

When Political Science and History meet. 'Legacies of the Past and Democracy' in Pietro Grilli di Cortona's Research

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The birth of a Standing Group on 'History and Political Science' was only approved and formalized on 5 June, 2015 during the last SISP Executive Board meeting, chaired by Pietro Grilli di Cortona. Its founding Manifesto reminds us that, in Italy, unlike other countries, meeting and confrontation between Political Science and Historiography is still not a very widespread custom. In fact, 'Historical Political Science' ('Politologia storica' in the Manifesto) is still considered a neglected area of research. In reality, the phenomena is not new; the complicated relationship between Political Science and History has interested many other countries and the distrust between disciplines is reciprocal. As far as modern Political Science and History is concerned, the success of the complex 'movement' called *Behavioralism* ('Behavioral Approach') established between the 1930s and 1950s and centered in the USA, definitely had a fundamental role in this process. Some decades ago, Dahl pointed out that those mainly American scholars who were later called *Behaviorists* or *Behavioralists*:

shared a strong sense of dissatisfaction with the achievements of conventional political science, particularly through historical, philosophical, and the descriptive-institutional approaches, and a belief that additional methods and approaches either existed or could be developed that would help to provide political science with empirical propositions and theories of a systematic sort, tested by closer, more direct and more rigorously controlled observations of political events (Dahl 1961, 766).

Among the results of the introduction of this approach into the Political Science field, was a low sensitivity, if not a clear-cut oblivion, toward history. More than a discipline the 'Behavioral Approach' reject a method, used by historians, described as individualizing or idiographic, considered incompatible to the generalizing or nomothetic one used by political scientists. From hence, derived a new political science, whose original features had a strong inclination toward a-historicity (Dahl 1961, 771) rather than anti-historicity (Pasquino 1971, 13). The focus on the scarce compatibility of the two methods echoed in one of the first Political Science manuals, published in Italy in the early 1970s (Urbani 1970, 41-42). Sartori himself, even though he considered History an immense deposit of experiences (but not of experiments) from which to draw, underlined how 'historical control' had an intrinsic weakness that limited its use in scientific analysis of politics (Sartori 1979, 248-250).

Forgetting history is not the only limitation of Behavioralism highlighted by those who gave the first account of its impact. Pasquino, for example, in his introduction to another important Political Science text book, in vogue in the early 1970s, referring to Dahl's (1961) observations regarding Behavioralism's unsolved problems, saw how the question regarding observable behavior and its measurement/quantification had swayed many behaviorists to choose marginal investigation subjects and precipitous retreats into 'methodologism' and technicality. In other words, they retreated toward the opinion that adoption and constant improvement in specific techniques for detecting and interpreting political behavior was more important than scientist creativity and imagination (Pasquino 1971, 20).

However, as early as the 1960s and 1970s, the awareness of the limitations of *Behavioralism*, the increase and widespread use of case-based comparative strategies, the development of approaches like Historical Institutionalism, encouraged even political scientists to revisit the question of the rapport between history and the social science, renewing interest for comparative-historical approaches and for systematic qualitative comparisons.

In the United States, thanks also to seminal works such as Barrington Moore Jr.'s *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (1966) and the advent of approaches like the above mentioned neo-institutionalism, the academic climate changed so the APSA established a 'Politics and History' section in 1989. In Europe, where 'Historical Political Science' has a rather significant tradition (just think, for example of Max Weber and Otto Hintze's contributions), a mainspring towards revisiting the relationship between political science and history was provided by Stein Rokkan's work, who, as we know, in attempting to understand and explain political development in Western Europe, turned his attention tenaciously to the weight of historical events.

As Morlino reminds us, Italy instead, witnessed a sort of paradox. On the one hand, the difficult rebirth of political science after the Second World War, made it almost mandatory to set discipline boundaries in respect to neighboring semantic domains (Philosophy Politics, Constitutional Law, History, Sociology). Furthermore, "...the most significant contributions came from the intermediate sectors themselves, midway between History and Political Science, between Economics and Political Science, between Sociology and Political Science" (Morlino 1989, 5).

The fact that an Italian 'History and Political Science' Standing Group was instituted 26 years after the United States and the contents of its Manifesto suggest that the Historical Political Science tradition still needs to be constructed and that its difficult genesis has left a legacy that not even founding fathers like Bobbio, Leoni, and Sartori were able to curb.

