"We Need a Bit of Trumpism":
Anger and Resentment in Austerity Italy

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Abstract

In this article, I look at anger and resentment as intertwined feelings underlying popular reactions to the perception of state failure in tackling social disparities. I adopt a perspective that articulates the anthropological study of the state with the Gramscian theorization of the integral state. I examine how anger and resentment shape the everyday perceptions of politics in the urban periphery of Brindisi. I organize my analysis around the examination of a corruption scandal that led to the arrest of the mayor, which I deploy as the prism to explore popular relatedness to the state, highlighting the "disconnection of feeling" between the political elite and popular classes. I argue that by framing the resentful feelings of the latter through the idea of disconnection, we can advance a useful description of people's relatedness to the state in the current historical conjuncture.

Keywords: austerity, clientelism, corruption, relatedness, the state

The defeat of Donald Trump at the 2020 US presidential election has been received among liberals all over Europe with a mixture of relief and triumphalism, as though this would deal a blow to European populists. In Italy, pundits and politicians often represented Trumpism as a temporary nightmare, ended by the reassuring election of democrat Joe Biden. National debates about Trumpism reflected internal political tensions, sharpened by the open support for Trump from conservative and extreme-right forces. It is a fact that Trump and his European counterparts can rely on popular support in their respective contexts. The 2008 Great Recession and the austerity politics that followed have contributed to fuelling anger and resentment over state failures in protecting citizens from the consequences of the crisis while channelling considerable sums to bail out the banking system.

In 2016, shortly after the election of Donald Trump, my attention was captured by a seemingly trivial mention of the Trump election to make a point about Italian politics. In late November, at the end of fieldwork in the

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southern city of Brindisi,[1] I was invited by friends from a parish church of a neighbourhood that I will refer henceforth as Rione, to join them for a day trip to Bari, the regional capital of Apulia, to the renowned sanctuary of St Nicolas. During the trip Vincenzo,[2] a retired factory worker in his sixties, took a seat next to me for a chat. We talked about politics, both at the municipal level where early voting had just taken place following the mayor's arrest resulting from allegations of corruption, and at the national level, since we were approaching a referendum over a disputed constitutional reform.[3] Vincenzo, a person with a long-lasting commitment to Catholic activism and with leftist sympathies, expressed his disappointment with politicians' self-referential attitude, patently concerned only with the preservation of power and privilege. Then he came up with an unexpected comment: "What we need is a bit of Trumpism!" (*ci vorrebbe un po' di trumpismo*). Vincenzo suddenly clarified that I should not misunderstand him. He did not sympathize with Trump. He just wondered whether the Trump effect could "unlock the situation" (*sbloccare la situazione*) in Italy, thus shaking up the political establishment that Vincenzo felt was distant and uncaring about ordinary people's needs. It was clear that Vincenzo was expressing a grievance over the deterioration of political representation while also voicing anger about the uncertain prospects that working people have been facing increasingly over the past decade. The fact that the election of Trump could appear as a "rupture" was possibly the paradoxical effect of his demonization in the mainstream media (and of his electorate likewise; Walley 2017). In the situated context of a southern Italian urban periphery, the call for an undefined Trumpism resonated with the disillusionment and resentment with politics and state responses to growing inequalities (Kalb and Halmai 2011).

In this article, I look at anger and resentment as intertwined feelings underlying popular reactions to the perception of state failure in tackling social disparities while preserving and enhancing spheres of "privilege" (Narotzky 2016). Instead of focusing on eventful mobilizations against austerity politics, where anger and resentment can be approached in their emotional

2   All the names used are pseudonyms.
3   The constitutional referendum (4 December 2016) concerned the reform of the national parliament and the relations between the state, regions and other territorial entities. The constitutional law was rejected.

performativity, I investigate these feelings in their occasional and trivial utterances, as common-sense responses to injustice and powerlessness. More particularly, I refer to anger and resentment as structuring feelings (Williams 1977) of the relational modalities through which relatedness to the state is actively constructed or passively experienced. Though both are described as responses to the feeling of injustice, resentment is also identified as the tool of divisive politics, aimed at defusing resistance and fuelling scapegoating attitudes towards marginalized social figures (Mulligan and Brunson 2020). As such, anger and resentment can be seen as characterizing cohesive and divisive modes of political subjectivation (Fassin 2013).

