The Crisis of the “First Republic” in the Lyrics of Italian Singers-Songwriters

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In the mid-1980s, in Italy the first symptoms of a crisis in the traditional party system, later known as the *prima repubblica* or “first republic”, began to emerge. The “Tangentopoli” scandal was still to come, but the seed of anti-politics started to grow in collective mentality. Italian singers-songwriters, the so-called “cantautori” (a portmanteau of *cantare*, to sing, and *autori*, authors), were interested in these developments; their songs commented on elements that played a crucial role, few years later, in the irreversible crisis of the “prima repubblica”: the overwhelming power of political parties, the “consociativismo” (secret power agreements between the government and the opposition), the corruption, the growing and pervasive role of mass media. Through the songs of singers-songwriters, the present essay traces the season of the scandal of “Tangentopoli”, stopping at 1994, the year of the victory of “Forza Italia”, the new political party founded by Silvio Berlusconi.

Keywords: folk song, Italian singers-songwriters, Italian “first republic”, scandal of “Tangentopoli”, Silvio Berlusconi

In recent years, in Italy too there has been a growing interest in historical studies in studying the *mentality* or *collective imagination* through the analysis of art forms,¹ conceived both as historical documents (useful for understanding aspects of everyday life and mentality that are often scarcely visible in traditional sources) and as *agents of history* (that is, having the capacity to both incorporate and influence behavior models and value schemes).²

The present essay focuses on the period of the crisis of the “first republic”, i.e. the old Italian party system, to its fall and the rise of Silvio Berlusconi, evidencing the presence in the lyrics of Italian singers-songwriters of elements of collective mentality that were at the base of the wave of anti-political sentiment characterizing the two following decades.

Towards the end of the 1980s,³ in the general atmosphere of confidence⁴ inspired by the booming world

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¹ See for example Carusi (2004), Mattera (2014).

² On these topics see, for use of film sources, the introductory methodological considerations in Cavallo (2009) and, in reference to the use of songs in contemporary historical studies, Peroni (2005).

³ On the political trends of the 1980s, see Colarizi, Craveri, Pons, Quagliariello (2004) and Gervasoni (2010).

⁴ On Italian economy in these years, see the opposite interpretations in Acquaviva (2005) and Salvati (2000).

economy and the proclaimed crisis of ideologies, the *canzone d'autore* or “auteur song”,⁵ which had flourished in Italy in the 1970s, seemed to have a hard time identifying proper targets for criticism and reflection in the Italian political scene. Towards the mid-1970s, protest songs (popularized by singers like Lolli, Pietrangeli, etc.) were on the wane and singers-songwriters in general, while remaining faithful to their original poetics, felt the impact of the decline of ideologies and the crisis of the left, and were distancing themselves from the contemporary political debate. This is evident for example in the work of Fabrizio De Andrè in LPs like *Fabrizio De Andrè* (1981) or *Creuza de ma* (1984), and Francesco De Gregori, in *Titanic* (1982) or *Scacchi e tarocchi* (1985). While the songs continued the tradition of the *canzone impegnata* or “politically committed song”, as it was called at the time, they lacked the more explicit references to the political debate common in the 1970s.⁶

However, within this general crisis of political topics, there were a few singers-songwriters who continued to comment on the contradictions of the optimistic and opulent Italian society of the 1980s. One of these was Edoardo Bennato who, in 1983, with the LP entitled *E' arrivato un bastimento*, anticipated two themes that were to permeate both the collective mentality and the work of the more cultivated singers-songwriters: the denunciation of the “consociative agreement” among the main political parties and the criticism of the pervasiveness of television.

In the song *Eccoli i prestigiatori* (Bennato, 1983b), (Here come the magicians), the critique of *consociativismo*⁷ becomes an actual manifesto of antipolitics:

Here come the magicians skilled in intrigue
 they smile but it is only a ruse, make way, let them pass
 here they come, the jugglers, make way, make way for the dwarves
 deft fingers in the high spheres, fake cards and good manners.
 The ace up their sleeve is their specialty
 The trick is there but you cannot see it, who will discover it?
 The guests come in all carefully selected
 red light on, that is the signal, all ready to clap their hands.
 Like the Sunday show, the celebrities parade
 and those whose documents are not in order, will remain outside.
 They are the powerful ones, you who do not count, you got to be careful
 sometimes you protest, you get bitter, but they are magicians, they read your mind.
 For this, every year, when Carnival comes, they take the ballots from their top hats

⁵ On Italian singers-songwriters see at least Gentile (1979); Borgna (1985); Baldazzi, Clarotti, Rocco (1990); Castaldo (1990); Curi (1997); Bonanno (2003); Monti & Di Pietro (2003); Deregibus (2006); Pivano (2006); Bonanno (2009). On the language of Italian auteur songs see Borgna & Serianni (1994). On the ties between politics and songs in Italy see Pivato (2002 e 2005).

