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Andrea Mammone, Ercole Giap Parini, Giuseppe A. Veltri

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THE RISORGIMENTO
IN CONTEMPORARY ITALY

History, politics and memory
during the national jubilees
(1911–1961–2011)

Annarita Gori

The Risorgimento: a shared myth?

In 2011, Italy celebrated its national jubilee. It was the third time that the country was called
to confront its past, the complex process of nation-building and, as on the previous anniversaries,
to deal with the issue famously highlighted by the liberal politician Massimo D’Azeglio: ‘Italy
is made; now the Italians must be made’. The meanings underlying these three celebrations
allow us to reflect on the different ways in which the past history of the country was used by
the ruling classes to build a common sense of identity; and to underline how this process developed
throughout the century. Jubilees are considered here not only as an anniversary, but also as a
‘procedure employed by national state and by specific politic cultures to define themselves, and
with the ways in which the politics of memory, legitimization strategies, languages of political
communication and commemorative machineries have served as channel liable to persuade and
to penetrate society’ (Baioni, 2011: 399). These commemorations, in fact, were important
occasions for reflection for politics and civil society, and for social scientists as well: in addition
to being a celebratory moment, they were also significant events which encouraged reflection
on Italian national identity and the relationship between politics, memory and the Risorgimento.

The Risorgimento is a crucial period in Italian history: it marks the foundation of Italy as a
united nation, but it is also the defining moment for some problematic divisions that have
characterized the country: masses vs. elites; South vs. North; monarchy vs. republic, etc. For
these reasons, the Risorgimento, its uses and its interpretations, will be the focus of this chapter:
alysing the myth of the Risorgimento through the lens of the jubilees will help shed light
on some basic problems of Italian history of the last 150 years, such as national identity in dispute
between political parties and local belonging, historical revisionism, the persistence of divisions
and the relationship with the national anniversaries of other countries.

The historiographical debate on the Risorgimento has developed in parallel with the different
phases of the study of its myth and its relationship to the idea of nation: the debate began with
the codification and the active promotion of the study of the Risorgimento by the state in the
Giolitti era; the subject of the Risorgimento enjoyed increasing interest until the first national
jubilee and a subsequent decrease because of the new centrality given in the collective
imagination to the Resistenza as the founding act of the Italian state; and, more recently, the
debate has benefited from the revival of studies on this period in the last ten years, characterized
by the attention paid to new trends in cultural history (Riall, 2007; Isnenghi and Cecchinato,
2008; Ginsborg, 2007), a revaluation of the concept of ‘masses’ as opposed to that of class, and
an analysis of the celebrations of the Italian Risorgimento in a European context (Baiioni et al.,
2012). The new focus on the Risorgimento, however, has also been accompanied by a wave
of historical revisionism that has led to an oversimplified, and sometimes misleading, reading
of the events and characters of national unification (Del Bocca, 2003; Di Fiore, 2007; Aprile,
2010). The most disruptive change in the last jubilee seems due to those political forces – especially
the Lega Nord (Northern League) and the Neo-Bourbons – that have shifted the focus of the
debate from ideological to territorial divisions, encouraging a dangerous combination of
revisionism and revanchist policies.

This wave of revisionism and the rejection of the Risorgimento have spread beyond the
field of historiography; this phenomenon is indeed also the result of the changing attitude of
political parties towards the Risorgimento, especially those excluded from the official
organization of the celebrations. In 1911, Republicans, Socialists and Catholics never called
into question the process of national unification; instead, they proclaimed themselves the real
heirs of the Risorgimento ideals, an attitude confirmed and developed further by the Communist
Party in 1961. The situation was quite the reverse, in 2011: with a new political class, the focus
of dispute had completely shifted; in fact, what was under attack from the secessionist parties
– some of them, such as Northern League, part of the government that organized the celebrations
– was no longer the interpretation or the appropriation of the Risorgimento, but the historical
event itself. The most evident symptom of this change is that the most strenuous defenders of
the memory of the Risorgimento were no longer the political parties, including some of those
in the government, but the President of the Republic Giorgio Napolitano (2012) and his
predecessor Carlo Azeglio Ciampi (2012), the chairman of the Comitato dei Garanti for the
Centocinquantenario.

