

Statistics and Nation Building in Italian History*

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1. Introduction: statistical organisation and nation-building

The importance of statistics for the development of national identities has been widely recognised in modern historiography. It suffices to refer to the remarkable correspondence (which cannot be considered as a mere chronological coincidence) between what was called the «era of enthusiasm» for statistical surveys¹ and the period of greatest prominence of the nationality principle in history (1830-1849). From the Belgian revolution in 1830 onwards, the creation of autonomous Statistical Offices, which occurred in most European countries, took on the symbolic value of recognition of an established national sovereignty.

In the following century, this inherent link between statistics and nation-building remained, and indeed consolidated, in spite of the fundamental changes taking place in the epistemological position of the discipline. To-day, facing the challenges posed by globalisation and sweeping social change, statistics have assumed a renewed relevance as an instrument of self-representation of society and of national integration, capable of bringing «rationality» and strengthening accountability in the conduct of public affairs². The experience of the Maastricht convergence indicators, the use of GDP for calculating the contribution to the E.U. budget (the so called «fourth resource») or the allocation of the Structural Funds, and the in-

* Paper presented at the Network «State and Statistics» of the Second European Social Science History Conference, held in Amsterdam, 5-7 March 1998.

¹ H. WESTERGAARD, *Contributions to the History of Statistics*, London 1932, pp. 136-171. See also T.M. PORTER, *The Rise of the Statistical Thinking, 1820-1900*, Princeton 1986, trad. it., Firenze 1993, pp. 14-15.

² See on this topic the essays collected in F. SOFIA - P. GARONNA (edd), *Statistica, storia e nazione: la statistica ufficiale tra passato e futuro. Una prospettiva comparata*, in «Annali di statistica», 10th s., XIV, Roma 1997.

creasing reliance on statistical indicators for determining policy or administrative measures show how the epistemological programme of statistics since its inception, and its «amphibious» nature combining technical expertise with an institutional mission, remain of the utmost validity and importance: bringing science into the art of policymaking.

But where the role of statistics is most clearly called into question at the turn of the XXI century is in relation to the turbulence and erosion affecting the nation-state and its insufficient functioning in relation to the new requirements of democracy and the transformation of society. The demand for security and safety nets, social cohesion, the consolidation of the social pact on which the existence of a community is based, the participation of all to the production of prosperity and welfare, the reconfiguration of citizenship, entitlements and responsibilities have given rise to issues which mark the passage to the next century, and represent its most worrying threats and promising hopes. These issues challenge and involve in one way or another the present condition of the nation-state, its organisation and shifting functions, its founding values and future perspectives. And statistics, once more in history, are assigned the task of nation building or re-building, taking stock on, and continuing, its early 19th century mission: i.e. understanding and analysing diversity, searching for the historical roots of divergences and idiosyncrasies, standardising methods and norms for the collection of national data, tracing back the formation and the culture of each statistical system, accounting for policy performance and identifying emerging trends conflicts and frustrations.

In this environment, there are at least five areas where the contribution of statistics to nation-building appears particularly prominent and in demand: i) the analysis of cultural identities and social integration, in response to growing pressures for multiculturalism and cohesion; ii) the support for public administration reform enhancing efficiency effectiveness and accountability; iii) the formation of the élite in business government and society through the dissemination of «statistical culture» and the reform of education and training systems; iv) the promotion of institutional adjustment in order to cope with techno-globalism, the expansion of international markets, urban regeneration, subsidiarity, fiscal federalism and decentralisation; v) the need to strengthen international cooperation and technical assistance to transition and developing countries.

However, «measuring nationhood» and strengthening its grips on society and governance presupposes not only investment in statistical methods, be they for the collection treatment or analysis of

data; it requires also an in-depth understanding of the factors explaining how and why statistical institutions have evolved. Given that statistics is both, and at the same time, a «science» and a branch of the public administration³, understanding the factors which determine the organisation of the public offices having statistical tasks, and the partition of roles between the centre and local institutions, academia and government, public and private, national and international, etc. goes a long way towards understanding the position of statistics in the constellation of knowledge and its relationship with nation-building.

This is the basic hypothesis underlying this paper, which aims at highlighting the main stages of the history of statistics in post-unification Italy, and relating them to the crucial requirements of national consolidation and development. Two specific issues will be dealt with more in detail, as being the ones playing the most important role in the case of Italy, and in relation to other European experiences: a) the organisational model of official statistics and its position in the framework of the public sector organisation; and b) the social use of statistics indicating the status of the inter-relationships between science society and the Government.

In relation to the first issue, it is to be emphasised that the structure and the notion itself of the public administration, in its relationship with technical and scientific competence, is of primary importance in the case of statistics; it affects in fact the division of roles between University, statistical research and official statistics; it shapes, and interacts with, skill acquisition and transmission, mobility and career patterns, and the relationships between statistical methods/techniques and the substantive sciences, or social science as a whole (sociology, economics, demography, law, etc.); finally, it is conditioned by the structure of governance, and government, reflecting the more or less decentralised organisation of the public administration, and more broadly social relations. For instance, a decentralised structure and tradition in statistics is capable of promoting a wide articulation of competencies and professional profiles, as it is the case of the statistical activities at the local level in the German context and the corresponding role of local statisticians, which is unknown to the French experience of more centralised Government. But this paradigm cannot be applied mechanically and naively; a centralised State in fact can produce an articulation of the different policy branches of the admin-

³ See A. DESROSIÈRES, *La politique des grands nombres. Histoire de la raison statistique*, Paris 1993; also A. DESROSIÈRES, *Amministratore e scenziato: come è cambiata la professione dello statista*, in F. SOFIA - P. GARONNA (edd), *Statistica, storia, nazione*, cit., pp. 87-104.

istration which strengthens the methodological and conceptual autonomy of the different sectors of investigation (economic, social, environmental, health, employment, etc.) and puts statistics in closer contact with the policy users of the data (INSEE in France); and a decentralised governance structure as in Canada or in Switzerland can decide to leave statistics at the federal level as an element of national cohesion and unifying infrastructure (e.g. Statistics Canada)⁴.

As far as the second issue is concerned, it can be shown that the organisation of statistics and its pervasiveness in the national culture and tradition affects in a decisive way the formation of an homogeneous and cohesive ruling class, and its role of national leadership. Viceversa, the weakness and shortcomings of the ruling class at the national level clearly affect the development and quality of statistics. For instance in Italy the lightness and superficiality of the attachment to the nation as a whole of the post-unification élite, which kept its interests and roots in the fragmented traditions and cultures of the pre-union states, meant that there was a lack of demand for significant statistical inquiries at the national level; it must be remembered that statistical information up to the second post-war period was collected essentially through Censuses or total surveys, requiring normally ad-hoc legislation or in any case a strong political commitment and public opinion support. These conditions being unmet, data collection and other statistical activities at the national level found great difficulties and lagged behind.

