Berlusconi's Italy

Mapping Contemporary Italian Politics

Michael E. Shin and John A. Agnew

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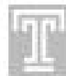

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Preface

Italy experienced a political watershed in the early 1990s when the old system of parties collapsed and was subsequently replaced. With the new regime emerged several novelties, such as new parties and electoral alliances on both the left and the right of the political spectrum. Perhaps the most notable outcome was the emergence of Italy's wealthiest man, Silvio Berlusconi, as the indispensable focus of Italian politics, both positively and negatively, from 1994 until 2006. Neither Berlusconi's rise to power nor his recent 2006 electoral defeat have met with many detailed empirical analyses of how his and the other organized political forces replaced the old parties. Without neglecting the personal role of *il Cavaliere* (or "the Knight," as he is known and likes to be known), our spotlight falls much more on the geographical dynamics of popular support (or "followership") for the various political factions, particularly on the center-right, to better understand how Berlusconi could assume such a central role in Italian politics.

The conventional story of how Silvio Berlusconi came to power and turned Italy into his fiefdom revolves around his control and use of the main private television networks. We challenge this story as

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far too simple to account for what actually happened from Berlusconi's initial rise to power in the mid-1990s to his narrow defeat in the 2006 Italian national election. Answering *how* Berlusconi was able to polarize Italian politics around opposing coalitions requires attending to *where* in Italy he initially garnered the most support for himself and his electoral allies. However, in the end, his failure to do so everywhere made him vulnerable to the opposition and its competing constellation of support elsewhere.

Thus, the alternative story told in this book is one that focuses on the geography of Italian politics as essential for understanding what has happened in Italy over the last fifteen years. Moreover, we challenge two more general claims about contemporary electoral politics in Italy and other Western democracies. The first claim, as mentioned above, is that control over the mass media—television, in particular—has essentially removed the influences of geographically grounded social and economic differences from political behavior. The second claim is that geography no longer matters in elections because people have become individualized "opinion" voters without much in the way of any regional differences in how they relate to politics in general or how they vote in national elections. We contend that geography still matters in elections because voters interpret, relate to, and act upon issues differently in different places.

Finally, this book contains a more general message concerning electoral politics in contemporary Europe and North America. Not only are electorates increasingly divided or polarized between left and right—often producing very narrow electoral victories for one side or the other—but there is also an increasing tension for political parties between trying to appeal to the "moderate" or "middle voters," on the one hand, or moving to mobilize voters around more "extremist" agendas (on the right or left) on the other. Berlusconi's attempt to incorporate relatively extreme right-wing parties within his center-right electoral coalition, along with his ability to frame his electoral appeal to a broad "middle" of the national electorate, is an intriguing example of moving in both directions at once.

Several individuals helped us in one way or another to complete this book. In particular, we thank Carlo Brusa, Sebastian Breau,

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1

Introduction: Berlusconi's Italy

I must obey. His art is of such pow'r.
Caliban, referring to Prospero, the unjustly deposed Duke of Milan.

—William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (act 1, scene 2

In our country we have never been truly liberated from the need for a great commander to whom we entrust our lives and free ourselves from the weight and responsibility of choices.

—Tonino Perna, *Destra e Sinistra nell'Europa del XXI secolo* (Milan: Altreconomia, 2006, p. 11).

July 9, 2006, must have been a day of mixed emotions for Silvio Berlusconi, the former Italian prime minister. The Italian team had won soccer's World Cup with a victory over France, but Berlusconi could not politically bask in the glory of the team to which he had tied his political career. Not only had he named the political party he invented in 1994 to serve his political ambitions after the chant for the national team, Forza Italia, his supporters had also acquired the nickname *gli azzurri* (the blues) after the pet name for the players on the national soccer squad. Since 1994, the story of Italian politics has been dominated by the larger-than-life figure of Berlusconi. When the corruption scandals and investigations of the early 1990s brought down the major parties of government in Italy, Berlusconi made himself a major actor in the emerging new system by organizing a new party and setting about creating a center-right constellation of parties that had never previously existed in Italian politics. He did so partly by mobilizing his own immense resources as Italy's major media baron and by adopting an array of symbols, not the least of which was his involvement in Italian soccer as owner of AC Milan and his connections through that to the national

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team, to appeal to an Italian electorate disenchanted with old-style politicians and their political parties. However, above all, Berlusconi has provided a political magnet for those Italians less concerned with the normative propriety or probity of national politics, precisely the problem unearthed by the corruption scandals of the early 1990s, and looking to government pragmatically as a solution/barrier to resolving their private problems (see, e.g., Berselli and Cartocci 2006). From this viewpoint, Berlusconi's own career is a metaphor for what some Italians have been looking for in political leadership. What many foreign commentators, most famously the *Economist* magazine, on a number of different occasions over the years, deemed as Berlusconi's "unfitness" to rule Italy, his conflicts of interest in particular, seemed to some voters as indicating a *sagacia* (astuteness) and *fortuna favorevole* (good fortune) that they hoped might rub off on them.

Leadership versus "Followership"

Berlusconi's media ownership and performance as a businessman-politician has come to dominate many accounts, both popular and academic, of Italian politics since the break-up of the old system in 1992 (see, e.g., Novelli 1995; McCarthy 1996; Zolo 1999; Ginsborg 2004a; Andrews 2005; Venturino 2005; Campus 2006a; Stille 2006; Lazar 2007). We refer to many of these accounts more specifically in Chapters 2 and 4. Berlusconi is often seen as the master shaman or trickster of contemporary Italy, manipulating his way to the top through mafia methods (and real Mafia connections) and then by appealing to the crassest and most vulgar aspects of Italian society. We explicitly acknowledge his importance as the organizer and salesman of the Italian center-right by titling this book the way we have. But, in our view, "Berlusconi's Italy" has only been partially of his making. Some of the thrust of this book lies in showing how he has clearly recognized and shrewdly navigated politically around the socioeconomic and ideological cleavages of Italian society. But we give much more attention than is typical to these cleavages and how they operate electorally. Berlusconi may have proved necessary to

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the past fifteen years of Italian politics, but it is clear that his role alone is insufficient in adequately explaining what has happened.