⁶ For example, “Le storie di ieri” (De Andrè & De Gregori 1975) explicitly spoke of the legacy of Fascism and the birth of Neo-Fascism, referring by name, in the first version, to the neo-Fascist leader Giorgio Almirante (who became “the great leader” in the final version). Four years later, De Gregori (1979) sang the lines “Viva l’Italia, l’Italia del 12 dicembre... Viva l’Italia, l’Italia che resiste”, with an explicit reference to the Italian Resistance against Fascism and the Nazi occupation in the name of a continuity that should lead the best part of the country to react against the bombing strategy enacted by the fascists and deviated sectors of the State (the “December 12” is that of 1969, the date of the bombing of piazza Fontana).

⁷ As it is known, this term (coined by the politologist A. Lijphart towards the end of the 1960s) indicates a model of representative democracy in which political stability is ensured by a system of power-sharing agreements and compromises among party elites. In Italy, the word was used both to refer to the initial phase of the Republic, with the joint elaboration of the Constitution, and to refer to the governments of “national solidarity” of the years 1976-1979, in which the PCI gave an external support to the government. Bennato’s song voices the suspicion, common at the time, that power-sharing agreement between government and opposition had continued in more shady forms in the 1980s.

And lock in a polling booth, your last illusion, you make a cross at random where you want.

In the same LP, Bennato's song "Assuefazione" (Bennato, 1983a) stigmatized the growing presence of television⁸ in the lives of citizens:

Attention, concentrate, eyes on the TV set
 testing addiction, change of identity
 get ready, attention, concentrate
 To each the right dose, depending on his gullibility
 all suspended from the thread of advertising
 there is enough for everyone, but to each the right dose
 A review of the world, do not tire yourself, use the remote
 what else do you want, what do you want more?

In this period, the debate on television was closely associated with the question of head of government Bettino Craxi's policy⁹ in favor of the Fininvest network and his close ties with its owner, Silvio Berlusconi.¹⁰ Bennato had always been very critical of the PCI (the Italian Communist Party)¹¹ and in those years had gotten closer to the PSI (the Italian Socialist Party), of whom Bettino Craxi was the secretary.¹² Perhaps for this reason his songs, while attacking television's increasing power to influence models of behavior, avoided commenting on the political management of television. This was done instead by another singer-songwriter, Antonello Venditti, who had already written "L'uomo falco" (Venditti, 1978) which many had read as an attack against Giulio Andreotti, one of the leaders of Democrazia Cristiana party. In line with his known sympathy for Berlinguer's PCI,¹³ Venditti attacked Craxi not only for his political choices, but also for his optimistic image which, in his view, was a mask for systematic of corruption and depredation of public resources. Here are the lyrics of the song "L'ottimista", (Venditti, 1984):

The optimist was born on his feet after seven months or shortly before that
 with an already ironed shirt and a firm chin
 an optimist who looks vaguely socialist
 and then and then, he's never wrong, never wrong.

⁸ On the ties between politics and television in the 1980s and 1990s and, in particular, on the evolution of the relation between Italian politics and its representation on TV, see Crapis (2006).

⁹ There have been many studies in recent years on Bettino Craxi. See at least Colarizi & Gervasoni (2005); Musella (2007); Spiri (2012). In particular on the relations between Craxi's PSI and the PCI, see the recent Gervasoni (2013).

¹⁰ The recent opening to the public of the Fondo Craxi archive has confirmed the existence of personal ties between Craxi and Berlusconi and its influence on the laws on television passed during the 1980s. Towards the end of 1984, for example, Berlusconi wrote to Craxi: "Dear Bettino, thank you sincerely for what you have done. I know it was not easy and that you had to spend your credibility and your authority. I hope I will have a way to return the favor. I thought it best not to insert an explicit reference to your name in the credits before the video in order not to expose you excessively. We will soon find a way together to do better. Thank you again, from the bottom of my heart. In friendship, yours Silvio". Without date but certainly written between October 20 and December 6, 1984; in Fondazione Bettino Craxi, Fondo B. Craxi, sez. II, serie 2, sottoserie 5, sottoserie 7, UA4, lettera 75.