I examine how anger and resentment shape the everyday perceptions of politics in the urban periphery of Brindisi, an industrial city of 87,000 inhabitants. Following Smart's suggestion that political scandals can create "moments of transparency" (Smart 2018, p. 118), I organize my analysis around the partial account of a corruption scandal that led to the mayor's arrest in 2016. I use this episode as the prism to explore popular relatedness to the state. I emphasize how Vincenzo's incidental call for Trumpism can provide meaningful insights into the "disconnection of feelings" between the political elite and popular classes. I am freely revisiting Gramsci's idea of the "connection of feelings" (*connessione sentimentale*) between the intellectuals and the people as the necessary condition for the lively integration of knowledge with the aspirations and feelings of the governed (Gramsci 1975, p. 1505). I argue that, by framing the resentful feelings of the latter through the idea of disconnection (Ciavolella 2017), we can advance a constructive understanding of people's relatedness to and within the state in the current historical conjuncture. To do so, I investigate how inhabitants of the urban periphery pursue their aspirations and navigate their difficulties by attempting to (re)build meaningful connections and react to the feelings of disaffection and neglect. In the context of a once-bustling industrial city, the idea of "disconnection" resonates with elaborations of the concept that address the uneven trajectories of capitalist modernity, the consequences of deindustrialization and economic peripheralization (Ferguson 1999; Vaccaro et al. 2017).

In and out of the state

My examination starts from the margins of a provincial city and builds upon the epistemological value of "peripheral vision" to gain meaningful insights into the relational complexities of state imagination and practice (Das and Poole 2004; Shore and Trnka 2015). I develop the analysis drawing from observations with two groups of interlocutors, both based in Rione. One is a network of working people involved in church activism, who were

trying to set up a neighbourhood committee to stimulate community action; the other is a small group of unemployed men, who protested, with the support of a rank-and-file union, to get back their jobs in the municipal waste management service. The community initiative was taking shape in the aftermath of the mayoral elections that followed the corruption scandal. The protests of the unemployed started before the corruption scandal, in which the owner of the contracted waste management company was eventually involved. Despite the differences, both cases were symptomatic reactions to the widespread feelings of neglect in the city's urban peripheries. Explanations of the urban blight and poverty in the peripheries almost inevitably mentioned clientelism and corruption as pervasive mechanisms of social dependence and political control. These "rules" favoured a few while leaving the majority excluded at the margins.

Between the 1950s and 1970s, the study of patron–client relations became prominent among the (mainly anglophone) Mediterraneanist anthropologists (Davis 1977; Li Causi 1975). This subject attracted particular interest among those researching in southern Italy, after Edward C. Banfield put forward his controversial thesis of "amoral familism" (Minicuci 2003). From the 1980s onwards, besides a few notable exceptions (Minicuci 1994; Shore, 2006; Signorelli 1983; Zinn 2019), anthropological interest in the topic has gradually, though not entirely (Vesco 2017), disappeared. Yet, clientelism, as a practice and ideology, has not vanished likewise, becoming instead a widely recognized phenomenon in contexts where it is perceived as the (not so) silent force of political life. Clientelism is also part of the common sense of southern Italian politics and society, with the contradictory incorporation of influential ideological snippets of intellectual discourses on the "crippled" modernization of the South (Schneider 1998).

By the same token, clientelism in Brindisi defines a rather flexible "popular semiology" (Blundo and Olivier de Sardan 2006) framing negative peculiarities that are often described as distinctively "southern" (Zinn 2003, 2019): the limitations of community initiatives, hampered by individualism and the prevalence of personalized vertical relationships; unequal opportunities in getting access to jobs and welfare provision (like housing); and ultimately the prevalence of political malpractices (e.g. vote-selling). Nonetheless, this popular semiology of clientelism is often conveyed with temporal modulations that signify a break between current clientelistic practices and past clientelism, framing the latter in the positive aura of the city's golden age of industrial and urban development. In the 1960s the city was targeted by the state-driven programme of direct industrialization of the South (Pirro 1983). In addition to the already existing mechanical industries, Brindisi expanded as an important centre of petrochemical and energy production. Since the 1980s, these industries have been undergoing a gradual but steady

process of deindustrialization, leaving behind a complicated socio-environmental legacy.[4]

The nostalgic view of clientelism resembles Piattoni's (1998) provocative concept of "virtuous clientelism" as a functioning mechanism of actual redistributive democracy during the "glorious thirty years" and the expansion of the welfare state and public employment (see Ferguson 2013). Current clientelistic practices, on the contrary, are understood in the context of the neoliberal reconfiguration of state redistributive mechanisms (from fiscal to welfare policies), starting in the 1990s and intensified by austerity (Cozzolino 2021), that would have unsettled the conventional patronage system, giving way to the "indistinct (*pulviscolare*) patronage" of micro-clientelistic practices (Brancaccio 2019), while at the same time sharpening the underlying class relations. Clientelistic ties, therefore, represent an important relational sphere through which to fathom the experience of changing redistributive patterns, faltering structures of political representation, and the forms of relatedness to and within the state.