However, this does not imply a lack of national belonging among the population; on the
contrary, the sense of belonging has been proved by the thousands of people who participated
in the celebrations and the myriad initiatives organized at a local level that resembled the diffuse
character and extreme localism of the celebrations of 1911.

1911: the triumph of the Savoy dynasty and the ‘double fiftieth’

In 1911, Italy celebrated its first anniversary through a variety of events that involved a number
of cities, each of which often had its own Risorgimento Day (Gentile, 1997: 20; Franco, 2002:
41–2). The existence of independent exhibitions highlighted the fragmentation of the Italian
process of nation-building through an effective representation of the myth of the Risorgimento
as consisting of several local stories (Brice, 2010: 48). Such fragmentation led to an original
‘Italian way’ in national celebrations, which found its most important realization in the Jubilee
Exhibitions. These in fact were divided into three between Turin, Rome, and later on Florence.

This choice ensured that each of the three cities, which at different times during the
Risorgimento had been the capitals of the Kingdom of Italy, represented a specific aspect of
the Italian national character. Turin, the industrial capital, hosted the Labour Fair (Tobia, 2003);
Florence, in line with its stereotype of ‘the cradle of art’ dating back to the nineteenth century,
organized a portrait exhibition in Palazzo Vecchio (Gori, 2011); finally, Rome, the new capital and the symbol of long-awaited Italian unity, hosted various exhibitions: one of modern art, the ‘Mostra delle Regioni’ in Piazza d’Armi, and one specially dedicated to the Risorgimento in the Vittoriano.

According to the organizers, the 1911 exhibitions had a twofold aim. On the one hand, they were to be ‘a testimony and, in some ways, even a challenge to all those foreigners and compatriots still doubtful’ (Caracciolo, 1980: 39) of the role that in the previous two decades Italy had taken up as a newly born economic and industrial power. On the other, the exhibitions were to transmit to the Italian people a strong feeling of unity founded on the Risorgimento and its mythology. However, the supposed unity that the organizers and the liberal ruling class alike wanted to show was quite an abstract notion to say the least. The most evident example of Italy’s national fragmentation and of its divided memory is the Vittoriano itself, the monument built for King Victor Emmanuel II that was inaugurated on 4 June 1911 and hosted the Risorgimento exhibition. In all its strength and majesty, the Roman monument represented the upholder of national unity, but it lacked any depiction of the nation, merely sublimated by sixteen statues representing the regions and located in the porch (Porciani, 1993: 400; Tobia, 1998). It is also possible to interpret the Vittoriano as the ultimate celebration of the Italian royal house, in the context of a kind of patriotic pedagogy connected to quite a conciliatory view of the Savoy dynasty as the leading force behind the Risorgimento (Brice, 1998). In fact, in 1911 the liberal ruling class proposed a symbolic representation of the Risorgimento

   essentially based on the assimilation of the different versions of the national myth common during the Risorgimento, from that of Mazzini to that of Garibaldi. The Liberal state transformed them all into integral parts of its national myth, after removing all elements that contrasted ideologically with its own political ideals.

   (Gentile, 1997: 17)

The idea of a national ‘pacification’ was the common theme around which the commemoration at the Campidoglio on 27 March 1911 was organized. During this event, the President of the Senate Giuseppe Manfredi remembered how, also thanks to ‘heroic attempts’, Italy had managed to resurrect itself under the aegis of the ‘long-lasting glories of the Savoy dynasty, whose work for the redemption of Italy is like an unassailable citadel’. Manfredi went on to say that ‘the royal house is now identified with the people’ and that ‘the people’s devotion to the Savoy dynasty was [firstly] a feeling, a matter of principle. But nowadays it is a tradition.’ In truth, a large part of the population felt excluded from the official celebrations and did not share the feelings of patriotism transmitted there. It is for these reasons that in the Italian case it would be more correct to talk about ‘jubilees’ in the plural. There are numerous explanations for such a definition. First, one could argue that the birth and expansion of veterans’ association, and thereafter of political movements, contributed to a broader reflection of one’s historical roots and of the so-called democratic Risorgimento. Second, the years that immediately preceded 1911 saw a plethora of anniversaries related to the leading figures and historical events of Risorgimento. On these occasions, all those people far from the liberal ruling class had started to try new modalities of celebration, even making themselves more visible on the urban scene.