¹¹ In the song "Arrivano i buoni" (Bennato, 1974), Bennato had already made fun of Soviet communism. Later, in his "Sono solo canzonette" (Bennato, 1980) he had openly attacked the PCI and its efforts to hegemonize Italian culture "[...] The party agents have offered me another invitation and told me that this time I'll get into trouble if I don't go with the rest to the great gathering, the great national celebration; they said that I cannot refuse in such a moment and that I owe my success also to them; that I am crazy and irresponsible, I have no gratitude, I'm a subversive and somewhat of a criminal [...]."

¹² Like many members and sympathizers of the extra-parliamentary left-wing, Bennato in this period was close to the PSI and in particular to its vice-secretary Martelli. Towards the end of the 1970s, Bennato often supported with his music the socialist Franco Carraro, who was running as mayor of Rome, after the famous "treaty of the motorhome" between Craxi and the leader of Democrazia Cristiana Forlani. On the relations between the PSI and extra-parliamentary left-wing see the recent Zampieri (2013).

¹³ On Berlinguer see at least Fiori (1989); and the more recent Barbagallo (2006) and Pons (2006).

He joins the strangest circles, so long as they are trendy
 he has one and only one speech for everyone: hurray for Italy and the red carnation¹⁴
 he's an optimist who looks vaguely socialist
 and then and then, he's never wrong, never wrong.
 He has a serious and worried air when he discusses the State for a long time
 but he lights up with immensity when lunch time comes [...].

The theme of Craxi's PSI¹⁵ and its capacity to play a leading role and gain the support of public opinion thanks to a pervasive use of television (the PSI had direct control of RAI 2, one of the three national public channels, and the support of Berlusconi's three leading private channels) was to become a leitmotiv in protest songs in the years of the crisis of the first republic. In 1989, Francesco De Gregori had released a politically very polemical LP, *Miramare 19.4.89*, in which he denounced the immorality and lack of vision of the government coalition, imagining an imminent violent reaction of the people.¹⁶ In the song “Bambini venite parvulos”, (De Gregori, 1989a) in particular, he described the irreversible crisis of the Italian republic, caught between political corruption and increasingly aggressive mafia organizations, underlining the crucial role of television in generating consensus towards the political leadership:

No reflection makes sense in this paralysis
 the data at our disposal do not allow for an analysis
 and yesterday's professors are quickly changing altars.
 They have donned new masks and begun to breathe
 children *venite parvulos*, there is an anchor to pull up [...].
 Legalizing the mafia will be the rule in the year 2000
 the charisma of Mastro Lindo¹⁷ will organize the line
 and we won't have to see anything we haven't seen yet.
 Every type of failure needs its *claque* [...].

A bit less obviously political and more poetic is Francesco Guccini's song “Ballando con una sconosciuta” (Guccini, 1990) in which he describes a miraculous encounter with the Virgin Mary of a TV antenna installer, a free man capable of creating his own happiness and rejecting the pre-packed one proposed by television:

[...] Until one day the antenna that rebelled against quiz shows
 made the disturbance go away and transmitted in the sky the image of the Virgin Mary
 a normal woman, not bad, who went like this:
 “I'll turn off the light, sir, if you want, I can make a melody stronger than the wind,
 I can also come out of the screen, the gravity,
 we could dance right now if you're not in a hurry and do not wish to go back down there”
 ...and we are always quick to change channels
 but with our feet firmly on the ground, watching life absent-mindedly

¹⁴ Red carnation was the symbol of the PSI.

¹⁵ Craxi's unquestioned leadership in the PSI exposed him to many personal attacks in the songs of those years. For example in “La ballata dell'uomo ragno” (De Gregori 1992), Francesco De Gregori wrote “[...] He's only the leader of a band of brigands but he looks like a Pharaoh, he has the eyes of a slave and the gaze of a master, he acts like Mitterand but he is worse than Nero [...]”

¹⁶ For example, the song ‘Pentathlon’ (De Gregori 1989b)—a reference to the “Pentapartito”, the five-party government coalition—said “[...] I do not like you in any way and thank heavens you don't like me. I'd like to whisper it in your ear, what are you going to do with that smile, that passport smile, always stuck on your face. Do you really think it will save you, if I'll have to take sides for once? If for once I'll have to stop bluffing? [...]”

