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# Moving away from civilization: the case of Italy. An overview and presentation

## 1. *Episodes of civil decay in Italy*

For decades, Italian social life has witnessed a set of phenomena that indicate deterioration in the quality of social and interpersonal relationships, and a generalized erosion of public-spiritedness.<sup>1</sup> This leads us to suppose that there is a growing process of degradation of civil life.

There are endless examples of this “uncivilized Italy”: rampant environmental mismanagement, from the so-called “Land of fires”<sup>2</sup> to the

<sup>1</sup> Among the many news items that have recently caused a stir in public opinion, two in particular should be mentioned here:

March 2020: a policeman tries to park his patrol car, but “he finds a gun pointed in his face ... held by a man with his head covered by a helmet who wants his watch. The situation gets worse: the policeman fires. The attacker is a 15-year-old ...: he falls wounded in the chest and head”. The robber is dead on arrival at the Pellegrini hospital; his relatives, almost all women, lay waste to the emergency room. The damage is enormous, so much so that eight patients have to be transferred to other hospitals. “In the meantime, the teenager’s friends organize a raid and open fire on police station”. ([https://www.ilmattino.it/napoli/cronaca/napoli\\_omicidio\\_15enne\\_rapina\\_carabinieri-5084300.html](https://www.ilmattino.it/napoli/cronaca/napoli_omicidio_15enne_rapina_carabinieri-5084300.html)).

February 2020: Two women were accused, along with a man, of having sexually abused two girls from the earliest years of life in order to produce child pornography. The man and one of the women allegedly decided to conceive a girl, according to the investigating judge A. Di Girolamo, «with the express intention of realizing their shared sexual fantasies» (Ansa, February 7th 2020).

Another of many such cases is that of Cosimo Antonio Stano, a 66-year-old mentally disabled man living in Manduria, who was tortured for months by a large gang of young people. Stano died in hospital after yet another beating at his home (April 2019). The adults in the gang were convicted in court, and their sentence was upheld on appeal, while the minors were taken from their families and put in care. (<https://www.lastampa.it/cronaca/2020/05/29/news/anziano-picchiato-fino-alla-morte-in-puglia-condannati-3-giovani-1,38904977/>)

<sup>2</sup> “Land of fires” (“Terra dei fuochi”, in Italian) is the name given in the early 2000s to a “vast area located in southern Italy, extending across Campania between the provinces of Caserta and Naples. The area is filled with innumerable illegal landfills and dump sites where toxic waste is continually set on fire, covering the region with dioxin-laden smoke and other pollutants.

problem of urban livability; violence against women, the elderly and minors; corruption; the questioning of competences; online haters; the uncontrollable vituperation that prevails in public discussions, where insults and abuse take the place of well-reasoned argument.

The Covid-19 pandemic brought an upsurge in all these phenomena. The government's public health measures were labeled a "health dictatorship". There were also widespread attempts to deny that the Sars-Cov-2 virus is dangerous, as well as to oppose and sabotage the vaccination campaign, often by healthcare personnel. Many people even questioned whether the virus really exists. Moreover, conspiracy theories peddled the notion that the entire pandemic was a plot to subjugate the population.

In truth, some phenomena such as Covid-19 denial and anti-vaccination movements are not restricted to Italy. However, their spread and pervasiveness in this country is striking: they are linked to other typically national traits, extending their range and making them more deeply entrenched.

The numerous episodes mentioned above have forced some observers to ask themselves: could Italians, or rather, certain specific social groups, be considered frankly uncivilized people? In short: is Italy a country with a limited degree of civilization (Sylos Labini, 2002)? It is likely that such beliefs have crystallized in institutionalized images of this country and its inhabitants.

To describe and explain the causes of these phenomena, «Quaderni di Sociologia» launched a call for papers on these issues some two years ago (<https://journals.openedition.org/qds/4011>). We started from the thinking of Norbert Elias, the theorist of the *Zivilisationsprozess*, or "civilizing process" (2000).