Italy is famously divided geographically along economic and sociocultural lines. It has long had a "southern question," the problem of the South's lower level of economic development compared to the North (e.g., Valussi 1987; Barbagallo 1994). More recently, with the growth of the Northern League and its campaign against "Roman" rule because of putative fiscal bias in favor of the South, the country has acquired a "northern question." Long-standing regional differences in affiliation with the Catholic Church and in the development of municipal socialism and trade unionism, as well as in collective memory of Fascism and resistance against it have also had profound effects on political sensibilities (Trigilia 1986; Agnew 2002, Chapters 5 and 6). Italy also is famously divided among city-regions that have historically provided a more powerful source for political identities than has the "nation" as a whole. Of course, the spread of a peculiarly "diffuse urbanization" since the 1950s has weakened the cultural grip of the older geographically compact city-regions. Today, much more of the Italian population lives in the diffuse and disordered peripheries of large metropolitan complexes than in the discretely defined *paesi* of historical memory (e.g., Paba and Paloscia 1994). In this context, national electoral success does not come easily. The old electoral system (1953–1992) never produced one party with a nationwide majority of seats in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate (the two equally powerful national legislative bodies). Governments were always coalitions of parties put together after elections. They rarely lasted long in office and always excluded both the Communist left (PCI) and Fascist right (MSI). All of the parties had clear geographical bases in different parts of the countries, even if by 1976 the PCI and Christian Democrats (DC) had become relatively "nationalized" parties in terms of the geographical spread of their votes. Yet, there was an electoral bipolarism implicit in the old system. When voters switched votes they tended to do so within "families" of parties, moving to ideologically adjacent rather than more ideologically distant parties.

The new electoral system introduced in 1993 placed a premium on the ability of the political parties to group themselves together

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into alliances so as to facilitate the election of a mix of single-member district representatives (majoritarian) and multimember district representatives (proportional). The idea was to encourage a greater bipolarism in the possibility of governments from opposite ends of a left-right political spectrum or translate the basic bipolarity of postwar Italian electoral politics into the possibility of alliances between clusters of parties that would present a common face as potential governments to the electorate before elections. In this way the blocked alternation between political "sides" and the short-lived governments of the old system would both be consigned to history. This was one of the goals of prescient observers long before the collapse of the old party system in 1992 (for example, see Pasquino 1985). In many respects this is what has happened (even with the return, under Berlusconi's hand, to a significantly proportional electoral system in 2005 as the leader and his allies feared for their political lives) (Berselli and Cartocci 2001; Berselli and Cartocci 2006; Pappalardo 2006). Certainly the 2001 election indicated a significant consolidation of a bipolar polity with "third forces" largely disappearing but with small parties still able to gain a higher degree of representation within the coalitions than their total numbers of votes would mandate (e.g., the Christian Democratic Union (UDC) on the center-right and the Italian Communists on the center-left). Overall, however, the new electoral system seemed to have begun to operate as an instrument of electoral socialization rather than as yet another failed reform simply reflecting the persistence of the political culture of the old regime (Cartocci 2004, but also see Bull and Pasquino 2007).

A downside of increased bipolarity has been an increasingly rancorous style of politics, particularly during election campaigns. Over the years 1994 to 2006, the tendency, initiated by Berlusconi but with avid response from his opponents, has been to portray political adversaries as enemies by using ever more violent and incendiary language. This violent populism borrows both from the style cultivated first in Italian politics by Umberto Bossi of the Northern League—what the DC politician, Mino Martinazzoli, memorably called "the politics of the bar"—and from the polarizing strategies used by U.S. Republican Party operatives such as Lee Atwater and

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Karl Rove with their dual focus on identifying "wedge issues" to attract key voting blocs and negative advertising to insult and vilify the "other side." Hectoring and simplifying thus replace debate and complexity.[1] Berlusconi has openly borrowed both advisers and strategies from the right-wing American electoral "playbook." In this regard he is not so much a model that Americans should beware of (pace Stille 2006) as a product of the export of the very system now in place in American electoral politics.[2]

Beyond the changes in electoral system, the period since 1994 has been one of rapid and widespread change in Italian politics and society (Guarnieri 2006; Bull and Newell 2006, Chapter 3). Not only did the major parties of government, the DC and the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), disappear in 1993 in the face of scandal, the PCI had already divided with the collapse of state socialism in the former Soviet Union, and a significant portion of the northern electorate was drifting toward the Northern League and its radically anti-Roman rhetoric. If in the 1980s a political inertia characterized the country, with government policies and public attitudes more like those that had prevailed in Britain and Germany in the 1970s and before—with for example, widespread popular commitment to government price controls, state ownership of major industries, protection of employment levels irrespective of market dynamism, and with limited swings in votes between political parties—all of this began to change in the 1990s. Some have put this down to purely domestic factors, such as the arrival of Berlusconi as a major political actor, whereas others have given more emphasis to the pressures and opportunities arising from the renewed burst of activity in the European Union following the Single Market and Maastricht Agreements that set Italy on course to lowering tariff barriers and joining the euro. Lurking in the background, however, along with the invocation of "Europe" (meaning the EU) as a source of discipline upon a profligate people, has been the perception of an increasingly negative impact of globalization on many of Italy's most important industrial sectors (Ferrera and Gualmini 2004). As a result, the perception of economic danger has become an important element in Italian political discourse both in terms of restricting criticism of government

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spending restraint and of mobilizing groups afraid for their economic future in an increasingly competitive and unpredictable world economy. If this has led to a sense of an "incomplete transition" from the old system to the new (from the First to the Second Republic) because no policy seems to settle much of anything, it has also reinstated the old fear that Italy is still anomalous in all sorts of ways, primarily in having had its main media mogul as prime minister and in not having two real parties (bipartyism), as opposed to two coalitions of parties that simply parallel its longer-term bipolarity.[3] Why can't Italy be just like an idealized Britain or the United States? Well, as we shall see, at least with respect to electoral politics, although there are all sorts of differences that mandate against Anglo-Saxon bipartyism there are also some important similarities (e.g., the way election campaigns are now run, the use of public power for private purpose, the decline of purely ideological and the rise of personalized politics, etc.) that suggest that Italy is not as anomalous as often alleged (see Sabetti 2000).

The Geographical Dynamics of Italian Politics

The political economy of Italy at the turn of the millennium is not the theme of this book. The geographical basis to Italian electoral politics in the Berlusconi years is our basic theme. By "geographical basis" we do not mean that people in certain places all vote a certain way because they have always done so and because they are all culturally or economically the same. There is a venerable Italian academic tradition—at least there was before the arrival of Berlusconi on the national political scene—of examining Italian electoral politics in terms of distinctive regions with long-standing political "sub-cultures." In our view, when projected from the 1960s into the 1990s this approach confuses what have turned out to be temporary regionally clustered place configurations with a permanent electoral geography. Assuming that new place configurations must necessarily be regional in ways that some of the old ones were, particularly the

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so-called white and red zones in, respectively, northeastern and central Italy, or that there is "no geography" at all seem equally wrong headed (see Chapter 2).