¹⁷ Mastro Lindo was a cartoon character, a plumber with muscular biceps, that solved the problems of housewives in a popular TV advertisement.

without entering the magnetic field of felicity
 felicity which we can only watch, waiting, find ready made
 almost as if it were the anagram of facility, cheating only with one letter [...]

In 1991, it was Enzo Jannacci and Giorgio Gaber who directed their sarcasm against television, which seemed to incorporate the worst of Italian society. The song "La strana famiglia" (Alloisio, Colli, & Gaber, 1991), from Jannacci's LP *Guarda la fotografia*, described the shameless use that public and private channels made of personal suffering to increase their ratings:

Let me introduce my family [...] the most miserable in Italy
 even if we suffer a lot we have good ratings
 We are the ones with the highest ratings.
 My two old half-senile parents have insulted each other for half an hour
 to the notes of "C'eravamo tanto amanti."
 Uncle Evarist hid out of shame, poor soul,
 they have already reported him on "Chi l'ha visto?"
 Ginetto from Idroscalo when his wife tells him to fuck off
 sheds tears live for Sandra Milo.
 Not to mention my brother whose collarbone they broke
 and now plays the dead guy in "Telefono giallo."
 Whose calling, where are you calling from, there many prizes for everyone
 hello, hello, hello, many prizes, many millions
 hello, hello, hello, with Berlusconi or the RAI [...].

It is significant that even two songwriters like Luciano Ligabue and Vasco Rossi, who leaned more towards rock'n'roll, used their songs to attack television for its capacity to determine not only public taste and fads, but also ethics and behaviors. Ligabue, in his song "Bar Mario" (Ligabue, 1990), told the story of a small town, singing about, "empty streets, not even the proverbial dog, lady television has won once again." Rossi, in the LP *Gli spari sopra* dedicated both "Non appari mai" (Ferro & Rossi, 1993b) as well as the more famous "Delusa" (Ferro & Rossi, 1993a) to the question of the moral corruption engendered by the TV programs of this year. In particular, the famous program *Non è la Rai* by Gianni Boncompagni, which was accused of creating a double moral standard (private and TV) in Italian families:

It is you who want to provoke me when you dance
 and you know what you arouse in me
 yeah, continue like that, you're doing great
 And you know I'll always say yes, I'm dying for you.
 It's you, when you dance like that on TV
 Think of how proud you're making your daddy!
 yeah, it's nice to play the game this way, eyes only
 but that Boncompagni guy, in my opinion [...].
 Do you always dress up like that even at home?
 Why? There are no spectators there
 yeah, daddy is jealous and won't let you go out
 But on television it's ok, who knows why.
 Hey you, disappointed girl, watch it, if one goes too far
 The stakes get a bit a bit higher, and if the wolf is there you're the one who's at stake [...]

The interest of singers-songwriters in current politics increased with the fall of international communism;

in particular, the events of 1989 were often reflected in the songs of the period.

The anarchist Fabrizio De Andrè released the LP *Le nuvole*, which contained the heart-rending “La domenica delle salme” (De Andrè 1990), a song that describes the fall of communism and, along with that, of Italian democracy. In De Andrè’s vision, while the healthy part of the nation protested in vain against the crisis of the country, the world was subject to a “terrifying peace” based on a unipolar system, where George Bush sr. played the part of a “Fourth Reich monkey”:

[...] The Poles did not die immediately and kneeling in front of the last street lights
 redid the makeup of the whores of the regime directed towards the sea
 the black market soap dealers directed their bellies East
 who converted in 1990 was exempted in 1991
 the monkey of the Fourth Reich danced the polka on the wall
 and while he was climbing up we all saw his ass
 The pyramid of Cheops asked to be rebuilt for that holiday
 stone after stone, slave after slave, communist after communist.
 On Corpse Sunday no shots were heard
 the laughing gas controlled the streets
 Corpse Sunday carried away all worries
 and the queens of the “tua culpa” rushed to the hairdressers [...] .
 On Corpse Sunday the nostalgia assistants
 Accompanied with flutes the body of Utopia
 Corpse Sunday was a Sunday like all others
 the day after there were traces of a terrifying peace.
 While the heart of Italy from Palermo to Aosta
 pulsed with a chorus of vibrant protest.