## 2. *Civilization, decivilization* (Entzivilisierung)

A preliminary task is to distinguish between the meanings of the terms "civilization" and "decivilization". We indicate at least three.

The first designates a set of cultural traits and institutions. The constellation of properties it encompasses generally concerns material life, political life, social organization, and the relationship with the environment. It is the descriptive conception of civilization, which Lucien Febvre (1930)-the French historian and founder together with Marc Bloch of the *Annales* school-called "ethnographic".

Illegal dumping is correlated with a significant increase in the incidence of specific diseases and mortality from leukemia and other cancers among the local population" ([https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terra\\_dei\\_fuochi](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terra_dei_fuochi)).

The second meaning of civilization is evaluative, as can be seen in the ancient and still current use of the term, for example in the distinction between “civilization” and “barbarism”. In this sense, we value to varying extent certain characteristics that we consider most salient among a large human group more highly than those of other social groups (Gallino, 1978).<sup>3</sup> Here again, there is often no explicit hierarchy among the considered properties, though attempts to establish one have been made by Niceforo (1930), Shils (1961) and especially Aron (1981, 321 ff.).

The term has been used in the first sense with regard to pre-colonial African civilizations or the Tupi-Guarani (Febvre, 1930, 11), and in the second when we speak of Greco-Roman civilization (Veyne, 2005).<sup>4</sup>

Norbert Elias introduced a third, more accurate, meaning to which we will refer here. With the expression “civilizing process”, Elias means the slow and gradual historical production of a new type of human being, with greater control over passions, emotions and drives, and who thus rejects violence. The civilizing process does not only concern the social norms that pressure the individual to behave peacefully and rationally. It also affects the psychology of modern man, who compared to his medieval ancestors is more oriented towards self-control and curbing his own urges and emotions. Elias distinguishes between two social processes, which he calls “psychogenesis” and “sociogenesis”. “Psychogenesis” denotes the processes of progressive self-control and self-discipline. Social action is conducted within the boundaries of an affectively neutral standardized behavior, abiding by impersonal criteria; its expressive forms become more moderate.

<sup>3</sup> The province of meanings associated with the term “civism” or public spirit is not considered here. It denotes the “high sense of duty as a citizen and fellow citizen, which impels individuals to neglect or sacrifice their own well-being for the common good” (*Vocabolario Treccani*: <https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/civismo>).

Nor does the concept of “civilization” correspond to that of “social capital”. Rather than examining the varying “fiduciary cooperation” between subjects, Elias investigates the changing balance of power that is established between them (Elias, Scotson, 1965). With his theory, a systematic link can be established between macro and micro social phenomena – as indeed is possible with the theory of social capital. Another distinctive feature of Elias’s theory is the priority assigned to analyzing the dynamics of social processes, hence his critique of a sociology of steady states (which Elias called *Zustandssoziologie* or *Zustandsreduktion*).

<sup>4</sup> Speaking of his interest in Greco-Roman civilization, Paul Veyne commented: “I am happy in this Greco-Roman world for several reasons. One is... its religion without a Church. Then there is the fascination I feel for this art which is... close to Italian art, and very different from its Germanic counterpart. Lastly, antiquity is unburdened by identity politics: it is a world civilization that spreads everywhere; it is Greek civilization with Rome as its version in Latin. Hence the absence of ethnic turmoil, because ethnicity and the nation-state have not yet been equated. What a relief!” See also Giardina (2007), from which the quote is taken.

The concept of “sociogenesis”, on the other hand, concerns the processes of social change:

The exploration of civilizing processes demands *sociogenetic* investigations of the overall structure, within a long-term perspective, not only of a single state society but of the social field formed by a specific group of interdependent societies, and of the sequential order in which it changes (Elias, 2000, 411).

Such changes concern the development of national states and supra-national organizations, trade, material and social life.