2. *The aborted introduction of the French model*

The choice of the organisational model of official statistics after the unification of Italy in 1861 has often been interpreted, and perceived throughout the period⁵, as an assimilation of the French blueprint of public sector organisation, based on the two basic principles of centralisation and formal bureaucratic processes. As in other sectors of the State administration (consider for instance the system of Prefects), also in the structuring of the statistical services the French model inspired considerably the new State. Statistics was thus incorporated within the structure of the main Economics ministry, that of Industry and Agriculture, as it had been the case in France.

⁴ J.P. BEAUD - J.G. PRÉVOST, *La forme et le fond. La structuration des appareils statistiques nationaux (1800-1945)*, in «Revue de synthèse», 1997, 4, pp. 419-456.

⁵ See D. MARUCCO, *L'amministrazione della statistica nell'Italia unita*, Roma - Bari, 1996, p. 13.

But soon afterwards there were significant departures from this model. In fact, the Royal Decree establishing in October 1861 the «Divisione Generale della Statistica» set up at the provincial level permanent Statistical Offices within the Prefectures; less than a year later, in July 1862, these Offices were abolished, and replaced by elected Commissions (Giunte) chaired by the Prefect⁶. This measure, which replicated the local organisation of statistics in Piedmont after the Carlo Alberto reforms of 1836, had important repercussions on the evolution of official statistics, determining the break-up of a fundamental linkage between the national and the local level. This change was then stimulated and justified by broader political considerations; it appeared in fact to enrich and democratise the constitutional framework of consultative monarchy, providing an institutional forum for political participation at the local level. But the application of this formula to statistics was not successful; it ended up in fact being a surrogate, inappropriate to the task of bridging the gap between the «legal» and the «actual» country, and proved to be detrimental to the technical operation of the administration in a field so special as statistics. The built-in conflict between the private interests of the elected officials and the scientific and technical nature of the operations, between the impartiality requirement and the political imperative, affected in the course of time the prestige of the institutions and the quality of the data, leading to the progressive decline of statistics at the local level⁷. Probably in order to explain this hybrid organisational model, combining the centralisation of technical expertise and forms of decentralised political control, one must recall the osmosis between politics and administration which characterised the pre-Union arrangements and the limited vision and Government experience of the Italian local élite. The humus at the local level, both from the institutional and social points of view, therefore, was unreceptive to the adoption of the French model, which had developed under the pressure of the culture of the Enlightenment and Republican values, based on the role of science and citizens' sovereignty; in the divided and subdued Italy of the time, the separation from the centralised Direzione on one side and the decentralised Giunte on the other led to diluting the specificity and technicality of the new civil service into an undistinguished red tape (*servizio di stato*).

⁶ The Ministers' reports to the King, and the Royal Decrees 9 October 1861 n. 284 and 31 July 1862 n. 707 in *Relazioni e decreti sull'ordinamento della statistica* [Firenze 1866], pp. 3-23.

⁷ See R. FRACASSI, *Ordinamento dei servizi statistici*, in «Annali di statistica», 8th s., V, 1957, p. 95.

3. Bodio and the golden age of Italian statistics

The golden age of statistical development in the post-unification Italy coincided with the Crispi Government⁸. It went essentially from February 1878, when a new organisation was established upgrading the central Office to the status of Direzione Generale⁹, up to 1898, when the Director Luigi Bodio, whose personality and competence played a decisive role in the regeneration of statistics, resigned. The Directorate engaged actively in promoting co-ordination with other statistical units in Ministries and in the territorial branches of those Ministries, particularly through the establishment of inter-ministerial working groups; informally therefore, and relying on the moral suasion and intellectual authority of Bodio, the Directorate assumed a leadership role over the whole of official statistics. Moreover, the creation of a new professional figure, the «ufficiali di statistica», recruited directly by Bodio, outside the bureaucratic constraints of the «concorsi» (public competitions), led to a leap forwards in the methods of work and in the quality of the production.

As a matter of fact, Francesco Crispi in designing the reorganisation of statistics and the creation of the Directorate in 1878 followed explicitly the model of the Prussian organisation, which had already been proposed a few years before by Luigi Luzzatti¹⁰. Bodio's management practises and innovation built solidly on this inspiration by emphasising the basic element of the German experience, i.e. combining the practical orientation of the *Amtsstatistik* (office work) with the rigour and dignity of Statistical Science, standing «on an equal ground or in any case in a fair relationship with the other social sciences»¹¹. In coherence with that model, technical and scientific training within the Directorate were strongly promoted, and all efforts were made to increase the specialisation and skills of the employees. The close contacts established with the world of research and the Universities are clearly documented by i) the launch of a second renewed series of the «*Annali di statistica*», which became a prestigious Review open to contributions by statisticians in Government and in the world of research; ii) the investment in methodology and mathematical statistics; iii) the contribution to University teaching given by prominent employees, who taught

⁸ D. MARUCCO, *L'amministrazione della statistica*, cit., pp. 39-65; also G. MELIS, *Storia dell'amministrazione italiana, 1861-1993*, Bologna 1996, pp. 160-166.

⁹ See the Royal Decree 10 february 1878 n. 4288.

¹⁰ Quoted in D. MARUCCO, *L'amministrazione della statistica*, cit., p. 43.

¹¹ P. SCHIERA, *Il laboratorio borghese. Scienza e politica nella Germania dell'Ottocento*, Bologna 1987, p. 111.

academic courses on a part-time basis or left the Directorate to get University posts.

Migrating from the statistical service towards prestigious and powerful positions in the public sector or in the academia became later a clearly recognisable pattern, leaving the question open whether this meant fleeing from the backwardness and constraints of State bureaucracy, or – more plausibly – disseminating statistical culture and expertise in the public professions. Several of the statisticians of the Directorate moved to fill prominent positions in the technical layer of the public administration, which was then being set up and experimented with. Among them, Orazio Paretti, who became director of the Cassa nazionale per l'invalidità e la vecchiaia degli operai (National Fund for Workers' Invalidity and Old Age); Vincenzo Magaldi, who was deputy director of the Istituto Nazionale delle Assicurazioni (National Insurance Institute, INA); Bonaldo Stringher, Chairman of the same INA and later Governor of the Bank of Italy; Alberto Beneduce, who created the holding institutions for the management of public shares capital, which have until recently played such a pervasive influence in the Italian economy. Bodio himself in 1902 was appointed Commissioner for Emigration, inaugurating what was a pilot experience in setting up more flexible and technical forms of management in the public administration. These people, as it was said of Beneduce¹², drew from their experience at the Statistics Directorate a rigorous aptitude towards the technical design and assessment of administrative actions, a special attention for social analysis and a non-formalistic flexible approach to policy making.