There is a geographical dynamism to electoral politics. Parties pick up votes in some places and lose them elsewhere, with considerable variance in "swing" from place to place. Places change their relative political complexion with respect to who votes for whom and why. Different types of people (social classes, church members, etc.) in different places also vote differently. Rarely, if ever, is there total unanimity anywhere. But these differences among people in how they vote and how they change their votes in the aggregate over time are always refracted through the "lens" of the significant others (or reference groups) and social processes of learning and everyday experience that are geographically stretched and distributed differentially across Italy.[4]

By way of two examples, after World War II, the city of Lucca in central Italy became a stronghold of the Christian Democratic Party (DC) in a region that was at the same time overwhelmingly drifting to the left. Over the past fifteen years, however, Lucca has become more like neighboring places, as it has also moved toward the center-left (Agnew 2002, Chapter 6). The city of Varese, in Milan's northern hinterland, has seen a much more dramatic movement among locally dominant political forces, from a strong socialist and DC presence immediately after the war, to a place dominated for a while by the Northern League and now where Forza Italia and the Northern League share the largest part of the local electorate (compare Goio et al. 1983 with Agnew 2002, Chapter 7). Other tales of fairly dramatic electoral change rooted in particular places on a par with these can be told from elsewhere in Italy.

A common view, however, is that Italy is becoming electorally homogeneous with the arrival of Berlusconi and his "videocracy." Italy is losing its internal electoral geography. The mass media are usually implicated as the main cause. From this viewpoint, it is Berlusconi's media ownership, in particular, not his salesmanship or organizational skills, which largely explains his success. *Period*. We challenge this view. Even though media of communication, above

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all television and the Internet, have narrowed the national space by sending out common messages that are received by increasing numbers of the population everywhere, whether people watch the same things or react the same way everywhere is open to serious question.[5] Established everyday routines and conversation settings still mediate between message and reception. This social logic to politics challenges the idea of the isolated rational voter engaging in a calculus of voting disconnected from the rest of life. Though dominant in voting studies, this approach has recently been subjected to important theoretical and empirical critique (see Chapter 2). Moreover, beyond the social influences on voting, cumulative if differentiated across space as they are, people are faced with different "problems" depending on where they live. For example, youth unemployment is much more serious in Naples than in Como, the problem of bad roads is more urgent politically in the industrial Northeast and the hinterland of Milan than it is in rural Calabria, and increasing penalties for tax evasion will disproportionately affect those places where businesses have tighter profit margins and depend more on "off the books" or black labor. Policies that require effective regional administration, particularly those emanating from the European Union involving funds for economic development, likewise create or fail to create distinctive local constituencies depending on the capacity of the regional governments to implement the policies. Such capacities, concentrated in relatively few administrative regions (Tuscany, Emilia-Romagna, Lombardy and Veneto), can become issues in electoral politics: why are "we" failing to capture "our" share of available funds and develop networks with regions elsewhere in the EU? (Fargion et al. 2006). There are also long-standing differences across Italy in how the act of voting is thought of, with a relative concentration of clientelist or patronage voters in the South and more so-called identity /ideological and opinion voters elsewhere (Cartocci 1990). Party organization varies from place to place, and some parties can claim more local "notables" (who can potentially sway the votes of their co-locals) as their representatives than other parties, and often appeal to both local "issues" and to the sensibilities of certain groups whose concerns are shared by the

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likeminded elsewhere. In other words, people acquire the reasons for how they choose to vote, and the menu of electoral choices available to them is provided through geographically mediated processes.

Berlusconi's political ability and capacity must be judged in this context. We do so by showing how his coalition (along with his party Forza Italia) and the new alliances on the center-left replaced the parties of the old regime through comparing the elections of 1987 and 1992 geographically with those that came after. We distinguish a number of ways in which the old parties were replaced and the new ones became grounded in the ensuing years: switching or substituting, splitting, or colonizing old voters and mobilizing new ones. These geographical processes are the subject of much of the empirical analysis of Italian national election results in Chapters 3 to 5. The specific nature of the processes we identify is discussed at some length in Chapter 3 before we embark on empirical analysis. We use recently developed methods of spatial analysis as the core of our approach in explaining party replacement and affiliation in contemporary Italy. In so many words, we are thus helping "to socialize the pixel [so to speak] by providing a geographic context for social behavior," one of the most exciting frontiers in social science, because "These new [geographic information] tools provide the ability to analyze social behavior across time and geographic scales, although their adoption by social scientists is yet to approach their potential" (Butz and Torrey 2006, 1899). The basic tenet of the approach is that not only electoral affiliations but also changes in such affiliations are best understood in a geographical context.

This is not to say that geographical or ecological methods are totally new to electoral analysis. Over the past thirty years much effort has been put into portraying elections geographically by means of various multivariate ecological models (see, e.g., Dogan and Rokkan 1969; King 2002) and models of information flow and partisanship (see, e.g., Huckfeldt and Sprague 1987; Books and Prysby 1991; Eagles 1995). Yet most of these works ignore rather than take advantage of the fundamental characteristic of geographic data that proximate observations tend to be correlated with each other, and that descriptively this can tell us a tremendous amount about how

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aggregate votes are correlated geographically and shift over time. In this book we are concerned primarily with describing *how* votes shift or persist geographically in the aggregate across elections and not with making statistical inferences about *why* they do. We do pursue some ideas about why changes occur but these remain speculative if only because of the difficulty of ever definitively transcending the instability of coefficients across different theoretical models (compare, e.g., Putnam 1993 and Solt 2004).

Why, then, if we find this geographical logic so compelling, is so much written about Berlusconi as an electoral magician as if he were all one needed to know about Italian politics? One reason of course is the fact that as well as a leading politician and party leader, he also owns Italy's three private television channels. This basic conflict of interest obviously has given Berlusconi a real advantage over his adversaries in reaching his potential electoral audience. He has also succeeded in personalizing Italian politics, in an American style, when the historic model (at least after Mussolini, and because of him) has been to have parties as the main instruments for electoral competition (e.g., Campus 2006a). However, many commentators are not willing to go beyond this, seeing his electorate as rather like pigeons undergoing operant conditioning. He feeds them; they peck at the right lever. His voters are simply bedazzled or beguiled by him. The power of celebrity is enough in itself to explain his success.