Those who celebrated the ‘other Jubilee’ were in fact the leading figures of the democratic Risorgimento and of the new popular parties. If nationalist leaders and the intellectuals of the journal La Voce, such as Giuseppe Prezzolini, had denounced the discrepancy between the official celebrations and the country’s real state, talking about a ‘sad year’, the Socialists went as far as coining the expression ‘double Jubilee’.
In the daily newspaper *L’Avanti!*, Claudio Treves (1911) explicitly spoke of ‘two fiftieth anniversaries’: one for the middle class and one for the people still struggling for their rights. ‘The enduring state of wretchedness and social degradation prevented the proletarian masses from feeling active participants in the life of the nation, and therefore from identifying with the mythologies of the Risorgimento.’ Similarly, the Republican Party, fiercely opposed to the Savoy-oriented celebrations, organized a counter-ceremony at the statue of Garibaldi at the Janiculum in Rome. The Republicans proposed themselves as the only true interpreters of the spirit of the Risorgimento, rejecting the monarchy that for them had ‘usurped’ the patriotic celebrations.

Equally clear was the stance of the Catholics, whose newspaper *L’Unità Cattolica* – which for many years came out draped in black as a sign of protest against the breach of Porta Pia – spoke of ‘a year of mourning’. The papacy, while still prohibiting Catholics from participating in political life, saw the fiftieth anniversary as an occasion for emphasizing the existence of a Christian patriotism, presumably more attentive to the values of the people. The opposition of Catholics to the jubilee celebrations never took the form of street demonstrations, but was instead characterized by intellectual protests carried out through newspapers, brochures and pamphlets, such as one by Florentine Catholic students (Editorial, 1911). In it, one could read:

We could feel how the true soul of the people was absent from that formal official parade . . . A prayer to God sprang from our young hearts: may God, thanks to the sacrifice and heroism of our martyrs, eradicate this old political Italy, otherwise destined to a never-ending slavery.

In conclusion, it seems that the idea of the nation and the public use of the Risorgimento were defined through the mediation of different political ideologies and territorial affiliations. All this did not lead to a weakening of patriotism and patriotic feelings, but to their reformulation. It engendered a critique not of national unity itself, but of the liberal state and the patriotism of its ruling class.

**Between the Risorgimento and the Resistenza: the celebration of ‘Italia ’61’**

Fifty years later, Italy was again to take stock of its national status and of the maturity of an identity shared by the whole of the population. Turin was chosen as a ‘showcase’ of a new Italy, a bridge between past and future (Merolla, 2004; Pace et al., 2005). This kind of representation was developed along two different lines: the first, linked to the role of the city in Italy’s economic and social growth, was embodied in the futuristic buildings of the International Exhibition of Work; the second, focusing on history and politics, took the form of the Mostra delle Regioni (Exhibition of the Regions), and the Historical Exhibition of Italian Unity.

In this last case, the organizing committee strongly underlined the meaningful connection between the Risorgimento and the anti-Fascist Resistenza (on anti-Fascism today, see Chapter 27 in this volume), as evident in the twentieth pavilion of the Mostra delle Regioni dedicated to the long unification process and, above all, in the Historical Exhibition located in Palazzo Carignano (Bouchard, 2005), the building that had been home to the first Italian parliament. Here, in fact, the liberation from Nazi-Fascism, to which the last room (significantly called *Echi risorgimentali nella Resistenza*) was devoted, was represented as a ‘Second Risorgimento’ (Traniello, 1997), since – as was explained in the catalogue of the exhibition – ‘[thanks to the Resistenza],
the Risorgimento truly ended. Because of all this, today’s Italy can freely celebrate its first hundred years of unity, as the Fathers of the Risorgimento had envisioned’ (Luraghi, 1961).

The association of the Risorgimento and the Resistenza should also serve as a historical catalyst to keep together a still very fragmented country, in a moment marked by deep socio-economic and political transformations: the imbalances due to the economic boom and the internal migrations; the abandonment of the convention ad excludendum towards the Italian left parties, which characterized most of their political existence in the post-war period; and finally, the neo-Fascist reprisals that started after the demonstrations in Genoa of June 1960. By connecting the Risorgimento to the Resistenza in a state-funded exhibition (Ballone, 1997: 415; Crainz, 1986), it was therefore possible to see a way out of that contradictory ‘institutional silence/testimonial emphasis’ and from the so-called ‘long winters of the Resistenza’ (Santomassimo, 1994) which had characterized the previous years – dominated by centrist political movements.