4. Fragmentation and decline in the Giolitti period

However, this process of mobility of statisticians, while certainly contributing to strengthening the technical and management capacity of the civil service, and enhancing the flexibility of the public sector organisation, which became more decentralised and often entrusted to ad-hoc bodies, led also to the fragmentation and loss of visibility of the Statistical Office. The decline of the Statistics Directorate in the Giolitti era can be attributed also to the proliferation of sectoral statistical, and their subordination to the political requirements of the reform process. A few examples can be provided: the autonomous administration of the State Railways, on the basis of the legislation which established it, and by will of its

¹² A. DE NITTO, *Fra le vicissitudini di una pubblica amministrazione: la «statistica» e Alberto Beneduce*, in *Alberto Beneduce e i problemi dell'economia italiana del suo tempo*, Roma 1985, p. 148.

head – Riccardo Bianchi –, started since 1905 to compile detailed statistics on the railways movements, which were getting a leading role in commercial flows¹³; in the same year, the *Unione statistica delle città italiane* (Statistical Union of Italian Cities) was founded in Florence, providing technical support and expertise to the flourishing experience of «municipal socialism», which was spreading in Italy and elsewhere¹⁴; in 1902 the *Cassa nazionale per gli infortuni sul lavoro* (National Fund for Work Injuries) started publishing statistical series on injuries in industry, which were expanded in 1912 to cover earnings for manual workers and the different degrees of disability¹⁵.

In some instances, however, the active involvement of statisticians in the reform process, their sharing of the values of the new culture and their militancy in the political movement of the reform was able to counterbalance the negative effects of the fragmentation of statistical competencies and operations, promoting fruitful exchange of experiences and professional mobility. This is the case of Giovanni Montemartini, who promoted in Milan under the auspices of the *Società Umanitaria* innovative surveys on housing and housing conditions, on education and the labour market; when in 1902 the Labour Office was for the first time created, within the Ministry of Agriculture Industry and Commerce, Montemartini was called to head the new structure. This Office was then transformed in 1911, under the impulse of the Minister Nitti, in «*Direzione generale della statistica e del lavoro*», following a pattern which was common to the most significant European experiences: this transformation marked an Indian summer in the activities of official statistics before the severe and prolonged winter of Fascism¹⁶. Another leading figure of the time was Ugo Giusti, who promoted the «*Statistical Union of Italian Cities*», assumed then the direction of the 1921 Population Census, and finally became the Director of

¹³ See [R. Bianchi], *A.S.E. Il Ministro dei Lavori pubblici*, in *Ferrovie dello Stato. Direzione generale. Relazione a S.E. il Ministro dei lavori pubblici sull'andamento delle ferrovie dello Stato nell'esercizio 1905-1906*, Roma 1906, p. V-XV.

¹⁴ O. GASPARI, *L'Unione statistica delle città italiane (1907-1927)*, in «*Le carte e la storia*», 1997, 1, pp. 139-145.

¹⁵ *Cassa nazionale d'assicurazione per gli infortuni sul lavoro, Schema di statistica degli infortuni sul lavoro*, Roma 1921, pp. 1-92, which describes the statistical series produced by the Cassa.

¹⁶ See M.L. D'AUTILIA, *Il cittadino senza burocrazia. Società umanitaria e amministrazione pubblica nell'Italia liberale*, Milano 1995. On the importance of Labour Offices at the beginning of the XXth Century all over Europe see P. GARONNA - F. SOFIA, *Statistica e nazione nella storia europea*, in F. SOFIA - P. GARONNA (edd), *Statistica, storia, nazione*, cit., pp. 22-24, with the bibliography on the topic.

the «*Istituto di economia agraria*», which during the Fascist period was *de facto* responsible of agricultural statistics¹⁷.

On the whole, we must acknowledge that the decentralized organization of statistics did not prevent the transfer of technical innovation and statistical progress, and the mobility of skilled personnel. For instance, in 1912 the population Census adopted the decimal classification of industry which had been defined by the National Fund for Work Injuries¹⁸.

Moreover, thanks to the political drive of the reform process, and the participation in it of prominent statisticians, the career opportunities for «regional» statisticians made considerable progress, as the curricula of Montemartini and Giusti show, well beyond the consolidated patterns existing elsewhere including the reference countries, such as it was Germany for the regional statisticians¹⁹. However, these positive elements were heavily dependent on the particular contributions of specific personalities and to the informal co-ordination mechanisms created by the reform process; on the whole, the impact therefore of the decentralised institutional arrangements of the Giolitti era on statistical developments has been generally considered negative, leading to lack of co-ordination, fragmentation and decline.

5. Re-centralisation in the Fascist period?

The reforms of the 1920's, which led to the creation of the *Istituto Centrale di Statistica* (Istat) in 1926, were prepared by a long and lively debate on the causes and remedies of the decline in Italian statistics. They aimed essentially at two objectives: i) the creation of an autonomous body not subject to the constraints of public accounting and personnel norms of the State bureaucracy (Ministries). This followed patterns and developments which had taken place in the previous period of administrative reforms and applied to statistics the same model of the other technical administrations of the State; and ii) the re-centralisation and improved co-ordination of statistical activities, by attributing to the «*Presidente del Consiglio*» (Prime Minister), as Head of the Executive, the responsibility of overseeing and controlling Istat, granting therefore to the Institute a position of primacy in relation to the statistical of-

¹⁷ M.L. D'AUTILIA, *L'amministrazione della statistica nell'Italia fascista. Il caso dell'agricoltura*, Roma 1992.

¹⁸ *Atti del consiglio superiore di statistica. Sessione maggio 1912*, in «*Annali di statistica*», 5th s., III, 1912, p. 61 (meeting of may the 11th 1912).

¹⁹ B. ZIMMERMANN, *Statisticiens des villes allemandes et action réformatrice, 1870-1914. La construction d'une généralité statistique*, in «*Genèses*», XV, 1994, pp. 4-27.

fices of the various Ministries and public institutions²⁰. It should be remembered that Fascism, the year before the creation of Istat, had strengthened the position and functions of the Prime Minister (Mussolini). In 1929 the re-centralisation objective was made explicit and strengthened through a law which established the gradual passage of statistical services from the State administration to Istat: in pursuance of this law, statistics relating to the Italians abroad were transferred from the Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1933, those made by the Customs General Department in 1935, the judicial one in 1938 and only in 1952 the public health statistics²¹.

However, as it is well known, the monolithic design of the state administration sought with determination by the Government clashed against the reality of the public administration, resulting in modest gains in the direction of re-centralisation, in spite of all the rhetoric profused by the Fascist propaganda. The actual organisation of the public sector evolved following the trend of the previous period towards the establishment of autonomous bodies²². This pattern maintained and in some cases reinforced the relative importance of the decentralised production of statistical information. For instance, the trade unions became public organisms regulated by law, and as such they were enabled to release data of an official nature; but this was the case also of welfare and social insurance institutions, some of which gravitating in the orbit of the Party, or of the Bank of Italy controlling and managing fundamental flows of public information. The organisation of the public sector on the basis of a myriad of autonomous administrations, having each an autonomous source of legitimacy and regulation, made particularly difficult to co-ordinate plan and harmonise statistical production, let alone the intended transfer of statistical authority to a single central power (Istat).

