

activism, as Baldina di Vittorio Berti, a UDI member quoted by Pojmann, seems unconsciously to reveal: 'it is necessary to explain that our common ideal of the emancipation of woman is subordinated to the safeguarding of peace' (p. 111); in the context of those years and from the perspective of a Communist militant, the safeguarding of peace meant ultimately the safeguarding of Soviet security and a denuclearised Europe.) Pojmann however implicitly addresses this issue, emphasising the gradual process by which both the UDI and CIF 'reaffirmed their autonomy by directly confronting the political parties, trade unions, Catholic organizations and the Vatican on outmoded ideas of gender' (p. 15). The theme could be extended and analysed more deeply, in particular with regards to the question as to whether, beyond a pure 'political activism' (p. 183), feminist movements were effectively able to react to the pressure of the international political context of the Cold War and to avoid a simple exploitation of feminist themes on the part of major political parties.

*Italian Women and International Cold War Politics* is a comprehensive and well-structured study of post-war Italian feminism based on a detailed study of primary sources and events. It lays the foundations for further investigations, which, relying on this thorough analysis, could integrate the historical reconstruction presented by Pojmann with a critical interpretation of the processes of politicisation of feminist activism identified by this work.

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**Cattolici e violenza politica. L'altro album di famiglia del terrorismo italiano**, by Guido Panvini, Venice, Marsilio Editori, 2014, 400 pp., €22.00, ISBN 978-88-317-3-6688

Scholars have underlined the religious or quasi-religious dimension of Italian terrorism since the late 1970s, yet the connections between Catholic culture and political violence have rarely been addressed. Sociological case studies on terrorist groups, despite their major contribution to our understanding of the religious features of underground organisations and violence, have lost sight of the historical depth and specificity of a Catholic culture that pervasively permeated collective identities, values and ideological frames and contributed to the development and handing down of attitudes of enmity towards established political structures.

Guido Panvini's densely written and admirably documented book corrects this historiographical deficit by examining the complex interactions between Italian Catholicism and the origination, dissemination and radicalisation of a political culture of violence that culminated in the 'Years of Lead' (*anni di piombo*). The author focuses on the specific role of Catholic culture and institutions, including the constellation of lay Christian associations, groups and trade unions, in creating a motivational and ideological space for violence and for providing a 'transcendent purpose' to a generation in search of meaning in life. This process of constituting a culture of violence, Panvini argues, cannot be completely ascribed to 'the particular predisposition of Christians towards a totalizing vision of life or faith in absolute values' (p. 380), or to the Church's deep-rooted hostility towards the state, which negatively affected citizens' trust in the political authorities and public philosophy. Rather, he suggests, it is

necessary to look at the disintegrative processes that arose from the rapid social and cultural modernisation and to the intense phenomenon of secularisation that marked Italian society in the 1960s and 1970s, to explain the emergence of a distinctive Catholic culture that prevented an unconditional and unreserved condemnation of violence and advocacy of non-violent methods of conflict resolution.

From the contextualisation of violence in broader political socio-economic and cultural processes, Panvini rejects any interpretation of political violence and terrorism as psychological and behavioural deviance. Instead, he looks at the power of theological metaphors and images of liberation, eschatological visions of social justice, apocalyptic expectations, cultural myths, rebellious fantasies and those collective representations that shaped the social behaviour of individuals in political action and provided moral legitimisation and justification for violence.

Panvini indicates the crisis of July 1960, and the massacre of Reggio Emilia (when five demonstrators were killed by police), as the 'precipitating' events that intensified divisions and antagonistic beliefs within political Catholicism, triggering a process of polarisation around pre-existing cleavages (anti-communism/communism) and around antithetical conceptions of social order and moral right (capitalism/anti-capitalism). The polarisation and moralisation of politics undermined the position of moderate Catholics, who drifted either towards a more explicit right-wing anti-communism or embraced a more aggressive criticism of the 'bourgeois' and capitalist value system.

Panvini maps the progressive polarisation of the political spectrum starting from the outraged reaction of conservative/moderate and pro-Atlantic sections of the Christian Democrats to the formation of the centre-Left (based on a DC-PSI coalition), which they considered the harbinger of the Communist Party's seizure of power. The precipitating of demands for the constitution of a united anti-communist front, inclusive of the neo-fascists of the MSI, together with an intensified recourse to anti-totalitarian rhetoric and the theological theorisation of 'violent resistance' to a tyrannical power reflected, according to Panvini, 'not so much a rebellion, but rather a calling for State preemptive repressive action against the advance of the Left in Italian society' (p. 63). The reconstruction of the political-theological debate around the question of the legitimacy of violence, which interpreted in an anti-communist manner the writings of Augustine and Origen of Alexandria and those of scholastic philosophers such as Thomas Aquinas, John of Salisbury and Marsilius of Padua, is especially interesting. Likewise, the author deserves credit for emphasising the influence of French Catholic *intégrisme* and the OAS (Organisation de l'armée secrète) on Italian ultra-traditionalist Catholicism and neo-fascism, providing a model of clandestine armed resistance and a significant antecedent in the implementation of unorthodox and unconventional forms of violent actions.