That said, nevertheless, the public use of the Risorgimento – and, in parallel with that, the use of the Resistenza – does not seem to have been a linear process shared by the whole of the political arena. On the contrary, it was at the centre of deep struggles – like what had happened in 1911. On top of that lay the paradox that, whereas the 1911 jubilee had had a very strong secularist – if not anticlerical – orientation, that of 1961 was organized by the Christian Democrats. These counted among their ranks the men in charge of the events, such as the MP Giuseppe Pella – who acted as president of the Italy ’61 Committee – and the mayor of Turin. In 1961, as in 1911, Catholics deprecated the behaviour of the old liberal ruling class, presenting themselves as the upholders of ‘true’ national unity. Such unity had only been completed now that the Christian Democrats – after decades of mistakes on the part of the liberals – had restored both the Church and the state as the basis of the Italian national character.

The closeness between Italy and the Vatican in terms of practices of memory, and in the commemoration of the Risorgimento, comes out very clearly when analysing some of the public statements of the leading figures of the time. If the President of the Republic Giovanni Gronchi ended his speech to the Chambers on 25 March 1961 during the Centenary Commemoration with a call to God to make a more prosperous and peaceful Italy, the Archbishop of Genoa, Cardinal Giuseppe Siri – in his pastoral letter for Easter 1961 – asked Catholics to celebrate the centenary of the unification of Italy, praying to God for the sake of ‘our’ country. A prayer that has to do with the consolidation of the ever more perfect unity in the civil organization and moral behaviour, in the fraternal relationship between all the citizens united under the Catholic tradition.

At the same time, as had happened fifty years earlier, the left-wing parties again utilized the theme of the double centenary, declaring themselves as the only true interpreters of national memory. Using the linkages established with the Risorgimento – which had become evident during the first free elections of 1948, when the image of Garibaldi was the emblem of the Fronte Democratico Popolare – and considering themselves as the moral heirs of the Resistance movement, these parties fiercely opposed how the Christian Democrats utilized the national memory on the public scene.

In the daily newspaper L’Avanti! the socialist parliamentarian Cesare Marini (1961) wrote:

The ruling class has so far given quite a conciliatory reading of the Risorgimento. National pride and the ambition of different sectors of society could thus be satisfied. The Risorgimento is a bit of everything: it is Victor Emmanuel for the monarchists,
Mazzini for the Republicans, Cavour for the Liberals, Garibaldi for the Democrats and the secularists. The Catholics are missing, and former priests cannot speak on their behalf. Yet, there are the organizers themselves who – with their ‘omnipresence’ – are taking a sort of revenge for their previous ‘absence’.

In L’Unità too, the journalist and political scientist Saverio Vertone (1961) openly spoke of ‘Italia ’61’ as ‘something between a great advertising campaign of Fiat neo-capitalism and a joyful and conventional patriotic masquerade: a sort of big “Risorgimento show”’. Also, the Communist leader Palmiro Togliatti (1961) complained about the improper use of the Risorgimento in the celebrations, but despite all the misinterpretations of the jubilee, he noted that ‘the people and the workers – as well as the Communist activists – are consciously and with great enthusiasm taking part in the celebrations’.

The popular feelings recorded by Togliatti were not accepted by many historians and intellectuals close to the leftist parties (Baris, 2012: 219). According to them, the centenary exhibitions – even though promoting a critical re-reading of the Risorgimento and having become an occasion for intellectual debate – were not so appealing in terms of historical commemorations. The Italian Marxist historian Ernesto Ragionieri (1964) explicitly spoke of the Fine del Risorgimento, whereas the historian and journalist Vittorio De Caprariis (1961) in Il Mondo complained about the crisis of the myth of the Risorgimento: ‘the celebrations were marked by a sort of coldness and formality on the part of those who should have been its leading figures, especially the young, who felt that past as remote history’.

