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Mabel Berezin
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Introduction

The rightwing populist moment as historical surprise

Prologue: Festa del Lavoro, 1984, Turin, Italy

On May 1, 1984, I boarded a city bus in a working-class neighborhood of Turin, Italy to take the twenty-minute ride to the center of the city to attend the annual May Day Parade. The first of May, then and now, is a legal holiday throughout most of Europe – a day set aside to honor the dignity of labor and a holiday that is increasingly a vestige of an "old" European social contract that "new" Europe is slowly rewriting. I was new to Italy and hardly spoke the language. I was a graduate student beginning work on a project that would eventually become a doctoral dissertation on Italian fascism. If there were such an entity as an ideal vantage point to observe the celebration of European labor, Turin in 1984 would be a propitious choice. Turin was historically among the reddest of the red cities in the industrial core of Italy. Turin, the adopted home of Antonio Gramsci who founded the Italian Communist Party there in 1921, had a long history of commitment to Italian communism in its intellectual and working-class circles. Militantly anti-fascist in the 1930s, Turin was a site of intense working-class protest and mobilization in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Bobbio 1979; Passerini 1984; Bagnasco 1986).[1]

More than simply a bastion of Italian communism, Turin was and is a place suffused with Italian and European history. Turin was the first capital of Italy. The original Italian Parliament, as well as Cavour's seat within it, remains intact. Liberalism as a political tradition had never had deep roots in Italy. The Turinese circle around Piero Gobetti in the 1920s

[1] It may seem odd to begin a book of political and cultural analysis with a memory. However, in so doing I follow the current trend in ethnography toward reflexivity, that is the conscious insertion of the researcher into the narrative for the purpose of increasing analytic precision. See Burawoy (2003) on the concept of a "revisit."

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represented what liberal tradition Italy could lay claim to (Gobetti 2000). In 1948, Italians turned to Luigi Einaudi, a member of a prominent Turinese family, a leading exponent of liberalism and the Governor of the Bank of Italy, to serve as the first postwar President of the Italian Republic.

In May 1984, Turin, Italy and Europe were decidedly "old" Europe. The Italian Communist Party still existed and the Berlin Wall stood. Although the Iron Curtain was beginning to rust, it was still very much a meaningful metaphor for political division. May 1984 was five years away from the fall of the Berlin Wall and eight years away from the Maastricht Treaty. In spring 1984, old Europe commemorated the fortieth anniversary of D-Day, June 6, 1944, the day the Allies landed on the beaches of Normandy and beat back Nazism and fascism. On June 6, 1984, then American President Ronald Reagan went to Normandy to link the previous World War to his plans for missile bases in Europe. In 1984, the European Community consisted of only ten member states. The European Parliament had its second round of elections on June 14, 1984. "New" Europe was on the horizon. In February 1984, Altiero Spinelli, an Italian proponent of federalism, drafted a Treaty on European Union which passed with a large majority in the European Parliament (Moravcsik 1998, pp. 356–358).

On May 1, 1984, Italian party structures that had been in place since the end of World War II were virtually unchanged.[2] In May 1984, Turin was an Italian Communist Party (PCI) city and the culture of communism was thick. It was reasonable for me to assume that on May Day one could learn much about the élan and spirit of Italian communism – as well as Italian political culture. It was with these expectations that I boarded the bus on that gray spring morning. Like any immigrant to a foreign and unfamiliar culture, I was eager to take in as much as possible to help me make my way in that milieu; and like any immigrant with less than fluent language skills, I had to rely on my eyes, my emotions, my inner sense – I had to read the signs and images in the streets and on the faces of those whom I encountered.

What I observed in 1984 is salient today which is why I remember the otherwise unremarkable gray day. The neighborhood where I boarded the bus, the Piazza Fontanesi, was a working-class district par excellence.

[2] The historic convention wherein the Italian Communist Party (PCI) became the Democratic Party of the Left was seven years in the future. Kertzer (1996) provides the fullest account of this convention. In 1992, the Italian Communist Party abandoned its major symbol when it replaced the hammer and sickle on the party flag with a tree. In so doing, it not only changed a symbol but broke its link with its history.