Panvini's examination of the interrelationship between Catholicism and the process of radicalisation of the 'New Left' is particularly convincing. The author carefully outlines the cultural climate marked by the national liberation movements in the Third World, the appeal of the 'guerrilla' spread by the myth of the Roman Catholic priest Camilo Torres and Che Guevara, the writings of Mao Tse Tung, Herbert Marcuse's critique of technological rationality as well as the tales of the missionaries in Africa, Asia and Latin America and the popularisation of the bias against consumerism that drove progressive Catholic youth groups towards Marxism. Alongside this anti-imperialist frame, which indisputably provided symbolic resources for violence and the boosting of a widespread Christian-Communist culture of dissent, Panvini highlights the consequences of the Second Vatican Council and the increasing aversion of the Church to the ideology of liberal capitalism, conceived as a cult of Mammon, in the legitimisation of violence. Here, Panvini emphasises the resounding effects of the encyclical *Progressio Populorum*, in

which Paul VI recognised the morality of revolutionary uprisings against poverty, oppression, inequality and all those other forms of injustice that were inherent in the social and economic structures of society. While openly discouraging violent revolution, Paul VI's encyclical was widely endorsed in Latin America (epitomised by the emergence of Liberation theology), and helped to create an 'indissoluble linkage between violence, revolution and [the] Christian message' (p. 266) among Leftist radical groups and organisations in Italy. According to Panvini, this process of politicisation of the Christian faith, which markedly accelerated during 1968, is characteristic of the biographies of numerous militants of the armed struggle, such as Renato Curcio, Margherita Cagol, Giorgio Semeria and others.

More problematic is Panvini's analysis of the relationship between Catholicism and neo-fascism. Both Catholic traditionalism and the Radical Right had formulated a radical critique of modernity, interpreted as an age dominated by unbridled materialism, hedonism, chaos and decline of spiritual values. Nevertheless, excluding neo-fascists' admiration for the ultra-orthodox Corneliu Codreanu's Iron Guard and Leon Degrelle's Rexisme, neo-fascism developed a concept of 'tradition' that was different from the one expressed by Catholicism. Here, Panvini disregards that neo-fascists' intellectual influences mainly derived from 'integral traditionalism' and neo-paganism (Julius Evola, Rene Guenon etc.), Eastern spiritualism and Indo-European mythologies as well as German Romanticism, Conservative Revolutionary literature, and authors such as Yukio Mishima, Knut Hamsun and Gottfried Benn.

In the last part of the book, Panvini retraces the dramatic escalation of violence that reached its height in the assassination of Aldo Moro, and the ambiguous position of important sectors and figures of Left Catholicism (*in primis* Corrado Corghi), in perennial oscillation between utopian and 'revolutionary temptations' and the Christian rejection of violent methods for the emancipation of the poor and the oppressed. The book ends with the Comitati comunisti rivoluzionari surrendering three large bags of weapons to Cardinal Martini's secretary, Father Paolo Cortesi, on 13 June 1984, symbolically indicating not only the ebbing of armed struggle and the beginning for many militants of individual paths of expiation and redemption, but also the decline of the great ideologies of the twentieth century and the rise of a new post-ideological world.

Unfortunately, the transition from individual or collective propensity to action to performed acts of violence and the dynamics of escalation and de-escalation of political violence and terrorism remain largely unexamined in the book. Also, the author overlooks the religiously inspired practices of terrorist groups (ritual and symbolic processes and coercive normative boundaries) and the fact that religious meanings are often inscribed in the act of violence itself, through the staged performing of sacrificial rituals.

In conclusion, the book represents a major contribution to the research on Italian terrorism and an essential study for the understanding of the intimate relations between Catholicism and political radicalism. It not only lays the basis for further research on the political culture of extremist movements, repertoires of strategies and actions and their evolution throughout protracted terrorist campaigns, but also encourages a broader analysis of the failure of democratic political culture and institutions in containing the radicalising effects of the 'crises of modernisation' in contemporary Italy.

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