This view of voters is a highly selective one. It presumes that other voters, on the left perhaps, exhibit a greater rationality. Of course, this is an example of the intellectual trap of "false consciousness" that we use when we cannot figure out why people could have done something which we find appalling. The famous quotation, apocryphal or not, of the renowned *New Yorker* magazine film critic, Pauline Kael, is emblematic. When told of Richard Nixon's forty-nine-state landslide in the 1972 U.S. presidential election she reportedly said: "How can that be? I don't know a single person who voted for Nixon." Berlusconi is often regarded today as Nixon was by many commentators in his day. Seemingly, people who would never vote for him are incapable of understanding why others might. In our view, to understand the success of a "toxic"

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leader such as Berlusconi, to use Lipman-Blumen's (2006) colorful term for leaders who have widespread appeal but whose success undermines institutions and increases collective anxiety, we need to focus on "followership" more than on leadership. Who is drawn to Berlusconi and his coalition and for what reasons?

Political Instrumentalism

Now, if we were Italian voters, we would probably never have voted for Berlusconi. But this is beside the point. Other people did. Berlusconi undoubtedly appeals to some people generally disinterested in politics and looking for a strong-sounding leader. George W. Bush has had much the same appeal. Some of this tendency among Italians is not new at all; even since the demise of Mussolini. Right after World War II a political movement based on *qualunquismo* (meaning literally "man-in-the-street" movement) or noncommitment to existing political divisions had some popular support, particularly in parts of southern Italy. But Berlusconi also is attractive to the legions of people who watch the diet of soap operas, films, and game shows on his television channels. Many of these programs present a particularly vulgar American consumerism as a model way of life. He promises its possibility to them. In this regard, he is like those generations of American politicians who have competed by promising "more." Not surprisingly, those who report watching more of this television are more likely to vote for Forza Italia. But this happens only if the television messages are reinforced and not countered through various social influences that either undermine traditional mores (and produce a more anomic everyday social environment) or work to discount or reduce the allure of the messages. Television, therefore, cannot be expected to have exactly the same effects everywhere.

Berlusconi's seemingly anachronistic "anti-Communism," a favorite theme of his election campaigns, needs understanding in this context. It draws attention to both the collapse of the actual state socialism with which some of his political enemies were once closely associated and the view of the state which he represents. If you vote

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for them, he is saying, you are voting not only for the failure of central planning (as in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe) but also, and more crucially, for what Adam Przeworski (1991, 7) has termed "the project of basing society on disinterested cooperation—the possibility of dissociating social contribution from individual rewards." Berlusconi thus represents something increasingly common across the Western democracies since the 1970s: the idea that, as Ronald Reagan said, government is not the solution, it is the problem. From this perspective, there is no such thing as a public interest beyond the aggregated preferences of individual persons. Margaret Thatcher, another of Berlusconi's heroes, once said: "There is no such thing as society." This logic will draw support from those who worry about the fiscal consequences of too much government spending because of "free riding" by those who do not have to pay the bills. But it also feeds neatly into Italy's legion of self-employed businessmen and group self-regulated interests (taxi drivers, pharmacists, etc.) who want to be left alone by government except when it is to their immediate material advantage.[6] In Italy, these types of people are in much greater numbers, in relative terms, than in most other European countries—and particularly dense in all of Italy's major cities and in the industrial districts of northern Italy. They see themselves as "innocents" in a system that encourages an instrumental approach to law (Diamanti 2006a). That this is hardly totally unique to Italy is worth reiterating, particularly in light of recent corruption scandals and payoffs to political paymasters in the United States and Britain (Sabetti 2000; Sciolla 2004).

The potential Forza Italia voter knows exactly what Berlusconi means when he invokes anti-Communism. This is not at all the same thing as the anti-Communism of the old Christian Democratic Party. That was about affiliations with the Catholic Church and NATO. This is all about *me*. Talk about rationality. From this point of view, rules and laws are not absolute or normative but respected only insofar as they make sense to you in the context of your life (Bailey 2001).[7] Berlusconi is the role model sine qua non for this pragmatic or instrumental approach to politics, but it is one that

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predated his appearance on the Italian political scene.[8] Clearly, however, after many years of seeing center-right governments at work in the United States, Italy, and elsewhere, none of this necessarily means the actual shrinkage of government. Indeed, as argued in Chapter 4, and notwithstanding much neoliberal rhetoric, Berlusconi and his allies became as proficient at "big-government conservatism" during their years in office as their U.S. counterpart, the George W. Bush administration. Partly this is because other constituencies with greater demands on government—pensioners, government employees, etc.—had also to be attracted into the fold. In Italy many of these people live in different relative densities in different places from those looking for government to be kept out of their pockets (Chapter 4). Thus, there is a geography to both patronage politics and tax revolt. Berlusconi has had to cater to both to win national elections.

Italian society, then, hardly appears here in the same light as it does when the focus is on devious political magicians seducing the populace or on an innocent civil society undermined by devilish political institutions (such as political parties). Such views, both academic and popular, complement that of the media obsession (e.g., Rodriguez 1994; Livolsi and Volli 1995; Sbisà 1996; Zolo 1999; Ginsborg 2004b; Andrews 2005). In 2006, and not very differently from the 2001 election (if with a different electoral system), the Italian electorate split more or less down the middle in its support for the two main political coalitions. Berlusconi, and his allies, then, do have mass appeal. It is a peculiar intellectual blindness to regard this electorate as consisting entirely of political dopes. Civil society is not always "civil" in the ways we might like; it can be remarkably uncivil even when based apparently on such "good" things as solidarity and association (Cazzola 1992; Sapelli 1997; Chambers and Kopstein 2001). The attitude toward Berlusconi voters is akin to the dismissal of poor, religious-oriented voters in the United States who vote for far-right candidates as not knowing their own interests, as if they were not entirely clear about where they stand (e.g., Frank 2005). Now, how they reach the positions they do is something else again. This can be studied and even, perhaps, understood.

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Book Overview

As we shall see, there are some important continuities between past and present in Italy's electoral geography. Although Forza Italia's voters are hardly carbon copies of old DC ones, and DC voters have split up in complex ways, at an oversimplified level, the following generalizations make some sense: if the North and Sicily have become the heartland of the center-right over the period 1994–2006, central Italy has remained largely in the hands of the center-left if much weaker now than previously, as it had been since the 1950s, with the peninsula South emerging as the zone where elections seem increasingly to be decided in terms of the national distribution of seats in the Italian Parliament. Although, of course, given the closeness of the 2006 election, it was the newly given vote of Italians resident abroad that actually determined the final outcome in terms of seats. However, the regional labels are potentially misleading, if only because over the past twenty years place configurations in relation to national elections have become less compact or regionalized geographically.