An example in this context can be provided, presenting aspects of a paradoxical nature. In 1927 the Comitato permanente per le migrazioni interne (Permanent Committee for Internal Migrations) was created within the Ministry for Public Works; among its tasks, the Committee was given also the responsibility of collecting regularly data on internal migrations, which were produced previously between 1905 and 1911 on an irregular basis by the Labour Office. Following the proclamation of the «ruralisation» objective, i.e. the promotion of rural areas, in 1929 the Committee was transformed

²⁰ See D. MARUCCO, *L'amministrazione della statistica*, cit., pp. 186-188.

²¹ See the following bills: Royal Decree 8 juin 1933 n.697; Royal Decree 11 July 1935 n.1525; Royal Decree 24 March 1938 n. 402 and Law 17 May 1952 n. 572.

²² G. MELIS, *Storia dell'amministrazione italiana*, cit., pp. 357-368.

in «Commissariato», renamed Commission for Migrations and Internal Colonisation, and transferred to the Prime Minister Office with all its tasks and functions, including the statistical one²³. As we said, in the same year the transfer of statistical activities to Istat was decreed; being Istat placed under the surveillance of the same Office, this should have appeared in principle not difficult to implement. However, surprisingly we find that among the institutions which Istat reported in 1931 to the National Statistics Council as escaping completely to its control, also the «Commissariato» was included²⁴. The re-centralisation therefore of statistics was strongly contrasted and ineffective. In January 1930, Mussolini himself issued a prescription containing the obligation for all public administrations to submit to Istat for revision the proofs of statistics for publication, wherever they were produced²⁵. Probably, the powers of Istat vis-a-vis decentralised production did not go much beyond proof-reading! And it is not clear whether the main preoccupation was the quality of the figures or political control and consensus building. In any case there is undisputed evidence that in the Fascist period Istat did not manage to improve significantly the quality and coherence of the whole of the statistical information produced in the public system.

In the end, re-centralisation did not work and the intended revival of statistics during the Fascist period did not take place. On the contrary, the subordination of statistics to the politics of the totalitarian regime gave a severe blow to the integrity reputation of the institution, which after the fall of Fascism it took a long time to remedy and re-establish.

6. *The continuing degradation and fragmentation of statistical organisation in the post-war period*

In the second post-war period, the decline of official statistics had reached such a level that data gaps and shortcomings, due to several factors including the difficulty of reconciling the contradic-

²³ Ministero dei lavori pubblici [afterwards Presidenza del Consiglio dei ministri]. Comitato permanente per le migrazioni interne [afterwards Commissariato per le migrazioni e la colonizzazione interna, and later Commissariato per le migrazioni e le colonizzazioni], *Le migrazioni interne in Italia. Dati statistici*, 11 vol., Roma 1928-1939.

²⁴ See *Atti del Consiglio superiore di statistica. Sessione ordinaria 21-22 dicembre 1931*, in «Annali di statistica», 6th s., XXVII, 1932, p. 128 (report by E. Antonucci, head of the I Departement).

²⁵ Mussolini's prescription of January the 4th 1930 was also reaffirmed on December the 2nd 1931: see *ibidem*, p. 131.

tions of a sparse production, as we saw above, were often attributed to voluntary falsification, which was unfair to claim, even if it cannot be excluded in certain instances²⁶. Rather than promoting an in-depth reform of the institutional set-up, and in the light of the difficulty of operationalising a functioning democracy and stable institutions based on alternating parliamentary majorities and minorities, it seemed then easier, and more important, to create forms of democratic control over the production of statistics at Istat. For instance, in 1951 a Government Committee was established to oversee the operation of the 1951 Census; this Committee was given powers to limit and overcome the prerogatives of the National Statistics Council²⁷. Lack of confidence with respect to Istat, and the increasing reservations and concerns surrounding the operation of the autonomous administrations, their opacity and subordination to the party system and their clientele, meant that also the opposition tended to prefer the statistical information produced by Ministerial offices subject to the control of Parliament and the public opinion. This is the case for instance of the Labour Ministry, where statistical production was resumed in 1949; on the basis of a law of April 1952, an annual report to Parliament on the statistics produced by the Ministry was to be made mandatory²⁸. In general, the proliferation of sources of official data remained a constant feature in Italian statistics, and the reaction to the centralisation intentions of the previous regime meant that the post-war period saw even an increasing fragmentation: in 1971 it was calculated that there were 15 thousands different public institutions carrying out statistical surveys²⁹.

²⁶ On the truthfulness of the statistical sources during the fascist period see, for example, V. ZAMAGNI, *La dinamica dei salari nel settore industriale*, in P. CIOCCA - G. TONIOLO (edd), *L'economia italiana nel periodo fascista*, Bologna 1976, pp. 329-378 and also G. LETI, *Il Consiglio superiore di statistica dal 1926 al 1945*, in «Annali di statistica», 10th s., VIII, Roma 1996, pp. 578-580. For the lack of reliability of the Italian statistics after the second World War, it is worth referring to the article of E. ROSSI, *Ma' ste fregnacce tu come le sai?*, first issued on «L'Italia socialista», 5 may 1948, and now in *Aria fritta*, Bari 1956, which comments on the statistics of the ERP Plan.

²⁷ See the Law 2 avril 1951 n. 291, art. 7 and also G. PARENTI, *L'attività del Consiglio superiore di statistica dal 1949 al 1989* («Annali di statistica», 10th s., III), Roma 1994, pp. 44, 49.

²⁸ See the Law 23 avril 1952, n. 472 and also Atti Parlamentari. Camera dei deputati, I Leg., *Documenti*, XVII, n. 2063, Proposta di legge d'iniziativa dei deputati Tremelloni, Bennani, Saragat ed altri, annunciata il 3 luglio 1951: *Per una relazione annua al Parlamento sull'occupazione e la disoccupazione*.

²⁹ See L. PINTO, *Aspetti organizzativi dei servizi statistici nazionali*, in «Annali di statistica», 8th s., XXVI, 1971, p. 87.

The return to fashion and policy debate of economic planning in the 1960's focused attention on the availability of accurate and timely time series, particularly in relation to modelling and economic forecasting. The precondition for statistical development inherent in the institutional organisation of statistics came back into question; the need for greater co-ordination of the different players and harmonisation of norms and methods was discussed at length³⁰. But not much in practise resulted from this discussion, except probably the creation in 1967 of the Istituto Nazionale per la Programmazione Economica³¹, which played with ups and downs a significant role in the creation of data bases and economic analysis. The fate of statistical re-organisation was to be inextricably linked to that of the «programmazione economica» in Italy: a history of impractical grand designs and cumulative frustrations, political manoeuvring and bureaucratic deadlock.

