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Corruzione: Collusion and complicity in Italy

One important hurdle faced by the makers of post-unification Italy was the realisation that it was impossible to exercise effective ideological and even political control of the country within the standard terms of the Western European liberal social contract. Italy was a composite of territories conquered by the Kingdom of Sardinia ruled by the Dukes of Savoy, the reigning house of Piedmont who became Kings of Sardinia only after 1720. The House of Savoy's marginal monarchical status undermined their claims of legitimacy for a united Italy. At best, a liberal social contract between State and citizen was considered an ideal that might be reached in the future, but most politicians of the time, judging from their speeches and actions, were more concerned with forging unity from the highly-fragmented political and cultural entities 1 absorbed by the Piedmontese and with lessening Italy's political dependency on the good will of foreign states. Despite D'Azeglio's much-quoted epigram ("Now that we have created Italy, we must create Italians"), early political visions of Italian citizenship did not envision a political role for the peasantry, landless rural workers (braccianti) and unskilled urban workers. The proletariat, whose existence was at least acknowledged by contemporary ideologues because they feared that European trade union agitation would contaminate Italian workers, was to be tightly controlled. Peasants were, well, peasants, and could be safely ignored. The State had reneged on Garibaldi's promises of land reform and confirmed the power of southern landowners. In other words, the political category

[1] I am tempted to use the word 'ethnic', but I avoid the term because there are so many problems disengaging the post-unification rhetorical insistence that Italy was populated by 'Italians' from various local realities. One need only refer to Banfield's famous *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (1958), in which the author argues that the people of the southern village of Montegrano (a fictional name) were completely consumed by self-interest and had no real conception of polity beyond the village, and its influence on subsequent discussions about 'Southern' culture to realise the pitfalls of confusing rhetorical figures (the South, the North) with local realities. When I use "cultural entities", I am referring to the fact that Italian regions and statelets had different histories, languages and traditions, which the people of these regions and statelets politicised in the newly-created Italy as a means of establishing cultural practices of resistance to the heavy-handed bureaucratic intrusion of the Italian national government.

'Italian' as envisaged by the founders of the State did not include at least half the population of the country.2

One solution that reconciled the democratic hopes of some (though not all) founders of the State with the Piedmontese desire to quash political resistance was to impose a *stato di diritto*, 'the rule of law'; in other words, a state by statute law and not by common law or by legal precedent. The law would be "context-free" (Sabetti 2000:11) and would be applied regardless of individual and regional self-interests. At first glance, this seems to be coherent with most late 19th century (and earlier) liberal-democratic political thought that addressed the definition of the rights and duties of citizenship. The legal system of modern states was not supposed to protect inherited privilege.

Because of the incipient anarchy that threatened the fragile nascent unity of a State whose charter for existence was due more to the benign yet self-interested tolerance of foreign powers than to the strength of its own political will, the rule of law was to have no exceptions. In other words, a vision of a legal framework in which contingencies would not evoke a recourse to the 'spirit of the law' to guide the *interpretation* of legislation meant that the particular circumstances that surrounded a situation of legal or political conflict acquired a heightened importance by its very denial – if the contingencies were such that a statute was seen as inapplicable, then this was grounds for the creation of new law covering new contingencies rather than a reason for looser or newer interpretations of the old statute. Interpreting the law and the limits of how it was to be applied was left in the hands of politicians rather than in the hands of the judiciary. Furthermore, the numerous detailed statutes required to cover as many situations as possible created a psychological climate in which people felt that everything was illegal unless specifically approved – one can never know all the laws that touch upon any given action or situation. To put things in comparative perspective, fundamental 'rights' in American and Canadian politics are seen as somehow beyond the reach of legislation.

[2] In a strange irony, given Vatican treatment of Roman underclasses before 1870, it was the Vatican who espoused the cause of the new Roman working class (new because they were largely imported from outside Rome, Romans lacking the necessary skills) in post-unification Italy. In 1891, Leo XIII issued the encyclical *Rerum novarum*, which called for better living conditions for workers (the subtitle was, "On the condition of workers"). The condition of these 'new' workers not only had degenerated, they stood in stark contrast to the living conditions of the growing middle class whose housing the workers were building; cf. Rendina (2001: 558,560).