In this article I adopt a perspective inspired by the Gramscian theorization of the "integral state", understood as a differentiated unity; that is, a dialectical relation of unity and distinction (political society *and* civil society), encompassing the richness of all internal determinations and mediations (Jessop 2009; Liguori 2004; Thomas 2009, pp. 167–195), so that "the state" reverberates in every single fragment of social reproduction (cf. Pizza 2020, p. 91). This basic perspective provides the fundamental background to combine one way of looking at the blurring of boundaries between state and society – through the "discursive construction of the state" (Gupta 1995) – with the emphasis on the relational dimension of the state (Thelen et al. 2017). Combining these approaches, my aim is to frame how the representations of the state *and* the state as a relational experience shape the concrete understanding (implicit and explicit) of what the state is and the moral speculations around what the state should be. As I detail in the analysis, assuming that institutional politics is widely perceived as potentially "corrupted" does not entirely displace positive moralities regarding how the state should be. By the same token, views of the intertwinement of politics and the state do not build upon logics of mutual and exclusive identification, therefore leaving room for the imaginative disentanglement of corrupted politics and popularized visions of the "good" state. Such vernacular visions of the state mobilize powerful notions of care (e.g. the state as a provider) that builds upon the symbolic articulation and continuity of pri-

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4   The population expanded rapidly from 58,313 in 1951 to 81,893 inhabitants in 1971, reaching a peak in 1991 (95,383), to gradually decrease during the following decades. Data from the National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), National Census of the Population and Housing. Available at: https://www4.istat.it/en/

vate (familiar) and public (the state) dimensions, thus appealing to the same symbolic strategies enforced by dominant state narratives (Alves de Matos and Pusceddu 2021). Approaching clientelism as an ideology, Signorelli (1983, p. 55) highlights a similar tension between particularism and universalism. Avoiding oversimplified explanations (e.g. familism, modernization, etc.), Signorelli points out the coexistence, in southern popular culture, of universalistic and egalitarian values with particularistic and clientelistic ones, and how the seemingly contradictory coexistence of these ideological forms – a "confused agglomerate" in Gramscian terms (Signorelli 1983, p. 55) – shaped ambivalent representations of social stratification, power, subordination and justice.

In spite of the inevitably elusive character of the state as a subject of inquiry (Abrams 1988), in this article I rely on a basic conceptual distinction between the state as an external entity and the state as a proximate relational sphere, which helps me think relatedness as the constant dialectics between the "in" and "out" of the state (Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Stacul 2016). Spatial metaphors are also "good to think" the polymorphous relatedness to and within the state by reference to the two ends of a continuum of "relational modalities" (Thelen et al. 2017): one that epitomizes the remote and abstract powers of the state that are out of reach and yet pervasively present in shaping daily life and the broader regulatory order of society (the state as a vaguely monolithic entity); and one that encompasses the relational contexts through which the state is concretely experienced (and dealt with) – like local politics and street-level bureaucracy, but also welfare provisions, such as housing, education, health care, employment and even the very intimate sphere of social reproduction. One clear example of the relatedness to the state as an external entity is the complaint about the absence of the state, particularly present in the sense of neglect of urban peripheries, in which distance and mutual estrangement construct the state as a pervasively absent presence (Pusceddu 2020). At the same time, the mundane practices and discourses that continuously negotiate the boundaries of the state by mobilizing cultural idioms to characterize its "symbolic roots" (Herzfeld 1992) such as the *raccomandazione* – the use of connections to get things done (Zinn 2019) – construct the state as an integral part of everyday social relations (see also Brković 2017). Clientelism is, in this respect, one way of experiencing the state through proximate relational possibilities (Vetters 2017).

