

Comparative analysis in the scholarly contribution of Pietro Grilli di Cortona. A personal recollection of my mentor

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These words, written by a French author in 1953, a year before Prof. Pietro Grilli was born, encapsulate the sense of my contribution:

“To see a human being reveal really exceptional qualities one must be able to observe his activities over many years. If these activities are completely unselfish; if the idea motivating them is unique in its magnanimity; if it is quite certain they have never looked for any reward; and if in addition they have left visible traces on the world – then one may say, without fear or error, that one is in the presence of an unforgettable character”.

Jean Giono, *L'homme qui plantait des arbres*, English translation, 1985

The contribution that Prof. Pietro Grilli di Cortona made to political science, and in particular to comparative analysis, is unquestionably visible and substantial. The originality of his works emerges first and foremost from their methodological approach and the attention focused on the comparatively overlooked area of communist and post-communist Europe.

His studies can be divided into three major spheres, namely the analysis of non-democratic regimes, the evolution and results of democratization processes, and the relationship between state and nation. Despite the diversity of the questions addressed, it is possible to identify the guiding thread of a rigorously and exclusively qualitative comparative approach in his strategy. A marked preference is shown in most of his publications for diachronic long-term analysis both in the explanation of processes of institutional change and in the conceptual analysis of the relationship inherent in the construction of the state and the nation.

The first sphere constituted the initial phase of his brilliant academic and scholarly career. His first article, ‘Modelli d’interpretazione del sistema sovietico’, published in the *Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica* in 1980, identified the specific characteristics of the Soviet regime through painstaking reconstruction of the debate on the distinction between authoritarianism and totalitarianism and careful consideration of the position of the post-Stalinist Soviet Union within the totalitarian model. His comparative studies

subsequently concentrated on identifying factors of instability in the regimes of the Soviet bloc with particular reference to the pre-communist political context, the role of the Catholic church and appeals to national identity, thus looking forward to the events that then led to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the radical transformation of its satellite countries. His first monograph, *Le crisi politiche nei regimi comunisti. Ungheria, Cecoslovacchia e Polonia da Stalin agli anni '80*, appeared some months before the fall of the Berlin Wall and still constitutes a rigorous comparative analysis casting light on the origin and outcome of the processes of change that swept through the countries of the communist area as from the mid-1950s and constantly influenced the direction of political, economic and institutional developments.

Another important subject of his analysis is the complex relationship generated between the revolutionary processes that led to the foundation of many of the non-democratic regimes and the administrative structures of the previous institutional order. In *Rivoluzioni e burocrazie* (1991), comparative analysis of the major revolutions in Russia, China, Germany on the one hand and the smaller revolutions in Cuba, Nicaragua, Iran and Algeria on the other proves an essential tool to reconstruct the different forms taken by this relationship in the different cases. The assumption of an increase in the power of the post-revolutionary bureaucracies is refuted and the important presence is instead highlighted of elements of continuity capable of surviving the revolutionary, including the persistence of cultural and structural models rooted in the past, the shortage of qualified personnel and attempts to imitate the organization of the colonizing country in order to ensure efficiency.

The other two central areas of study developed out of the first. The second, regarding processes of democratization, is unquestionably the most important, not least in terms of publications. Use of the comparative method within his long-period strategy makes it possible in the context to develop a broad theoretical model capable of explaining regime change in terms of its genesis, succession of individual phases, and possible outcomes as well as the various factors, internal and international, which influence such change (*Come gli Stati diventano democratici*, 2009).

Comparative area analysis of the diachronic kind is instead employed for the rebirth of political parties in the countries of central and eastern Europe (*Da uno a molti. Democratizzazione e rinascita dei partiti in Europa orientale*, 1997), where the similarities and differences between the various party systems are primarily the result of historical variables in the political development of East Europe and not only of contingent factors emerging from the respective political and institutional contexts.

His work on the Italian transition from Fascism to democracy (*Il cambiamento politico in Italia. Dalla Prima alla Seconda Repubblica*, 2007), which extends up to the advent of the Second Republic, paints an interesting comparative picture. The cases of France in the 4th and 5th republics and Belgium between 1962 and 1993 are thus also taken into consideration in order to explain the influence of the previous regime in the construction of republican Italy.

Diachronic analysis and the subject of transition from one regime to another also inform major studies on the legacy of the previous institutional structures in the construction of democracy in Europe and on the causes leading to crisis and, in some cases, to collapse in non-democratic regimes all over the world. Two PRIN projects, funded

respectively in 2007 (*Tra vecchio e nuovo regime. Il ruolo delle eredità delle democratizzazioni europee*) and 2009 (*Perché democratizzare? Le cause della crisi e del crollo dei regimi non democratici nella terza ondata*), both supervised by Prof. Grilli, resulted in the publication of three collective volumes, the last of which posthumous, constituting an important part of his scholarly legacy.