Statutes and political practices must not contradict or impede 'natural' or constitutionally-defined rights. In Italy, there is no definition of rights under a *stato di diritto* that is above the law, since, at least in 1861, there were no rights that have not been defined by statute.

In general terms, this meant that Italian Constitutions (there have been several since the birth of the State) are particularly dim beacons that barely illuminate social problems. In practical terms, this has obliged police, lawyers, judges and politicians to adopt two strategies, both of which in the end undermine the rule of law: either turn a blind eye to illegal activities that popular mores consider normal under some circumstances (for example, until recently, some forms of assault that are linked to an alleged code of male honour, such as wife-beating and sexual assault) or engage in some extravagant verbal acrobatics to get around the rigidity of the letter of the law.[3]

The result (apart from the low prestige enjoyed by the judiciary in public opinion) is a myriad of laws aimed at a constellation of contingencies. Not surprisingly, many of these laws seem to contradict one another. Furthermore, because Italian laws are formulated in terms of an immediate problem, they do not usually incorporate clear implementation policies, directives aimed at low-level bureaucrats that explicate how the law is to be applied in specific contexts. As one highly-placed political consultant explained it to me, the specificity of the situation covered by the statute should obviate the need for implementation policies and strategies, which, after all, are necessary only in cases in which laws are formulated as general principles rather than aimed at specific social and economic circumstances. More than once I have been in government offices where disputes in interpretation of proposed government policies discussed on television and in newspapers (a good example is the current proposed reform of pensions that has been the subject of political and popular debate for at least five years) have obliged harassed bureaucrats to get a copy of the relevant statute books and argue their case against a citizen by quoting chapter and verse from the bombastic language used in formulating statues.

[3] This is not to say that the latest constitution is ignored. Legal judgements often cite not only the relevant statute but also the article of the constitution from which the law is inspired. Given the vagaries and contradictions of the Italian constitution, however, this is no more than an attempt to create a shared discursive field that operationalises the relationship the State and its citizens. See Magli (1996) for an overview of the contradictions and ambiguities of the constitution.

Of course, the opposite is also true, with citizens who claim services and rights arming themselves with copies of the relevant statutes. Legal and context-specific administrative methodologies, for want of a better term, are usually so specifically detailed, or, more often, are orders-in-council not ratified by Parliament, that they appear entirely ad-hoc even to most Italians. As one person told me, "on paper, Italy is the best country in the world" because many of its laws are progressive instruments designed to further social welfare. In practice, however, the country is an administrative nightmare. Long ago, Dante wrote, "For every fly on the wall, there is a law". The situation does not seem to have changed.

One example of this quagmire is the laws surrounding government *concorsi* ('competitions', sing. *concorso*). By law, all government positions in the bureaucracy (except for the upper echelons, which are staffed by political nominees) are filled by the winners of an apparently rigorous and highly formalised selection process. The same procedures are used in some non-government recruitment procedures such as the exams for admission to the Bar and to the association (*l'Albo*) of notaries. All well and good, since the precise rules governing the *concorso* are allegedly designed to create a level playing field in which merit and competence can emerge and be rewarded. The Italian political philosophy (and practice) of centralisation to which I have repeatedly alluded, however, has inspired the formulators of the system to make each commission's judgements *insindicabili*, 'without appeal', just as politicians are insulated from popular criticism. The only recourse available to a failed candidate is on technical grounds, that the commission did not respect the formal rules (for example, in a university competition, if the commission did not issue a written judgement on one of the candidate's publications, or if they gave one candidate more time to answer a question than another candidate, or even if a commissioner used the informal *tu* with one candidate and the formal *Lei* with another).

By the same token, potential candidates are held to the same formal rigour in their applications. Until recently, most applications had to be written on *carta bollata*, 'franked paper', a legal size sheet of lined paper with margins on the left and right. Applications had to use the entire space between the margins, leading to incredibly confusing hyphenation (the word is broken wherever it happens to fall on the right margin) and to

extremely complex technical problems with aligning each line of the application with the printed lines on the *carta bollata*, whose spacing has apparently remained unchanged from the 18th century. I still remember the printer setting for getting it right: 1.631 lines per centimetre, assuming that one was able to align perfectly the first line with the printer head. It was best to buy several sheets of paper for every application.

