Experiments in Civil Society in Post-war Urban Sicily: Danilo Dolci and the Case of Partinico 1955-1978[1]

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Italy and particularly the South have been stereotyped as corrupt. This portrayal is explained by the weakness of civil society which in turn is understood via the power of the Church and the family as well as the legacy of fascism. This article questions these assumptions arguing that proto-civil society experiments can be found in apparently unlikely places — Partinico in the Province of Palermo. The work of Danilo Dolci demonstrates that the practices of civil society — protesting, campaigning and lobbying — were already developing prior to the remaking of Italian politics and society post-1989.
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Introduction

This study originated from my interest in corruption in urban society. Much of the literature on corruption identifies Italy as a corrupt society and moreover that it is a low-trust society where social capital is weakly developed. It is argued that in these circumstances civil society[2] is correspondingly weak, as suggested by scholars such as Edward Banfield (1958), Robert Putnam (1993) and latterly by Paul Ginsborg particularly in his *Italy and Its Discontents: Family, Civil Society and the State 1980-2001* (2003). Ginsborg has suggested that civil society's development in Italy has been retarded by the power of the Church and the family. Here he follows Banfield. However, he develops a new narrative in which he argues that a stronger more vibrant civil society emerges after *c.*1989, which he attributes to the end of the Cold War causing the Christian Democrats to lose their *raison d'etre* as the bulwark against communism and also because of the impact of the liberal Pope John Paul whose *Familiaris Consortio* (1981): 'From the family citizens are born' had rejected traditional papal teachings which had emphasised the sacramental role of the family. Finally, Ginsborg suggests, the longer term effects of the growth of higher education from the 1960s onwards had created a new 'reflexive' middle class whose broader horizons enabled it to be responsive to social and political issues that were beyond mere self-interest. Moreover, they have adopted civil society participative techniques to defend the constitution of 1948; challenge the monopoly power of the *partitocrazia*; campaign to return utilities to public ownership; support free media; adopt anti-racist positions and above all to be anti-corruption (Nautz ed. 2013). Most important, as we shall see, the historical ethnography analysed here strongly suggests that these activities existed far before the 1989 (see also Prato 2000).

Before examining the work of Danilo Dolci in western Sicily in the 1950s and 1960s and the contention that corruption can be attributed, in part at least, to the weakness of civil society it is essential to consider the approach of historians, political scientists and

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[2] The literature on civil society is vast; for the present article, starting points include Morris (2006), Kumar (1993) and Ginsborg (1995). For the wider issue of trust see for example Fukuyama (1995).

anthropologists, specifically those who adopt an urban perspective (Pardo 1996 and ed. 2000). Historians have long borrowed analytical tools from other disciplines often to illuminating effect (See for example Darnton 1985). The contention of political scientists that corruption can be understood via the weakness of civil society is not without merit but it is essentially a circular argument that has probably been exhausted (Pardo and Prato 2011). Indeed Putnam's thesis has been criticised by John A. Agnew (2002) because it draws a rigid dichotomy between the north and south of the country claiming an inverse relationship between clericalism in the south and civic mindedness in the north without accounting for the variation within regions or indeed differences between places and spaces.

This case study then explores the work of Danilo Dolci (1924-1997) who promoted a range of projects — educational, environmental and economic — designed to provide a small urban community, Partinico, in Sicily with a political voice. Dolci arrived in Sicily in 1952 and headed to the small town of Trapetto where he initiated a series of self-help projects. He moved to nearby Partinico in 1955 where he established the *Centre for Research and Initiatives for Full Employment*. (CRI); and from these small beginnings additional centres were set-up in Roccameno, Menfi and Corleone. The establishment of the *Centre* in Partinico was perhaps the logical consequence of earlier experience in voluntary activity at the Nomadelfia community near Modena the patron of which was the Countess Pirelli. The community was directed by an inspirational renegade priest, Don Zeno Saltini. These experimental communities, of which Nomadelfia was one example, drew from various traditions: Christian missionary initiatives as well as Fourierist self-help experiments. These experiments suggested that the building of a civil society was a difficult task throughout Italy and not just in the south. Dolci was not a clear thinker but he was an inspirational organiser who was at ease as he said with 'the poorest of the poor'. Most important was Dolci's development of a repertoire of civil society practices — campaigning, petitioning, promoting broad spectrum social coalitions to lobby local councils, regional and national parliaments, using local radio, conducting social research, engaging in acts of civil disobedience to heighten awareness of injustice. Hunger strikes were his most dramatic tactic. The hunger strike was symbolic of poverty and in 1952 Dolci began his first fast after having written to the regional government in Palermo following the death of a child from malnutrition. The fast took place in the room where the child had died. After eight days Palermo responded with promises of funding for sewers and the provision of a pharmacy (Baldassaro 2015).

