

## Book Review

### Review of Andrea Cossu and Matteo Bortolini's *Italian Sociology, 1945 – 2010: An Intellectual and Institutional Profile*

Christopher Thorpe <sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *University of Exeter*, UNITED KINGDOM

\*Corresponding Author: [c.m.thorpe@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:c.m.thorpe@exeter.ac.uk)

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Andrea Cossu and Matteo Bortolini, *Italian Sociology, 1945 – 2010: An Intellectual and Institutional Profile*, London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017, vii + 137 pages.

*'Io fei gibetto a me de le mie case'* - I made my own home be my gallows. Thus wrote Dante Alighieri in *The Divine Comedy*. I am starting to know what he meant. Like so many others at the time of writing, I have been exiled from my office and condemned to work at home. There is nothing either comedic or divine about working from home. I can discern very little on the horizon of my short to medium-term future on which to fixate as way of an antidote to the acute anomie of the present. All the more surprising that on completing my close reading of Andrea Cossu and Matteo Bortolini's *Italian Sociology, 1945 - 2010: An Intellectual and Institutional Profile*, I found myself actively feeling grateful for my current predicament. Notwithstanding sustained assaults to disciplinary autonomy, the intensifying marketization of higher education, and the fug of Covid-19 induced uncertainty that lays thick in the air, relative to our Italian cousins the state of sociology in Britain could be a lot worse.

This book forms part of an edited series presided over by John Holmwood and Stephen Turner entitled *Sociology Transformed*. Commissioned in 2017 by Palgrave, the series maps changes to the field of sociology 'on a country by country basis', which it does with the aim of contributing 'to the discussion of the future of the subject' in its 'many variant forms across the globe' (ii). Set against the backdrop of this wider orientation, the book provides an historical 'sociological account of sociology as an academic profession in Italy between 1945 and the late twentieth century' (2). More specifically, the authors aim to demonstrate how 'the particular configuration of intellectual agencies, organizational constraints, and disciplinary structuration' have informed the evolution of the discipline in Italy to date (4).

Animated by the desire to go beyond the overly 'politicized and romanticized' myths embedded within the professional memory on the one hand, and poorly substantiated scholarly accounts on the other, the book depicts the fragmented, polycentric and piece-meal development of sociology in Italy in the post-war period (3).

Cossu and Bortolini's sociological reconstruction of the history of Italian sociology assumes a primarily two-part structure. Running to eight chapters in total, the first four chapters combine to tell the story of the intellectual and organizational development of the discipline in the period from the final third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the appointment of the first full chairs in sociology in 1961. Chapter one recounts the struggle to separate out the intellectual and disciplinary identity of sociology from the humanities on the one hand, and statistics, economics and political science, on the other. Chapters two and three address further issues of disciplinary differentiation, early attempts at empirical sociological research, and the marginalization of sociological practice to a range of 'extra-academic' research centres and institutes - most notably in Milan and Turin in the North, and the multi-

faceted entity that is *Il Mulino*, in Bologna. Chapter four delineates processes of continuity and change in the professional sociological habitus from the last 1960s onwards, as the intellectual dispositions of the then up-and-coming generation of institutionally trained scholars clashed with those inscribed in the old-guard.

The remaining four chapters are each devoted to mapping the direction and diversification of the discipline in the years following the establishment of the first fully accredited degree in sociology at the University of Trento – the subject of chapter five. Chapter six explores the influence of Marxist-inspired forms of critique of Italy's modernization both during and from the 1960s onwards, whereas chapter seven describes the steady fragmentation of Italian sociology from the 1970s into two main ideological camps – 'Catholic' and 'lay'. The final and eighth chapter provides a survey of the state of the field from the 1980s up until 2010. The take home point here is that growing numbers of Italian social scientists 'are abandoning Italian as their main language of communication and are distancing themselves from the ossified national academic conventions' (112). For now at least, it seems unlikely that the future of Italian sociology lies in Italy.

In summary, this is a well organized, well-researched, and clearly written book. Moreover, the light-touch approach to theory, the authors drawing loosely on Bourdieu's Field Theory and Abbott's 'ecological approach' to frame the data, ensures that the peculiarities of the Italian case are viewed through the prism of general-level processes and patterns. While the narrower aims of this book may well serve to limit its appeal to a wider sociological readership, in terms of its broader value Cossu and Bortolini's study provides a pertinent reminder that the rise and fall of academic disciplines is largely determined by forces and factors that lay well beyond the sphere of influence of their practitioners. There is much to learn from the way social scientists in Italy have sought to overcome the institutional structures and state-led policies constraining them. Let us hope that the future of sociology in Britain bears little resemblance to the history of the discipline in Italy to date.