There is more. In a university *concorso*, the slightest error in the list of published titles in the applicant's curriculum vita compared to the title as published is grounds for exclusion. No matter how minor, differences between the curriculum and the separate list of published titles submitted for evaluation are also grounds for exclusion. Submission even one minute after the announced deadline is grounds for exclusion (in Rome, the postal station at the train station has long lines of frazzled candidates at the most unlikely hours because it is open till midnight). Failure to include a supporting document (for example, men are required to prove that they have completed their obligatory military service) means exclusion, not an invitation to send the missing paper. Failure to notarise a photocopy of even the simplest document (for example, a candidate's *codice fiscale*)[4] or to include a simple photocopy instead of an authorised copy of some documents (for example, residency status, available only at the town hall) leads to exclusion.

The effect on candidates is, understandably, extremely destabilising and demoralising. Many candidates form self-help groups to check each other's applications even though they are competing for the same post. I stress, however, that this excessive legalism is not a conspiracy of the powerful against the powerless, though it is tempting to see it as such. The effect on *concorso* commissioners is also negative, with even the

[4] These cards are white plastic with black raised letters and numbers. With time, the black ink rubs off, and the card cannot be photocopied even though it can be read with the naked eye. This leads to all sorts of stratagems for making the photocopies required by law: hand-inking the letters and numbers, using a stamp pad to temporarily colour the numbers and letters, etc. People can waste hours on this problem, since it is never something one anticipates until one needs to make a photocopy of the card.

most honest living in fear that they have forgotten to take all the formal procedures into account when justifying their decisions, fair or not.[5]

The result of such a philosophy, when applied to all dimensions of the social contract, is constant battles of interpretation by citizens and bureaucrats alike who are desperately trying to contextualise legal principles designed for an allegedly context-free political and rhetorical space. However, the Italian interpretative battleground is strewn not so much with the rhetorical remnants of individual struggles for power and ascendancy as with the corpses of the failed definitions of citizenship – including notions of rights and duties that touch the very heart of the Self constituted as a *civil* persona – that were found to be strategically inoperable, irrelevant or culturally illegitimate in the circumstances defining the micro-political negotiations in which every citizen engages.

This is not a theoretical description of the Italian political process, in the commonly accepted sense of the word. The impacts on political practices and especially on individuals' sense of Self are immediate, structural and devastating. Because even local bureaucrats are faced with the problem of constructing a discursive field that defines the 'spirit' of the law for which no 'spirit' was intended in each instance of individual claims for services (for example, a citizen asking that his deceased father's government pension be transferred to his mother), they in effect *make* law. Petty bureaucrats in Italy are no more evil or inefficient than in other countries. They are simply operators in a system designed to avoid contextualising – 'corrupting' – the law in a multi-centred, multi-class, multi-linguistic polity founded on the tacit assumption that the majority will be hostile to a state created from conquest rather than by consensus.

Although it is the bureaucrat on the front lines who *apparently* has the first and often the final say in battles of legal interpretation, this does not necessarily lead citizens

[5] For more details, see Lanoue (1999). One noteworthy point: all decisions, including grades given for university exams, are taken by commissions composed of a minimum of three people. For low-level *concorsi* (for example, university exams; selection of tutors rather than professors), however, professors often try to save time and energy by not physically attending the *concorsi* for which they are commissioners and rely on their colleagues' judgement. If all commissions met with all their members, no one would ever have time to teach or do research. Not only is this illegal, it leads to absurd situations in which a suit can be brought against a professor (for example, by a failed candidate who uses the fact that the commission was not composed of the requisite number of people to bring suit against the commission's judgements) who was nominally on a commission but who was not physically present during deliberations.

to develop a sense that there are 'hidden' or tacit rules that underlie the formal and public aspects of institutional spaces, that they can initiate ritualised and formal negotiations with representatives of entrenched power in order to arrive at the 'real', 'informal' means of dealing with the problem. In other words, and contrary to popular stereotypes of Italian corruption, a bureaucrat usually says no to any request for services or claims for rights not because he or she is hoping to be bribed by the frustrated citizen, though this does happen, but because there is no compelling discursive field that legitimates the claimant's persona as citizen. When bureaucrats say to themselves (and to me, in interviews), "who is this person wanting document X? Why should I risk myself for someone I don't know?" they are not merely drawing a line between friends and kin on one side and non-kin and non-friends on the other. Since the rule of law means that all power originates with the State and not with individuals, bureaucracy becomes a means of control rather than a vehicle for furnishing services. Individual claims are thus attacks on the State, which they are honour-bound to defend. I think they are genuinely unable to situate a person in their State-sanctioned definition of 'citizen', much as they might want to. In brief, ‘citizen’ gives no automatic legitimacy to claims.