When the Historical Political Science tradition is developed in Italy as well, we are sure that Pietro Grilli will be listed as one of its forerunners. As Barbara Pisciotta's contribution in this issue reminds us, Pietro Grilli used History and long term, diachronic analysis as the underlying theme of his scientific contribution. Obviously, he was not a lone pioneer; Pietro Grilli had a sound competence in Political Science methodology. It is not by mere chance that he authored a chapter on the subject in a Political Science text-book (Grilli di Cortona, Lanza, Pisciotta and Germano 2016) used by various University courses. Moreover, in a Box on 'History and Social Sciences' he is noted in research work where he shows that the methodological boundaries between History and Social Sciences

have not always been so clear-cut; how the use of the comparative method often unites the two disciplines and that striving to formulate general laws like those formulated for Physics does not exclude that many social scientists are convinced that research -produced 'laws' often have 'local' characteristics. In other words, a spatio-temporally bounded application, often tends to fade (without annulling) the differences between Social Science and History, resizing Behaviorist a-historical drives (*ibid*, 38).

Pietro Grilli was fully aware of the unresolved academic controversies involving methods and approaches, used and usable in Political Science. He respected other people's convictions, different from his own, but he did have his preferences, defending them passionately but without elbowing anyone else, never allowing himself to be swayed by fads. Despite some extensive case studies, as Barbara Pisciotta points out, and diversity of topics, we see a second underlying theme in his constant recourse to comparative control, in his preference for qualitative analysis, in his attention to rigorous, accurate construction and treatment of concepts.

Finally, a third underlying aspect was seen when he had to choose research questions, facing Gilpin's dilemma, on explaining 'trivial issues exactly' or treating 'important issues imprecisely', he did not hesitate. Since his graduation thesis in 'Dottrina dello Stato' on *Stalin and after Stalin in the Soviet Union*, he preferred the second path, often facing questions, treated very little by Italian Political Science, like those relating to Eastern European political systems, even when collecting data was difficult and empirical sources were in short supply.

Therefore, the choice of studying *The role of legacies in European democratization processes after the Second World War* was the continuation of a path which Pietro had already begun (see, for example, Grilli di Cortona 2009). Curiosity regarding this subject was encouraged by the acknowledgement that a general democratization theory was – and still is- non-existent in Political Science (see in this issue the article by Leonardo Morlino). This is true, partly because it is rather difficult to report on a body of generalization processes which is distant both in time and in space. In the planning phase of Pietro Grilli's research, he tried to arrange the various factors that favor/influence the democratization boot processes and their outcomes, gathering them into two groups, not necessarily reciprocally exclusive: i.e. an international and an exquisitely national one. In addition, Pietro Grilli proposed a third group, the one labeled 'old regime legacies' which does not exclude the other two, assuming that some legacies were favorable and others contrary to democratization. So the working hypothesis for his research wanted explanations of differences in democratization outcomes, to pay particular attention to legacies that the past of each country transmitted to new political actors, thereby constraining their strategic choices and behavior.

The *legacies* choice meant measuring up against one of the main ambitions of Social Sciences: to explain social change, implying that, however relevant it might be, it is difficult to create a 'tabula rasa' of the past; even the greatest social and political changes in the end, prove to be less fluid than they seem at first and finally – the past is never really the past at all, because it reappears again under many forms.

From a theoretical-methodological point of view, attention on legacies enhances history and the role of historical inertia, recalling what was theorized by historical neo-institutionalism, as it foresees the survival of norms and regulates institutions; taking into

consideration the role of routines, norms, procedures and what pre-existing organizational forms take in political processes (March and Olsen 1989).

Therefore, the *Legacies* theme links to two of the most well-known theoretical frameworks of *path dependency* (Pearson 2000). This tries to explain continuities by theorizing that, once former choices have become institutionalized in organizations: rules/norms, agreements, and prerogatives, it seems difficult to modify them and the actors involved tend to conform, almost complying to inertia. This theory also underlines discontinuity, believing that the past does indeed exert influence, but not necessarily producing movement that goes towards the same direction. Sometimes it causes totally opposite reactions, for example, fueling actors to break free from past constraints in any way they can.

Nevertheless, legacies have never been completely overlooked in the past by scholars of political change. Tocqueville, for example (1856), picked up the connection between the outcomes of the French Revolution and institutions, between processes and events dating back to the *Ancien Régime*, showing for the first time how the past that the revolution wanted to destroy (and surely destroyed in part) was not completely past and its weight and influence still continued to be felt. In addition, Skocpol (1976, 309-310) notes that, regarding the Revolution, “the old Regime’s legacy modeled post-revolutionary differences directly and indirectly” and that that changes were also due to “certain structural models of former regimes” (*ibid.*, 310). We have already mentioned Barrington Moore Jr’s work. Huntington (1991), who, in turn, reaffirmed that re-democratizations are more likely to succeed than democratizations because they are supported by a wealth of experience and a memory of the past, transmitted by institutions, collective actors and often by single political leaders.