Like any process of change, civilization has its opposite, which Norbert Elias calls *Entzivilisierung*.<sup>5</sup> This term is difficult to render in another language. It is often incorrectly translated as “decivilization”. *Entzivilisierung* more properly denotes the regression of the civilizing process. It is not just a reduction in the level of civilization – in which case the correct German term would be *Dezivilisierung*, but Elias does not use it – but the total loss of civilization. After this “zeroing”, there must be a reset; civilization must be rebuilt on new foundations.<sup>6</sup> According to Elias, history is not a linear, steady evolution towards civilization. Advances and retreats intersect and overlap throughout the civilizing process. The history of the 20th and 21st centuries provides clear examples (Goldhagen, 2009).

Elias applies the concept of *Entzivilisierung* to various cases (for a review, see Mennell, 1990). Depending on circumstances, he uses the term to mean:

- a) Regression from the standards of peaceful coexistence, as in the case of the Shoah and other mass murders (Elias, 1998). Russia’s recent military aggression against Ukraine is the latest example of how decivilizing processes approach the ideal type of “barbarism”.
- b) The alienation expressed through generational conflicts, as in the case of the terrorist movements of the 1970s (*ibidem*).
- c) The rise of the permissive society, where interpersonal relationships have changed to allow greater informality in how people behave, dress and express themselves. This “relaxation”, according to Elias, can be accepted only because of the institutionally consolidated self-control and capacity to restrain one’s urges that has been secured in modern society (2000, 157).

<sup>5</sup> “[...] working with Norbert Elias’s theories, we need to think in terms of a tension balance between conflicting pressures. It could be argued that decivilizing trends, or decivilizing pressures, are *always* present” (Mennell, 2001, 32).

<sup>6</sup> Two instances of the painful resumption of civilizing processes can be mentioned. The first is the resumption of civilizing processes in Germany after WW2. The second will concern the events, near and far, which will mark the future history of the citizens of the Russian Federation. More generally, on the civilization process in post-World War II Europe, see Betts (2020).

d) Lastly, Elias deals with *Entzivilisierung* as the loss of civilization due to technological innovation (2006) and the changes in cultural institutions it brings (Bianco Ad., 2021).

The concept of *Entzivilisierung* in Elias is therefore plastic, flexible. It evolves over time, along with Elias's research.

### 3. *Decivilizing processes in Italy: violence, aggression, regressions*

Starting from these considerations, we wondered if the concept of decivilization could provide useful insights into a variety of manifestations of violence in Italy, viz.:

- Femicides and gender-based violence<sup>7</sup>
- Violence against the elderly and minors (Istat, 2020)
- Child abuse in the family and parental abuse<sup>8</sup>
- Violence and harassment motivated by disability, ethnicity, origin, sex or gender, sexual orientation (Istat, 2022a; 2022b)
- Violence against healthcare personnel (Rossi, Mele, Punziano, 2022)
- Violence against policemen and Carabinieri<sup>9</sup>
- Assaults on railway personnel by passengers<sup>10</sup>
- Crimes committed by law enforcement
- Fights between gangs scheduled online (Prina, 2019)
- Clashes between soccer fans (Dal Lago, 1990)

<sup>7</sup> The Ministry of the Interior recently published a report on this topic covering the period from August 2021 to July 2022 ([https://www.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/2021-11/2021-\\_sac\\_brochure\\_violenza\\_sulle\\_donne.pdf](https://www.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/2021-11/2021-_sac_brochure_violenza_sulle_donne.pdf)). The report addresses many other acts of violence in addition to femicides.

More generally, it can be observed that the homicide rate in Italy, as in other European countries, has historically been decreasing – not only in recent years. In contrast, the United States, a country in which the murder rate has increased in recent years (Knowles, 2022). Were we to use this indicator alone, Elias's theory of civilizing processes would be corroborated. However, it would be inappropriate to argue that this single variable is sufficient to tap the overall phenomenon of violence, including non-lethal violence.

<sup>8</sup> The more general Istat report on violence against women also covers this topic (<https://www.istat.it/it/violenza-sulle-donne>).

<sup>9</sup> “The Carabinieri Corps, ‘a police force having military status and a general competence and permanently employed in ensuring public safety’ is a key component of the Italian defence and security system” (<https://www.carabinieri.it/>).

