalism in industrial relations in England attest.[54] But although revisionist trends may resemble one another, specific situations vary from country to country. More typical of the Italian context, for example, are the fragmentation and dispersion of industries—hence the integration of industry into the rural community—and the roles played by the family, small-scale agricultural production, and Catholic ideology. One of the many variants of this mixture is the history of large landholders in Tuscany—a group of aristocrats and agrarian entrepreneurs who played an important role in Italian politics between the unification of Italy and fascism and whose large holdings (as in the Veneto) were divided into small productive units (*poderi*) rented to sharecropper families under the owner's paternalistic control. The commonly accepted picture of such men presents a conservative elite of the aristocratic type tied to the social and economic conventions of the sharecropping system and open to innovation only through the least risky financial investments. Studies that concentrate on the activities of urban entrepreneurs, the configuration of wealth, or the management of particular companies present a much more varied and complex picture. One prime example of this is Baron Ricasoli, a great landowner and member of the feudal aristocracy, a politician, and a capitalistic entrepreneur, whose investments in state bonds or in politically guaranteed stocks could be seen not as an example of the flight of agrarian capital but as an attempt to support capitalistic investment in agriculture in a phase of incipient economic crisis.[55] The sharecropping system itself, traditionally presented as "one of the most unprogressive features of feudal-

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founded textile factories in Piedmont, was Swiss. On the latter, see Gian Albino Testa, "La strategia di una famiglia imprenditoriale tra Otto e Novecento," *Bollettino storico bibliografico subalpino* (1981), pp. 603–36. Another example of a company town in the Veneto has now been studied by Carlo Fumian, *La citta' del larozo: Un' utopia agroindustriale nel Veneto contemporaneo* (Venice, 1990). Various aspects of Rossi's career are discussed in Giovanni L. Fontana, ed., *Schio e Alessandro Rossi: Imprenditorialità, politica, cultura e paesaggi sociali del secondo Ottocento,* 2 vols. (Rome, 1985).

[53] Emphasis on "gentrification" often leads scholars to forget that ownership of lands, farms, or urban dwellings in many cases served the entrepreneur as a way to obtain bank loans. See Giorgio Fiocca, ed., *Borghesi e imprenditori a Milano dall'Unità alla prima guerra mondiale* (Bari, 1984). For an exemplary analysis of the phenomenon, not in a bourgeois milieu but among peasants and home-based weavers during the first half of the nineteenth century, see Franco Ramella, *Terra e telai: Sistemi di parentela e manifattura nel Biellese dell'Ottocento* (Turin, 1984), chap. 5.

[54] See, e.g., the debate prompted by Patrick Joyce, *Work, Society, and Politics: The Culture of the Factory in Later Victorian England* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1980).

[55] Giuliana Biagioli, "Vicende e fortuna di Ricasoli imprenditore," in *Agricoltura e società nella Maremma grossetana dell'Ottocento* (Florence, 1981).

ism,"[56] can be seen in another light not only because of intrinsically "rational" economic elements (great flexibility in the use of resources) but also because certain goals of social preservation that typified it had positive long-term results—for example, in forming the social structure on which the region's small- and midsized industry, luxury agriculture, and elite tourism are based today.

Thus scholarship is moving ever farther away from the practice of applying ready-made, external sociological models to individual cases. Rather, it is beginning to examine specific historical contexts and, within those contexts, the options available to individuals; it is addressing the interplay of challenge and response in a perspective that privileges the moments and rhythms of innovation.[57] In this larger picture, the history of Italy's south—the Mezzogiorno—is an overwhelming and problematic case in point. As long as it was defined only as a "backward" area oppressed by the weight of the past or by new mechanisms of a "dualistic" development, the south offered little occasion for any study of real social transformation. Where sociological deductivism reigned the consequences of social backwardness were known in advance; its overturning has focused attention on the Mezzogiorno, and it is precisely southern Italian society's deviation from the "normal" paradigm of modernity that has provided an opportunity to experiment with new analytical concepts and different explicative models.