Understanding the culture of urban society in post-war Sicily has attracted considerable attention (J. Schneider 1969, J. Schneider ed. 1990, Cucchiari 1990, J. Schneider and P. Schneider 2003). Historians, however, have tended to call on the work of political scientists.[3] Dolci's work in the small town of Partinico south of Palermo opens up the possibility of analysis informed by anthropological perspectives and particularly urban anthropology (Prato and Pardo 2013, Pardo and Prato eds 2012) and the relationship between citizenship and governance (Pardo and Prato 2011). Dolci's activity as educator and political campaigner invites exploration not only of civil society practices but also of his writings — interviews

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[3] Most notably Robert Puttnam (1993).

with all manner of men and women — which provide rich oral testimony of the conditions of poverty, religious beliefs, realities of power, gender relations and much more. Indeed for his *Inchiesta a Palermo* (1956) and *Spreco: Documenti e inchieste su alcuni apetti dello spreco nella Sicilia occidentale* (1960) Dolci and his assistants conducted 500 interviews with people in Palermo and the surrounding small towns (Foot 1998; Dolci 1959, 1963 and 1981). Their testimonies provide 'thick description' of the life and culture of Sicilians in both urban and rural settings by means of analysis of texts, rituals, practices and language.[4] These proto-civil society activities were manifest fully forty years before Ginsborg's suggested turning point of 1989-1993.

Danilo Dolci and the Practice of Civil Society

Dolci, from northern Italy, came as a settler in a foreign land not dissimilar to Samuel and Henrietta Barnett at Toynbee Hall in London's East End in the 1880s. Comparable experiments had also occurred in the USA and Russia, of which Jane Adams' Hull House in Chicago founded in 1889, and Alexander Zelenko's network of settlements in northern Moscow in 1905-08 were perhaps the most notable. Dolci's activities and campaigns promoted proto-civil society practices in what had been regarded as a barren waste as far as civil participation was concerned; but the collapse of fascism presaged a new beginning as the Republic's Constitution declared, 'Italy is a democratic republic founded on work, [Article 1]; and, 'the republic recognises the right of all citizens to work and promotes the conditions which render effective this right' [Article 4].

Dolci's campaigns involved road building and other unauthorised 'public works' without pay, the so-called '*sciopero alla rovescia'* or strike in reverse. An initial action in 1956 resulted in his arrest along with fifty others, mostly day labourers. Following his arrest, Dolci stated that his aim had been to draw attention to the problems of unemployment and poverty. In some respects Dolci was building on notions of public works that had been promoted in the liberal phase of the Italian state and also in the Fascist era but which had not been effectively sustained. Indeed peasants' land hunger had prompted a peasant uprising at Marchesato in Calabria in 1943, which had in turn prompted peasant protests in Apulia, and Luciano in Sicily. Dolci's road building protest worked, as his action sparked protests of unemployed workers in Palermo, Rome and Trapetto.[5] The trial in Palermo became a *cause celebre* and a number of lawyers offered to defend Dolci and his supporters without a fee; but Dolci conducted his own defence and so he was able to test out the State's commitment to the Constitution, a classic exercise in civil society politics. The trial also attracted the support of members of the Italian intelligentsia — Alberto Moravia, Carlo Levi and Ignazio Silone. Dolci and his co-defendants were acquitted of resisting arrest and insulting the police but were found guilty of trespassing on public land and sentenced them to 50 days imprisonment (time they had already served while in police custody).

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[4] Geertz (1973); and for historians, Gunn (2006).

[5] *La Stampa*, February 1956 (http://www.archiviolastampa.it/, accessed 3 August 2016)

