

Kappelin knows, and loves, Italy: there is no trace, in her work, of a superiority complex towards Italians – such folkloristic people! ? which is on the contrary a common feature of some foreign media when dealing with Italy. Rather, Kappelin tries to understand how came that a country with a unique cultural and historical heritage has let itself be bluffed by a man who has – perhaps irreparably – compromised Italy's reputation in the world.

And the book is indeed not only about the founder of “Forza Italia”, but instead, as it is made clear by the meaningful title (*Berlusconi. The Italian*), about Berlusconi as embodiment of some national peculiarities, so to say.

Italy in the whole have not yet been able to reflect about Berlusconi's almost twenty-year dominance over the country's political and economic life, pressed as it is just now (February 2012) by a never-ending emergency – the risk of a financial collapse – which caused, in November 2011, the appointment of a “technical government” (i.e. voted by the Parliament but not resulting from the last general election) being charged with the task of crisis management. Furthermore, although “style” is significant – professor Mario Monti does not “peekaboo” the German chancellor (Kappelin reminds Berlusconi's blunders in chapter seven, *Tittut i världen*) and seems not to be used to spend his nights with twenty- to thirty young girls at the same time – the common feeling is that there has not occurred any shift in economic and social policies, which remain unfair and not effective (at least in the view of re-launching the economy and not only balancing public finances). This sense of continuity prevents to look at “Berlusconism” as a close (?) period in Italian history.

What does Berlusconi's success reveal of Italy, according to Kappelin's book? Basically, three aspects: the power of organised crime; the Catholic Church's influence upon domestic politics and culture; the well-grounded male chauvinism.

The first two points (which particularly chapter six, *Maffian*, and eight, *Klockorna i Peterskyrkan*, focus on, although they are recurring issues all over the book) are frequently cause of embarrassments to Italians when talking with foreigners.

And indeed it would be unthinkable in Sweden – Kappelin is not so explicit, but the starting sentence of her book is: how come that Italians vote for Berlusconi? ? to pervert justice in the way Berlusconi did in Italy (by the notorious *ad hoc* laws, described in their origin and

content in the chapter five, *Konflikten med rättväsandet*), and to witness powerless to the connivance between politics and criminality. This is due probably to a political tradition in Nordic countries which Henrik Berggren and Lars Trägårdh have described as a high degree of social trust, meant both as trust in other people, including strangers, and confidence in common institutions due to their transparency<sup>[1]</sup>.

However, Kappelin's thesis is that what explains why a politician, who from a Swedish point of view is completely incomprehensible, has been so successful is, besides his relationship with organised crime on one hand and with the Catholic Church on the other hand (at least until the last sex affaires), male chauvinism: a key factor, the Swedish journalist stresses already in the *Introduction*, in understanding Italy's decline, from the economic stagnation (now recession) to the lack of trust in the future. And in chapter one (*Italien och Italienarna. En introduktion*) Kappelin points out indeed that the country is like a journey back in time, in a masculine and sensual world, where "l'apparenza" (look)<sup>[2]</sup> means all and where a downward compromise has been achieved between the individual and the State: as you (State) do not accomplish your duties towards me (citizen), I am not bound to accomplish mine towards you. It is the triumph of the "furbo" (cunning fellow)<sup>[3]</sup>.

With such a background, it is quite obvious that women have no chance, with few exceptions, to establish themselves as political and economic independent actors. Their unhappy fortune in Berlusconi's Italy is the subject of chapter three (*Madonnan, horan och Silvio Berlusconi*): those that are good looking are reduced to nothing more than ornamental elements in a society ruled by old and unappeasable men and therefore appointed as parliamentary members and even ministers exactly because of their "apparenza"; the others, the common women, who are not mistresses of some sultan, are mostly doomed to insignificance in the economy and in politics.

Berlusconi, Kappelin insists on this point, has not invented male chauvinism, which on the contrary is well-grounded in the country's culture; his sin with no redemption is to have turned this national inclination into a rule and the "velina"<sup>[4]</sup> (young girls almost naked whose only task in Berlusconi's TV programs is to shake their body in alluring ways) into the ideal model of womanhood.

And thus we come to another valuable contribution of Kappelin's book, after the effective

part on women's role as mirror of Italy's decadence (and again here we could remind that on the contrary Nordic countries are on the top in the world's gender equality ratios): to the huge concentration of media power achieved by Berlusconi much attention is drawn upon (see particularly chapter four, *Makten över medierna*), but this problem is not presented at all as an Italian peculiarity. Rather, Kappelin warns that also countries which have repeatedly condemned Berlusconi for his conflict of interest have no safe defence against such a risk.

The final part of the book focuses on how Berlusconi has changed Italian political style, turning electoral campaigns into sales where even the promise of one million – and not half a million, as Kappelin writes – new jobs can be sold to people in search of an encouraging fairy-tale, with immigrants welcomed as scapegoats (chapter nine, *Dragkampen i Italien – resultat och misslyckanden*), and on the dangerous meeting between authoritarian democracy and media populism (chapter ten, *Auktoritär demokrati och medial populism*). No one before Berlusconi, Kappelin points out, had dared to draw a comparison between Mussolini and himself with a kind of self-congratulation. But what the author argues is not that the founder of “Forza Italia” is the new Mussolini: the difference is that the latter aimed at building a new Italian, whilst the former is satisfied with the existing one. The point is rather that the centre-right parties, with Berlusconi in the forefront, have taken over and reverted the “cultural hegemony” based since 1945 on antifascism as the key-source of national identity, and have systematically put down liberal institutions (starting from parliamentary and judicial powers) – and politics itself.

In this perspective, Berlusconi's Italy appears as a political laboratory for the whole Europe. This is the somehow not expected conclusion from a non-Italian author, which enables the book to be not only a commented review of stereotypes about Italians (and about differences between Northern and Southern Europe), but a more demanding reflection about possible future developments of democracy at an international level. Out of Italy many have laughed when seeing Berlusconi's blunders and listening to his hymn (“Meno male che Silvio c'è”), but – Kappelin warns – his “style” has become a model for a new generation of right-wing politicians, starting from David Cameron in the UK.

Thus it is not easy to get rid of Berlusconi as though it were a mere interlude in Italian history, perhaps cherishing the always comfortable thesis that it has been a further

demonstration of the *Gattopardo*'s core idea: in Italy everything is to be changed so that nothing changes. On the contrary, Berlusconi, this is Kappelin's conclusion, has substantially changed the way Italians look at themselves – and at the others – as well as the ways of contemporary politics. And it will take time to go back to previous ones – or to find something new.

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[1] See H. Berggren, L. Trägårdh, *Social Trust and Radical Individualism. The Paradox at the Heart of Nordic Capitalism*, in *The Nordic Way*, Stockholm, Global Utmaning, 2010, pp. 18-19.

[2] In Italian in the book, see p. 18.

[3] In Italian in the book, see p. 29.

[4] The book has been written before the “Ruby affaire”.