It is then possible to agree with Massimo Baioni (2011: 411), who recently argued that

'Italia ’61 seemed to be at one and the same time the heyday and the twilight of the celebration of the myth of the Risorgimento. Through its modernization, Italy had entered an epoch that required languages, symbols and memorial practices even further removed from this country’s traditional framework of patriotic and national myth.

2011: a ‘controversial’ jubilee

‘See you in 2011’: it was with this slogan, depicted on large placards, that ‘Italia ’61’ ended. Fifty years later, Italy again celebrated its history and, one more time, opened a debate about the Risorgimento and its public use in the middle of a political crisis that started in the mid-1990s, whose weakening effects obviously impacted on the celebrations of the 150th anniversary.

Unlike the previous two jubilees, in 2011, no law was introduced to prepare an organic plan of events and raise funds; in 2007, the centre-left government established some agencies, such as a Comitato interministeriale (Interministerial Committee), a Unità tecnica di missione della presidenza del consiglio (Technical Mission Unit of the Prime Minister’s Office) and a Comitato dei garanti (Guarantee Committee). In particular, the problems encountered in the four years preceding 2011 are due to the lack of overview of the event because of the economic difficulties linked to the global crisis, but also to the attitude of some Italian parties that, through the Comitato interministeriale chaired by the Minister for Culture Sandro Bondi, demanded that the celebration take into account ‘the limits and flaws of unification, in particular the so-called Southern Question’. The members of Comitato dei garanti, and especially the president Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, fought from the beginning against an indiscriminate and instrumental historical revisionism; nonetheless, especially in 2009, in the Committee there was an evident ‘fear that this political and cultural mindset, fuelled in particular by the Northern League, might have such a negative impact on the celebrations, that there was the risk of their “derailment”’ (Fiocco,
This supposed derailment did not come about, but the controversy sparked by the Lega Nord and the general climate of uncertainty about the celebrations led to some significant consequences: first, the regional exhibition, initially planned to continue the tradition started in 1911, was not organized; second, several members of the committee resigned because of the apathy of the government (Galli Della Loggia, 2009). In 2010, in fact, in addition to Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, Gustavo Zagrebelsky, Ludina Barzini, Marta Boneschi, Ugo Gregoretti and the writer Dacia Maraini also withdrew from the committee; Maraini said to the *Corriere della Sera*:

> The committee has been hollowed out from the inside . . . we were ignored; we were nothing more than a fig leaf, while someone was trying to promote a ‘revisionist’ reading of the Risorgimento in line with the ideology of the League.

(Carioti, 2010)

This uncertainty also impacted on the overall planning of the anniversary, which, except for a set of heterogeneous exhibitions scheduled in Turin from March to November 2011 and evocatively called ‘Experience 150’, did not have any great event, as opposed to the previous anniversaries in 1911 and 1961.

The historical Expo called *Fare gli Italiani* was conceived by Walter Barberis and Giovanni De Luna, and aimed to display a hundred and fifty years of national history, investigating the modalities and results of the project through which Italians were ‘made’. It does so by looking at their capacity to absorb the various fractures that traversed our national history in terms of society, politics, economy, ideology and culture.

(Barberis and De Luna, 2011: 11)

Italian history, also in order to answer recent critiques based on federalist and separatist ideas, was conceived precisely as the union of a set of fractures: city/countryside, North/South, emigration/immigration; these were then displayed to visitors through fourteen different blocks (e.g. the Church, wars, factories, mafia, consumerism, etc.).

The exhibition was sufficiently successful to be extended to November 2012. At the same time, it was also criticized for the ways in which it presented the Risorgimento. The first room of the exhibition, dedicated to the men and women of the Risorgimento – represented through busts lit up in turn from which one could hear these men and women’s most famous sayings – seemed ‘an expedient thanks to which the curators got rid of a problem that was difficult to handle more than anything else’ (Bertolotti, 2012: 105).