This is an important theme of Chapter 2, which provides an overview of Italian electoral geography between 1994 and 2006 with respect to the potential movement from bipolarism to bipolarity (as we have defined them), a discussion of the 1993 electoral system and the major changes of 2005, and a general review of economic and social trends producing more localized electorates all over Italy but particularly in the North and South. The subsequent three chapters take up the story of the collapse of the old party system between 1987 and 1994 (Chapter 3), the emergence of Berlusconi as a major actor and his impact on the new system along with those of his allies and his adversaries between 1994 and 2001 (Chapter 4), and the ways Berlusconi prepared for but ultimately lost out in the 2006 election (Chapter 5). In the Conclusion we review the overall evidence for a geographical logic to Italian electoral politics during the Berlusconi years and speculate on Berlusconi's future role (if any) in light of his recent behavior and what the results of the 2006 constitutional referendum may tell us about emerging possibilities for the Italian center-right after Berlusconi.

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2

The Geography of the New Bipolarity, 1994–2006

One of the high hopes of the early 1990s was that following the cleansing of the corruption associated with the party regime of the cold war period, Italy could become a "normal country." There were hopes that bipolar politics of electoral competition between clearly defined coalitions formed before elections, rather than perpetual domination by the center, would lead to the potential alternating of progressive and conservative forces in national political office and check the systematic corruption of *partitocrazia* based on the jockeying for government offices (and associated powers) after elections (Gundle and Parker 1996). From one viewpoint this has happened. A fragile electoral *bipolarity* between competing center-left and center-right coalitions has seemingly replaced the old system at the national level. Unfortunately, confusion over what is understood by bipolarity has affected judgment by political commentators as to what has been achieved (Franchi 2006). In particular, a populist-plebiscitary conception of elections between rigid blocs who then demonize one another and fail to recognize any deliberative function for parliament once in office has been confused with the need for bipolar

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competition at election time (Sartori 2006a; Berselli and Cartocci 2006).

But in another respect, a persistent feature of Italian electoral politics is the continuing lack of electoral bipolarity at other geographical scales, such as the regional and local. Politically, Italy remains a "geographical expression" with little evidence of either emerging nationwide swing between party groupings or of that opinion voting in which any voter anywhere is potentially available to vote for any party. There is also an absence of institutional *bipolarism* in the sense of true left and right parties replacing the ad hoc arrangements at work in what remain strange and often ideologically incoherent coalitions. Indeed, from this viewpoint, the old system organized around the two "spheres" of DC and the PCI was more truly bipolar but obviously had an inability to produce alternation in office between the two sides (Bogaards 2005).

However, the whole concept of a "normal country" this discussion circulates around is deeply problematic. It is based on an idealized model of electoral politics in Britain and the United States, which countries presumably lack the geographical and ideological fractures of Italy and, as a result, effortlessly produce alternation in national office between distinctive left- and right-leaning political forces (Agnew 2002, Chapter 4). Of course, Italian politics has many unique features. But geographical variance in support for political parties is not one of them. This is a widespread characteristic of electoral politics around the world. The study of Italian politics, as well as the study of other political systems, has lacked an understanding of why this is the case. Crucial has been the seeming difficulty of thinking geographically about national politics. A certain "methodological nationalism" has immunized scholars against thinking in terms of fractured or variegated national territories. A normative commitment to national unification has further undermined attending to the ways in which political identities and interests are made out of local and regional conditions as well as national-level ones. Michel Foucault (1980, 149) has captured most vividly what seems to have happened in conventional thinking about space and time:

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> Space was treated as the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile. Time, on the contrary, was richness, fecundity, life, dialectic. . . . The use of spatial terms seems to have the air of an anti-history. If one started to talk in terms of space that meant that one was hostile to time. It meant, as the fools say, that one "denied history. . . ." They didn't understand that space . . . meant the throwing into relief of processes—historical ones, needless to say—of power.

As Foucault was suggesting, the devaluation of spatial thinking is a well-established intellectual tradition in its own right. So, it is no surprise that thinking about Italian politics should follow a similar logic—except, that is, because there can be few countries that would seem to be so ripe for the application of spatial thinking. Not only is Italy obviously divided geographically by significant economic and cultural cleavages, its politics has often been understood in spatial terms by students of the "southern question"—the North-South gap in economic development—and of fixed regional political cultures (the red and white zones) as well as by those suggesting more complex typologies of region-based voting processes (exchange or patronage votes in the South, identity votes in the colored zones, and opinion voting in the Northwest) and center-periphery relationships in relative power between central and local governments (Agnew 2002, Chapter 2). Much of this can be traced to the nature of Italian political unification "from above" and the historic difficulty of "nationalizing the masses" around a common set of social identities and interests associated with the national as opposed to other "scales" of social life (Salvadori 1994). As a result, patronage and vote-trading in the interest of geographical constituencies have tended to substitute for less obviously instrumental and more ideological types of mass national politics.[1]

Yet, time and again, influential commentators have announced the immanent demise of a geographically divisible Italy as votes nationalized around two major parties (as in the 1970s with DC and the PCI) or as the media controlled by one man, Silvio Berlusconi, have finally unified the country politically in a nationwide electoral

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marketplace that is transcending older and now largely residual local and regional mediations (as in recent years). This is the saga reiterated in several of the most popular English accounts of Italian politics since 1992, whatever their own particular virtues in explaining aspects of what has happened (e.g., Andrews 2005; Stille 2006). In this chapter, our primary goal is to challenge the theoretical and empirical adequacy of the vision of a single Italy as the emergent trend of post-1992 Italian electoral politics; albeit because of Berlusconi or more mysterious forces.

In so doing we want to question two more deep-seated theoretical biases in academic political studies that extend well beyond the Italian case. The first of these is the idea of a new politics totally dominated by control over mass media, particularly television, rather than a politics still driven by social affiliations and political-economic divisions mediated by the routines of everyday life. From the two-step flow model of political influence formulated by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) to recent studies of the roles of friendship and familial networks and local-environmental effects in the social construction of political outlooks (e.g., Zuckerman 2005), it is clear that media messages are both selected and interpreted according to political orientations that are embedded in networks of social influence. Furthermore, local economic and social issues frequently provide the dominant lens through which national (and other extra-local) messages, claims, and promises are refracted by social networks and thence into political attitudes and voting behavior (see, e.g., Agnew 2002; Golden 2004).