7. *The reform in 1989: «decentramento» and research*

The synthetic excursus above on the evolution of the statistical organisation in Italy has shown how the issue of strengthening the statistical activities in a core institution empowered with a critical mass of resources and expertise, and provided with sufficient autonomy and technical reputation has been at the heart of the concerns and reform efforts. It has also been shown that the administrative traditions and culture of the country prevented the realisation of such more or less enlightened intentions fragmenting the institutional environment of official statistics and diluting its technical dimension in the stifling hug with the public administration at the policy level. The aborted centralisation of the Fascist period not only left unresolved the question of putting on solid technical basis the operation of Censuses and sample surveys, which relied for data collection on the weak structures of the municipal or ministerial bureaucracy; but it discredited the whole idea of an autonomous and centralised institutional set-up.

It is only therefore an apparent paradox the fact that the far-reaching reforms of 1989 were dominated by the motive of «decentramento», which only in a superficial and ideological interpretation

³⁰ See, for example, G. PARENTI, *Stato e prospettiva dell'informazione statistica in Italia*, *ibidem*, pp. 13-49.

³¹ The Institute was established by the Law 27 february 1967 n.48 aiming at «procedere ad indagini, ricerche e rilevazioni inerenti alla programmazione economica». On the negative reactions of the National Statistical Council to the foundation of the new body see G. PARENTI, *L'attività del Consiglio superiore di statistica*, cit., p. 99.

can be taken to mean decentralisation. In fact, the new statistical law established a National Statistical System, recognising and promoting the operation of decentralised statistical offices in each Ministry, public body or enterprise, region and municipality. But it gave Istat a regulatory and co-ordinating role in relation to the whole system, placing all statistical offices under the supervision and functional responsibility of the central institution. Moreover Istat, renamed for the occasion «National» statistical Institute rather than «Central», became a research institution from the point of view of staff regulation and career, status and recognition, increasing its autonomy and technical authority³². The conditions therefore were created for strengthening the co-ordination of statistical activities in the public sector brought all under a common umbrella, albeit a weak and formal one. No additional resource in fact was provided for the creation of the network, implying that most of it would simply give recognition and visibility to existing activities, and that the reformed institutional arrangements were sufficient to stimulate greater cohesion and integration of data production.

However, the change in the status of the organisation, the explicit acknowledgement of the research nature of its core activities, together with the powerful stimuli, and constraints, brought about by European integration and the greater technical culture of the younger generations of statisticians determined an impressive leap forwards in the last two decades in the credibility and scientific orientation of Istat. The leadership role taken by Istat in Europe, its increasing recognition as a scientific independent authority witness the great transformation underway. But the National Statistical System is still by-and-large a virtual construction. Besides, new challenges are coming about due to increasing European integration and institutional reforms giving emphasis to the regional level.

Recognising the diversity of institutional cultures, including statistical culture, in the country, and organising an integrated independent and highly competent system of statistical structures, remains to-day the fundamental enterprise with which the building of the nation was, is, and will be confronted.

8. *The betrayal of the Risorgimento and the decline of statistics*

The position and role of statistics in the public administration can be more clearly determined by looking at the intersection of

³² On the introduction of the National Statistical System, passed with the Law decree 6 september 1989 n. 322, see P. GARONNA, *Statistical «decentramento» in Italy: significance and implications*, in «Statistical Journal of the United Nations. Ece», XI, 1994, pp. 75-89.

two important relationships: first the importance of statistics in the culture of the élite, and second, the role played by the public administration in the formation, and reproduction, of the ruling classes.

Here too the knots and contradictions of the present time have ancient roots. We will start from the prominent role assumed by statistics in the process of national unification of Italy, which has been fully analysed by Silvana Patriarca³³.

In the heyday of the Italian «Risorgimento», the epoch of revival of the national sentiment and agitation against foreign domination leading to the unification of the country, statistics was assigned the mission of discovering and consolidating a unitary national identity. In the crucial years of the struggle, statistics was considered an emblem and instrument of liberalism and representative government, and therefore used as a political weapon against «autocratic» power and absolutism in restoration Europe. It was natural then in post-unification Italy, when the new country found itself confronted with the intractable issue of full democratic representation and the frustrations in the construction of a national governance structure and élite, that statistics was confined in a corner. The failures of «nationalisation» efforts and the betrayed promises of the Risorgimento, which statistics duly registered for instance by pointing out the high levels of illiteracy, created the conditions for a loss of interest in, and relative abandonment of, statistics³⁴. What Hippolyte Taine said of revolutionary governments brought to power by popular action, i.e. that they cannot be reformed but only overthrown, may well apply to statistics: after statistics was used, and probably also abused, as an instrument of political fight, it became very difficult afterwards to put it back into the tool box of normal administration; when statistics becomes the symbol of opposition and fight, it is hard to use it then as a tool of government and administration.

More specifically, however, the difficulties of statistics taking root in the post-unification public administration can be traced back and connected to the difficulties of nation-building and the formation of the new «national» ruling class. Three aspects deserve to be noted here.

In the first half of the 19th century, in being the instrument of civil society against illiberal and «foreign» governments, statistics was naturally led to develop close links with «science», as a form of

³³ In *Numbers and Nationhood. Writing Statistics in Nineteenth Century Italy*, Cambridge 1996.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 234.

rationalisation of government and source of freedom for society. This was in nuce the fundamental message delivered in the engaging pages of Gian Domenico Romagnosi, the liberating role of science in society and government; and this element was claimed by Romagnosi to be the distinctive feature of the «Italian school» of statistics³⁵. When statistics was channelled instead in the administrative circuits in post-unification Italy, and became diluted in the insipid broth of a slow and sleepy bureaucracy, it lost its previous attractiveness and the source of its scientific strength, loosening its links with science and research. The already mentioned 1862 institutional expedient, which created elected Statistical Provincials Commissions, moved statistics even further away from the authority of science, towards mediation of interests and political compromises³⁶.

Once the political unification of the country was achieved, the interests of the local élites (notabili) pushed towards the re-establishment of control, law and order at the local level; statistics, which had played such an important role in the political and administrative unification, was feared as having potential destabilising effects at the level of civil society, as a possible tool of social unification; and therefore it was controlled constrained and sometimes opposed. This political conservatism and resistance to social change might explain i) the recurrent recommendations by parliamentary commissions in the occasion of Censuses that the data collection and processing take place at the local level, therefore under local control³⁷; ii) the great resistance to finance statistical activities at the central level³⁸; and iii) the inertia in reforming the local statistical administration.