Dolci was often referred to in the Italian press as the 'Sicilian Gandhi' because of the emphasis placed on the power of non-violent resistance. If there was a connection between Dolci's thinking and Gandhi's it probably came via Aldo Capitini (1899-1968). Capitini had studied philosophy at the University of Pisa in the 1920s and he became an opponent of fascism but he abandoned his Catholic faith when the Vatican concluded the Lateran Treaty with Mussolini. Gandhi briefly visited Italy in December 1931 on his return from the Round Table conference in London and met with Mussolini who he may have regarded as a potential ally against Britain (Wolpert 2002). Gandhi's visit inspired Capitini to take-up promotion of the peace movement and non-violent protest as a political strategy (Fallica 2001). He was subsequently imprisoned twice in1942-43; but in July 1944 he established, in partnership with Emma Thomas, an English Quaker, the *Centre for Social Orientation* in Perugia. The *Centre* was essentially a political education device and similar centres were established in Ferrara, Florence, Bologna, Lucca, Ancona, Assisi and Naples. Capitini was active in numerous causes — the preservation of free education, vegetarianism, ecumenical religious activity as well as non-violence. In 1954 he promoted an international seminar in Perugia specifically to explore strategies of non-violent campaigning; and in 1961 he promoted a Peace March from Perugia to Assisi which became a regular event organised by the Brotherhood of Peoples. It was significant that Italy had adopted St Francis as its patron saint in 1939 and in 1946 the President of the new Republic went to Assisi to hear Cardinal Canali's homily. The number of pilgrims that visited St Francis' grave in that year reached a record high, an indication of the success of the Republic and the Vatican to popularize the saint (Guaina 2009). This kind of activity later became more secular in character and drew also from the British CND tradition but Capitini's slogan *Pace da tutti i balconi* ('Peace from every balcony') was a particularly evocative statement of a European wide pacifism that emerged in the 1960s. Capitini also introduced Dolci to Giulio Einaudi (1912-1999), the Turin-based publisher and it was this connection that drew Dolci into a wider intellectual *milieu* which included Aldous Huxley, Bertrand Russell, Ignazio Silone, Alberto Moravia and Carlo Levi. The scope of civil action in the new Republic encompassed social issues including poverty and unemployment; political issues, principally peace and non-violence; and economic issues involving public works such as roads, housing and irrigation.

It was in this environment that Dolci's thinking evolved. He recognised that the key issues were poverty, sanitation, irrigation, the Mafia and that the solutions to these issues were to be realised by the 'mobilisation of the discontented majority' (Dolci 1981: xxii). In this respect he drew on liberal reform ideas of land reclamation — the *bonifica integrale* — and the draining of marshes and wetlands, which had begun in the 1920s; and *bonifica montana* the reclamation of upland areas. His identification of irrigation was a key issue to promote profitable agriculture in the Belice valley which would potentially revive the struggling agro-towns of Partinico and Trapetto, both of which were racked by poverty. Dolci also conducted numerous social research projects most notable being his *To Feed the Hungry* (1959), which compassionately revealed the lives of road sweepers, cigarette sellers, market traders, building labourers, sulphur miners, card sharpers, leech doctors, snail gatherers,

beggars, women fish-curers and others on the margins of casual employment and poverty (Dolci 1956).

'We ought to get together, set up a co-operative and make work for ourselves'

'They ought to make the Constitution effective … Put [it] into effect with its rights and duties …'

'We ought to unite and do something for ourselves over and above what the parties are doing'

'First and foremost they [the parties] should observe the Constitution'

'Strikes are no good. The best thing to do is to get into the good graces of the Head of the Labour Bureau'

'No one was as good as me at getting grants … I knew all the politicians as I've belonged to all the parties in my time'. [Founder of Partinico Co-operative] (Dolci 1963).

Although there appears to be an underlying naïveté in most of these testimonies there was recognition of some of the political realities: the solutions to their problems resided not only in some form of self-help but also in attracting support outside the orbit of the *sottogoverno*.[6] The Constitution and its guarantees were known; solutions could be found in connections and negotiation with a representative of the regional government in Palermo — the Head of the Labour Bureau — even if there was an element of deference or a search for a patron. The peasants and artisans were essentially not dissimilar to the *popolino* (little people) of Naples whose 'cleverness' was essential for their survival (Pardo 1996). Overall, conduct might not conform to an ideal liberal model of civil society action, autonomous and articulate but the testimonies of Dolci's 'witnesses' reveal a link between 'moral behaviour' [in Palermo and Partinico] which informs their 'management of existence' in Pardo's sense (1996). Nevertheless the Centre was providing valuable civic education and signalling that public space could be occupied by the poor and the powerless. The activity of Capitini, Don Zeno Saltini, Dolci and many others illustrates a significant development: civil society exists not only in places but also in a space — social, political and physical — between the state and the family. But it is also an analytical space where the cultivation of horizontal solidarities capable of drawing together a broad spectrum of individuals and social types can be observed and understood.[7] It also has the potential to check the excesses of the political class and is therefore a bulwark against corruption. Civil society manifests three essentials: first, social self-organisation, as it is made up of a myriad of voluntary organisations, clubs, societies, pressure groups, charities which could empower citizens to retrieve public space for civil purposes. These organisations can also provide a critique of the prevailing excesses of

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[6] There were 'unofficial' agreements among DC, PCI, PSI which sometimes also included smaller parties like the PLI and the PRI. For an anthropological analysis of *sottogoverno*, see Prato (2000).
[7] See Kocka (2004) and Muir (1999). In the European context, historians (Nautz et al. 2013; see also Ginsborg 2014) have studied the relations between the state, the family and civil society.