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Little machine shops that spewed out soot and noise throughout the neighborhood intermingled with apartment houses built in the 1930s. Shopkeepers who owned the small fruit, milk, bread and poultry shops that lined the main street and habitués of the small cafés still spoke Piemontese, the dialect of the region. The neighborhood around the Piazza Fontanesi represented working-class Turin, and working-class Italy at its peak. The bus that I boarded that day to head to the center of Turin was crowded with elderly men whom one did not see during the ordinary work week. These working-class men in their seventies and eighties who had put on their best clothes, worn but sturdy jackets and suits, clearly purchased as Sunday best in the 1950s and 1960s were striking. They had placed red carnations in their lapels and were heading to the center of town to join the parade. Their clothes as well as the camaraderie among the men highlighted the ritual significance of the event to them.

The annual May 1 commemoration was a performative event through which the Italian and European left acted out its political commitments. As May Day is an official holiday in Italy as well as most of the rest of Europe one does not have to be retired or unemployed to join or watch the parade.[3] To my surprise, when I got to the center of Turin and began to walk along the sides of the streets to follow the parade, old men with red carnations dominated the scene. In one of the most vibrant and politically engaged cities in Italy, and arguably Europe, home of worker movements and women's movements, there were no workers, no middle-aged men or women and, more importantly, no young people in the streets.[4] Not only was the activist generation, the 60s' generation, missing but there were no signs of the next generation. Where were they? Where were the people who today would be thirty-eight- to forty-eight-year-old leftists?[5]

There was a youth presence at the parade – but not the youth that I had expected. Who, I asked, were these apparently Middle Eastern students – Iranian, Palestinian women in veils, men with black-and-white checked headscarves – who were out in force on that gray day more than twenty years ago demanding justice and representation? Read from the vantage

[3] On the ritual significance of May Day celebration, see Boldini (1998).
[4] Tarrow (1989) is the paradigmatic work on social movements and militancy in Italy during the late 1960s and 1970s. Lumley (1990) provides a cultural analysis of the period; Hellman (1987) studies women as political actors.
[5] Popular culture in the form of Marco Tullio Giordana's 2003 epic, *La meglio gioventù*, provides one answer – activists as well as their children have retreated to private life. The trans-European popularity of the film, astonishing given its six-hour length, indicates that Giordana struck a resonant chord. Golden (1997) describes the defeat of labor politics in Italy during this period.

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point of the present, those signs in the streets, signs that were not unique to Italy, were a harbinger of events to come.

If the world had stopped changing on that spring day in 1984, Reagan's "evil empire" would still exist. Eastern and Western Europe would remain divided. Terrorism would be a local and national phenomenon and Islam merely a religion. Globalization was not yet a part of the public vocabulary.[6] Old Europe, the agglomeration of political ideologies and practices, institutional arrangements and national political cultures, would remain largely unchanged from their consolidation in the nineteenth century. In 1984, it would have been as difficult to imagine that the Italian and European left would cease to be a potent oppositionist force to the march of markets as it would have been difficult to imagine that Islam would be a force in European politics. In 1984, Europe was national. It would have been difficult to imagine then that if one wrote about domestic contestation in Italy, or France or Germany or the Netherlands, one would also have to incorporate the larger entity of Europe into the analysis.

In 1984, European public discourse did not connect routinely the words "neo" and "liberalism." At that point, neoliberalism evoked Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan – not something that characterized continental or Nordic Europe.[7] The signs of something new were nonetheless apparent in the halls of public policy as well as in the streets. Across the Alps in France, on May 10, 1984, French President François Mitterand gave an interview to *Libération* newspaper on the occasion of the third anniversary of his election. The socialist President surprised his constituency by announcing his plans to create "a society with a mixed economy, a state closer to the people and a market more accommodating to the creators of businesses [*enterprises*] and aware of the aspirations of workers" (*L'Année Politique* 1984, p. 45). On June 17, 1984, the French National Front acquired ten seats in the European Parliament. In December 1984, Bernard Stasi, who in 2003 headed the commission that restricted the wearing of religious symbols in public places, published a report entitled, *Immigration, a Chance for France* (1984) that defended the contribution of immigrants to French life. The contours of future change were becoming visible.

[6] Fiss and Hirsch (2005) show that the term "globalization" only began to take off as a concept in the early 1990s and did not achieve widespread usage until the late 1990s.

[7] Harvey's (2005) brief historical introduction to neoliberalism identifies Sweden as an example of "circumscribed neoliberalism" (p. 115). On the introduction of neoliberalism to the French as well as European polity, see Fourcade-Gourinchas and Babb (2002) and Prasad (2005; 2006).