³⁵ Gian Domenico Romagnosi's most widespread work on the subject is *Questioni sull'ordinamento delle statistiche* (1827), afterwards in G.D. ROMAGNOSI, *Opere*, XII, Firenze 1835, pp. 1-115. On the significance of the concept of «national science» in his thought see F. SOFIA, *Una scienza per l'amministrazione. Statistica e pubblici apparati tra età rivoluzionaria e restaurazione*, Roma 1988, pp. 381-415.

³⁶ Already in 1858 the Piedmontese Commissions seemed to Cesare Correnti «soverchiare da una pressa di statistici frettolosi e parziali: ministri, intendenti, giornalisti, deputati»: see [C. CORRENTI], *Note intorno alle statistiche italiane*, in «Annuario statistico italiano», I, 1857-1858, p. 392.

³⁷ See, for example, Atti Parlamentari. Camera dei deputati, Leg. XX, sessione 1899, *Documenti*, n. 66-A: Relazione della Commissione parlamentare (Cocco-Ortu, presidente, Lucifero, relatore): *Quarto censimento della popolazione del Regno*, p. 1: «Fa vive raccomandazioni al potere esecutivo, perché tutto quanto possa esser fatto nei Comuni, colà si faccia: anche più, possibilmente, che raccogliere ed ordinare le notizie sulle abitazioni, e sul rapporto loro con gli abitanti; e quanto si attiene alla distinzione dei beni, ed alla questione vessata ed importantissima della popolazione stabile, occasionale ed assente»: but the recommendation is topical for the subject.

³⁸ On this topic see D. MARUCCO, *L'amministrazione della statistica*, cit., *passim*.

Diffidence and mistrust were to some extent justified by the lack of reliability and objectivity of statistical data. The poor quality of surveys and data was often lamented in post-unification Italy. Historiography has clearly documented the perceived shortcomings of collected statistics, be it in the field of demography, or agriculture, or industry³⁹.

9. The failed «nationalisation» of civil society

A few preliminary conclusions can be drawn at this stage on the relationship between the formation of the national élite and the development of statistics.

First, the fragmentation of statistical production in post-unification Italy closely corresponds to, and reflects, the fragmentation of the national civil society, and the failure to integrate in a cohesive national identity the multiplicity of regional and cultural divergences. Similarly, the weakness and fragility of the national ruling class, tied to local networks and tenacious bonds of traditional stratification, finds a pendant in the lack of an authoritative and independent centre of gravity of statistical activities at the national level.

Second, the need for continuing and intensifying nation-building after the unification («We made Italy. We must make now the Italians!»), drove statistics away from governance and management towards maintaining an interventionist role, as a tool for change rather than conservation, mobilisation rather than reform⁴⁰. This is a peculiar feature of the Italian 19th century liberalism, as compared with other European countries: statistics as belonging almost exclusively to the culture of political intervention. Statistics was in fact used as a tool for imposing the hegemony of the political alliance between the top civil service (the «piedmontese») and an area of the northern civil society; the «Associazione per il progresso degli studi economici» founded in 1875 was monopolised by the «lombardo-veneto» school (from Lombardy and Veneto). It was then employed for the affirmation of the role of the public administration during the period of F. Crispi. It was instrumental to support-

³⁹ See C.A. CORSINI, *L'acculturazione mancata. Il processo formativo dell'organizzazione delle fonti demografiche nel periodo post-unitario*, in SOCIETÀ ITALIANA DI DEMOGRAFIA STORICA, *La popolazione italiana nell'Ottocento. Continuità e mutamenti*, Bologna 1985, pp. 115-137; G. FEDERICO, *Per una valutazione critica delle statistiche della produzione agricola italiana dopo l'Unità (1860-1913)*, in «Società e storia», 1982, 15, pp. 87-129; M. LUNGONELLI, *Tra industria e burocrazia: gli esordi della statistica industriale in Italia*, in «Studi storici», XXVIII, 1987, pp. 277-294.

⁴⁰ It is worth noticing that, contrary to what happened in the second half of last century, in the present context investment in statistical infrastructures has been enhanced by privatisation and liberalisation processes.

ing the technocratic modernisation project of F.S. Nitti and his movement. Finally, it fed the nationalist and population-policy perspectives of the Fascist period.

Third, the restricted social base of statistics, its belonging to the «legal» country as opposed to the «real» one, its distance from the ordinary experience of administration and citizenship may account for some of the theoretical specificity of statistical thinking in that period; for instance the criticism of the typical nature and representativeness of Quetelet's averages, as formulated by Angelo Messedaglia or Luigi Rameri; and the fierce rejection of social darwinism and the predicaments of the Lombroso school⁴¹.

Fourth, the marked international orientation of statistical work, from the time of Bodio onwards⁴², was naturally conditioned by the links with the research community and the international schools of statisticians, and by the difficulties encountered in structuring the national dimension.

Five, the attention for new methods and techniques and the investment in analytical instruments has to be related among other things to the lack of base data and the unreliability of administrative sources.

10. *Model-driven estimates and integration from different sources*

Between statistics and the civil society a mutual distrust developed in the course of the Italian history. On the one hand, the «legal» country used up numbers and figures when, and to the extent that they were, necessary for political or militant purposes; on the other, the citizens did not place great confidence in government statistics and its public function, and sometimes feared their abuse. Statisticians from their end either took distance from a reality which was considered opaque and difficult to capture (the informal economy, real earnings, migrations and opinions)⁴³; or bent to the requirements of commitment and political involvement, albeit reluctantly, putting their expertise at the service of (noble or ignoble)

⁴¹ C. PAZZAGLI, *Statistica «investigatrice» e scienze «positive» nell'Italia dei primi decenni unitari*, in «Quaderni storici», XV, 1980, 45, p. 807; S. PATRIARCA, *Numbers and Nationhood*, cit., pp. 232-239.

⁴² On the strong involvement of Italian statisticians with the International Institute of Statistics, see D. MARUCCO, *L'Istituto internazionale di statistica dal 1885 alla crisi del dopoguerra: organizzazione e dirigenti*, in «Le carte e la storia», 1998, 1, pp. 164-168.

⁴³ Typical of this attitude is Luigi Bodio: see, for example, one of his reports in *Censimento della popolazione per professioni. Relazione ... alla Giunta centrale di statistica (presentata il 20 aprile 1877)*, in «Annali del Ministero di Agricoltura, industria e commercio», 1877, n. 100, *Statistica*, pp. 41-75.

causes. This uneasy relationship had important implications for methods and research in official statistics.

In a period when the main data collection procedures were the Censuses and the compilation of administrative registers or files, which require a widespread dissemination of statistical competence and a solid organisation and management of statistical production, the statistical office, well aware of the fact that both organisation and dissemination were lacking, took other directions: the best efforts in fact of Italian statisticians were put into the promotion of ad-hoc surveys and empirical studies leading to monographic investigations, or technical support was given to statistical activities delegated to other players, like in the case of the highly appreciated parliamentary enquiries⁴⁴.