<sup>10</sup> On April 1, 2022, the Minister of the Interior Luciana Lamorgese, the Minister of Infrastructure and Sustainable Mobility Enrico Giovannini and other institutional representatives signed two protocols in order to “monitor and improve the safety of local and regional public transport vehicle drivers, to counter attacks and threats to personnel”. See <https://www.trasporti-italia.com/autobus/mims-interno-firmati-due-protocolli-per-la-sicurezza-del-personale-del-trasporto-pubblico/51321>.

- The success of bloody sports such as mixed martial arts (Dal Lago, 2022)
- The perception that cities are unlivable and unsafe (Chiesi, 2004; Commissione parlamentare, 2017).

Such phenomena are often labeled together under headings such as “social unease” or “malaise”. But these social actions are not only characteristic of negatively privileged status groups. Rather, they seem to indicate a clear regression of the level of civilization in interpersonal relationships. Elias’s notion of *Entzivilisierung* can thus be used in the strict sense. In fact, violence in social relations is at the crux of his theory.<sup>11</sup>

- There is a second set of phenomena that do not necessarily result in violent aggression, but which are nevertheless a regression from standards of civilization acquired collectively. They include:
  - The systematic questioning by non-experts of results obtained by scientific disciplines (Specter, 2009)
  - The aggressiveness shown in everyday life as well as in the media, such as the phenomenon of haters on the web (Ziccardi, 2016)
  - The dissemination of arguments based on fantasy and emotionality instead of empirically and rationally based knowledge (Tipaldo *et al. infra*; Lucantoni, Orazi, 2019)
  - The failure to comply with hygiene rules during the Covid-19 epidemic
  - The trivialization of emotions and sentimental voyeurism in the mass media (Di Gregorio, 2017).

One might ask at this point what factors have led in recent decades to the erosion – in Italy, but not only – of some of contemporary societies’ central values (Shils, 1961; Nachtwey, 2017) in the public debate and politics: values such as knowledge, competence, science, and independent judgment. The answer to this question should be sought in the changes that have taken place in the agencies of young people’s socialization, education and training, such as schools and families (Garelli, Palmonari, Sciolla, 2006; Sciolla, D’Agati, 2006).<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Elias does not elaborate on the concept of violence and does not distinguish between the concepts of “aggression” and “violence”. In particular there is no distinction between “expressive violence” (stressed by Elias) and “instrumental violence” (Wieviorka, 2004). For an extensive historical review see Edwards *et al.* (eds., 2020).

<sup>12</sup> A recent overview of the Italian system is offered by Gavosto (2022). See also the section on education and training in the Istat BES (Fair and Sustainable Well-being) report (<https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/269316>), as well as the numerous studies on education and school organization that «Quaderni di Sociologia» has published over the last thirty years. Lastly, the books by Cornali (2005) and Bianco An. (2009) are still useful guides to the educational situation in Italy.

On the current situation of families, see the section devoted to this topic in the 2022

#### 4. Historical roots of decivilizing processes in Italy

The study of civilizing and decivilizing processes encompasses a variety of social phenomena. With regard to Italy, it is a question of examining the country's historical development or, to use Elias's term, the evolution of its national *habitus*. We will now present some research topics which go beyond the content of the papers published in this issue of «Quaderni di Sociologia».

This third set of phenomena is deeply rooted in Italian history, and thus calls for a broader analytical perspective. Italy should be considered in its *longue durée* – the perspective that interested Elias, in Braudel's footsteps – and in terms of its place in the West.

Italy differs from all other European states except Germany (Wehler, 1995; Elias, 1998) in being an imperfect, incomplete, unpacified state (Cassese, 1998; Martinelli, Chiesi, 2002).

