

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* on 07/02/2019, available online:
<http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/1354571X.2019.1550883>.

Matthew Evangelista (ed.), *Italy from Crisis to Crisis. Political Economy, Security and Society in the 21st Century* (London and New York, Routledge, 2018), i-xviii + pp. 254, ISBN 978-1—138-10685-7, price £29.99, soft cover.

Matthew Evangelista's collection of essays is a welcome and precious addition to scholarly reflections on Italian politics, economics and society over the last four decades. This is a time during which, as the book's title suggests, Italy has moved 'from crisis to crisis'. The volume includes chapters not only by well-established academics, such as Sidney Tarrow and Jonathan Hopkin, but also by younger researchers. All the essays make for an insightful and thought provoking read and in their methodological and theoretical approach reflect the contributors' multifarious disciplinary provenances: history, sociology and political science. The volume covers a broad range of topics from Italy's economic decline and poor performance since the 1980s to its troubled transition to a multi-ethnic society. It also discusses issues such as transformations in the Italian party system and populism, corruption, ageing, changes in values. The book avoids the mistake, often made by similar academic publications, of artificially disjointing domestic from international politics and has a substantial section on foreign and security policy. The latter includes three interesting and perceptive chapters on Italian foreign policy after the Cold War by Elisabetta Brighi, Italy's defense policy by Fabrizio Coticchia and energy policies by Elisabetta Bini.

All the essays go out of their way to set their analysis of Italy in a wider context, keeping away from, to use Matthew Evangelista's words, the 'sense of teleological and even normative undertone' that characterises many of the academic studies of

Italy (p.4): Italy, Evangelista continues, is often treated ‘as sui generis’ (p. 5) and erroneously looked at as ‘as a country transitioning to a “normality” which is never quite reached’ (p. 5). As Sydney Tarrow points out, Italy is not necessarily more crisis-prone than other democracies, but rather exhibits features that other states have come to share.

The comparative outlook adopted by most chapters focuses on Southern Europe. Jonathan Hopkin and Julia Lynch look at EU-inspired structural reforms, which Italian governments implemented throughout the 1990s to join the Eurozone and the budgetary policies pursued thereafter to avoid being kicked out of it. Neither in Italy nor in the rest of Southern Europe, have liberalising reforms done much to reverse slow growth. Conventional explanations for their failure point to Southern European countries’ inability to push liberalisation far enough or to the persistence of inefficiencies and distortions in their administrative and legal institutional machinery. Hopkin and Lynch question both arguments, especially the one insisting on the need for higher dose of cuts and deregulation. Drawing on Karl Polanyi’s observation that ‘for markets to work effectively, they must protect and be protected by society’, they argue that reforms didn’t produce the expected results because they removed institutions that didn’t work but ‘failed to build new institutions that could re-embed the market, or failed to build appropriate new institutions at all’. More and better quality regulation and not less regulation, so they claim, is what Italy needs to address its ‘current malaise’ (p. 59).

The 2008 economic crisis and the austerity pill that Italy and other Southern European countries were pushed to take plunged them into a period of prolonged recession and

produced soaring levels of youth unemployment (currently 40.2% in Italy). Faced with a life of precariousness and a welfare state unresponsive to their needs, between 2008 and 2013 around 100,000 young Italians left to go abroad. As Adele Lebano notes in her chapter ‘Where have all the young people gone?’, in 2014 the number of Italians who migrated exceeded that of immigrants who arrived. Among people below 40 who leave the country, 70 per cent have a university degree. Over the last ten years young Spanish, Portuguese and Greek graduates have also emigrated en masse causing Southern Europe an immense generational brain drain, one that it will take a long time to recover from.

The focus on Southern Europe provides interesting data and plenty of food for thought to better contextualise problems and challenges that are not unique to Italy but common, in nature and scale, to other Southern European countries. However, several issues discussed in the book, far from being solely a Southern European problem, have also kept policy makers in Northern and Central Europe extremely busy. The list is long: growing anti-immigrant sentiment, islamophobia and the revival of nativist discourses; the rise of the Far Right, the crisis of mainstream politics, electoral volatility, populism, rampant euro-scepticism. The volume’s contributors only occasionally acknowledge this. Interestingly and surprisingly, although the book was published in December 2017, the election of Trump and the Brexit referendum and aftermath are not mentioned once. When reading Italian newspapers today, one senses Italian commentators’ satisfaction (and meagre consolation) in seeing countries that have long been represented and perceived as solid and mature democracies dealing with levels of political instability and clownesque politics that up to a few years ago were commonly pathologized as Italy’s

anomaly. Without necessarily sharing Italians' joy in observing Italian 'pathologies' becoming increasingly 'normal', it is unquestionable that a full understanding of Italy's recent 'crisis' requires the use of larger and more 'global' lenses.

For all the similarities with its European neighbours, Italy features a number of specificities. One of them is the fact that the nation is ageing at a much faster rate than other advanced capitalist countries. The segment of the population between 15 and 24 years old accounts for only 10 per cent of the population in Italy but for 12.5 per cent in Europe and 18 per cent worldwide. It has been estimated that by 2025 people over 65 will be more numerous than under 25s. The paradox is that Italians have fewer and fewer children even though more than 50% of women are out of the labour market. Italian women's employment rate is 46.6%, 12.2% lower than the EU-28 average (p. 162). The latter is another Italian negative record that Lebrato discusses and tries to make sense of in her thoughtful and informative essay. As she points out, the inflow of immigrants is helping to counteract ageing and low fertility rates and the worries of those who wonder who will pay their pensions in future years. But this is an argument still to be won in Italy, as well as in the rest of Europe.

Ilaria Favretto

Kingston University