The second theoretical bias is the idea inherited from such intellectual luminaries as Hegel and Durkheim: that modernity is essentially national and that the nation-state provides the singular nexus for modern politics. In other words:

> that national history secures for the contested and contingent nation the false unity of a self-same, national subject evolving through time. This reified history derives from the linear, teleological model of Enlightenment History—which I designate with a capital H to distinguish it from other

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> modes of figuring the past. It allows the nation-state to see itself as a unique form of community which finds its place in the oppositions between tradition and modernity, hierarchy and equality, empire and nation (Duara 1995: 4).

To Sergio Romano (1993), for example, looking back favorably on the efforts at Italian political unification in the mid–nineteenth century, although alert to the ultimate failure of the later Fascism to fulfill its proclaimed goals, Italy was fatally undermined as an individual subject by the party system of the postwar period. Writing in the immediate aftermath of the *mani pulite* scandals, Romano hoped that "escape" was still possible but only if the veto power of numerous groups within Italian society was neutralized by institutions that departed from the traditions of *trasformismo* (vote trading) and through the encouragement of national-level bipolarity (and alternation) between political forces. Whatever the merits of the details of his discussion, the entire approach rests on the model of nationalist teleology as critiqued by Duara.

We take issue with these biases not by invoking either timeless regional subcultures with different densities of "social capital," the sort of idea made popular for Italy in recent years by Robert Putnam (1993), or other fixed spaces of one sort or another, defined by criteria such as family types, landholding patterns or soils (as in classical electoral geography) (e.g., Solt 2004), but by claiming that dynamic place configurations are central to how the "new" Italian politics is being constructed. By dynamic place configurations we mean the mix of local and extra-local social and economic influences that come together differentially in different places and that change in their conditional effects as the influences themselves are shuffled and displaced over time.[2] These configurations are apparent most obviously in the emerging electoral geography of Italy from 1994 to the present; for example, the South became a zone of competition between the main party coalitions and what Diamanti (2003a) calls a "zona azzurra" of heavy levels of support for Berlusconi's Forza Italia that emerged in the Northwest and Sicily. These patterns, in turn, reflect trends in support for party positions on

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governmental centralization and devolution, geographical patterns of local economic development, and the reemergence of the North-South divide as a focus for ideological and policy differences between parties and social groups.

As Italy is being remade politically, therefore, it remains both one and divisible. Our central thesis (pace Diamanti 2003a, 2003b; and Caramani 2004) is that the historical pendulum does not swing *from* local *to* national (or vice versa), therefore, but constantly *around* these and other geographical scales (through the linkages that both tie places together as well as separate them in their particularity) that although the balance of importance between them changes, there is never a final victory for one, be it either regional or national.[3] Geographical *catenaccio* or lock-down (a term used to describe the defensive style of play in Italian soccer) is not a feature of Italian politics however much it might be desired for ideological or intellectual reasons. Before considering some of the details of post-1992 Italian electoral geography, we want to describe briefly the current conventional wisdom about a nationalizing Italy and to say a little about what we mean by "place and electoral politics."

Envisioning a Single Italy

There are two different versions of the "nationalization thesis" as applied to contemporary Italian electoral politics: if one emphasizes Berlusconi's putative revolutionary use of mass communication to reduce Italy to a single homogenized "public opinion," the other argues for the "return of the state," following a short interregnum in which the "local" and the "periphery" had challenged the authority of the center, and the corresponding homogenization of political opinion around a nationwide menu. The rise of Berlusconi's Forza Italia party, undoubtedly the centerpiece of the center-right alliance since 1994, is seen as particularly representative of this new national homogenization. In both cases, therefore, national politics is seen as operating increasingly without mediation by places or territory. From these perspectives, the question of "where?" is ever more irrelevant to understanding the workings of Italian electoral politics.

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The advent of Italian media baron Silvio Berlusconi to national political office as leader of his own political party, Forza Italia (who has twice been prime minister of center-right Liberty Pole/House of Freedoms governments) is frequently interpreted as representing the success of a national "telecratic" model of politics over the old party-based model. In this interpretation, as recounted, for example, by Daniele Zolo (1999), parties no longer call themselves "parties" as such (they are slogans, as in Forza Italia, or known as a Lega (league), Alleanza (alliance), Polo (pole), Casa (house), Rete (network), or Ulivo (olive tree)) and they relate to the public and their voters "in ways that are radically different from those in the past" (Zolo 1999,727). Notoriously, political communication is now largely in the hands of one man through his control over most private and public television channels. More importantly, Berlusconi, has changed the rules of the political game. Other politicians have followed where he led. "Italy has evolved, in less than twenty years," Zolo (1999,728) asserts, "from a neoclassical democratic model, founded on the competitiveness of the multi-party system, to a post-classical democratic model, that is to say, beyond representation, dependent on the television opinion polls and the soundings of public opinion." Reaching all across Italy, television has replaced grassroots organization as the main instrument of political involvement. Thus, "the new politicians no longer belonged to 'parties': they became elites of electoral entrepreneurs who, competing among themselves through advertising, spoke directly to the mass of citizen consumers offering them their symbolic 'products' through the television medium according to precise marketing strategies" (Zolo 1999, 735). As a result, "Not only is political communication almost totally absorbed by television, but so is the whole process of the legitimization of politicians, of the production of consensus and of the definition and negotiation of the issues *that have no other location and, so to speak, no other symbolic places* except television studies and popular entertainment programmes—to which the stars of the political firmament are often invited" (Zolo 1999, 739) (our emphasis).

Television in general and Berlusconi's ability to use it to his advantage have undoubtedly had major effects on Italian electoral

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politics. Parties do increasingly rely on advertising and polling to push their agendas. Television viewership is relatively higher per capita in Italy (and elsewhere in southern Europe) than in the United States and northern Europe (Wise 2005). Certainly in Italy and elsewhere, celebrity politicians— think of the actor Arnold Schwarzenegger in California, the wrestler Jesse Ventura in Minnesota, the businessman Thaksin Shinawatra in Thailand—have challenged the centrality of professional or machine politicians (Street 2004; Hilder 2005). The personalities of candidates increasingly eclipse the character of parties as major elements in political campaigns (Venturino 2005). Political parties everywhere have also lost much of their capacity to make voters identify strongly with them, perhaps because governments around the world have lost their ability to fulfill what they promise at election time. Specifically, with economies less nationally structured under conditions of globalization, governments are less capable of executing independent economic policies.