Since the country's unification, in fact, its central governments have not been able:

- To monopolize the use of violence, i.e. to eradicate competing organizations such as the mafias. Mafias have an autonomous “taxation system” and a private use of justice and violence (Gambetta, 1992; Sciarrone, 2021).
- To harmonize taxation and defeat rampant tax evasion,<sup>13</sup> which has probably been “normalized” by the frequent tax amnesties declared by various governments in recent decades (Bianco *infra*).
- To reduce the geographic, economic and civil gap between the Center-North and the South (see Cersosimo and Nisticò, 2013; *infra*).
- To monitor and control land use: illegal construction is a widespread practice, at least in some regions.<sup>14</sup>
- To block the rise and persistence of extractive rather than inclusive political and economic institutions (Acemoglu, Robinson, 2012; Felice, 2013), i.e. institutionalized forms of social closure (Parkin, 1978) in some southern regions.
- More generally, to limit the spread if not indeed the normalization of

Istat *Annual Report*. (<https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/271806>). Also see the Istat webpage at <https://www.istat.it/it/files/2020/12/C03.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> In 2018, approximately 42% of Italian taxpayers paid 91% of the country's entire personal income tax revenues; the remaining 58% pays only about 9%. Almost half of Italians (48.4%) do not declare any income (Brambilla, 2020).

<sup>14</sup> According to Istat's BES program (<https://www.istat.it/it/files/2021/03/9.pdf>, domain “landscape and cultural heritage”, indicator “illegal building”), 8.9% of the buildings constructed in Italy in 2018 were illegal, unauthorized by the municipal authorities. There were significant regional differences: the percentage in the Northern regions was 6.1%; in the Center 19.1%; in the South 48.3%, with peaks of 68.4% in Campania, and 67.2% in Basilicata and Calabria.

blatantly illegal behaviors in everyday life (Scamuzzi, 1996; Baldissera, 2006).

In recent decades, Italy has wasted at least three historical opportunities to modernize its social, civil and economic structure: mass education, public welfare, and the adoption of the single European currency.

The promise held out by the first of these opportunities was jeopardized by the abandonment of long-term projects and later by neglect or, if you prefer, by the lack of attention to the quality of teaching, learning and training.<sup>15</sup> This took place in a period of tumultuous changes in advanced countries' economic models: globalization and the challenging entry of new economic players in the international trade and labor market; the decline of Fordism, which had fueled much of Italy's economic development after WW2; and above all, the so-called information revolution (Freeman, Soete, 1985). For ICT to spread in every sector of human activity, more and better education had to be provided. This was accomplished in many European countries, including Switzerland, Sweden and Finland, as well as in Asia, particularly in South Korea. Italy, however, made no such effort. This is why Italian students' average scores in reading literacy, mathematics and science in 2018 were lower than those achieved by students of the same age in other Oecd countries.<sup>16</sup>

Over the past fifty years, resources have been allocated preferably to pensions and social assistance benefits. The annual accumulated deficits that this has caused have been funded from general taxation and public borrowing (Baldissera, 1996; 2019). As a result, public debt has spiraled, and several pivotal public spending programs – for education, research, infrastructure, and policies benefiting families, health and urban renewal – are chronically underfunded. In other words, active and “social investment” policies have been neglected (Morel, Palier, Palme, 2009; Hemerijck, 2018).

Sovereign debt could have been brought down sharply when Italy joined the single European currency. This opportunity was also wasted.

Other consequences that were only to be expected included declines

<sup>15</sup> Plausible indicators of this lack of attention include the number – over three million – and percentage (25.1%, Eurostat, 2020) of NEETs, or young people between 15 and 29 years old who are not in education, employment or training; the decline in academic achievement (reported by Invalsi and Oecd, 2021); the persistently high rates of avoidance of compulsory schooling; and the so-called low-skill equilibrium trap, “a situation in which the low supply of skills is accompanied by low demand from firms” (Oecd, 2017, 20, 161-2).

<sup>16</sup> In these three test sets, Italian 15-year-olds' scores in 2018 were as respectively as follows: 476 compared to the general average of 487 points; 487 compared to the general average of 489 points; and 468 compared to the general average of 489 points. <https://gpseducation.oecd.org/CountryProfile?primaryCountry=ITA&treshold=10&topic=PI>



in economic growth, *per capita* income, birth rate – and therefore, within a few decades, of the resident population. In Italy, economic and civil development has been left out in the cold.