contemporary power structures. Thus, in the 1970s and 1980s Leoluca Orlando led the *Città per l'Uomo* movement in Palermo, while in 1985 the newly established *Società Civile* in Milan proclaimed its intention, 'to liberate the city from the parties'. Secondly, civil society is shaped by liberal rather than revolutionary ideology and by definition accepts a plurality of political positions. Finally, and very importantly, civil society exhibits a series of practices including at least petitioning, lobbying, testing the justice of the legal system, civil disobedience as well as social reportage and analysis. Anthropologists have offered an articulated analysis of this issue. Prato (2011: 136-140) has contrasted a liberal understanding of civil society where the individual grants 'conditional legitimacy' to political powers to a Marxist view that civil society conceals the collusion between the State and dominant socio-economic classes (including Gramsci's addition of the cultural element to this alliance). In view of recent approaches that criticise the concept of civil society as a 'third sector' between the family and the state (which nowadays would include formally-organized, and sometimes ideologically-oriented, NGOs), Prato has suggested that it would be analytically more useful to address 'civil society' in terms of 'moral community' and that "social cohesion, trust, cooperation and solidarity are based on commonly held norms" (Prato 2011: 140).[8]

Dolci's international reputation grew throughout the 1960s and beyond and the CRI was instrumental in providing evidence on diet, health and wages as well as education and training in civil society approaches: the techniques of political organisation and campaigning. For example, in 1978 the activists in Partinico began a campaign for road improvement to link Partinico to the small town of Mirto. A delegation was set-up composed of the CRI, trade unions, the Mayor of Partinico and representatives of the political parties to lobby the Minister for Agriculture of the Regional Government. This campaign demonstrates clearly the transactional nature of civil society politics. Additionally, it invites consideration of the importance of urban spaces — the *piazza* — where public rituals such as the *passeggiata* provided a vehicle for information exchange, discussion and potential action. The estimated cost of the road project ranged from $150,000 to $250,000. Peasant small holders and labourers simultaneously lobbied the Regional Government offices. By July, at a Partinico council meeting a joint intervention involving the CRI and trade unionists broke the deadlock and the budget for the road was approved in August 1978. This campaign was perhaps more recognizably convention than the road building tactics that Dolci had led in the 1950s.

Dolci taught organisation, self-help, the accumulation of evidence to support reform campaigns, lobbying as well as symbolic protests. His charisma and adoption of ascetic forms of protest — he subjected himself to numerous publicly orchestrated fasts — were undoubted factors that contributed to civil society in Partinico. The hunger strike invites comparison with Gandhi's activities in India as a means of shaming British authorities into submission. Although, as I have mentioned, the wider European press referred to Dolci as the 'Sicilian Gandhi', it was more likely that the hunger strike in Sicily drew on a Catholic tradition. It represented a non-violent resistance to achieve justice and was allegedly practised by St Patrick in early Christian Ireland. But it also featured in the Revolutionary War of 1848 when Giuseppe Arcangeli eulogised upon the dead bodies of the 'Citizen Martyrs' killed in the

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[8] On trust as a fundamental aspect of legitimation and moral consent, see Pardo 2000: esp. p. 4.

Battles of Curtatone and Montanara, near Mantua.[9] He exhorted others to follow the martyrs whose blood was sacred. Indeed, Arcangeli's oratory was a mix revolutionary and religious metaphor (Riall 2010, Mollica 2012). Dolci's practice of the hunger strike or fast was closer to Terence McSwinney, the Catholic Mayor of Cork, who fasted for 74 days in Brixton prison in 1920 and the Hispanic Labour leader in California, Cesar Chavez, who endured a number of fasts between 1968 and 1974 and was certainly a much closer cultural contemporary of Dolci than Gandhi. The cult of Catholic martyrdom undoubtedly resonated in Sicily possibly levering in support from members of *Catholic Action*, the most important of the Catholic leagues; Dolci's missionary approach might also be regarded as a Christian calling (Moessner 1992, Sweeney 1993). Dolci's fasts were always carefully calibrated. In 1962 his campaign to secure the Iato Dam was carefully orchestrated with preliminary publicity and a protest march on the third day involving 2,000 people walking through the streets of Partinico (Baldassaro 2015). His courage in the Belice earthquake disaster of 1968 shamed the government into action and his earlier willingness to provide evidence to the Government's *Anti-Mafia Commission* (1963) made him a marked man. But the successes in respect of road building, the Iato Dam project, education provision were collective efforts that suggest the emergence of a proto-civil society in an apparently unlikely place. The Partinico project built horizontal solidarities within and without its immediate community and beyond the party machines. Key issues around work, infrastructure and freedom from Mafia intimidation were galvanising agents which mobilised the local population and generated a modest vibration on the Richter scale of local and regional power. Dolci's work was undoubtedly innovative but it is important to recognise that the growth of civil society in Sicily prior to *c.*1989-1993 was shaped by a range of factors: the *questione meridionale* or Southern Question, as well as the Church, the state and the family. While these cannot necessarily be seen as inhibitors, in Sicily and in the South more generally there were also a range of promotional factors, including the development of co-operative banking; urbanisation which provided places and spaces in which civil society could grow; peasant protests/movements could develop and so could structural demographic change which resolved longstanding problems including over-population, under-employment, inefficient under-capitalised agriculture.