In recent decades, Legacy studies of preceding authoritarian régimes have been concerned with inter disciplinary literature dealing with ‘coming to terms with the past’. Essentially this means considering the way new democracies measure up to the problems of the violence by the preceding non-democratic régime. This issue has found fertile terrain in some countries (see, for example, Hagopian 1993; Aguilar 1996 and 2008; Barahona de Brito, González Enríquez, and Aguilar 2001; Hite and Cesarini, 2004; Costa Pinto, 2006) and in some disciplines such as History and Legal Doctrine. Particular attention was placed on *historical memory* and *transitional justice*. This latter concept summarizes an area of research centered on how society faces human rights abuse, mass atrocities or other forms of severe social traumas, including genocide and civil wars of the former régimes, in order to build a more just and peaceful democratic future (Teitel 1997 and 2000; Elster 2009; Di Gregorio 2012).

In modern Political Science, studies on authoritarian legacies are few. Even though a volume on this subject was presented in 1982, by Herz, legacies has found some space on democratization studies’ agenda only in the past twenty years (see among others, Larsen 1998; Morlino 2003; Hite and Cesarini 2004; Grilli di Cortona and Lanza 2011; Costa Pinto and Morlino 2013). One of the reasons why it was so unpopular is that past legacies are rather allusive and ambiguous; their definition and operationalization far from simple. An important seminal work on the subject was carried out by Leonardo Morlino (2003) who states:

I define as authoritarian traditions or legacies those behavioral models, rules, relationships, social and political situations, but also norms, procedures and institutions, that were introduced or reinforced by the authoritarian regime immediately preceding the democratic transition (...). The observable aspects of the authoritarian legacies are different. In the first place, an authoritarian legacy contains three elements, connected amongst themselves, but that can be present, even if only partially, in the new democratic settings. They are: *a*) a group of beliefs, values and attitudes; *b*) one or more public institutions, bodies or simple organizations; *c*) the behaviors derived from the relationships between the first two dimensions (...) (in substance), as suggested by the same definition, there are two fundamental types of legacies: *a*) those relative to values, to the institutions and to the behaviors desired by the authoritarian regime; *b*) those which reinforce precedent values and existing institutions, with new institutions, bodies or organizations and consequent behavioral habits. The second type of legacies is profoundly rooted in the political culture and tends to be stronger and more persistent (2003, 256-257).

Pietro Grilli di Cortona (2011a) noted that the few studies proposed by political science focused, above all, on the legacies of previous authoritarian régimes and that it would be useful to use other perspectives that did not set time limits. Therefore, he proposed a distinction between historical legacies (the ‘*trapassato*/past imperfect’) and inherently authoritarian ones (past). Historical Legacies, which are defined by the same terminology used for the authoritarian ones and involve factors such as values, memories, identities, norms, institutions, organizations, élites, behaviors, routines and practices, which, even though they are filtered, reinforced or weakened by the authoritarian régime, always have an influence on democratization and consequently, on the following régime (Pridham 2000, 42).

Furthermore, Pietro Grilli also advocated a thorough reflection on the concept of *historical memory*: its meaning, the different uses that political actors, called upon to build new democracies, could employ, and the concept of *political learning*, already embodied in some important studies on the subject (Bermeo 1992; Pridham 2000); in addition, Grilli also identified a series of ways in which the influence of historical legacies could be utilized. In particular, past history could contain the following elements:

1. *indirect influence* occurs when legacies affect the *non-democratic* regime, which in turn will influence the transition to democracy and subsequent establishment of a democracy;
2. *emulative reference* occurs when symbols of the pre-authoritarian or pre-totalitarian past, such as constitutions, norms, and institutions are restored, bringing back the previous stage;
3. *political learning* occurs when *learning* from past experiences and from previous mistakes have positive effects on democratization and its results.

As far as the operationalization of strictly authoritarian legacies is concerned, based on Morlino and Grilli’s definition we have three predominant dimensions: A) élites; B) political institutions and structures and the cultural models on which they are based; C) socio-cultural aspects. During research, these three dimensions were further disarticulated. Specifically, the category, ‘Institutions, political structures and organization models’

was further divided into: a) 'Institutions', b) 'Parties and Party Systems', c) 'Elites', d) 'Stateness and related Problems', while the socio-cultural dimension was divided into e) 'Statalism' and f) 'Mobilization, Political Culture and Civil Society'.