In any case, it should be noted that failure to achieve these great historical goals is not the fault of the political élite alone. Powerful distributive coalitions have continued to pursue opposite interests (Olson, 1982).

In the coming years, we are going to see the outcome of a fourth opportunity to reform and modernize Italy. This time, the opportunity has been offered by the European Union in the form of the Next Generation EU plan. The plan is a financial instrument that will channel resources into six missions which include digitization, ecological transition, and health. With 191.5 billion euros provided by the EU and domestic funding amounting to 43.5 billion, the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, or PNRR in its Italian acronym, could bring about a profound change in Italians' daily lives. However, many of the planned reforms (e.g., those dealing with competition and the land registry) are viewed askance by certain Italian political parties, some of which are demanding that the PNRR be “remodeled”.

As has often been said, the great Italian anomaly lies in the country's labor and total factor productivity, which has stagnated since the 1990s.<sup>17</sup> The situation was worsened by the international financial crisis (2007-2013), the pandemic, and the economic consequences of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Italy was harder hit by these events than other advanced countries. Productivity flagged despite all the innovations made available by new technologies, which fueled spectacular growth in many other national companies and economies. Since these innovations have also been introduced in Italy, touching every sector of economic and social life, it must be assumed that forces are at work which can completely nullify their advantages.

The public sphere has lost its appetite for innovation: not only for technical-scientific inventions, but also for the incremental, everyday innovations typical of economic, organizational and social processes. Efforts are being made to make up for lost time, at least as far as R&D is concerned (CNR, 2021). Currents of opinion have emerged that seek to undermine scientific and technical knowledge, expertise and independent judgment in public debate (Cosentino, 2020). To some extent, these values have also been shunted aside in the public sphere, thanks to the efforts of political movements that espouse favor policies of clientelistic populism, where money is transferred to specific social groups in order to win votes (Muddle, Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017; Müller, 2016; Piattoni,

<sup>17</sup> More precisely: in the period 1995-2020, total factor productivity dropped by an average of 0.1% per year ([https://www.istat.it/it/files/2021/12/Misure-di-produttivita-C3%A0\\_1995\\_2020.pdf](https://www.istat.it/it/files/2021/12/Misure-di-produttivita-C3%A0_1995_2020.pdf)).

2018). We could also say: in Italy the well-being of citizens, of all citizens, is no longer a political goal.

The usual belief – among political figures, but not only – is that economic stagnation is detrimental to social integration, and thus causes the spread of uncivilized or illegal behavior. From this vantage point, all of the phenomena covered by the umbrella term “social malaise” are generally explained by economic variables. Consequently, the proposed remedies are also often purely economic and redistributive. Frequently, they involve creating new public debt (totaling around 150% of Italian GDP in 2022), euphemistically labelled “departure from the balanced budget”. And just as frequently, they are legitimized with noble claims of “fighting inequalities”. An admirable aim indeed, were it also to address the causal sources.

In other words, and in a nutshell, the civilizing process in Italy has been hobbled by the way the unified state was formed, from 1860 onwards. In the post-WW2 years, and after several decades of strong economic development, the missed opportunities recalled above (particularly the failure to reform education) fostered economic stagnation and exacerbated the decivilizing processes, especially in the Mezzogiorno. Far from stemming from recent economic decline, “social malaise” is a historical Italian problem. It is more likely that the decivilizing processes discussed here – widespread illegality in particular – have hindered and still hinder Italy’s economic growth in various ways.

In conclusion, the concepts of civilizing and decivilizing have attracted little or no attention from the sociological community and the political class in Italy. However, civil development (or its opposite) may be a major causal factor for economic development (Lockwood, 1996). Both are influenced by institutions and political decisions, at the local and national level. This hypothesis is not new, as it has been explored in many sociological studies (for a summary see Boudon, Bourricaud, 2011, entry on “Development”).