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Old Europe, new Europe and the postwar "world of security"

In 1984, old Europe was on the verge of becoming new Europe. It was one of the last years of the postwar "world of security" – a term that Stefan Zweig, the Austrian essayist and novelist, popularized in the context of World War II. He began his autobiography with a description of the prewar "World of Security": "When I attempt to find a simple formula for the period in which I grew up, prior to the First World War, I hope that I convey its fullness by calling it the Golden Age of Security. Everything in our almost thousand year old Austrian monarchy seemed based on permanency, and the State itself was the chief guarantor of this stability ... The feeling of security was the most eagerly sought-after possession of millions, the common ideal of life. Only the possession of this security made life seem worthwhile" (Zweig 1943, pp. 1–2).[8]

Zweig's description of the "world of security" and the collective emotional attachment that it implied resonated as much with post-World War II Europe as with the interwar period. Tradition and hierarchy governed Zweig's "world of security." He invoked the Austrian monarchy as its infelicitous primary symbol. Yet the differences between the two periods were differences of degree, not of kind. Arguably, after witnessing the horrors of World War II and the Nazi genocide, security was paramount in the minds of European citizens and rulers alike.

Postwar European security was a material, as well as an emotional, state of collective well-being that was socially solidaristic, economically redistributive and international (Alesina and Giavazzi 2006). High productivity and growth were the economic pillars of postwar security. The Cold War and the threat of nuclear proliferation did little to undermine the basic feeling of security that permeated postwar European society. Eichengreen's (2006) exhaustive history of the postwar European economy describes the period as a "golden age." The French have labeled the same period the *Trente Glorieuses* – the Thirty Glorious Years. The German and Italian economies were "economic miracles."

By 1984, the social safety net associated with the postwar social contract was beginning to fray. The "end of ideology" politics associated with neoliberal economic policy that was unthinkable in Europe in 1984 is now more the norm. Europeans either stay away from the polls – abstention rates have increased – or vote in a volatile fashion that suggests no deep cultural or ideological commitments. The Muslim students who

[8] Zweig, a Jewish émigré, wrote his autobiography, *The World of Yesterday* (1943), as he fled the Nazis. He committed suicide in exile in Brazil shortly after completing this work.

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seemed mysterious in 1984 are now a constitutive feature of the urban landscape of contemporary Europe and a potent political force.

Since 1984, the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe coupled with the twin and interconnected processes of Europeanization – the expanding process of European integration – and globalization have altered the social and political landscape of contemporary Europe (Berezin 2003). Insecurity in both the public and private domains has been one response to these processes. Fear – of immigrants, crime, disease, unemployment – has become a recurrent theme in European public discourse. Europeanization and globalization have fueled social and cultural anxieties that imbue the rhetoric of fear with emotional resonance as well as political salience.[9] Rightwing populist parties and movements, a label of classificatory convenience rather than strict analytic precision as these parties and movements have as many differences as commonalities, have thrived in the European climate of insecurity. Although the European right is not alone in its evocation of insecurity, it has arguably been the most effective in bringing the emotion of fear to the foreground of political discourse. The events of September 11 in the United States and the increased possibility of terrorist activities in Europe have solidified the rhetoric of fear and insecurity as a legitimate political stance.[10]

Rightwing populism and European integration gained momentum during the 1990s – a temporal coincidence that matters. European integration, an instance of enforced transnationalism, challenges the standard prerogatives of the territorially defined nation-state. The accelerated pace of European integration disequilibrates the existing mix of national cultures and legal norms that governs those nation-states. An unintended consequence of disequilibration is the weakening of the national social contracts that threatens to make the national space "unfamiliar" to many of its citizens. "Unfamiliarity" is more than simply a feeling of disorientation: it has practical consequences.

The modern nation-state is the institutional location of a relation between a polity and a people that provides security for its members. Legal institutions of the modern nation-state, such as citizenship requirements, structurally inscribe individuals in the polity and society. National cultural practices from common language to shared norms cognitively and emotionally inscribe individuals in the polity and society. *Experience*,

[9] Anderson and Pontusson (2007) use OECD data that distinguish between the fact and perception of economic insecurity.

[10] Robin (2004) discusses "fear" as a political idea and emotion. Berezin (2002) explores the interaction between the emotions of security and insecurity and their effect upon political institutions and behavior.

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individual and collective, is a temporal and cognitive phenomenon that consciously or unconsciously draws upon the past to assess the future.[11] Experience creates a tension between imagined possibilities and perceptions of constraint. Social, cultural and monetary capital draws the boundaries of experience that permit individuals and groups to negotiate between institutions and culture. Postwar Europe, for the most part, minimized tensions between national culture and national institutions. The postwar European nation-state was an arena that adjudicated risk for its members. Capital in all its dimensions was national. "Social Europe" and the need to preserve it, a *pro-forma* comment built into integration discourse, is an acknowledgement of postwar social solidarity.