Though with a much minor poetic and evocative ability, Antonello Venditti wrote along similar lines in the song “Dolce Enrico” (Venditti, 1991), dedicated to Italian communist leader Enrico Berlinguer. The song laments the fact that the new unipolar world system sanctions the triumph of capitalist injustice and, in Italy, a situation of passivity, immorality, and shady power practices (symbolized by the impossibility of finding out the truth about the incident of Ustica):

[...] The world changes, has chosen a flag
 the only thing that remains is a truer injustice.
 Here everybody screams, here we are all different
 but if you hear them speak they are the same as always.
 And how many lies, how many secrets at the bottom of the sea
 do you really think they will surface one day?
 Oh no, don’t say no, tell me I’ll be there one day [...].

A diametrically opposed reading of the fall of communism was provided by Lucio Dalla. In the song “Communist” (Dalla & Roversi, 1990), Dalla dealt with the recent events in Eastern Europe but said he did not want to sing about them in the name of an ideology, but in the name of his Christian piety:

[...] I sing the man stuck within the nail and the wood
 the man that is one big cross, the man without voice
 the man who shivers, the naked, wounded man, the man they buried.
 I sing the rage and the love of the man that was vanquished

I sing the rejected man, not the triumphant man
 I sing the lost man, the man who asks for help
 the man who looks into the water of the river
 where the water leads the man who lights a lamp or the one who finds his voice [...].

Among the various interpretations of the fall of international communism by Italian singers-songwriters, it is worth remembering also “Tango rosso”, a single by Sergio Endrigo (Bartolucci & Endrigo, 1990). In the song, while criticizing Soviet communism,¹⁸ the authors openly invoke the birth of a new “utopia”, capable of giving hope to those who had always opposed capitalism:

And now what to do and where to go, in what to hope
 And where’s the new man, lost in the steppe, he will never return.
 An idea suffocated by bureaucracy, by ramshackle five-year plans.
 But how melancholic it is when a utopia dies.
 Other revolutions, other springs will come, who knows where who knows when [...].

After the first emotional reaction to the fall of the Berlin Wall and the gradual dissolution of communism in Eastern Europe, public opinion began realizing that the crisis of international communism had many consequences also for Italy: from the weakening of the eastern border (with the migratory flows this entailed), to the redefinition of the party system (an inevitable consequence of the dissolution of the PCI). Thus, while many singers-songwriters interpreted 1989 from an international perspective, with only indirect references to Italy, others began gradually focusing more and more on the political situation of their country. Already before the scandal of Tangentopoli (“Bribesville”), one of the fathers of Italian singers-songwriters, Gino Paoli, in the song “Quattro amici” (Paoli, 1991) spoke about the crisis of ideologies, noticing—perhaps in the wake of the new political effervescence associated with the university movement of the “Pantera”¹⁹ of that period—a new revolutionary spirit among the younger generations. In line with this spirit, the song departed from the style of the classic auteur song and included a participation by the “juvenile” singer-songwriter Vasco Rossi:

We were four friends in a café who wanted to change the world [...]
 we had profound talks about anarchy and liberty
 In front of a coke and a coffee you came out with your “because” and proposed your “wills” [...]
 I’ve been left alone at the café, the others have all gone home
 and today around three o’clock four kids came by [...]
 I heard them chatting, they had decided to change this world, which is not right
 I am here with four friends at a café who want to change the world [...]

Much more heart-rending and passionate than Gino Paoli’s “call to arms” directed at the younger generations is the Franco Battiato’s “Povera patria” (Battiato, 1991); the song of the Sicilian singer-songwriter is a frontal attack against government parties, their corruption and their ties with the mafia. This critique was intended to embody the voice of a large spectrum of civil society and for this reason Battiato deliberately used the word *patria* (fatherland), which was traditional part of right-wing discourse:

Poor fatherland, oppressed by the abuse of power

¹⁸ For example, Endrigo—though he had always proclaims himself a communist—harshly criticized Soviet communism in the song “If on May 1, in Moscow” (Endrigo, 1981).

¹⁹ On this student movement, see Albanese (2010).

by despicable people, who do not know what shame is
 they think they're powerful and they don't mind what they do, and everything belongs to them.
 Among the leaders, how many perfect useless fools
 this country is devastated by suffering [...]
 But how to excuse the hyenas in the stadiums and in the newspapers?
 The pigs' boots sink in the mud
 I feel a bit ashamed for them because it hurts to see a man like an animal.
 It'll never change, never change; yes, it'll change, just wait, it will change.
 I want to hope that the world reaches a more normal level
 that it will be possible to gaze at the sky and the flowers and not talk about dictatorships
 if there is still some time left to live.
 In the meantime spring is late.