Obstacles to the Development of Civil Society
Mezzogiorno and the Southern Question
The case of Dolci and Partinico qualifies Ginsborg's argument that Italian civil society has only emerged significantly since *c.*1989-93 because of long term developments in Italian society. In addition to the orthodoxy in respect of corruption and the political class in Italy it is important to recognise an additional orthodoxy: the presentation of the *Mezzogiorno* by politicians, writers, historians as backward and unchanging. Such orthodoxy has created the *questione meridionale* or so-called 'Southern Question'. The image of irretrievable backwardness and comparability with the underdeveloped world has left little space to consider civil society programmes. Further, Edward Banfield's idea of 'amoral familism'

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[9] These were mainly Tuscan and Neapolitan volunteers who, together with the 10th Regiment of the Army of the Kingdom of the two Sicilies, had joined the fight against the Austrians. Interestingly, they wore a tricolour cross as a 'federalist' symbol of a unified and independent Italy.

(1958) argued that southern society in Italy was marked by a family culture that excluded the outside world and denied all notions of social or communal responsibility (See also Hobsbawm 1969).[10] Indeed, 'amoral familism' has entered the lexicon of social theory to underpin arguments that assert that civil society and civic responsibility have been developed only weakly in the *mezzogiorno* and Sicily in particular (Levi (1947). The image of 'otherness' has also been accepted by historians with Judith Chubb's description of Palermo a notable example:

> 'Italy's sixth largest city is balanced precariously between Europe and Africa. Behind the façade of a prosperous metropolis, the crumbling slums, narrow twisting alleyways, and dank courtyards of the old city harbour conditions of housing, health and sanitation more reminiscent of a Cairo or a Calcutta than of a major European city.' (Chubb 1982: 1)

The 'Southern Question' was created in the 1870s by the reports and writings of Leopoldo Franchetti and Sidney Sonnino (1876) who highlighted the backwardness and poverty of the region south of Rome and including Abruzzo, Puglia, Calabria and Sicily. *La Sicilia nel 1876* (Franchetti and Sonnino 1877) was written in the form of a travelogue and constructed an image of savage barbarism and of what cultural theorists such as Edward Said would call 'otherness' and which later anthropologists have called 'Orientalism in One Country' (Said 1978, Schneider, J. ed. 1990, J. Schneider and P. Schneider 2003). Such a negative view was stretched still further by the Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso in his *Criminal Man* which posited racial theory as an explanation of criminality (Lombroso 1896). Additionally, Sicilian novelists such as Giovani Verga (1882) and Tomasi di Lampedusa (1958) extolled the notion of the Sicilian 'essence' certainly for the aristocracy which encompassed an inherent fatalism and pure self-interest.[11] Later still Gramsci developed his thinking about the concept of hegemony arguing that the ideological sway of the *latifondisti* was assured by the teachings of the Church. The peasant, Gramsci says, feels his 'Powerlessness, his solitude, his desperate condition, and becomes a brigand, not a revolutionary, he becomes an assassin of the *signori,* not a fighter for communism'.[12] Such a view was also accepted by historians of the left including Eric Hobsbawm in his short study of social banditry (1969). However, Gramsci's thinking is much more agile than might first appear. Indeed he extolled the view that man could change his environment by recognising it as an 'ensemble of …relations' that could be changed.

The Family, the Church and the State

For many observers of Italian culture and society the family is the 'accredited masterpiece … the bulwark, the natural unit, the provider of all that the state denies the semi-sacred group,

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[10] For an overview of criticism of Banfield, see, Pardo (1996).

[11] A more recent version of this perspective is expressed by Sciascia (1961).