The rule of law creates tension for any action not included within the shared definition of the social roles engaged in the transaction. In other words, there is ambiguity between social identities and the politicised identities of the nation, not because they are situated in two mutually incomprehensible discursive fields that share little semiotic and semantic overlap but precisely because there is an overlap between the two even if they are not congruent. For a variety of reasons, only some of which I have mentioned here, there are simply that many shared, legitimate elements with which to construct a richly-variegated social identity – regional origin, class origin, dialect, profession, each of which is itself a cornucopia of metonymic links – compared to the thin gruel of shared signs engaged in producing the discursive field of the political Citizen-Self in the nation-state.

There is no bureaucratic ritual space that allows a 'real' but tacit process of social negotiation because there is no definition of 'citizen' that encompasses both the bureaucrat *and* the claimant, a situation similar to the one brilliantly described by Verdery (2003, in particular pp.59-69) for another less than functional country, socialist Romania. When legal rights are so narrowly defined and so dependent on particular

contingencies, bureaucrats and citizens are not so much negotiating the substance of a claim by making a rhetorical shift from legalese to another, more 'human', discursive field to cut corners. Instead, they are desperately searching for shared social and cultural criteria that would allow the process of negotiation to be engaged; that would allow, in other words, a transition from the community of unidirectional power to the community of *shared* values. In this desperate dance of narrowly-defined positions, even well-meaning bureaucrats are as much prisoners of the system as their clientele (see Herzfeld 1993 for a description of much the same paradoxes in Greece). Given the narrow focus of most laws and the fragility of national charter myths, how can a bureaucrat be certain that the complex personal circumstances – the social self – that inform a citizen's claims for moral and social justice correspond to the legally-sanctioned definitions of citizens' rights; in other words, to the political Self? In this game from which there is no exit strategy, officially sanctioned power flows from the top, but values emerge from the 'bottom', from the disempowered client. It is a dangerous game, in a sense, because the values the client wants to introduce into the negotiations have been specifically excluded from the political process by the rule of law. *This* is the corruption of the system, not the exchange of money or favours as such but the continual, structurally-produced attempt to sabotage the rules by introducing shared *values* into negotiations.

For example, *if* the citizen is not happy with the bureaucrat's first ruling ("Sorry, your father did not sign the form authorising the transfer of his pension before he died, so your mother cannot get his pension; what can I do?"), *or* if the citizen's interpretation is cued not only by the failure to obtain a favourable ruling but also by the hostile or indifferent treatment the bureaucrat doles out, *then* this sets off an interminable round of further negotiations as the citizen seeks to obtain redress from the bureaucrat's immediate superior, section head, department head, the deputy assistant minister in Rome, and so on, up to and including the courts. Right from the start, however, these failed negotiations soon take a nasty turn, with the bureaucrat thinking the citizen is pulling a fast one, that there really is no form and never was, and the citizen thinking that the bureaucrat is hiding the fact that he lost the papers or is too lazy to search. For the bureaucrat to admit that the claimant is not lying, that there really is a form that was misplaced, he has to abandon his political identity and move into the more complex and unsanctioned terrain

of the community of values in which both are members, in which both are sons and fathers. For the claimant to admit that the bureaucrat is only doing his job, he has to accept as legitimate the bureaucrat's political persona, which is derived from the political philosophy that bureaucracy is an instrument of control that has been twisted out of all reasonable proportion by the process of negotiation itself. The two can rarely meet; reconciliation is difficult.

There is no possible way of reaching accommodation within the impasse. Even if the bureaucrat is thinking strategically and wants to get rid of the pesky client, or if he wants to do 'the right thing', he or she must agree to the client's displacement of the situation to non-institutionalised meanings. Even if interpretations by both parties are charitable – perhaps the citizen misplaced the paper because of the general confusion surrounding his father's funeral; perhaps the bureaucrat is the victim of an incompetent file clerk – the results are the same. Both parties are in impossible situations since to get the pension one or both have to break the law or at least break out of institutionalised procedures: the client by appealing to the values of the *patria* (which contain a polite *j'accuse* against the state), the bureaucrat by stepping out of institutional bounds and either illegally granting the request without the required paperwork, or calling on favours and friendships with his or her fellow workers to seek the misplaced paper.