The first is a comparative diachronic analysis by area of eleven European countries – France and Germany in the west, Italy, Spain and Portugal in the south and Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria and Russia in the east – aimed at explaining the similarities and differences in the respective processes of democratization due to political, economic and institutional contexts inherited from the previous non-democratic regime (*Tra vecchio e nuovo regime. Il peso del passato nella costruzione della democrazia*, 2011, edited with O. Lanza). The second develops a multi-case qualitative comparison of 83 countries in every part of the world in an attempt to identify the causes of crisis and collapse in non-democratic regimes of the ‘third wave’ (*Come cadono i regimi non democratici. Primi passi verso la democrazia nei Paesi della ‘terza ondata’*, 2014, edited with L. Germano and O. Lanza). The third and last is a broad comparative analysis of the internal and international factors that have led in the various areas of the world to the fall of non-democratic regimes during the ‘third wave’ (*Crisis and Breakdown of Non-Democratic Regimes. Lessons from the Third Wave*, 2016, edited with B. Pisciotta and E. Terzuolo).

Another important area of comparative studies developed by Pietro Grilli regards the processes involved in constructing the state and the nation, in which connection he examines the aspects related to the territorial dimension of politics and highlights the different outcomes emerging in cases of where state and nation coincide or fail to coincide in the major European countries and the resulting dynamics as regards the institutional sphere (the formation of unified or federal states) and parties (the impact of the rift between centre and periphery and the birth of nationalist parties). All this is examined in *Stati, nazioni e nazionalismi in Europa* (2003). The study of parties and party systems is also developed through a comparative approach in collective works on East and West Europe (*Partiti e sistemi di partito nelle democrazie europee*, 2007, edited with G. Pasquino). Another area of analysis within the study of the building of the state and the nation regards the relationship between the Italians and the European Union, addressed in terms both of the supranational challenge to the nation state and of the highly topical question of Euroscepticism (*Gli italiani e l'Europa*, 2004).

Further scholarly contributions worked on by Prof. Grilli up to June 2015 and published during 2016 include the following:

- the second edition of *Capire la politica* (2016), a textbook of political science co-authored with Orazio Lanza, Luca Germano and Barbara Pisciotta;
- *Crisis and Breakdown of Non-Democratic Regimes. Lessons from the Third Wave* (2016, with Eric Terzuolo and Barbara Pisciotta), the above-mentioned American on the causes of crisis and collapse in non-democratic regimes in the various areas of the world;
- *Las Transformaciones de la democracia. Miradas cruzadas entre Europa y América Latina* (2016, ed. Osvaldo Iazzetta and Maria Rosaria Stabili), a collection of papers delivered at the Italian-Argentine conference organized by Prof. M.R.

Stabili, where the final version of Prof. Grilli's contribution on the crisis of democracy was edited by Prof. Roberta Modugno;

- *Lezioni di scienza politica* (2016, ed. Rosalba Chiarini and Barbara Pisciotta), a collection of previously unpublished contributions, proposed by Prof. Paolo Carnevale and including a selection of his lectures on political science, published by Editoriale Scientifica in the political science and comparative politics series directed by Pietro Grilli.

Attention should also be drawn here to the numerous institutional and academic posts held by Prof. Grilli during his career:

- 1994: member of the committee for reform of the Italian institutions and electoral system appointed by the Presidency of the Council of Ministers;
- 1997–2006: member of the CUN;
- 2000–05: member of the CNEL, appointed as an expert by Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, President of the Italian Republic;
- 2001–09: Director of the Department of Political Institutions and Social Sciences, and subsequently of the Department of International Studies;
- from 2010 on: President of the educational board of the advanced degree course in European Studies and International Relations and of the advisory board of the Library of Political Studies;
- September 2013: elected president of the Società Italiana di Scienza Politica.

Two years after his death, my personal memories are still vivid and the sense of loss even more painful. Pietro Grilli was my mentor. I have him to thank not only for instilling in me a passion for research and supporting me in my academic career but also and above all for teaching me this profession and devoting many hours of his time to explaining what research actually means in concrete terms. These are all things I shall never forget.

It was my good fortune to meet him at La Sapienza University of Rome at the end of 1993. Newly appointed associate professor in Trieste, he was standing in at the same time for Prof. Domenico Fisichella, holder of the chair in political science, while I had only just started work on my degree thesis.

I immediately realized that he was a serious, helpful, correct and well-balanced person, all qualities that he was always recognized as possessing. Pietro was not only this for me, however. During the twenty-two years in which we worked together, I knew him also as a witty and amusing person with a keen sense of humour capable of defusing the tensest situations and seeing the positive side of things. Many of us look back nostalgically to the cheerful and friendly atmosphere of the working lunches we shared, discussing scholarly projects or relating personal episodes of a humorous character. I miss all that more than ever today.

I regard Pietro as possessing a very rare gift in our world, namely the ability to separate people's political opinions from their personal qualities. This is something I appreciated in him from the very first moment of our meeting.

Above all, however, I must stress that he always had the courage of his convictions, even when they proved awkward and he was well aware that they would be of no personal advantage to him.

And this is exactly how I will always remember him, as an unforgettable person.