[12] From Gramsci, La Questione Meridionale in 'Operai contadini', *L'Ordine Nuovo* 3 January 1920 quoted in Joll (1977: 69).

the avenger and the rewarder' (Nichols 1973: 68). From the moment of unification of Italy in the 1860s the family has been an ideological battle ground for the hearts and minds of the people. The early liberal state made little progress in wresting the family from the Church and was unable to mount a vigorous anti-clericalism like had emerged in the French Third Republic. After 1922, Mussolini and the Fascist State sought to compromise with the Church with the consequence that 'Italian civil society, frail in many parts of the country, lost all its elements of autonomy, pluralism and dissent and became little more than a series of assembly points for the regime's parades and activities' (Ginsborg 2014: 208)**.** The fascist state had in fact appropriated Italy's public space to achieve political control and consent (De Grazia, 1981). Mussolini set out his views on the family in 1927 in which peasant family was the engine that would power the Fascist State by means of state programmes of marriage and fertility. Thus Fascist organisations such as the *Opera Nazionale Balilla* (youth organisation for 8-14 year-olds) and the *Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro* sought to instil fascist values via various organisations to promote loyalty to the cause. Women though still devoted time to organisations such as Catholic Action. But fascist organisation in Italy flattered to deceive. The theatrical events and parades disguised the fact that family welfare remained the prerogative of the Church which taught the anteriority of the family over the state and society. The Fascist-Church accommodation institutionalised in the Lateran Decrees represented in fact a 'fragile consensus' (Mosse 1979). Moreover, Italian families were often sceptical of the flummery of fascism and were suspicious of the state. During his exile to the remote village of Cagliano in Basilicata, Carlo Levi was told:

> 'There are hailstorms, landslides, droughts, malaria and the State. These are inescapable evils; such there have always been and there always will be. They make us kill off our goats, they carry away our furniture and now they're going to send us off to the wars. Such is Life.' (Levi 1947: 78).

The primacy of the family has been extended to argue that Sicily is constituted as a 'low trust' society where the family is the sole repository of refuge, assistance and protection. Beyond the confines of the family according to this interpretation there is an absence of trust in the State and therefore an absence of voluntary associations and mutual aid.[13] According to this view, families and individuals live in suspicious isolation inhibiting social solidarity between families and denying the possibility of the development of associational life and therefore civil society. As I have indicated earlier, despite substantial criticism exposing the weakness of this view, the political scientist Robert Putnam (1993) has indexed the declining civic commitment of Italian society on a north-south axis: there is a strong and vibrant associational life and civil society in the north but a weak propensity to associate and co-operate in the south which has allowed the invasion of the state by criminal elements who enjoy the collusion of national and local élites. What is regarded as legitimate and illegitimate,

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[13] For a long time, trust between Southerners and the State has been missing on both sides. As Pardo notes, trust 'between two parties, [it] must work both ways in order to work at all ... it is credibility that inevitably breeds trust; and credibility is heavily dependent on the relationship between the actual and the perceived management of responsibility' (2000: 7).

however, is not always clear as in social and political reality there is a 'blurring' of the line dividing acceptable conduct from inadmissible conduct (Pardo 2012).

There are three questions that arise. First, does the claim that Sicilians have an inability to co-operate stand up to the evidence? Second, was1989 a watershed for the development of civil society in the south and Sicily, or was there in fact proto-civil society experiments pre-dating the 1989 turning point? Third, was there an evolution of civil practices that enabled Sicilians to exert power prior to the 1990s?

Factors Promoting Civil Society

Co-operative Banking

It is certainly the case that the northern provinces of Lombardy, Emilia Romagna and the Veneto have a richer tradition of associational activity (Muir 1999). However, the South and Sicily were able to develop co-operative banking prior to 1914 with some considerable success. The *banche popolari* movement required both trust and co-operation. Following the banking legislation of 1866 the southern provinces had established 377 *banche popolari*, more than half of the nation's co-operative banks. Admittedly, they carried a lower proportion of the nation's equity but southerners had been able to establish more banks per capita than was the case in the northern provinces: one per 34,000 inhabitants as against one per 52,000 inhabitants in the north. In both the north and south *banche popolari* shareholders were small merchants and industrialists although the south attracted more small farmers than the north and the north attracted more small businessmen than the south. These patterns were not surprising given the divergent economic structures of the two regions. Furthermore, balance sheet evidence suggests that the southern *banche popolari* were controlled by small proprietors, shopkeepers and self-employed craftsmen. Moreover, the collection of local government taxation — *esattorie* — was proportionately greater in the south than in the north (A'Hearn 2000). Additionally, the co-operative banking movement in the south, including Sicily, displayed other associational potential. In 1915 there were six Catholic leagues with 1,087 members per 100,000 population. It might be objected that the Catholic Leagues were instruments of *latifondisti* and Vatican hegemony but like the co-operatives the Leagues suggest a capacity to associate denied by the traditional view of the Mezzogiorno and Sicily in particular. At the same time it is important to recognise that there was also an entrepreneurial culture indicating innovation and flexibility that in turn required co-operation and trust (Pardo 1996). The impact of the Great War polarised the country between communism and fascism of which the latter in the end was able to co-opt many of the Catholic-inspired organisations by using its cell structure to pursue a policy of entryism in relation to the Catholic Leagues. Consequently, the potential for associational activity was arrested and therefore the exercise of power via an open civil society was suppressed by a totalitarian regime from 1922 until 1943. The *banche popolari* movement, the wider co-operative movement and the Catholic Leagues suggest the presence of sufficient social capital to organise and associate. Such a view of the south and Sicily qualifies the Banfield-Putnam low-trust equilibrium which has denied the possibility of co-operation and therefore the possibilities that might follow — horizontal solidarities, civil society and potentially political power. This was not, however,