If you are a baker, you touch the flour

On 6 February 2016, the mayor of Brindisi was put under house arrest charged with bribery and corruption (Fulloni 2016). Two years later, the first sentence confirmed that he favoured a private firm to win the contract

for the waste management plant in exchange for money used to repay personal debt. The private firm had undertaken the waste management contract two years earlier (in 2014), while investigations over alleged corruption started in 2013, shortly after the mayor was elected in May 2012. Running as the independent candidate with the support of a broad coalition of centre-left parties (he took up Democratic Party [PD] membership only after the election), he appeared new to politics, though not an unknown person. In fact, he was a popular journalist on regional TV channels. Not being a politician by profession may have facilitated his election. Quite a few people I spoke to admitted they voted for him because he was not "a politician" (*un politico*), hence a trustworthy candidate. However, shortly after the election, the mayor had to face a first trial, accused of abuse of his office, fraud and exaction for entrusting the municipal press office and call centre service to a company in which he held the majority of shares before the election. Cristiana, a charity volunteer in Rione who had voted for him, expressed discouragement commenting that "if you are a baker, you touch the flour" (*se fai il fornaio la farina la tocchi*), as though this metaphor entailed a view of politics as a dubious business, meaning that anyone who gets involved, to some extent, exposes themselves to corruption by dealing with power and money.

The judicial issues led to the mayor's political isolation. Shortly before the arrest, regional and municipal PD executives pressed for withholding support in the municipal assembly, thus leading to the subsequent reshuffling of the municipal government. From this brief account, it is clear how controversies, political strife and lack of confidence in the local political leadership marked the four years of the mayorship. The mayor's arrest was followed by the immediate downfall of the municipal government and assembly. An extraordinary commissioner appointed by the prefecture was put in charge of the ordinary administration until new elections were held. The latter took place a few months later, between May (first ballot) and June (runoff). Once again, the newly elected mayor was not a politician by profession (she was a lawyer) but she was supported by a heterogeneous coalition that included the council members who supported the reshuffling of the previous municipal government. The new mayor was also the daughter of a previous Christian Democrat (DC) mayor, who was arrested while in office in 1984, charged with pursuing his private interests, omission of official acts and embezzlement. The new mayor's father was the first of three mayors who faced trials during their tenure up till the mid-2000s. The second mayor was arrested in 2003, in the context of a wider judicial investigation that journalists described as the "Tangentopoli brindisina", alluding to the 1992 nationwide corruption scandal (Tangentopoli, literally: Bribesville), a real watershed in the history of the Italian republic (Ginsborg 2003, pp. 179–188). During the mayoral campaign, this unfortunate record was repeatedly

alluded to as a worrisome symptom of the city's malaise, as if the political misconduct revealed more widespread social malpractices. Shortly after the latest mayor's arrest, the national press glossed the case as "the curse of the mayors" (Gioia 2016). Furthermore, the city faced a serious social and economic situation characterized by high unemployment rates[5] and the chronic crisis of the local industrial sector, throttled by subcontractors' precarious dependence on large corporations.

Nevertheless, the political stalemate was far from confined to Brindisi. In the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, the austerity that followed resulted in the downfall of the centre-right government of Silvio Berlusconi and the rise to power of the so-called "technocratic" cabinet of former EU commissioner Mario Monti (in 2011). The new government was promptly described as a government of national salvation and, accordingly, supported by nearly the whole parliament. This event can be taken as the turning point in two decades of political bipolarization starting in the 1990s, following nationwide judicial investigations over political corruption that dealt a final blow to the party establishment of the post-Second World War era (Ginsborg 2003, pp. 249–259).

In the 2013 national elections, following Mario Monti's resignation, the newly formed party Movimento 5 Stelle (Five Stars Movement – M5S, founded in 2009) gained an outstanding electoral consensus, becoming the most popular party in the South (Brancaccio et al. 2019). Shunning conventional positioning as right or left, the M5S broke into the political scene with an uncompromising anti-establishment discourse, targeting the privilege of the "parasitic" elite – the caste (*la casta*) – as claimed by the M5S founder, ideologist and brilliant comedian Beppe Grillo (2013). Similar anti-establishment political discourses emerged in Spain, where the Podemos experiment of leftist populism mobilized "the caste" as a key target of its political critique. Nevertheless, if we were to frame the roaring consensus of the M5S within the broader European responses to austerity, we would find it a fundamentally conservative political project, shaped by a mixture of moral puritanism calling for the rule of law, neoliberal leanings, and ambiguous stances on migration. Through the overt rejection of conventional party politics (one reason why it was quickly stigmatized as the epitome of anti-politics), the M5S embarked on a campaign to clean up corruption and privilege in politics, calling for ordinary citizens (*la gente*) – not just the people (*il popolo*) – to renovate national politics and society. The 2016 mayoral elections in Brindisi were the first of this kind where the M5S in

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5 The 2011 national census recorded 20.3% unemployment, higher than the regional rate (17.3%) and almost twice the national rate (11.4%). In 2015, the local job centres recorded that 30% of the active population was in search of employment. Data available at: http://ottomilacensus.istat.it

Brindisi put forward candidates. Despite this, they achieved an outstanding result, becoming the most successful party in the city. Exploring this electoral behaviour, I realized that many M5S sympathizers were willing to vote for that party, no matter who the candidate mayor was. At a time when the other parties were trying to hide behind "civic slates" and non-professional politicians, the M5S was able to capture a broad consensus with the simple display of a then widely recognizable symbol of anti-establishment politics. However, the grouping of several political formations into large coalitions (a compromise rejected at the time by the M5S) favoured those parties that carefully supervised their electoral consensus through the well-established patronage system.