A recent study by Marta Petrusewicz on the administration of one *latifondo* (large landholding) in Calabria during the nineteenth century is quite special in this sense, since it deliberately overturns the usual perspective on a phenomenon generally considered among the most backward in nineteenth-century Italian society. Although the property owners in this case study belonged to an ancient noble family and led a gentlemanly life, the *latifondo* was constituted in the early 1800s as a result of changes during the period of French rule, and it was administered with a quintessentially "bourgeois" rigor and a logic that was in many instances "feudal." Only a small and well-defined portion of the production was destined for the market, and the entire administration resembled a tightly integrated, organic, and socially closed world. It is precisely in these elements, however, that Petrusewicz sees the efficiency and "rationality" of the operation, judging it by criteria that measure productive flexibility and capacities for economic and social adaptation to external conditions more than monetary profit.[58]

[56] Zamagni (n. 33 above), p. 128.

[57] Banti, *Terra e denaro* (n. 20 above), is an excellent example of this method. Studying an agrarian bourgeoisie of aristocratic origin that was among the most advanced in a capitalistic sense, Banti shows why, by whom, when, and with what means this group adopted fundamental innovations in production techniques. For a different application of the same general methodology, see Alberto Mario Banti, "Gli imprenditori meridionali: Razionalità e contesto," *Meridiana: Rivista di storia e scienze sociali* 6 (1989): 63–90. For a discussion of the concept of "strategy" in this sort of study, see Giovanni Federico, "Azienda contadina ed autoconsumo fra antropologia ed econometria: Considerazioni metodologiche," *Rivista di storia economica,* n.s., 2 (1984): 224–68, and "Contadini e mercato: Tattiche di soppravvivenza," *Società e storia* 39 (1987): 877–913. My own reference to the problem of the moments and rhythms of innovation is indebted to Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (New York, 1944).

[58] Marta Petrusewicz, *Latifondo: Economia morale e vita materiale in una periferia dell'Ottocento* (Venice, 1989).

Petrusewicz takes the feudal model of Witold Kula and Edward P. Thompson's concept of "moral economy" as her point of departure, but other scholars of the Italian Mezzogiorno have found inspiration in anthropological literature outside Italy. What counts more than the results of non-Italian scholars' studies of the Mezzogiorno (which tend to be criticized in Italy) is that those studies have helped stimulate theoretical reflection on the Mezzogiorno, which is sorely needed if we are to understand how Italy's southern regions fit into the Italian and European contexts.[59]

Many and varied aspects of the recent cultural and economic evolution of the Mezzogiorno itself enter into this change in perspective, and southern Italian society today makes a more vital and dramatic impact on the national scene. Nevertheless, new studies have introduced an entire set of modifications to the rural and feudal picture, stressing, for example (in relation to the topic at hand), the numbers and the functions of the urban elites, the bureaucratic and professional elites,[60] and the technological[61] or more strictly entrepreneurial elites. Even where the city's *borghese* character is undisputed, as in the case of Naples—not an industrial city but the biggest city of the peninsula and an exceptional case—the urban context has attracted scholarly attention as an example of a "compromise between inheritance and innovation that gives form to the special identity of the nineteenth century."[62]

When historians study the entrepreneurial *borghesia* in the Mezzogiorno, they stress the region's remoteness from international markets, hence the uncertain conditions under which innovative entrepreneurs had to operate. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, when southern agriculture specialized in the production of oil, wine, and citrus fruits, ensuing transformations "derived no

[59] It seems to me significant that only recently and after some time have some of these works been translated into Italian. Among such studies are Jane Schneider and Peter Schneider, *Culture and Political Economy in Western Sicily* (New York, 1976), trans. Soveria Mannelli in 1989; Anton Blok, *The Mafia of a Sicilian Village, 1860–1960: A Study of Violent Peasant Entrepreneurs* (Oxford, 1974), Italian translation, Turin, 1986. Space limitations preclude tracing the chronology and the lines of importation of all the texts of historical anthropology that have influenced current Italian thought. Particularly applicable to the present discussion are Polanyi, *The Great Transformation,* translated into Italian in 1974; and Edward P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Past and Present* (1977), available in Italian together with other essays in *Società patrizia, cultura plebea: Otto saggi di antropologia storica sull'Inghilterra del Settecento,* ed. Edoardo Grendi (Turin, 1981).

[60] Enrico Iachello and Alfio Signorelli, "Borghesie urbane dell'Ottocento," in *La Sicilia,* ed. Maurice Aymard and Giuseppe Giarzzino, Storia d'Italia: Le regioni dall'unità a oggi (Turin, 1987); "Special Issue: Città," *Meridiana: Rivista di storia e scienze sociali,* vol. 5 (1989), a special issue on cities in the context of southern Italy.

