

BOOK REVIEWS

Italia ribelle. Sommosse popolari e rivolte militari nel 1920

by **Andrea Ventura**, Rome, Carocci Editore, 2020, 195 pp., €21.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-88-290-0407-2

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Why did political violence erupt across Europe in the immediate aftermath of the First World War? For many years the dominant explanation relied on George L. Mosse's thesis of the 'brutalisation of politics' caused by the experiences of soldiers in the war. Twenty-first century historians have pointed out, however, the growing prevalence of political violence immediately before the First World War, and the important role of young paramilitaries who had never performed military service, as well as other flaws within this model. Andrea Ventura's *Italia ribelle. Sommosse popolari e rivolte militari nel 1920* asks the very reasonable question: if not brutalisation, then what? Can a microhistory of two significant outbreaks of violence in Italy in 1920 help us to understand the politics and dynamics of violence in this period? And, more generally, how might a microhistory approach help us in the age of global history – or, to be more precise, an era when the study of both wartime and the postwar era in European history are dominated by transnational and comparative approaches? This short but ambitious book cannot provide definitive answers, but offers much food for thought.

The two cases analysed here are not, at first glance, very alike. One revolves around the fatal shooting of a linesman by a gendarme after a heated local football match; the other explores anti-mobilisation protests against the further deployment of troops to Albania, indicating (among other things) how anti-imperialism might be woven into domestic concerns. Both, however, reveal the complex dynamics by which specific grievances could be generalised and politicised. Each is scrupulously narrated, drawing on a range of published and archival resources, to offer a complete description of the violence which highlights noteworthy features such as the role of rumour and misinformation in accelerating events, or the links drawn by participants between unfolding conflict and the war years. The complex interactions between political, social and military spheres emerge well in these careful accounts, which make clear that the relations between civilians and soldiers were multifaceted, contingent and often fraught. Ventura highlights the importance of local contexts: each town's political traditions, economic circumstances and social dynamics helped to shape events as much as national and international developments.

Ventura sets out the wider stakes for his research clearly in the introduction, and follows up with a chapter on each of his two case studies. The remainder of the book is dedicated to analysis and interpretation. Highlighting the backgrounds of participants in the Viareggio and Ancona riots, the majority of whom were not veterans of the trenches, Ventura decisively rejects the idea that these can primarily be explained by Mosse's

'brutalisation of politics'. He instead draws on Charles Tilly's model of the 'revolutionary situation' with competing sovereignties to explore the changing political and social landscape of Italy in the years from 1919 to 1922. Just as the anti-establishment movements reached the peak of their popularity, so too did the reactive violence and repression of the state. The book raises the hypothesis of the brutalisation of the 'forces of order'. The notoriously harsh wartime discipline of the Italian army may have shaped the expectations and practices of the carabinieri – agents of that grim system – once they returned to their peacetime duties after the war. Used to the extensive powers they held over soldiers, they responded with angry and excessive force to unruly civilian socialists and trade unionists. At the same time, the roots of fascist blackshirt violence clearly predate the peak of anti-establishment protest.

This book more than supports Ventura's proposition that microhistory may still have useful insights in the age of transnational and global scholarship. The methodology applied here is an excellent example of how to test out grand historical hypotheses against the evidence of local realities. The reader may occasionally get lost in the wealth of characters and events presented here but, happily, the author is always sure where his argument is leading him – the micro never quite overwhelms the macro. This will be an important book for scholars of fascism and its origins, but it also has a great deal to say about the strengths, weaknesses and *modus operandi* of the postwar Italian left. The wider community of international scholars who work on the 'Greater War' would also benefit from its observations.

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Acting Across Borders: Mobility and Identity in Italian Cinema

by Alberto Zambenedetti, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2021, vi + 256 pp., \$105.00, ISBN 978-1-4744-3986-2 (hardback), ISBN 978-1-4744-3989-3 (eBook)

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Through an examination of the works of two iconic actors, Amedeo Nazzari and Alberto Sordi, this highly creative and extensively researched study examines how (im)/mobility – as both theme and cultural phenomenon – has shaped the on-screen formation of the Italian national identity.

The volume is organised into two parts: the first is dedicated to the cinema of Nazzari and the second to that of Sordi. Each part is comprised of five chapters organised around a specific film or films and a different expression of the theme of (im)/mobility. There is an introduction to the volume as well as a separate introduction and a conclusion to the two parts.

The first chapter focuses on an analysis of *Luciano Serra pilota*, the 1938 film that gave Nazzari his big break into the movies and began the formation of his on-screen persona as