The collective and individual experience of old Europe was national *and* solidaristic; the evolving experience of "new" Europe is individualistic, albeit with a dose of ambivalence and nostalgia. In terms of the argument of this book, "new" Europe, writ large, can be conceptualized as an opportunity space primarily for individuals and groups who are able to compete in trans-European economic, social and cultural markets – the "eurostars" that Favell (2008) chronicles. For a host of reasons, this is a restricted group, as evidenced by the 2005 defeat of the referenda on the European constitution in France and the Netherlands. In the month before the referendum on the European constitution in France, *Le Monde* described the typical "convinced European" as a "male, citizen of less than thirty-nine years, educated, of the center left or center right."[12] The living exemplar of *Le Monde*'s dry statistical profile emerged in an interview given to the *International Herald Tribune* on the day after the referendum. A thirty-six-year-old male who "works in an Internet Company" claimed "I am embarrassed for France . . . I travel a lot for work and have a lot of friends across Europe. My Italian and my Spanish friends just don't understand what is happening in France – I don't either."[13]

[11] Historians (for example, Scott 1996; LaCapra 2004, Chapter 1; Jay 2005) who privilege experience as an analytic category tend to focus on individual subjects. Their approach is inductive and contrasts to the deductive and collective conceptualization of experience that this book offers. See Throop (2003) for a critique from the perspective of anthropology.

[12] Nicholas Weill, "En trente ans, l'euroscepticisme n'a cessé de croître sur tout le continent." *Le Monde* (Paris) April 4, 2005. Citations to newspapers are referenced by publication name, place of publication, author where appropriate and date of publication. If a page number is available, it is noted. Many of the citations from the French newspapers came from the Dossiers de Presse, a clipping file, at the library of Science-Po in Paris, France. Unfortunately, the page numbers of articles were often cut off and replaced with an official "date stamp." Many of the articles from the more mainstream French newspapers may also be found on the web where page numbers are also not noted.

[13] Katrin Bennhold, "France Turns Out for Vote on the EU: Political Class Braces for Rejection." *International Herald Tribune* (Paris), May 30, 2005.

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In contrast to the bewildered mobile male Internet consultant and his trans-European colleagues, the experience of the ordinary European is still national – that is, their cultural and social capital, as well as their economic possibilities, are still firmly tied to the national state (Díez Medrano 2003). The disconnection between past experience and a European future that is oriented to the market rather than to the collectivity is fueling a reassertion of nation-ness that characterizes the rightwing populist moment.

Early theorists of modern democracy understood that feeling safe in one's political space was a cornerstone of democracy that enabled citizens to empathize with others. In the beginning of the *Politics*, Aristotle underscored the link between security and democracy among citizens when he emphasized the need of "common safety" among members of the polity – the "rulers and ruled" (Aristotle 1979, p. 29). Contemporary discussions of democracy have elided the discussion of security that was crucial to earlier formulations. Europe as a fully realized political and cultural space, as institutionalized in the European Union of now twenty-seven member states, has compromised the link between democracy and security, broadly conceived as social, political and cultural, that was the cornerstone of the postwar settlement. By moving the center of political gravity from the polity to the person, from the state to the market, Europeanization has compromised the bonds of democratic empathy and provided an opportunity for rightwing populists to articulate a discourse of fear and insecurity.

The rightwing populist moment as historical surprise: the argument in brief

The accelerated process of Europeanization that includes political, economic and cultural integration is the core trans-European context, I suggest, within which the rightwing populist moment emerged. Synergy exists between "new" Europe's rightwing populist moment and the transformation, if not outright disappearance, of the postwar "world of security."[14] Despite the presence of political terrorism in Italy and other parts of Europe during the student agitations of the 1960s and early 1970s, no one – academics, journalists or politicians – would have imagined in 1984 that rightwing populist parties would become a significant presence in

[14] The debate over security has often taken the form of the debate over welfare and social Europe. See Pontusson (2005), Mares (2003) and Offe (2003) for recent discussions. With the exception of Offe (2003), most of these authors work with a more restricted material conception of security.