[61] Leandra D'Antone, *Scienze e governo del territorio: Medici, ingegneri, agronomi e urbanisti nel Tavoliere di Puglia (1865–1965)* (Milan, 1990).

[62] Paolo Macry, *Ottocento: Famiglia, élites e patrimoni a Napoli* (Turin, 1988), pp. 261–62. See also Paolo Macry, "Borghesie, città e Stato: Appunti e impressioni su Napoli, 1860–1880," *Quaderni storici* 56 (1984): 339–83, "Tra rendita e 'negozio': A proposito di borghesie urbane meridionali," *Meridiana: Rivista di storia e scienze sociali* 5 (1989): 61–76, and "La città e la societá urbana," in *La Campania,* ed. Paolo Macry and Pasquale Villari, Storia d'Italia, le regioni dall'unità a oggi (Turin, 1990), pp. 93–182.

impulse from agronomic and technological innovations, from the efficient use of available resources for productive ends, [or] from the ability to conquer the market by the high road of cost reduction and increased competition"—as a strong paradigm might suggest—"but represented adaptations of varying degrees of competence and efficacy to conjunctural shifts in the market."[63] For the southern entrepreneur (according to the same author), this meant "avoiding the immobilization of sizeable amounts of scarce capital . . . spreading the risk over a broad range of agricultural, commercial, manufacturing, [and] financial initiatives, always [making] small and relatively liquid investments, pulling them out at the first negative market signs; using market variations and the limits of the infrastructure for speculative ends; . . . tightening up production relations founded on peasant self-exploitation rather than on direct exploitation."[64]

Even in southern Italy, then, the portrait of the *borghese* is not clearly defined and it combines the same diverse social elements that we have found in all the elites of Italy: the property owner, the industrialist, the merchant, the rentier, the administrator, and the functionary. The greater structural fragility of Italy's southern provinces accentuates the dramatic nature of this amalgam, however, and carries its theoretical indeterminacy to the extreme. The study of a peripheral area of extreme instability thus suggests the need to concentrate on the relationships between the various components of modernization (economic, cultural, and institutional), measurement of their internal hierarchies, and theoretical evaluation.[65]

Once the term *borghesia* is purged of the rhetorical functions it has taken on, the very ambivalence of the concept may turn out to be extremely rich and prolific. It would not be the first time that the "Italian case" provided a serviceable laboratory for the comparative analysis of processes of modernization.

[63] Biagio Salvemini, "Note sul concetto di Ottocento meridionale," *Società e Storia* 26 (October–December 1984): 917–45, quotation on p. 923.

[64] Biagio Salvemini, "Per un profilo della borghesia imprenditoriale dell'Ottocento meridionale: Una griglia interpretativa generale," in *Le borghesie dell'Ottocento,* ed. Alfio Signorelli (Messina, 1988), p. 73. One of the most noteworthy case studies (on the Florio family, the most prominent entrepreneurs in Sicily in the nineteenth century) confirms the picture of a varied production. For the essential sector of citrus fruit production, see Salvatore Lupo, *Il giardino degli aranci: Il mondo degli agrumi nella storia del Mezzogiorno* (Venice, 1990).

[65] Hence it is often accurate to speak of "modernization" in connection with the Mezzogiorno, as it is accurate to suggest that the modernization that does indeed occur and that often is characterized by culture and custom more than by structural economics is derived and subalternate. In this sense Schneider and Schneider (n. 59 above) spoke of "modernization without development" and Luciano Cafagna of "passive modernization" ("Modernizzazione attiva e modernizzazione passiva," *Meridiana: Rivista di storia e scienze sociali* 2 [1988]: 229–40). Others have spoken of a "submerged modernization." See Giuseppe Giarrizzo's introduction to Lucio Avagliano et al., *La modernizzazione difficile: Città e campagna nel Mezzogiorno dall'età giolittiana al fascismo* (Bari, 1983). See also Paolo Pezzino, "Quale modernizzazione per il Mezzogiorno?" *Società e storia* 37 (1987): 649–74. In this context, it appears significant that the first expressly interdisciplinary review, *Meridiana,* has appeared in southern Italy.