Did, then, 2011 see an ‘end of the Risorgimento’, as foreseen fifty years earlier? Not at all. In 2011 the Museum of the Risorgimento in Turin was reopened, now under the direction of Umberto Levra. In the museum, this historical period is represented not only in a national perspective, but with several references to European history too; furthermore the Risorgimento, from 2005 onwards, became a real ‘hot topic’ among politicians, journalists and historians. The most discussed topic in newspapers, as well as at conferences and in several monographs, was how the Risorgimento produced on the one hand a kind of nationalist-populist ‘neopatriotism’ – think, for example, of how in 2011 Garibaldi was the protagonist of an advertising campaign for an Italian telephone company – while fostering, on the other hand, a federalist revisionism which projected contemporary issues and problems onto the past.
This was underlined some time before by historian Alberto Mario Banti (2010) in La Repubblica:

The trivialisation of historical figures and events, which politicians are now evoking as if these people were supporters and forerunners of a given political project or party, is very far from the historical analysis that is being brought about by researchers. Researchers utilize today’s Italy not as a final aim [of their interpretation] but as a starting point.6

This struggle, and the contrasts between different political opinions, reached its peak around 17 March 2011. At its core was the debate on the legitimacy of proclaiming a special national holiday only for 2011 to celebrate Italian unification. With regards to the national celebrations, the leader of Südtiroler Volkspartei and President of the Autonomous Province of Bozen, Luis Durnwalder, during the councillors’ meeting of 7 February 2011, argued that the province was not to take part in the celebrations of 17 March. A few days later, in response to a request for clarification, Durnwalder replied on the province’s website:

You know that in 1918 the region of Südtirol was annexed to Italy against the wish of the population. We had a great deal of suffering under Fascism because of the assimilation politics pursued by the regime. But we only wanted to maintain our own culture. So, do you honestly think we should celebrate something? I fully respect others’ feelings, but I demand the same respect for all those citizens who do not want to celebrate.7

Also in the North, an anti-celebration stance was taken by the Lega Nord (see also Chapter 17 in this volume). This case is more complex than the Südtirol Volkspartei: first of all because the Lega was a party in government in 2011; second, because that same year, the party headed by Umberto Bossi faced local government elections; these were critical to strengthening its hegemony over the territory, but came at a moment when opinion polls already predicted a dramatic loss of votes for the party (Spagnolo, 2012). The decision by Lega Nord ministers to vote against turning 17 March into a bank holiday was therefore not surprising: in this way, the Lega made a strong statement of identity, choosing ‘to distinguish itself from the allies in an explicit and direct way; highlighting, once again, its hostility to the Italian unification process and brandishing the flag of the party of the North’ (Diamanti, 2011). Furthermore, the Lega did not organize its own federalist demonstrations, as happened in the South with the Neo-Bourbons; this probably reflected an identity dilemma: while rejecting the idea of unity, the party could still take advantage of the jubilee by trying to put forward its own interpretation of the Risorgimento, which underlined the pivotal role played by the North and by proposing a kind of ‘Lega version’ of the ideas and figure of Carlo Cattaneo. Probably, the absence of large pro-federalist events was also linked to the ‘stagnation’ of the federalist process, which had lost part of its initial momentum. Nevertheless, even though the Lega did not organize any large demonstrations, it continued to campaign against the jubilee in its newspaper, significantly entitled La Padania. On 17 March, the Lega Nord, published a special seven-page issue dedicated to the hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary significantly entitled ‘Let’s celebrate a farewell to parasites. United in Federalism.’ In it – besides news about several towns in Padania that refused to celebrate – was an article by Diego Scalvini (2011) calling for the advent of a ‘new Risorgimento, able to erase the original sin of centralism and that will acknowledge historical territorial identities. . . . A problematic historical truth, expunged from textbooks and relegated to the dark corners of a few bookshops.’8
This said, it would be unfair to confine the critique of the Risorgimento, and of its public usage, to Northern Italy and its regional politics. In fact, in parallel with the Northern League’s articles and the declarations of members of linguistic minorities, new and rather nonconformist essays also emerged. These were mainly by radical Catholics and neo-Bourbonists, and focused on a revisionist re-reading of the Risorgimento. Such feelings of Southern revenge, together with the denunciation of the ‘crimes’ perpetrated by the House of Savoy, and of the waste of the riches of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, are probably the most significant themes of this now extensive literature. Furthermore, all this is being amplified by new neo-Bourbonic and independentist movements such as Insieme per la rinascita, Neoborbonici, V.a.n.t.o. and Rdsin.

