

"Terroni": How Italy was Unified 150 Years Ago

Luca Delbello and Letizia Airos (February 10, 2011)



Presented at the John D. Calandra Italian American Institute Pino Aprile's book sheds an alternative light on the meaning of the Italian unification. "'Meridionalismo' is a kind of construction by the winners"

"Enthusiastic reactions or latent irritation" are the words Niccolò d'Aquino uses to describe the reception of Pino Aprile's "Terroni: All That Was Done so Italians of the South Would Become 'Meridionali'" (Piemme, 2010), an essay published recently in Italy. The America Oggi journalist praised Aprile's popular and narrative abilities, explaining the annoyance of being accused by many as anti-Northern League and Borbonic.



The book presentation took place at the [John D. Calandra Institute](#) [2], a research center of Italian-American studies at the [City University of New York](#) [3]. The Dean of the Institute Prof. Anthony J. Tamburri and Prof. Peter Caravetta of [Stony Brook](#) [4] were also present for the round table.

The so-called 'southern issue' surfaced with many facets, also with an approach that at certain times went beyond the Italian context.

[Carravetta](#) [5] spoke describing the author's work as "measured and passionate, without falling into the trap of racism". "Prejudices result in ideological creations" according to the Stony Brook professor; therefore some northerners created a condition of superiority building a "subordinated mentality", according to which a large number of southerners reacted and react today by denying their roots and identity.

According to Carravetta "one begins thinking himself inferior and becomes thankful when something is given, fueling Hegelian master-servant dialectics..."

"One is always south of somebody else". And there comes mass emigration. "A structured under-development, which was theorized also by the Austrians with the Milanese. 'Meridionalismo' is a kind of construction by the winners".

Pino Aprile passionately described the creative process that brought him to writing this book. "I realized I was a southerner when living in Milan", he admitted, "You are a southerner but you're good", these were the words the authors says he was told while living in Lombardy, as if his "southerner" condition were a congenital negativeness.

"Apulia has been a crossroads for many different people... they would come to stay and were the richness of the region", today "the demolition of differences is the objective of the [Northern League](#) [6]", he

attacked [Umberto Bossi](#) [7]'s party. "The South was poorer than the North even before 1860", Aprile added, "the South became the internal colony since the [Unification of Italy](#) [8], from the moment in which Piedmont took power, since it is a territory that lost everything to dominating powers".

The southern answer to exploitation was the violence of the different Mafie, which began after the Unification; banditry and escaping towards the "new world" were other escape valves. "The Mafia produces blood in the South and money in the North", Aprile shook the public again. Also not many know that banditry is actually a movement identified as criminal which in fact saw many honest men defending the exploited and the outcasts.

The author, with a remarkable rhetorical ability, spoke about 150 years of abuse and violence committed by Piedmont towards the southern people. "It was one of the first concentration camps of history", he stated, talking about the tortures committed by soldiers in the south, who had license to rape and kill.

The author then spoke about the Unification of Italy, and about its celebrations, in which - he said - no southerner actively participates in. The true victim of this unification, according to Aprile, was the South, and Italy has yet to admit its faults, and politicians try to confuse the nation with lies of a united and compact Italy. "The only way to truly unite is to know the history and the victims".

The book, which was received with great success and caused debates in Italy, promises to make itself heard also in the United States, where it will soon be translated. As Tamburri said, Aprile's book offers itself as an explanation to certain aspects of the emigration of Italians abroad. "Aprile's book speaks about Italy, but also explains the immigration of the Italians abroad. Because of this, our Institute had to focus on it. That is why we will have 'Terroni' translated into English by Bordighera Press.

According to Niccolò d'Aquino "150 years from the Italian unification, it is the right book at the right time, a book by a journalist about Italian history similar to those of the great Indro Montanelli."



Aprile, quoting a study by the [National Research Council](#) [9] and the [Bank of Italy](#) [10], also reminded: "Southern Italy wasn't behind. Actually, in certain sectors it was ahead of the North. If counting from 1861 it means that the armies destroyed factories and killed people, the richness of the South. There were 80 years of massacres, robberies, pillaging and laws against the South, to concentrate all of Italy's poverty in the southern regions."

Afterwards he compared it with other countries: "Italy was born in blood. Also the United States were born in blood. Most countries are born in blood. Each one of us is born in his or her own mother's blood. But then we are cleaned, milked, cuddled, and bred... we become part of the family. But the South was born in blood and never became part of the family".

"Also in the United States there was a civil war to unify the country. But now American students find Northern and Southern heroes on the same history book pages. They are heroes of their country, all citizens of the same country."

According to Aprile this never happened in Italy. Returning to the present he said that "Today we aim at tearing down differences, towards homologation. But Italy is great around the world because of its differences."

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