If this proposed shift fails, the consequences are disastrous. While the citizen has the right to seek redress by following a long hierarchical chain to the top, any person on the chain – supervisor, field director, regional assessor, lower court magistrate, supreme court judge – these encounters inevitably multiply the chances that the final result will be against the citizen since each person on the chain is subject to the same paradox of seeking unsanctioned shared spaces within institutional arrangements, or the negotiations are so complex and exhausting that the citizen will abandon attempts at rightful redress (as many told me, "it's simply not worth it"). There is nothing dramatically new in these accounts, as Herzfeld's descriptions (1993) of Greek bureaucracy testify. As in Greece and doubtless as in many other countries, a structurally-complicated bureaucracy tied to a legal system with little leeway is in itself a means of political control, no matter how well-intentioned some bureaucrats may be and no matter how benign and 'democratic' are

the laws justifying the institutionalised technologies of power or the intentions of its technicians.

The point I am making is that *there is no way to bypass the constraining effects of the rule of law*. It has often been said, for example, that Italians are corrupt because they are prone to invoke *conoscenze*, 'acquaintances', in an attempt to get things done, to obtain services, or simply to get an unfair advantage over fellow citizens seen as competitors in a struggle for very limited social services and social legitimacy. While this strategy works for some (for example, it worked for me and my shutter problem), it does not, *can not*, work for everyone. For one thing, it is a zero-sum game. For example, *conoscenze*, no matter how powerfully placed they may be in a given administrative hierarchy, are equally subject to the same destabilising effects of the rule of law on their sense of Self. As Korovkin points out (1988), every patron is also a client to someone else. In other words, it is not so much that the system sets most people off on a desperate search for *conoscenze* as much as it instils a *desire* to acquire them based on the *fear* of failing to do so. It creates a ritualised political economy of individual agency vividly expressed through strong emotions that continually destabilise the Self in ways that are very much akin to Augé's description (1995) of the Self in the *non-lieux*, non-spaces, of what he calls "supermodernity" (but which I think are part of a modernist sensibility, at least in the case of Italy).

Augé argues that these spaces resemble each other in broad outline regardless of locality and seem designed to produce efficiency and comfort, but their monochromatic resemblance deprives temporarily-dislocated Selves of the ability to find anchorage in the 'normal' habitus that in other circumstances provides people with elements with which they construct and affirm the authenticity of the public Self (Augé, however, does not consider the effects of such non-places on people who work there; these 'non-places' are in fact micro-places, so it seems to me that Augé's problem is merely one of scale, of developing a sufficiently precise geographic language to link the extremely local with the extremely global; see Harvey 2001:222-4 for a similar critique though not of Augé). Italian institutional spaces are destabilising in exactly the same way as Augé's airport lounges: what one is or does in private becomes irrelevant once a person begins negotiations within an institutional frame because these spaces are constructed in such a

way as to shift the sense that a person is *right* (to claim a pension, to ask for a driving permit, etc.) towards the depersonalised disequilibrium of the State. In practical terms, *conoscenze* are no guarantee of protection because, simply put, it is not the formal pyramidal structure of power that is the root cause of individual malaise.

The only alternative, regardless of one's wealth, is to contextualise the law by invoking another discursive and behavioural field that legitimates the strategic negotiations over questions of interpretation. This is *perbenismo*. On the surface, it *appears* more "human" and therefore more "responsive" and "flexible" than the law because its signifiers point to the 'politeness', 'courtesy' and 'breeding' of *perbene* – all markers of the culture of 'breeding' that belong to the *patria*, in contrast to the nation's disequilibrium masked by officially-sanctioned 'democracy' (which people will often invoke when they are frustrated by the state, though it changes nothing since bureaucrats are sanctioned by 'democracy').