But whether these trends, particularly that of the centralization of media control, have had the totalizing effects on national politics alleged by Zolo and others (e.g., Schlesinger 1990, Sbisà 1996; Pagnoncelli 2001; Ginsborg 2004a; Bendicenti 2006) is open to question. For one thing, many segments of the population do not rely as heavily on television for entertainment or information as often alleged. Young people in Italy, for example, are increasingly drawn to radio rather than to television. This is one reason why Berlusconi has recently set his sights on increasing his share of the notoriously fragmented Italian radio business (Taddia 2004). People also tend to watch the television channels and programs that already appeal to them and avoid those that do not. In this regard, television (as with partisan newspapers) tends to reinforce and mobilize already held opinions rather than convert people to new ones.[4] More importantly, opinions are also still formed in everyday interaction with other people, notwithstanding their joint reliance on increasingly homogenized national sources. People in different social groups operating in different milieux interpret what they encounter in viewing television in radically different ways. However persuasive television often

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appears, the best attempts at persuasion often backfire when people bring their own "common sense" and identities to bear in interpreting what they see (Hall 1980). People are neither as gullible nor as ignorant as either pollsters or media critics often make them appear. (When they are gullible or ignorant, they do not require television to encourage or validate them!) As Giovanni Sartori (1989) has argued, television can also encourage localism more than nationalization. It takes attention off parties and puts it on politicians and their service to constituencies. Thus, television moves simultaneously between the extremes of "no place" and "my place." Any sort of national "good," as inherited from the nationalism of the French Revolution, is lost in between (Sartori 1989, 189).

Finally, Forza Italia's success probably owes more to Berlusconi the politician than in his role as the media baron (see Chapter 4). Not only has he been effective as a coalition builder, at the very least politically mobilizing local business elites and Rotarians all over Italy and bringing together various political forces from the political right, but Forza Italia has become much more of a membership organization than a simple electoral vehicle operated from the offices of Berlusconi's main business, Mediaset (formerly Fininvest).[5] Even Forza Italia has had to organize itself territorially. It seems to have done so relatively successfully in a context in which all parties have lost the kind of local organizational presence some of them (or their progenitors) once had (Poli 2001; Mannheimer 2002). At least in national elections, if not so much in local ones, Forza Italia has been able to supplement its national-level media dominance with local campaign events (in the American style) very much to its benefit.[6] Vital to this success has been the image Berlusconi has cultivated of himself as a persecuted outsider crusading for the interests of other "self-made" people, drawing from the U.S. Republican Party strategy of portraying its electoral adversaries as the "enemies" of ordinary people, which at one and the same time both obfuscates and subtly suggests his own dependence on "persecuted" political connections for his own business and political success.[7] In his very disavowal of insider status his initial dependence on a political mentor, Bettino Craxi, for his business success and his constant run-ins with

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the judicial system for shady business practices proclaim him as the living symbol of the well-established Italian politics of *raccomandazione* and crony capitalism (see, e.g., Zinn 2001) At the same time, and hardly unique to Italy, Berlusconi also represents the appeal of a person who has made it in business (and as President of AC Milan, in soccer, the most popular sport in the country) who constantly draws attention to the fact that his political adversaries "have never worked." This appeals to those dismayed and alienated from professional politicians and "politics as usual."[8] Even without Berlusconi, therefore, there will be a continuing basis for this aspect of *Berlusconismo* and the emphasis on a populist rapport between the leader and the population at large (Chapter 6). Opportunistic in pursuing themes that appeal to a center-right electorate (such as Catholic objections to fertility treatments, etc.), Berlusconi has worked most actively to blur the distinction between state and market beloved of true liberals, partly to preserve his own vast business interests from competitive pressures (Pasquino 2005; Alesima and Giavazzi 2007).

Paul Ginsborg (2003), hardly insensitive to the role of Berlusconi's media ownership in recent Italian politics (see, e.g., Ginsborg 2004a), argues that too much emphasis on television risks ignoring "the degree to which other forces were at work in Italian modernity, forces which ran counter to any idea of the facile manipulation of the individual." Indeed, the old pre-1992 Italy was dominated by two "churches": the Catholic Church and the Italian Communist Party. Since their relative erosion as political agents, a plethora of small groups, nongovernmental organizations, and single-issue movements have pluralized the Italian political scene, albeit unevenly from place to place.[9] Moreover, television has long been overtly politicized in Italy with the main parties previously dominating their own state channels in both personnel and message. What is perhaps most important about Berlusconi is that his almost total dominance of Italian television in recent years has helped to shape popular tastes in such a way that favor his type of celebrity political candidacy (Ginsborg 2004a; Bendicenti 2006). Even so, distracting mass publics and steering public opinion are imperfect arts, as Berlusconi's defeats in 1996 and 2006 attest. Active human agents can always

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react perversely to media "spin" and often match what they see on television with their own prior experience at the expense of the former (e.g., Thompson 2000, 262–3).

A second account emphasizes rather both the declining role of the regional mediation in electoral orientations alleged to have dominated Italy before 1992 and an end to the seeming rise in importance of localism and local government that took place in the 1990s and was closely associated with the political rise of the Northern League. In this construction, offered most forcefully in recent years by Ilvo Diamanti (2003a, 2003b), these old patterns are said to be giving way to a nationalized "electoral market" as "differences in votes between areas decline, the geographical gateways of single parties, those that were considered subcultures, have all faded, not only the white zone of DC but also the green zone of the League that was built and now has faded, and Democrats of the left (DS) and Reformed Communists (RC) have lost major support in the central region, above all in the districts where they were most weak in this area" (Diamanti 2003b, 239–240). In particular, "there no longer exist specific area interests that characterize the politics and the policies of the parties; above all those of the center-right, the present government. Because the majority, particularly Forza Italia, has an electoral base scattered in different zones" (Diamanti 2003b, 239). Forza Italia is characterized as practicing a "politics without territory" (Diamanti 2003a, 85). Institutionally, this trend is said to reflect a rebalancing between center and periphery, such that, for example, the 2001 election saw a ballot in which Berlusconi and his coalition were formally paired together and the national government had begun to reassert its authority as a result of EU directives and popular demands to deal with "national" problems. But this is not a return to the past, even if it is a "return of the state." To Diamanti, it is more a reimposition of authority at the center in the face of a vastly changed country in which the swing of the geographical pendulum to the periphery had gone too far.[10]

All this is particularly surprising in light of Diamanti's (2003a, 7) claim early in his book that territory qua place does not simply imply a backdrop to political processes but is "a crossroads . . . where society, politics and history are joined together and where they

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become visible." This is a fundamental tenet of his previous writing on Italian politics in general and the Northern League in particular. But here it has become contingent rather than necessary: present significantly only when a dominant political subject, such as the old regionally hegemonic parties in the white and red zones or the League in the far north, brings it into play. What seems to have happened is that Diamanti has fused three different conceptions of the role of territory *in* politics without clearly distinguishing their different consequences *for* Italian national politics: the role of territorial or jurisdictional claims in a party's discourse (critically that of the Northern League in relation to Padania or northern Italy versus the rest of Italy), the role of territory (or place) in social mediation between people and parties, and the relative autonomy of local politics vis-à-vis central government. The fading of either the first or the third, we would suggest, does not necessitate the fading of the other two, particularly the second, which is the primary concern of this book.