the complete picture and there is no doubt that the Italian Republic after 1943-48 was characterised by stasis and corruption. However, civil society in Sicily was yet to develop organisations and practices that enabled people to navigate the public realm to achieve positive social and political gains.

Urbanisation, Urban space and Demography

The portrayal of the South and Sicily as backward and underdeveloped is not without foundation. It deserves scrutiny, however, because it limits our analytical ability to penetrate the nature of power — especially the apparent power of the powerless — in a society often viewed as the victim of extra-state power and short-hand descriptors such as violence, criminality, patronage, deference, apathy, insularity and low-trust. In fact these descriptors lead to a view of Sicilian life and culture that constructs a stereotypical view of an inability to co-operate and therefore unable to build the organisations and associations that are the hallmarks of modern civil society. There was, however, a range of transformational processes at work which helped to modify this bleak picture. Urbanisation was certainly a key development post-1943. This was especially important in the east of Sicily and the Straits of Messina where the cities of Catania, Syracuse and the port of Augusta all grew substantially. However, Palermo had stagnated, gaining only 0.6 per cent in population between 1936 and 1942 although the impact of war and the Allied invasion undoubtedly had an effect. But the telling evidence of urban stagnation lay in the smaller medium-sized towns so that between 1936 and 1942 the proportion of Sicily's population living in towns of 50,000 or more declined from 51.4 per cent to 26.1 per cent of the total (Population Index 1943: 146-153). Nevertheless, urbanisation was undoubtedly a key driver of associational activity. The Allies, too, provided impetus to the process of organisation and participation; and Marshall Aid provided funding for infrastructure, the promotion of a free press, as well as the provision of technical expertise and productivity programmes.

The processes of demographic and urban change were complex and change in the south and Sicily did not arise from internal dynamism. Rather, it was the northern and central regions that were the most dynamic; and between 1861 and 1971 some 15-16 million people migrated from the countryside to more industrialised areas where wages were higher. In the North, urban growth was a function of increased labour productivity in both urban and in rural areas. Between 1860 and 2000 labour productivity grew nineteen-fold because the capital to labour ratio grew of an almost similar order. Even after 1943 there is significant evidence that in Sicily capital, technology and manpower were underemployed and this could be a constraint on urbanisation but it was also a driver of migration to central and northern regions of the peninsula. Crucially, the gap between urban and rural wages goes some way to explain the rural-urban migration flows and the higher wages of the cities signified their higher productivity per capita (Malanima 2005). Growth in total factor productivity was especially significant in the period 1951-73 (Malanima and Zamagni 2010), and the Italian surge in industrial capacity coincided with a marked decline in real energy costs: the shift from coal to oil and gas favoured Italy and Sicily's strategic position favoured both industrialisation and

urbanisation. In 1977 Enrico Mattei had secured the agreement to bring natural gas by pipeline from North Africa to Syracuse on Sicily's south-east coast.

At the same time the cultivation of industry and urbanisation was encouraged by the unintended consequences which flowed from the state's land reform programmes. Parliamentary inquiries showed that the extent of underemployment in Sicily and the south generally was especially acute and so the programme of land redistribution of *latifondo* and to settle a long running grievance for the peasantry was finally achieved in 1950-52. However, the new government-subsidised farmhouses were soon abandoned as the re-settled families were unable to make them economically viable. Thus, the long run trend of rural depopulation was emphasised still further: in Sicily alone it is estimated that some 200,000 people moved from the mountains to the plains; from the centre to the coast; to railway stations; to main road sites. Further, the promotion of petro-chemical industry by the state facilitated the growth of Syracuse, Catania and Messina. Between 1951 and 1971 the establishment of petro-chemical plants at Syracuse and Gela accounted for sixty per cent of Sicily's industrial investment. Thus, significant structural change came primarily as a consequence of out migration allowing those that remained to become on balance more productive. The dynamic differential in urban-rural wages widened dramatically in the post-war world, and not just in Italy but between developed and underdeveloped regions which were often transnational. Additionally, exogenous shocks such as earthquakes, in the Belice valley for instance, also prompted migrations. Cities and towns presented attractive social opportunities — marriage, the possibility of better housing and so on. Crucially, for a country like Italy the falling costs of energy between 1945 and 1973 moved the international terms of trade in its favour and Sicily was geographically favourably located to import oil and natural gas. All these factors favoured urban capital formation, both fixed and mobile, which in turn enhanced the urban-rural productivity ratio. Extrinsic factors — the European Recovery Programme (Marshall Aid) and the Italian state's entry into the EEC in 1957 — all had an effect on urbanisation as growing employment in industry and services caused rising inequality in personal income distribution, thus facilitating rural-urban migration. In 1951, 41.1 per cent of Italy's population was classified as urban and by 1971 this proportion had increased to 52.2 per cent. Even the small towns of the Palermo region began to grow modestly after a long stationary period. So, those within the catchment area of Palermo, including Partinico, grew from 24,000 to 28,000 between 1951 and 1971. Similarly, nearby Alcamo grew from 32,000 in 1931 to 42,000 in 1971.