The central office had to develop statistical methods and skills capable of addressing the demands of information arising in areas where actual (good quality) data were lacking. Montemartini clearly explained this strategy when discussing the choice of survey methodology for the first regular collection of data on the labour market⁴⁵. The main options were given by confronting the different experiences in Germany and England: in the former, data were drawn from the public labour exchange offices, while in the latter the source was the employment reports provided by business. In Italy an eclectic method was developed, based on the integration of data derived from different sources, in particular administrative data from labour offices and survey data from enterprises. The reason for this choice, which looks to-day particularly modern and enlightened, is that – Montemartini explains – labour exchange offices were in Italy limited in coverage and inefficient, and the English method «would only work if we had to deal with intelligent and good-will employers, or even better with strong employers organisations»⁴⁶.

The creation of Istat, in the intentions and opinion of its founding father and first President, Corrado Gini, should have remedied

⁴⁴ S. PATRIARCA, *L'impresa statistica nell'Italia ottocentesca*, in C.A. CORSINI (ed), *Da osservazione sperimentale a spiegazione razionale. Per una storia della statistica in Italia*, Pisa 1989, p. 26.

⁴⁵ G. MONTEMARTINI, *Il mercato del lavoro. Note metodologiche*, in «Giornale degli economisti», 2th s., XV, 1904, I, pp. 326-339.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 329: «È solo possibile quando si abbia a che fare con industriali intelligenti e volenterosi, o meglio con forti associazioni di industriali». For another application of this eclectic method see, for instance, A. MOLINARI, *Statistiche internazionali sul consumo della carne con speciale riguardo al consumo delle grandi città*, in «Bulletin de l'Institut international de statistique», XXII, 1926, 3, pp. 187-269.

to the serious shortcomings in the collection and processing of data, which represented – in his view – the weak aspect of the development of the discipline in the country. Unfortunately, neither the 1926 nor later reforms have been able to eradicate this original sin of statistical organisation and management in Italian statistics. The focus therefore of the 1926 reform – according to Gini – should have been organisational, and should have affected above all the data collection procedures, rather than the methodological and analytical aspects. Hence his famous motto: «Neither statistics as mathematics, nor statistics with mathematics, but statistics with the minimum necessary mathematics»⁴⁷.

11. *Legal formalism and the «Italian school of public law»*

It has been said above that one of the main handicap of Italian statistics was the poor quality of administrative sources. Some of the main reasons for this state of affairs have already been considered; particularly, as in other countries, the lack of independence and credibility of statisticians, dispersed across the many and various offices requiring statistical data, and subordinated to the policy orientation and constraints of their political masters.

One set of reasons however is worth highlighting, as it explains a great deal of the scarce consideration given to statistical competence in the public administration in Italy, regarded mostly as distant strange and foreign in relation to the core skills yielding prestige reputation and visibility to the status of the public employee. This aspect, which contrasts significantly with other experiences (for instance in France or Germany), appears particularly striking in consideration of the fact that the organisation of statistical activities has in general been decentralised, and that statistics has played an active role in the policies of state intervention; which should have made it particularly attractive and dear to policy users and administrators, as for instance it has been the case of France.

A dominant factor in the development of a non-statistical, or even an anti-statistical, culture in the public administration was the emergence first in the 1890's, and the affirmation afterwards, of the «Italian school of public law», which proclaimed the centrality of the legal approach to the study of the public sector, and permeated since then the operation of the public administration. The legal method – on the basis of the teaching of Vittorio Emanuele Orlando, the father of the school – should be developed and applied to the

⁴⁷ C. GINI, *Condizioni attuali e futuri progressi della statistica*, in «Commercio», IV, 1931, p. 20.

operation of the State, free from all contamination derived from sociological statistical or political science disciplines. The concept of the legal personality of the State acquired a central status in the treatment of administrative issues, creating a profound barrier between private and public management philosophies and practises, and emphasising the authority connotation and formal features of the operation of the public sector. Since the legal culture was then the main culture of the ruling class and the one that from the beginning of the 20th century granted access to public sector jobs, particularly top management positions, the Italian school had a profound influence on the formation and reproduction of bureaucracy⁴⁸. Among other things it was this school of thought which was responsible for the progressive breach between statistics, and more broadly social science, and the legal culture of the élite in the administration and in society.

It is worth signalling that statistics remained a compulsory discipline in the curriculum of the Faculty of Law until the education reform of 1923⁴⁹; however, it lost weight and prestige, and was not capable of channelling the study of public law towards empirical analysis. At the same time, the opinion arose that current statistical information, especially the one collected through official and administrative channels, were of such quality to be of little help in understanding reality, particularly the complex reality of policy making and government⁵⁰.

12. *The return of statistics to the University: the foundation of the Faculty of Statistics*

The creation of Istat was part of a wider strategy aimed at correcting the imbalances and misalignments determined by legal formalism. The re-centralisation of statistical production should have been the condition and the outcome of a broader public administration reform oriented towards the improvement of technical and management expertise and its application to the design and imple-

⁴⁸ On the leading role played by the legal school of Orlando, see M. FIORAVANTI, *Costituzione, amministrazione e trasformazioni dello Stato*, in A. SCHIAVONE (ed), *Stato e cultura giuridica in Italia dall'Unità alla Repubblica*, Roma - Bari 1990, pp. 7-21. For his influence on the bureaucracy see also C. MOZZARELLI - S. NESPOR, *Giuristi e scienze sociali nell'Italia liberale*, Venezia 1981.

⁴⁹ M.G. OTTAVIANI, *La statistica nell'ordinamento didattico dell'Università e dell'istruzione superiore ed il suo insegnamento (dalle origini al 1939)*, in C.A. CORSINI (ed), *Da osservazione sperimentale a spiegazione razionale*, cit., p. 50.

⁵⁰ See for instance E. CORBINO, *Le statistiche e le relazioni periodiche nella burocrazia*, in «Giornale degli economisti e Rivista di statistica», LIX, 1919, pp. 278-282.

mentation of policies⁵¹. Corrado Gini, before promoting the creation of Istat and becoming its President, had created special Schools of Statistics for the public administration, first in Padua, where he taught, and then in Rome. These Schools were attached to the Faculties of Law and Political Sciences. In the same framework, Gini conceived and placed the establishment of public exams in statistics: and in fact in March 1930 a bill was passed prescribing a special exam in statistical sciences for all those who aspired to be recruited in the statistical offices of the public sector, be they Ministries, or public institutions⁵². This bill seemed to take determined action in order to solve the question of introducing highly specialised staff in bureaucratic apparatus and give to statistics a role and value as autonomous discipline and specialisation in the public sector employment.