It does seem clear that the old regional subcultures, to the extent that they were ever as powerful in the regions to which they were ascribed as Diamanti alleges, have eroded. However, there is also evidence that this erosion was well under way before 1992 (Agnew 2002, Chapters 5 and 6). A case could be made for the reemergence of central state authority after a period in which it had weakened, even though big city mayors and regional governors have all acquired powers they lacked before 1992 and a watered-down devolution law giving certain health, education, and policing powers to the administrative regions passed the Italian Parliament in 2005 and came up for referendum vote in June 2006. But do trends toward a breakdown of regional party hegemonies and a reassertion of state authority necessarily signify a collapse of geographical mediation in Italian electoral politics tout court? Indeed, Diamanti's (2003a, 2003b) own empirical exposition suggests anything but. His discussion of electoral trends is entirely in terms of changing *geographies* of support. What he demonstrates, in fact, is that an idealized regional pattern has given way to a pattern of localities—or what he himself calls electoral "archipelagos" (Diamanti 2003a, 105). As the least

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regionalized party, Forza Italia still has a demonstrable electoral geography that, although distinctive in the precise localities it encompasses as areas of strong support, bears a remarkable geographical resemblance to the split North-South vote of the old Christian Democratic Party at the top of its game in the 1970s. At the same time, other major parties retain or have established even more definitive geographies of popular support, even as some regions have become more competitive between parties than hitherto. Even as parties have lost some of their grip on pools of support in different regions, voters still seem to exhibit distinctive patterns of electoral choice that are definitely not the same irrespective of where they are in Italy.

In idealizing an electoral past when regional party hegemonies ruled over electoral outcomes, an understandable view perhaps for someone rooted in the Italian Northeast, Diamanti has confused a dynamic and complex reterritorialization with an incipient nationalization (homogenization) of Italian electoral politics. In equating region with territory or place tout court (an almost pervasive feature of political science and history discourses about Italian society and politics) he likewise misses the extent to which geographies can take forms other than the regional. In emphasizing the role of certain parties with different roles for territory in their discourse in defining different electoral epochs and reducing each to sound-bite phrases—DC and the PCI from the 1950s to the 1980s ("politics in territory"), the League from the 1980s into the 1990s ("territory against politics"), and Forza Italia from the 1990s into the 2000s ("politics without territory")—Diamanti has also misconstrued his own evidence that electorates remain, if in different configurations over time, associated intimately with distinctively different geographical patterns of electoral choice.

More recently, Diamanti (2004) seems to explicitly backtrack from much of what he has claimed as an emerging "politics without territory." Even Forza Italia now is said to have a "territorial character" that Diamanti previously dismissed even as he described it. Indeed, the considerable losses of Forza Italia in the 2004 European and administrative elections are put down to "problems of political

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geography" as it lost to its national allies in their strongholds and to the center-left in many places, including Milan and Rome. Blame is laid at Berlusconi's door for relying so heavily on television and marketing, although even he is also downgraded as something of a political "has been." That Forza Italia has in fact achieved something of a foundation in many localities through colonizing chambers of commerce and more especially through its own organizational presence on the ground is still denied. Diamanti ends on a peculiar note for someone so recently enamored of "politics without territory," even as he still locates the uncertain but deterritorializing present against a past of ideological and geographical certainty when he writes: "The time of ideological fidelity and undiscussed political identities is finished: the time of eternal passions. But whoever believed that television was enough for repositioning, with marketing experts and opinion polls at the service of closed oligarchies, must reevaluate their belief. And to take up studying again: Society, territory, geography" (Diamanti 2004, 2). Of course, we couldn't agree more with this sentiment. But we think we have something in mind considerably more complex than Diamanti's vision of geography as politically homogenous regional territories that are either present or absent.

Place and Electoral Politics

We find it useful to think of explanations of political behavior as either *compositional* or *contextual* in nature (Goodin and Tilly 2006). We can offer only relatively brief remarks here about this distinction, which is the centerpiece of some recent writing on Italian politics (Agnew 2002). Compositional explanation characteristically locates behavior in individual persons and, more particularly, in their associated socioeconomic attributes but as traits not as substantial social connections. The complexities of social attachments, political reasoning, and desires are all reduced to the singular notion that unmediated individual desires determine political action (Taylor 2006). Social traits stand in as surrogates for what desires we expect different types of people to have. From this perspective, all that needs to

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be known about people to understand their voting and other political behaviors is which national census categories they belong to. In other words, support for political parties is best explained by reference to aggregation of the socioeconomic traits of their electorates. Contextual understanding, however, emphasizes the mediating role of social and political milieux, such as workplaces, residential and other living arrangements, party origins and organization, religious practice, immigration from distant places, and histories of social conflict, between the agency of individual persons on the one hand and making electoral choices on the other (Agnew 1987, 1996).

From this point of view, census categories are meaningless unless placed in the contexts of everyday life. The traits themselves always exist in reality as particular configurations and take on meaning and produce the reasons for why people vote they ways they do in relation to social and material attachments that are always locatable somewhere. Thus, a certain class "membership" in one context can elicit a very different meaning and, consequently, a different type of vote or party orientation than it might, for example, in a large as opposed to a small city and for the mix of people with different "generational" experiences in adolescence (this seems to be crucial in adult political socialization) in those places (e.g., Kinder 2006).

To make this point more abstractly we can use Ian Hacking's (2004, 281) turn of phrase: "Existence precedes essence." In other words, "who you are is determined by your own actions and choices" (Hacking 2004, 282), not by a priori membership in a category of a classification scheme. Classifications, however, have feedback or "looping effects" when people act as if they do belong to particular social (or other) categories. But they do so only on the basis of their own reactions to them in relation to the everyday constraints and images they experience, not because the categories define them. Consequently, "in any place and time only some possibilities even make sense" (Hacking 2004, 287).

Contexts of "place and time" are not best thought of as invariably regional, local, or national, although they frequently have elements of one, several, or all. Rather, they are best considered as always located somewhere, with some contexts more stretched over

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