	*c.*1911	1951	1971
Partinico	21,700	24,700	27,800
Alcamo	32,200	41,800	41,900
Roccamena	2,500	3000	2,400
Trapetto	1,400	2,400	2,300

Fig 1: Population of Selected Towns in the Palermo Region (http://www.istat.it/en/, accessed 6 August 2016).

The most dramatic growth took place in the east: Catania grew from just over 300,000 in 1951 to 409,000 in 1961; and Messina mushroomed from 220,000 in 1951 to 270,000 by 1968. These trends simply underscored the economist's rule that labour will follow capital. At the same time, there were key processes at work which promoted the possibility of civil society in Sicily's small agro-towns. First, the long term effects of emigration, although often viewed negatively, reduced pressure on the land as it reduced the overall size of the agricultural labouring population. It also encouraged those that remained to commercialise their activity and invest in land improvement and equipment. The remittances from those who had emigrated encouraged the upward mobility of those that remained as they invested in property improvement for renting out, house improvement and the education of children. Second, the growth of the state bureaucracy brought new professions to Sicily — civil servants, local government officers and teachers — who began to edge out the older professions — doctors, lawyers, land agents — from the public sphere. In sum, these changes began to disrupt the older hierarchical patronage structures as well as creating new social groups that were more open to participative behaviours. The small Italian agro-towns were also the locations of a number of organisations; and even before Dolci arrived in Partinico the town had many associations, including allotment societies, four trade unions, co-operative and building societies, a sportsman club, a football club and the Civic Club Umberto, which was frequented by clerks and shopkeepers. Admittedly, they were almost exclusively male-dominated, indicating the gendered boundaries of civil society in the town (Hageman 2013). Furthermore, these towns had physical structures that facilitated associational life and sociability. There was the *piazza* and the *corso*, the venues of *passeggiata*. It was in these places that social exchanges were made and confirmed and where the solidarities of the town were made manifest (King and Strachan 1978). Thus, the traditional narratives of national histories have overlooked pockets of civil society practices in Sicily and have also underestimated the significance of social experiments in smaller urban settlements that were able to achieve vital agency through critical development issues — work and the tradition of toil, roads, irrigation projects — revealing a capacity for civil society practices to populations cast as cynical, narrowly family-oriented and apathetic towards social and political matters.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that Italy and Sicily have faced many challenges in establishing a civil society that can exercise effective restraint upon the political parties. However, it is clear that Dolci's experiments have left a legacy that has enabled the new 'reflexive' middle classes to claim back the *piazza* and establish a range of solidarities that are active around the environment, employment and immigration. The peace movement, too, has an enduring tradition in the region; and the work of prosecuting magistrates to tame the worst excesses of Mafia power has created space for civil society, although this of course has not been without its tragedies. Perhaps the coalescence of Mafia power and political power resides more, according to the prosecuting magistrate Giovanni Falcone, in administrative fragility, inertia and casual indifference and the weakness of the state rather than in the weakness of civil society (Della Porta and Meny eds 1997). The practices of clientelism and the diffusion of the

funds from bartered votes has perpetuated corruption and consequently arrested the development of civil society, but the activities of Dolci and his supporters showed that social and political actors can succeed seemingly against the odds. The development of civil society was undoubtedly encouraged by the growth of economic prosperity between 1948 and 1973; that is, from the declaration of the constitution of the new Republic to the great oil shock. In 1999, Palermo hosted the *Civitas* world congress in recognition of the city's achievements, in its citizens having reclaimed the city — '*Città per l'Uomo*' — from the mafia and having established a new regime of lawfulness as well as a cultural renaissance (Orlando 2001).

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