Peripheral vision

Rione is a spatially separate urban agglomeration that started to be built in the early 1960s through public housing programmes.[6] The neighbourhood expanded with the relocation of households living in shacks on the city outskirts. Some of these households had been displaced from the city centre by airstrikes during the Second World War. Others were displaced at a later stage by urban reorganization plans in the 1950s and 1960s. Despite the expansion of public housing, the chronic housing shortage, made more acute by the inflow of peasant families from the province, led the municipal government to accommodate numerous households in abandoned Army facilities, previously serving as stables, at the edge of the new quarter. Rione was planned as a self-sufficient suburb, conceived as a promising model of the city's urban expansion, intensified by the bustling industrialization of the 1960s. However, the persistent lack of services and incomplete infrastructures fell short of expectations. Rione had also developed along subtle class lines, with a first nucleus designed for the expanding public sector employees and industrial workers, followed by the recently urbanized peasant families and the underclass of the poor and unemployed. Later in the 2000s, the neighbourhood further expanded with new housing projects for the police force, intended as a contrast to the bad reputation the quarter had gained as a stronghold of cigarette smuggling and organized crime (Tornesello 2009). Between the 1970s and 1990s, Brindisi became the regional hub of cigarette smuggling. In 2000, following the death of two finance police officers in a car chase, a massive police operation led to the definitive dismantling of cigarette smuggling networks. A report of the Parliamentary Antimafia

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6   The CEP (Coordinamento di Edilizia Popolare) brought together several boards (including the post-war UNRRA – United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) with the aim of planning the creation of new affordable housing.

Commission (2001, p. 58) estimated that in the mid-1990s, in the province of Brindisi (nearly 400,000 inhabitants), cigarette smuggling provided the principal source of income for around 5,000 families. Cigarette smuggling also became the remunerative business of the mafia organization Sacra Corona Unita, mainly active in the provinces of Brindisi and Lecce.

In the aftermath of the mayoral elections, the regional secretary of the PD – the main party of the defeated coalition – and former public prosecutor in the Brindisi court, hinted at the stigmatized reputation of the neighbourhood, making explicit reference to the possible role played by the organized crime in shifting the consensus towards the winning coalition. Inevitably, the statement caused angry reactions, though it alluded to something that was floating over the debate about the electoral result; that is, the role played by clientelistic networks in shifting a relevant number of votes in the urban peripheries. Campaigning in the populous quarters at the edge of the city was seen to be of strategic importance, as these areas were believed to be decisive in the election runoffs. Rumours ran around that a large pool of votes could be "bought" either with money (€50 seemed to be the going price), other payoffs (e.g. gasoline vouchers) or with the alluring promise of a job or a flat in public housing.

In the 2016 mayoral elections, Vincenzo supported a progressive left-leaning group (Brindisi Bene Comune) that mobilized the language of the commons and was firmly grounded in environmental mobilizations against the oil and coal industries. However, in Rione, this was the electoral choice of a tiny minority. Those who wanted to express their protest eventually turned to the M5S. Vincenzo, speaking from his experience of social commitment in the neighbourhood, saw "clientelism" and the preference for exclusive and vertical solidarities as the main impediment to cohesive community initiatives on an egalitarian basis. In his usual allusive way, he referred to the difficulties of getting the neighbours involved in collective and inclusive undertakings that benefited "the community". Going straight to the point, while we were walking across Rione, he pointed to one apartment building, where a party had taken place to celebrate the recent electoral results. The party, in which fireworks were used to celebrate, was given by a supporter of the winning coalition. The supporter was a small businessman who influenced the electoral consensus in the neighbourhood by promising jobs. Vincenzo was annoyed by the episode and convinced that vote-selling was a problem of "social culture" (*cultura sociale*) that was hard to change. But he was also aware of the conditions of material deprivation that made the people often eager to sell their votes.

Circles of progressive parties and associations shared a similar cultural explanation of the vote-selling, insisting on the necessity to spread the "culture of legality". They mobilized the conventional trope of international discourses of corruption and anti-corruption since the 1990s (Zerilli 2013).