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European politics. Yet, today this is the case. The fluctuating electoral success of rightwing political parties is the most salient empirical indicator of an emergent rightwing populist moment. Rightwing parties are not new to European politics. A majority of European nation-states have such parties – some dating back to the 1930s (Pettigrew 1998; Eatwell 2000).[15] What is new is that parties that analysts had viewed as extremist and fringe now attract sufficient numbers of votes to sometimes become part of legally constituted governing coalitions.[16]

An analytically sensible starting date for the rightwing populist moment is March 1994 when Gianfranco Fini's "post-fascist" National Alliance became part of an Italian governing coalition. The short-lived 1994 Silvio Berlusconi government was the first instance in the democratic parts of postwar Western Europe where the right so visibly emerged as a legitimate political actor (Ginsborg 2003, pp. 285–324). In 1994, the genre of political parties to which the National Alliance belonged appeared as an exception to the prevailing political rules. From the vantage point of today, these parties appear more as fixtures than as fissures on the European political landscape.

In March 1998, Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front made a significant showing in the French regional elections (for analysis see Perrineau and Reynié 1999). In April 2002, the first round of the French presidential elections gave Le Pen enough votes to have become President of the Republic – if he had won the second round. In February 2000, Jörg Haider's Freedom Party became part of an Austrian governing coalition – that unraveled, and reemerged periodically. International alarm and public outcry in the national and international public spheres followed these events in Italy, France and Austria.[17] In the Austrian case, the European Union applied sanctions. In addition to these more prominent cases, fringe parties have posed significant parliamentary threats in Switzerland, Belgium, the Netherlands and Denmark.[18]

[15] I make this observation to underscore that in some cases there is a degree of formal continuity between old and new rightwing parties, not to imply that there is substantive similarity between the past and the present.

[16] Norris (2005, p. 8) reports a graph of mean votes for seven radical rightwing parties in Western Europe that displays an unbroken curve from 1980 to 2004. This curve begins to level off in 2002 and the figure, although striking, should be interpreted with caution.

[17] Van de Steeg (2006) has analyzed the trans-European component of the reaction to Haider's electoral victory. Haider died in a car accident in October 2008.

[18] Hossay (2002) provides profiles including electoral data of rightwing parties in eleven European nation-states. Eatwell (2000, p. 408) provides a list of rightwing political parties and the percentage of the vote that they captured between 1996 and 1999. Norris (2005, p. 59) covers the same ground but takes statistics to 2004 in a much more visually compelling way.

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Despite exceptions such as Holmes' (2000) anthropological account and Art's (2006) historical analysis, the rightwing populist moment lacks an analytic and theoretical narrative that situates it within the changing political, social and cultural context of contemporary Europe.[19] Noisy cadres of militants expressing extremist positions of various sorts distract from nuanced analysis of rightwing populist parties. The recurrent popularity of the genre of parties that constitute the rightwing populist moment suggests that they are expressions of deeper social phenomena that the explanations of mainstream political science based on party strategy, electoral behavior and public opinion surveys only partially capture.

Wide fluctuations in electoral politics and outcomes suggest that the salience of rightwing parties represents *thin* rather than *thick* commitments on the part of a volatile European electorate. *Thick* commitments characterize party militants with a deep commitment to xenophobia and a simple-minded ethnic nationalism. These are the activists that Klandermans and Mayer (2006) have recently profiled. While political extremism of all stripes may generate violence and hatred, it tends not to make large electoral inroads. Skinheads do not win political campaigns. The ever variable *thin* commitments of disgruntled citizens are sociologically and culturally more interesting and politically more important. *Thin* commitments make urgent the recalibration of the standard categories that analysts typically deploy to discuss the right.

Social scientists who study rightwing populism in contemporary Europe frequently explain it as a xenophobic response to the increased presence of non-Western immigrants in diverse nation-states. In these formulations, rightwing populism is morally unfortunate but politically unsurprising. This book takes a different stance. It starts from the position that contemporary rightwing populism represents a historical surprise, not a political and social certainty. Migration, whether for employment, family reunification or political asylum, is an undeniable fact of past, as well as present, European experience. Immigrants may be a necessary but not a sufficient condition to account for the contemporary right. As Hall (2003, p. 398) cautions, "correlation is not causation."

This book views the emergence of the rightwing populist moment in the 1990s in various European venues as an unexpected, rather than an expected or natural, event. It asks whether there would be a rightwing populist moment in the absence of Maastricht and the subsequent intensification of Europeanization. This formulation suggests compelling

[19] One reason for the lack of nuanced writing on the right is that ethnic conflict and nationalism have captured the scholarly space that such studies would normally occupy.

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