However, expectations appear again to have been largely beyond actual achievements. Public offices in fact continued to produce poor quality statistics escaping on the whole the guidance influence and methodological control of Istat. The National Statistics Council complained often and repeatedly the lack of sound teaching education and training in statistics, as having a deep and negative impact on the quality of work in the public administration⁵³.

Probably the clearest manifestation of the substantial failure of Gini's ambitious programme can be found in the foundation in 1936 of the Faculty of Statistical Sciences at the University of Rome, promoted by Gini himself, who became right after his resignation from Istat the first Faculty Chairman. Gini had evidently abandoned his original plan and design of regenerating «from within» the public administration through statistics and through the establishment of dedicated statistical institutions of higher education. He decided then to reset the reform programme on a longer term and wider perspective, creating in the University a line of teaching and a curriculum addressed both to would-be public and private employees, aimed at increasing the statistical culture in society at large as

⁵¹ M.L. D'AUTILIA, *L'essor de l'information statistique et son impact sur l'administration dans l'Italie fasciste. L'Istituto centrale di statistica 1926-1946*, in «Jahrbuch für europäische Verwaltungsgeschichte», IX, 1997, pp. 179-193.

⁵² See the Royal Law decree 24 march 1930 n. 436 and G. LETI, *L'Istat e il Consiglio superiore di statistica*, p. 124. The best profile of Corrado Gini is in S. LANARO, *Nazione e lavoro. Saggio sulla cultura borghese in Italia 1870-1925*, Venezia 1979, pp. 44-51.

⁵³ See for instance *Atti del Consiglio superiore di statistica: sessione ordinaria 21 dicembre 1936*, in «Annali di statistica», 6th s., XXXVIII, 1937, pp. 5-16; *Atti del Consiglio superiore di statistica: sessione 22 dicembre 1938*, in «Annali di statistica», 7th s., IV, 1939, pp. 23-24.

well as the public administration. Science, and statistics, seem therefore to retreat back to from where they came, the University, taking stock of the failure of the political programme, which we find throughout the history of Italian statistics, directed to regenerating the ruling classes through enlightened public intervention, i.e. science in the state, the science of the state, statistics.

The consequences of this change of strategy were felt heavily in the post-war period, when the liberation from Fascism left the field open for institutional reform and democratic rehabilitation. The decay of the central office was accelerated by the new context, rather than contrasted. The identity crisis was essentially due to the serious deterioration and probably the severance of the close linkage connecting science statistics and the public administration, which had presided over the golden moments of statistical development in Italy. This was the case when at the times of Bodio statistics in the administration was considered an essential precondition of effective government, or when statistical science in the Nitti period was deemed an indispensable aid to administrative action. In the 1950's Istat found itself devoid of scientific prestige and competence, having ceded to the University its scientific and training mission; to the extent that in 1949 Livio Livi, member of the National Statistics Council, stated that Istat should deal only with administrative matters leaving to other institutions the questions of science and research⁵⁴. In the clash between State and Science which characterised the Italian history with a particular emphasis and visibility, Istat, and statistics, remained squeezed, and lost independence and prestige. The following fifty years have been spent trying to reconquer autonomy of status mission and operation in the organisation of the State.

13. *Conclusions: statistics and nation-building in Europe*

To what extent, and how, does statistics contribute to nation-building, in particular to create an effective public administration and state organisation, and to develop a modern open national ruling class? What can we learn from the formation of Italy? What implications does the Italian experience have for European integration? The history of Italian statistics is particularly instructive and revealing in addressing this set of questions. Ancient nation and young state, Italy as a unified country has been the outcome of a European process: it was born in fact in response to, and under the impulse of, changing equilibrium and political disintegration/

⁵⁴ G. PARENTI, *L'attività del Consiglio superiore*, cit., p. 33.

integration in Europe; it was therefore very receptive to the adoption of foreign models in the organisation of the State, the public administration and in the establishment of institutions for the production and the reproduction of the élite.

Statistics too reflected an evolution where European influences and linkages were brought to bear in a cultural «melting pot». In particular, both the two main European models, and philosophies, of statistical development have been in Italy a source of inspiration contrast and emulation for nation-building: on the one hand, the continental model of statistics rooted in the power of the State, the prestige and authority of the public administration and in the technical competence of the bureaucracy, has been applied with mixed success to the organisation of the Italian public sector; on the other, the Anglo-Saxon model of statistics expressing the variety and richness of civil society, but also its fragmentation and conservatism, resisted and survived in the decentralised structure of Italian statistics, even though sometimes underground or lacking recognition and credibility.

In the political movement leading to the formation of the new state, the two models largely overlapped and crossed in a virtuous circle of militancy and discipline, since the organisation of the nation was basically inherent in the social processes of conspiracy rebellion and state-building; later, however, when the newly formed State adopted an administrative structure and organised its bureaucracy aiming at consolidating a national leadership, statistics reflected all the difficulties encountered in the modernisation of the public administration and in the «nationalisation» of society, i.e. in the formation of a ruling class at the national level, capable of a national vision and responsibility.

The synthesis of the two models, which Italy tried then, and tries now, to operationalise, can be clearly seen by observing the pendulum in the centralisation-decentralisation patterns, which has characterised the organisation of Italian statistics from the origins to the present day, and the intimate but controversial and contrasted intercourse between academic and institutional statistics.

The two European models of statistical development closely correspond to two different mechanism for the formation of the national élite: in continental Europe social mobility and a modern and cohesive ruling class were ensured by a meritocratic process of selection and advancement of the «fonction publique» (the army, the judiciary, the diplomacy, the financial administration, etc.), of which statistics was an integral component and pre-condition; in the Anglo-Saxon world social change was engineered mainly through industry and entrepreneurship, i.e. economic freedom ac-

companied by a social thinking based on empiricism and philanthropism.

The mechanism described above were both at play in Italy with inevitable gaps and conflicts: indeed, the failure of the State and the weakness of the civil society became at times mutually reinforcing, and statistics has been called to provide both competence and techniques for public administration reform, and the insights and motivation for greater social cohesion and innovation.

In Europe, as in Italy, the challenge of the present, and of the future, lies in developing a new synthesis between economic freedom and social governance, building and identity and conscience of European responsibility and social leadership, and creating mechanisms in the educational system and in the public institutions presiding over the formation of an élite capable of thinking in global terms.

European statistics, not surprisingly, has been called to play a prominent role in the European integration process. Its problematic to-day appears strikingly corresponding to the one faced by the evolution of Italian statistics: Europe in fact is in search of the appropriate mix between centralised and decentralised statistical production, and between a statistics capable of permeating government and business structures and one endowed with the independence and the scientific authority warranted by an intimate frequentation of the academic world.

Thus, the history of statistical organisation and nation-building in Italy has profound implications for Europe: *de te fabula narratur!*