The crisis of the parties of the first republic and the rise of new political forces²⁰ were soon incorporated in auteur songs. The first reference to the Lega Nord party with its plans for a secession of Northern Italy came from two Neapolitan singers-songwriters. Pino Daniele in “O' scarrafone” (Daniele, 1991) told a story about migrating north and wrote “this Lega is disgraceful”, Edoardo Bennato, in “Il paese dei balocchi” (Bennato, 1992), spoke about the emergency associated with the arrival of migrants from Albania and denounced the growing intolerance of Italians.

After a journey full of hardship and fear
 you are happy to have arrived to toyland [...]
 All the others have shut their doors
 but we are good and welcome you with open arms here in toyland.
 Welcome, we are very happy, you are welcome even if there are already many of us here in toyland.
 Down, down, down to the brothers in the south; ki-ki-kisses the brothers in the north,
 right, we are all united and get along, racism never took root here [...].

With the beginning of the Tangentopoli scandal, symbolically represented by the arrest of Mario Chiesa in February 1992, and the murder of judges Falcone and Borsellino by the Mafia, in May and July, two trends became prominent in Italian auteur song: a specific openly anti-mafia trend [inaugurated by the Stadio with the song “Per la bandiera” (Curreri, Grandi, & Guccini, 1992) and followed by Jovanotti, Giorgio Faletti and many others in the following years], and a more general trend, in which politics, in the strict sense, was once again the topic.

With the explosion of the scandal on illicit payments to parties, it was natural for popular arts to find an easy target in politicians, a trend which became common in light entertainment and satirical shows.²¹ Most singers-songwriters however, as the heirs to the left-wing cultural tradition, preferred a more sophisticated interpretation of the contemporary scandals, attacking the idea, common in the press and even more on TV, that corruption was so common that it did not make sense to distinguish among the various parties and politicians.

This was the direction followed, for example, by Pierangelo Bertoli, who—already at the Festival di Sanremo of 1992, and therefore a few months before the scandal of Tangentopoli—presented his caustic “Italia

²⁰ On the last legislature of the “prima Repubblica” and the fall of the old party system, see at least Cafagna (1993), and Carducci (1993).

²¹ To remain in the area of music, one can think of the radio program Rete 105 Cee, in which the more popular songs of the moment were rewritten as satires of Tangentopoli. See Persivale (1993).

d’oro” (Bertoli & Negri, 1992), in which he described a “real” Italy, impoverished by financial and political corruption, and imagined a new ‘bombing season’ for the country.²²

They’ll tell you it’s easier now, that justice will become stronger
 that serving the strongest is right and humanity can go fuck itself
 Tell me now if everything is so ephemeral, if the one who murdered was the criminal
 then the arrogant interest that takes into account only those who massacre the most
 The power roars that dictates the rules, the voice of liberty falls
 while in the accounts of the economic wolves, no trace of the blood of those who’ll pay
 Golden Italy born of labor, with your laurel crown, find an excuse if you can
 Black Italy under the old banner of the jolly host you don’t give a fig about us
 at all you want as long as you can, you never pay the bill anyways.
 All is lost in the noise of missiles while other shots already ring out
 in the streets travelled by the weak our war will not burn out
 And they will talk to us again of tears, of the results of poverty
 of bribes and bosses, all of them out of jail, of another bomb that went off in town.
 My only hope is to remain among men, that ignorance won’t prevail
 that we will stop collaborating, that we will change who decides [...].

Less bitter but on the same line was Francesco Guccini, who in “Nostra signora dell’ipocrisia” (Guccini, 1993) wrote:

[...] On Ash Wednesday they confessed to us more or less
 that the party was over and carnival was past
 and announced Fast [...].
 And offered ex-voto with cunning faces to Our Lady of hypocrisy
 so that a hand would wash the other, all guilty, amen [...].