In ordinary conversations, such legalistic views were often "regionalized", thus connecting un-civic behaviours and rooted mistrust of the state to the troubled history of national unification and the persistence of rebellious anti-state feelings in the South (cf. Vesco 2017; Zinn 2019). Another friend in Rione (also a retired worker in his sixties) recalled how a well-known smuggler, killed in 1974 during gunfire between rival bands, was highly respected in the neighbourhood as a benefactor. Not only did he support the livelihoods of many families, he also represented "the revolt against the state" that, in contrast, "did not provide anything to live on". Elaborating more on this memory, he added that smugglers were socially respected as they resembled the "brigands" who fought against the new oppressive state in the aftermath of national unification.

Residents of Rione overtly acknowledged that cigarette smuggling contributed to the bad reputation of the neighbourhood. They also pointed to the economic backlash of the end of cigarette smuggling. However, the "worsening" (*peggioramento*) of life conditions was more commonly attributed to the gradual cuts to public services and growing unemployment "during the crisis", when even making a living in the shadow economy became difficult. Caritas's volunteers, for instance, pointed to the increasing requests for help they had been receiving since the early 2010s. A married couple committed to local church activities (Sonia, a school teacher, and Teodoro, a factory worker) complained that Rione had paid, more than other neighbourhoods had, the cost of municipal budget retrenchment. For instance, the only surviving public service – the municipal nursery – was believed to be kept open because it served households from a nearby and well-off residential quarter. The lack of reactions and initiatives from the neighbours, they went on, made things even worse, increasing feelings of isolation and impotence. At the time, the most active parishioners were trying to set up a neighbourhood committee (*comitato di quartiere*) to pursue the community interest with the municipal government. Teodoro firmly believed that they had to do something, yet he did not conceal his scepticism. Like Vincenzo, he pointed to the increasing individualization of community life, the lack of mutual trust, the deterioration of social solidarities. However, Teodoro reckoned that things used to be otherwise, even during the turbulent times of cigarette smuggling. While acknowledging the worsening of the economic condition, Teodoro and Sonia connected this situation to the deterioration of political representation that would have particularly affected the poor peripheral neighbourhoods. Mobilizing a somewhat idealized past (Zinn 2019, p. 133), they recalled how things used to be relatively better when organized parties (overall the DC) were strongly present in the neighbourhood and provided a channel for the satisfaction of people's demands. Also, patron–client relations of the past, framed through the reassuring memory of a reliable political establishment, seemed wrapped in a nostalgic aura of

a time when political organizations could provide better conditions for the whole community and not only for individuals. One should note the stark contrast with the absent state that "did not provide anything to live on", hence making possible the legitimation of cigarette smugglers as benefactors. For others, the state was present and socially legitimated through the powerful influence of the DC patronage system. One thing was clear: in Rione, many inhabitants still tried to navigate their powerlessness and insecurity in ways that showed their trust in vertical relations of a clientelistic type in their pursuit of better livelihood chances. However, when the patronage system did not pay off, people could pursue other strategies through collective mobilization or radical rank-and-file unionism. That was the case of the unemployed who started mobilizing in 2011, who tried to combine union-based action and informal agreements with the political elite to get jobs in the municipal services. In the next section, I provide a closer examination of this story.

Whither clientelism?

In the previous section, I mentioned how patron–client relations of the past are recalled with nostalgia, as dependent on influential party organizations whose redistributive capacities benefited most people and not, as in the present, a restricted circle of individuals. This nostalgic view of a more democratic and just clientelism is far from limited to some inhabitants of Rione. According to a recurrent narrative, the 1960s development of the city depended on the astute and responsible brokerage of local politicians (some of them MPs) with the central state. The Christian Democrat MP Italo Giulio Caiati (also a member of the municipal government) was popularly credited with the construction of the petrochemical complex in the early 1960s, while also remembered as a powerful influence (along with his subordinates) in the selective recruitment of the local workforce. The long queue of cars outside Caiati's villa on Sundays, when all clients appealed to their patron for help, favours and *raccomandazioni*, is often recalled as a reminder of that era. Figures like Caiati acted as the personalized interface between the central state and peripheral areas. They were also the conveyor belt of hegemonic DC political power and masters of its territorial articulation up to the 1980s (Gribaudi 1980; Piattoni 1997; Pirro 1983). According to Piattoni (2018), the crisis of this mechanism depended on a range of factors. In particular, budgetary issues and changes in the electoral system in the 1990s led to the decline of effective clientelism (that is, clientelism that works) and the increase of political corruption, as consensus started to depend less on direct relations with constituencies and more on increasingly expensive electoral campaigns (Piattoni 2018). This argument

provides a plausible framework in which to situate the metamorphosis of the patron–client relationship that consolidated in the early decades of the Republic (Fantozzi et al. 2019; Zinn 2019). It appears to be even more so for socially marginalized subjects, whose attempts at navigating insecurity are hardly univocal and can often take diversified directions, illustrative of the ways of managing and building relatedness to and within the state.