For empirical verification, Pietro Grilli identified an articulated series of indicators, sub-divided into each subject matter with the aim of empirically checking, in selected cases, the degree of reliability in the research's main hypothesis.

Regarding case choice, the research was projected as an area comparison, focused on the diachronic analysis of 11 Western European countries (France and Germany), Southern European countries (Italy, Spain and Portugal) and Eastern countries (Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria and Russia). The research objective was to explain the similarities and differences of their democratization processes, determined both by their political, economic and institutional legacies derived from former non-democratic régimes and by their widely-considered past history.

The research results published by *il Mulino* publisher (Grilli di Cortona and Lanza 2011) confirm the strong incidence of legacies in democratization processes. Traces of the past always last; hence every neo-democracy must deal with them. The success or failure of democratization is also based on legacies, in particular on the ability of new régimes to control or neutralize those 'negative' traces; that is, those least compatible with a democratic set-up. 'Positive' traces, on the other hand, are those that lead to choices that can facilitate the establishment and consolidation of democracies.

The main problem that builders of democracies have to face, is that often the 'positive' or 'negative' characteristics of legacies cannot be determined *ex ante*, but only *ex post*. In fact, results often belie the evening's forecast. In the cases under-consideration, arenas in which the transmission of legacies is more frequent and relevant, and on which a comparison can be made, are the ones relating to institutions, party systems, issues regarding stateness, élites, the role of state in society and in economy, and political culture and civil society areas.

In addition to visible legacies (élites, institutions, organizations, political practices), we need to deal with invisible ones: mainly the *memory of the past* filtered by élites, mass media and institutions. This is a hard theme to circumscribe because of masses and élites' changing and oscillating perceptions of the past. However, it is obvious that invisible legacies are relevant to democracy policy: the re-actualization of events happening many years before may seem absurd, but it is part of daily politics, having positive and negative aspects. The Fascist, National-Socialist, Communist, Francoist, 'collaborationist', Nationalist past, as well as the complicity, the crimes and the responsibilities of the élites, continue to affect mutual legitimation between opposing political forces.

In building a durable and quality-style democracy, a fundamental role is played by the élite and protagonist groups dedicated to democratic revival, which often represent a minority of the population. The delicate task of finding a balance between extremes is up to them: between a memory that is learning and warning for the future and one that is made up of continual irruptions of the past into the present, that bring back political agendas, which revive a past that does not go away, thereby fueling conflict and opposition.

Finally, to conclude, I would like to share some of my personal memories. Although we occasionally met at academic events, my relationship with Pietro Grilli as scientific collaborator began at the annual SISP Conference held in Bologna in September 2006.

Together with Gianfranco Pasquino, he co-chaired the panel on ‘Parties and Party Systems in European Democracies’. I was at that time a *paper presenter*. In the following months, in order to prepare a handbook that we were compiling, we exchanged e-mails concerning opinions and suggestions on our respective chapters.

What came about, was an on-going synergy regarding work methods and academic report styles. A few months later, Pietro offered me a partnership, as local unit head of research, for the 2007 PRIN on the *Role of Legacies in Third Wave Democratization*. The collaboration was then followed by the writing of a Political Science Handbook for De Agostini editors, with the 2009 PRIN on *Why democratizing? The causes of non democratic regimes crisis and breakdown in the third wave*, and might have continued with a further PRIN project on *Stateness and Democratization*, which was only outlined, as Pietro, who was meanwhile elected President of the SISP no longer wanted to participate in competitive tenders.

I saw Pietro Grilli for the last time on June 5, 2015, one month and eleven days before he passed away. I was at Roma Tre University for a PHD/Doctorate Commission and Pietro was at the Department also to preside over the SISP Directive Board meeting convened for that afternoon. He was worn out due to his illness; we had a frugal lunch at a café near the Department with colleagues who worked with Pietro in Rome and we chatted about our children and our families. He confided to me that he would have rather be lying down in bed resting. But his work-ethic and his keen sense of institutional duty obliged him to be there. These were values that I had learned to appreciate; they were part of his rich culture and value baggage. Pietro Grilli was endowed with out of the ordinary analytical skills, scientific rigor, great working and leadership skills, noteworthy authoritativeness, needed to carry out scientific undertakings with great efficiency and lucidity. In addition to his various professional skills, I was also aware of his extraordinary personal qualities; in particular, innate politeness, cordiality, reliability, irony and generosity. For all these reasons, I was happy to be able to work alongside this man, considering myself lucky to have had this opportunity.

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