Although the rituals of the Self of *perbenismo* are just as limiting and one-dimensional as the bureaucratic practices enabled by the rule of law, *perbenismo*'s semiotic references to the *perbene* code (politeness, composure) contain definitions of the Self – limited, bigoted, snobbish as they may be – that are much more in tune with widely-shared cultural criteria with which private Selves are constructed throughout Italy. In other words, what everyone shares regardless of (or, because of) differences in regional accents, cuisine and social values is a well-developed sense of clearly-bounded (yet semantically ill-defined) categories arranged in a hierarchical gradient whose semiotic referents are the reified past represented as ‘breeding’. It is a natural concomitant of a rigid class system where one's protection against others is assuming one's class identity. More important, however, is *perbenismo*'s ritual aspect. Its contours are understood by everyone, and its formality protects individuals, clients and bureaucrats alike when they seek to shift negotiations away from the sterility of pure power that formally frames interactions in institutional spaces. Most importantly, *perbenismo* contains a ritualised acknowledgement of the other's power.

Besides favouring the production and reproduction of fear and uncertainty among citizens, the destabilising of the Self that emerges from the *stato di diritto* is testimony to

the sterility of Italy's national charter myths. Were these myths viable, they could provide meaningful frames for strategic negotiations even in a *stato di diritto*. In some ways, I am trying to describe a problem similar to the one analysed by Cardoso de Oliveira (2000) when he describes the feelings of resentment that arise from the inability of the Canadian legal and constitutional discursive fields to acknowledge the moral legitimacy of some claims for special status made by groups (Quebecois, in one particular case analysed by Cardoso de Oliveira) who *feel* disenfranchised despite enjoying all the legal and bureaucratic protections and rights afforded to other Canadians. In the Italian case, the constant attacks on an individual's sense of self by the failure of the bureaucratic system to provide a shared basis for negotiation between citizen and State corresponds to the "invisibility of moral insults" described by Cardoso de Oliveira despite the fact that in both cases citizens often end up obtaining the services or rights they claim. In other words, people claim injustice because they *feel* that the process is tainted, that complaints about inadequate services *could be* ignored by politicians and bureaucrats, who, for their part, point to the formal aspects of the law and its technologies ("last year, the Ministry processed 34.2 million claims, an increase of 2.3% from the previous year") rather than acknowledge that guaranteed sabotage of the Self is part of the social contract between the nation and citizens.

It is precisely the fact of rapid and continual social and political change in Italy over the centuries adding so many meaning to most shared political categories that has led to the ongoing crisis in strategic negotiations that I have described. For example, everyone knows what 'aristocrat' signifies in terms of a hierarchy of values and 'breeding', but no two people would agree *who* is an aristocrat because rapid and continual social change over the centuries has produced many varieties of aristocrats, just as there many varieties of bourgeois. In a sense, political attempts to imbue the life of the State with meaning is a futile game, trying to make precise by a *stato di diritto* what, in the community of values, already contains too many twists and turns. It may be that the Italian preoccupation with the past is a symptom not of ‘tradition’ (whatever that means) but is instead a desperate attempt to recover and render precise semantic fields that the modern *nazione*, in a desperate bid to make things clearer and more functional, has purged of meaning. This impasse between sterility and richness leads to a vicious circle

of failed negotiations of social positioning that creates the conditions for further imbalance.

To sum up, what some outside observers might call corruption or inefficiency in political practices from a North American or even a northern European perspective is a more complex phenomenon than the simple contamination of public political spaces by values and comportments normally associated, in Western ideology, with the so-called private dimension. Certainly, it is not the so-called 'survival' of tradition. Naturally, faced with the destabilising effects of the rule of law on the Self-as-citizen in the *nazione*, people who live surrounded by a very hierarchical ensemble of cultural values will seek to shift the rhetoric of negotiations onto a more favourable playing field, that of the *patria*. In contrast to the bulk of the vast literature of Mediterranean patronage, I argue that it is not the hierarchical aspects of the social and political practices under which people live that account for 'corruption' and clientelism. Instead, I believe that the lacunae in national charter myths justify the rule of law, with all its negative consequences for decontextualising citizens. I argue that it is the artificiality of the bourgeois *perbene* code that serves as a model for the impersonality of *perbenismo*, which establishes a ritualised neutral semiotic ground in institutional spaces. I argue that *perbenismo*'s semiotic and especially semantic *poverty* is what allows it to be claimed by citizens as representing *their* values while paying lip service to the implicit hierarchy of the rule of law. The institutional spaces of the *nazione*, which contain an insufficient number of meaningful referents for the construction of a discursive field that encompasses both rulers and ruled, become a menacing but passable minefield under the uneasy but workable map provided by *perbenismo*.