On a hot summer morning, four men chained themselves together in front of Brindisi town hall. They were demonstrating in order to be re-hired by the contracted waste management company that had refused to renew their job contracts, pretending they were no longer needed. For their part, the workers held that they were targeted for their union activity. A rank-and-file union, led by a former factory worker and ex-militant of the extra-parliamentary left, organized the demonstration. The chaining scene started as the press showed up. The union leader issued a statement. Later, he managed to access the municipal meeting where several issues related to the waste management company were on the agenda. The private company had won the tender to manage the dumping site and the RDF (refuse-derived fuel) facility. The scope of the RDF facility was to reduce the amount of waste in the dumping site through the production of fuel from solid waste, and therefore reduce the cost of waste disposal. The facility served an extended district unit of 20 municipalities of the province. As the facility stopped working because of a malfunction (possibly due to overload), the increase of waste in the dumping site directly affected the cost of its disposal. The representatives of all the municipalities involved were then meeting to decide on the contract with the company. The union staged the demonstration to raise two main issues: payment delays of the salaries of about forty workers, and the re-employment of the workers who had chained themselves together in front of the town hall. Moreover, considering the high unemployment rates, the municipal services tender specifications included a clause about employing a percentage of the local unemployed workforce. According to the union, the waste management firm was failing to comply with this rule. Since the beginning of my stay in Brindisi, I had come across negative comments about the workers of the waste management service. The contracted companies – I was often told – were pressed by the municipality to hire unemployed people previously involved in the "illicit" economy (notably cigarette smuggling). According to widespread rumours, these situations were the outcome of the clientelistic management of recruitment procedures.

Some of the protesters outside the town hall came from Rione, and most of them had previous experience with cigarette smuggling. Their stories resonated with many conventional narratives about the workforce of the smuggling economy. For those raised in poverty, cigarette smuggling offered the chance to gain more than they needed, even squandering large sums of money and "enjoying the good life". Once the smuggling economy came to a halt, in the

early 2000s, they found themselves again living from hand to mouth. In the eyes of people like Vincenzo, who grew up in a modest peasant family that could eke out a living through factory work, the spendthrift life of the smugglers marked a meaningful ethical divide from the thrifty ethics of hard work and sacrifice. Another widespread narrative of the turbulent time of cigarette smuggling often mocks the wasteful habits of smugglers, hungry and eager for the symbols of wealth. Andrea, one of the protesters in front of the town hall, explained: "as a young man, I spent everything I could because I was hungry", giving to "hunger" a dense meaning far beyond just eating. Later on, when cigarette smuggling ended, he became involved in the Pitchforks Movement (*Movimento dei forconi*), animated by ideas of popular justice against the powerful and corrupted elite. The movement started as a protest organized by farmers, lorry drivers and petty entrepreneurs hit by the crisis, spreading across the country between 2012 and 2013, with demonstrations, and street and railway blockades. Disappointed by the reticent attitude of the leadership and the waning of the promised 'rupture', he gave up: "I gave all myself to the movement, but I left since I felt betrayed by my leaders". These fragments help situate the small group of unemployed protesters in the broader simmering situation of the city, made more acute by the lasting consequences of the Great Recession.

Andrea was quite a frantic person, continuously moving around the union leader, whom he trusted completely. They had been very close since the spontaneous creation of a committee of the unemployed in the early 2010s. Thanks to its charismatic leader, the rank-and-file union was also the only union that managed to build trustworthy relationships, providing an organized leadership to their protests. However, other initiatives of the committee members fell entirely outside the scope and style of a radical union. Some of them, in fact, during the 2012 electoral campaign, would have reached informal agreements with the mayoral candidate, offering electoral support in exchange for jobs in the municipal services. However, after the elections were over, some got jobs while others lost them. The situation escalated when the waste management company started to face difficulties, leading to the deterioration of the service and prolonged delays in paying wages. As early as a few months before the mayor's arrest, many rumours circulated that the "waste issue" would lead to the fall of the municipal government, and it had become the tipping point of political conflict in the assembly. The corruption scandal that followed confirmed the rumours regarding the fragile equilibrium of the municipal government, thus opening the way to new elections. That fragility was reflected in the lack of actual power that undermined the precarious arrangements made within the dysfunctional patronage system. Eventually, the unemployed continued living precariously from hand to mouth, while trying to find other ways out, either with or without radical unionism.