The interaction between institutions, political decisions, and civil and economic development could be one of the most relevant issues for future sociological research in Italy. Here, normative and positive beliefs, political and cultural institutions, socialization processes, and social behaviors all come into play. Investigating them is a question of describing phenomena similar to those we have discussed above – where there have been few systematic analyses, controlling their variations over time, and comparing them with those observed in other areas or regions, in Italy and elsewhere. The same can be said about the diffusion of these phenomena between occupational groups or, to use another expression, between classes and social strata.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Italy’s most disadvantaged social classes have grown in number in recent years, inspiring some observers to re-introduce the term “neoplebeians” (Perulli, Vettoretto, 2022). For a critical discussion of the action of marginalized social groups (the “under-class”) see for example Wacquant (2004).

## 5. *The contributions to this special section*

Adele Bianco uses the term “shame” as thematized by Elias and applies it to tax evasion in Italy. Though tax evasion is by no means unknown in other advanced countries, it is more tolerated in Italy, sometimes justified, and also enjoys political “support”. In *The Civilizing Process*, Elias dealt with taxation and the concepts of shame, civilization and decivilization. Bianco argues that the lack of (a sense of) shame about tax evasion in Italy is an indicator of decivilization (or lack of civilization). This behavior can be attributed to declining social cohesion and a weak sense of belonging and citizenship.

Signs of decivilization can be seen in the modes of verbal interaction, or more often in open conflict, among “experts”. Giuseppe Tipaldo and coauthors use the Covid-19 pandemic to shed light on emerging dynamics in techno-scientific controversies. They then provide ample empirical evidence of some symptoms of decivilization by drawing on a large corpus of textual data retrieved from Facebook. They show that most of the clashes in science take the form of an interdisciplinary conflict where exponents of neighboring disciplines struggle to consolidate, expand or defend their own territory on the map of knowledge in which they are legitimized to speak of Covid-19 with authority and credibility.

Cersosimo and Nisticò examine the multidimensionality of inequalities in Italy. The territorial gaps are significant. These inequalities affect whether and how people can access essential public services such as health, education, mobility, safety, and quality of the environment. With fewer and lower quality public services, some places or regions thus become less attractive. As a result, they lose population, causing a generalized impoverishment. The latter translates into a loss of skilled labor and less demand for goods and services. The pandemic has aggravated these processes, amplifying geographical inequalities in Italy. The persistence of wide geographical gaps in many areas of economic and social life is a distinctive aspect of the civilizing-decivilizing process in contemporary Italy.

Maddalena Cannito, Luca Falzea and Paola Maria Torrioni scrutinize gender socialization processes through an Eliasian lens, supplemented with Connell’s theory of the configurations of practices. They seek to determine whether and to what extent the civilizing process, which has led to less legitimacy and a progressive abandonment of the use of violence by the *pater familias*, has also resulted in effective gender equality between parents and between male and female children. The analysis of a large number of qualitative interviews with parents and children reveals that gender differences persist in the practices of defending women from what is perceived as a dangerous, male chauvinist outside world.

Lastly, Alon Helled compares some properties of the Italian and Israeli political system. He wonders if instability and fragmentation can be

considered a form of decivilization in both systems. Starting from Elias's theory, Helled discusses the construction of shared national identity and the sense of belonging. Beyond the differences between the two countries, Helled identifies the socio-political and socio-cultural factors that result in a very weak feeling of common belonging. Based on Elias's conception of social figurations, Helled's analysis focuses on three historical-social properties that define the collective "self" of both Italy and Israel: 1) the nation-state model, 2) the democratic regime, 3) republicanism.

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*Post scriptum.*

In memoriam: *Oleksandr Ivanovych Kisluyk* was born in 1962. Inter alia, he rendered in *Ukrainian Studien über die Deutschen of Norbert Elias*.

Reportedly, on or before March 5, 2022, he was shot during the Bucha massacre, near Kyiv ([https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oleksandr\\_Kysljuk](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oleksandr_Kysljuk)).

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