These groups gave voice to a feeling of discontent and revanchism that had existed for a long time in Southern Italy, and that resulted in a strongly divided memory of the Risorgimento and the emergence of a large and diverse number of political cultures with various local roots. In order to legitimate themselves and gain consensus, they used and reworked in a revisionist manner the history of the unification of the country, focusing in particular on ‘the events [which] happened during ’59–’61 that caused the disappearance of various state and regional entities, especially the collapse of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies’ (De Lorenzo, 2013: 9). Although primarily rooted in political extremism, especially on the far right, in recent years neo-Bourbonism lost its connotation of an informal movement of public opinion, taking a more overtly political form which led to the ‘birth of many small parties of Southerners, which were established in the hope of picking up some “protest” votes in the context of the current economic crisis and the loss of credibility of the traditional national parties’. However, in light of their dismal election results and their inability to develop a credible platform, these networks continue to propose as their strong point the public use of history ‘which took extreme forms as the Centocinquantenario drew near, with the open rejection of the official celebrations, the proposal of their own calendar of celebrations and a large presence in the field of popularized history’ (Montaldo, 2012: 106).

Works such as those cited in the introduction to this chapter – the most famous exponent of which is the journalist Pino Aprile, the renowned author of the trilogy Terroni, Giù al sud and Mai più terroni – contain allegations against the process of Italian unification and tortuous theories about the economic decline of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, ahistorically described as a third economic power in nineteenth-century Europe. Such theories demonstrate how this ‘so-called anti-Risorgimento “historical revision” is as replete with indisputable statements and indignant tones, as it is lacking in studies that prove the former and justify the latter’ (Lupo, 2011: 3). This new wave of revisionist thinking, and its connections with political movements, was evident during the three days of Malaunità: Controcelebrazioni dell’Unità di Italia, which took place in Naples between 15 and 17 March 2011. The event was named after the collected volume Malaunità, edited by Aprile, Del Boca, Di Fiore, Guarini and others. Not only was the book presented in Naples, but there also took place a ‘libertarian’ flash mob in Piazza dei Martiri, a public commemoration of the fallen Southern patriots and an intercessory prayer in the church of San Ferdinando. The public reading of the names of soldiers, bandits and émigrés, followed by a parade carrying the old Bourbon flag and a votive candle, produced a sort of syncretism with Catholic rites, as if a new ‘civil religion’ was being born.

As we have mentioned, however, the awareness that our process of unification is not a collectively shared memory should not be too alarming. It is true that during ‘the Centocinquantenario a wave of revanchist revisionism spread across Italy, leading to what has been defined as a “history of Italy à la carte” in which each political subject has chosen its own version of national identity, grafting it onto an ever-different origin and erasing the distance between past and present’ (Catastini et al. 2012: 184); however, the phenomenon, despite the
intensification due to the media, never brought about a large and potentially subversive movement, but was rather confined to posturing. The number of people who participated in the jubilee, both in the North and the South, seemed to prove that, albeit a bit hazy and in different ways than in previous jubilees, the sense of identity still stands.

Notes
1 The speech by Joseph Manfredi is quoted as attached document in the article by Luca Tedesco (2011).
2 The choice of dedicating a room to the Resistance and not to the Lateran Treaty was stigmatized by the MSI (see La conciliazione e la guerra ’15–’18 bandite dalla Mostra di Italia ’61, Il Secolo d’Italia, 25 May 1961).
3 In connection with the role played by the DC as organizer of the celebrations, the Italian historian Emilio Gentile (1997: 357–8) argued how ‘the national myth appeared as a leading player in the Italian political arena, although in the context of a performance which – at a symbolic level – resulted in a self-glorification of the ruling party more than in the celebration of national unification’.
6 See also the intense and prolonged debate as a consequence of his comments on the ‘national-populist’ show of Roberto Benigni at the Sanremo music festival (Benigni e ‘Fratelli d’Italia’, dubbi su una lezione di storia, Il Manifesto, 20 February 2011).
7 Available online at www.provinz.bz.it/land/landesregierung/durnwalder/chat/chat_i.aspx?Pg=6 (accessed 14 January 2015). On this web page are also some enthusiastic comments, mostly in German, by inhabitants of the province of Bozen.
8 See also the voting declarations on a law on the celebrations of 150 years of Italian unification by the regional councillors of the Lega Nord in Lombardy on 22 February 2011 in part available on YouTube.

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