Conclusions

Anger can take different forms, showing variations in relation to different contexts, structural constraints and historical contingencies. In the past, anger unleashed the periodical outbursts of the popular classes. The history of southern Italy (before and after unification) is also the history of peasant insurgencies (Tarascio 2020). The poor social and material conditions of workers and peasants – exacerbated in the post-Second World War period – led to widespread social unrest. Organized mass parties like the Italian Communist Party (PCI) played a crucial role in orienting popular anger towards the achievement of concrete political goals, setting the framework for effective collective action and self-identification. At other times, anger gave way to episodic bursts of violence. In Brindisi, during the spring of 1946, a peaceful demonstration of the unemployed ended with an assault on government buildings (including the tax collector's office) and the looting of rich mansions. The pervasive political action of conservative parties in power, such as the DC, created other binding connections and hegemonic frameworks, this time more intimately connected to the exercise of actual power over access to material and symbolic resources (e.g. social mobility), sustained by inter-classist ideology. In the conflictual development of southern society, universalist and particularist pushes coexisted in shaping local and national projects of political mediation and relatedness to the state, thus moulding the expression of social anger into competing hegemonic projects. The contentious memory of this past ("the state" as corrupted and yet responsive to popular demands) still fuels expectations, surviving the crisis of democratic capitalism and the neoliberal transformation of the state (Cozzolino 2021). At the same time, disappointment with politics finds expression in discourses of pervasive political corruption nourishing resentful feelings towards the "uncaring" state. Anger and resentment have also fuelled aspirations for regenerative politics ("messianic", according to Palumbo 2016), often embodied by controversial figures of "salvation". In the mid-1990s, powerful media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi tellingly promoted his political project through his success story of "apolitical" self-entrepreneurialism. In the context of austerity, the M5S took politics back to and for ordinary citizens, denouncing the systemic corruption of the irredeemable political establishment.

During a conversation at a dinner in Rione, the discussion turned to politics and disappointment with the newly elected municipal government. Cristiana[7] and her husband Fabrizio had voted for the winning mayor, though they did not hide their lack of confidence. However, they were not responsive to Vincenzo's suggestion that they support Brindisi Bene Comune. Instead, Fabrizio, remarking that "they're all the same", shout-

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7   See the section "If you are a baker…".

ed that next time he would vote for the M5S so that "we'll send them all home!" (*li manderemo tutti a casa*). This excited outburst is illustrative of the intertwinement of anger and resentment in channelling grievance through support for political projects perceived as capable of disrupting established privileges. The successful outcome of the 2020 referendum on constitutional reform, reducing the number of MPs,[8] is a poignant example of such politics of anger and resentment. While fundamentally reducing the already crippled mechanism of political representation, the referendum assumed the meaning of exemplary punishment of the political establishment and its privilege. In this case, anger and resentment do not necessarily entail that the popular vote is driven by coherent discourses about incisive politics that reduce inequality. These kinds of politics are, more often, volatile catalysers of popular discontent and instrumental responses to widespread aspirations for regenerative discontinuities, as the call for Trumpism shows.

The analysis in this article points to the need to address the polymorphous complexity of practices, representations and expectations through which "the state" is experienced, evoked, constructed and pursued. Approaching the state as a continuum of relational modalities allows us to read anger and resentment through the contradictions and tensions between cohesive and divisive politics. The working people, discouraged by political corruption, and the unemployed, unable to make conventional connections work, are the two sides of the same coin. They both reveal the feelings of disconnection among the popular classes that struggle to find meaning in their social pursuits and political aspirations. They address the dysfunctional development of established mediations – from mass parties to the patronage system – and the latter's inability to tackle the critical reconfiguration of redistributive patterns and the consequent growing inequalities. The situated stories examined in this article speak to the broader context of austerity Italy and the unsettling feeling of neglect, distance and injustice. The disquieting call for Trumpism is, in this respect, one more telling symptom of the disconnection that increases the breaches in the ruined edifice of neoliberal democracy.

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8   The constitutional referendum reduced the number of seats in the Chamber of Deputies (from 630 to 400) and the Senate (from 315 to 200). The reduction of the size of the parliament was a central point of the Five Star Movement's political programme.

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