More polemical and with more explicit references to current events was Enzo Jannacci in the song “I soliti accordi” (Jannacci, Jannacci, & Rossi, 1994). The song attacked the political climate, the idea that everyone was more or less corrupted, and the power-sharing agreement among the elites which led to the birth of Forza Italia, the new party founded by Silvio Berlusconi.²³ On February 27, 1994, one month after Berlusconi’s famous video-message in which he announced he was “joining the game”, Jannacci released his song:

[...] And after all the story (c’mon, tell us!)
 is always the same (what did I tell you?)
 there’s one who shouts, shouts and pulls faces from that windows.
 The names change, they remain bastards
 watch the radio, the usual faces
 the usual chords (the usual agreements). Which ones? The usual ones.
 C major, A major, A minor, D minor, G seventh, D minor...
 C major, A major, D minor, A minor, G seventh, B minor...
 In the middle of the road (what’s that), three guys with pitchforks (oh, all right)
 but the little thieves are always hanged by the big thieves.
 The first yelled (ring-a-round-a-roses: Forza Italia!)

²² After the mafia murders of 1992, between the spring and summer of 1993, Italy was subject to a sequence of mafia bombings: in Via Fauro in Rome on May 14, in Via dei Georgofili in Florence on May 27, in Via Palestro in Milan on July 27, at S. Giorgio al Velabro and S. Giovanni in Laterano, in Rome on July 28.

²³ On the birth and consolidation of Forza Italia see at least Maraffi (1995); Golia (1997); Ginsborg (2005); Ginsborg & Asquer (2011).

the second counted (I’m missing a platoon)
the third fired, but then explained radish and broad beans [...].

A couple of months later came the elections of March 1994 with the extraordinary success of Berlusconi’s coalition,²⁴ which cleaved public opinion in two. An image of Italy developed as a divided country, with those in favor of the value schemes proposed by television associated with Berlusconi and those who were against them.²⁵ In the years to come the division, in the political debate, was not so much between left-wing and right-wing but between pro and against Berlusconi.

This division became soon a topic in Italian auteur song: In the LP *Se son rose fioriranno*, for example, Edoardo Bennato dedicated two songs to the recent events. In “La frittata è fatta” (1994a) he ironically commented on the new government and on the tensions between the new head of the government, Silvio Berlusconi and the President of the Republic, Oscar Luigi Scalfaro:

[...] At this point, it’s official, the fat is in the fire
happily with everyone’s support, the fat is in the fire
between saboteurs and politicized judges, between TV drama and ratings
practically speaking the fat is in the fire, *paisa*.
It was in the air, special edition, the fat is in the fire
in a second, you didn’t even notice: the fat is in the fire
Easily, as if it were nothing, the fat is in the fire
happily, notwithstanding the president, the fat is in the fire
and among investigations and probings and rich prizes for all participants
happily, the fat is in the fire, *paisa* [...].

In the song “Meglio Topolino” (Bennato 1994b),²⁶ Bennato directly attacked Silvio Berlusconi:

[...] Cavaliere, ace of *denari* with the winning smile
Scrooge, better Scrooge, at least he doesn’t promise anything [...].

From this moment on, the rise of Berlusconi focused the attention of pop and satirical songs,²⁷ which found an easy target in the new leader, especially in his problems with justice and his sexual scandals, more than his actual politics.

Bested by pop songs, singers-songwriters ended up gradually abandoning the political topics of the day or, in some rare cases,²⁸ opted for the generic anti-political slogan “all guilty”, which they had opposed in the past.

²⁴ On the 1994 elections see Pasquino (1995); Bartolini & D’Alimonte (1995).

²⁵ In the collective imagination influenced by television there was a widespread anti-political sentiment, characterized by a general condemnation of the ‘old’ parties, combined with the criticism of excessive taxation, bureaucracy and inefficiency in public spending.

²⁶ Topolino is the Italian name for Mickey-Mouse.

²⁷ I am referring both to rock groups (from better known ones like Litfiba and Avion Travel, to niche bands like CSI, Modena City Ramblers, to underground groups like La famiglia Rossi and Talco) and comedians like Roberto Benigni or Claudio Bisio. It is worth remembering that in the following years both “historical” singers-songwriters like Venditti [“Il sosia”, (Venditti, 2003)] and Vecchioni [“Faccetta rosa in campo azzurro”, (Vecchioni, 2004)], and new ones (like Paola Turci and Daniele Silvestri) used Berlusconi for target practice, often with somewhat unsophisticated arguments.

²⁸ Antonello Venditti in “Prendilo tu questo frutto amaro” (Venditti, 1995) sang: “[...] in this new Republic nobody resembles me [...].”

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