

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Il terrorismo italiano. Storia di un dibattito**, by Giovanni Mario Ceci, Rome, Carocci, 2013, 342 pp., €35, ISBN 978-88-430-7134-0

Giovanni Mario Ceci's recent study is a good place to start approaching the topic of Italian terrorism during the 1970s from a scholarly point of view. In *Il terrorismo italiano*, the author – a qualified modern historian specialising in the recent past of the Italian Republic – retraces the many strands of scholarly debate that have developed since terrorism first made its appearance in Italy.

Ceci uses Italian as well as international literature to make a distinction between different phases. In the first part of the book, he reviews interpretations that appeared immediately after the emergence of the phenomenon of terrorism in the late 1960s. Sociologists and political and social scientists in particular laid the groundwork of an analytical framework that oriented the research for many years. It is interesting to discover that Italian terrorism, particularly in its left-wing manifestations, became a research topic outside the national border very early on. Particularly in the USA, where terrorism was conceived as a universal, metahistorical phenomenon (Laqueur), and the media devoted many reports to 'Italy's agony', Italian terrorism was studied from as early as the end of the 1970s. Obviously, this interest was deeply connected to relations between the two superpowers and the influence they strove to exert on peripheral yet strategically relevant areas of the world. The preoccupation that terrorism could expand and affect the American 'new Republic' was evident. Internationally, social scientists, historians and journalists, above all American but also French and some Italian observers, therefore focused particularly on the international links of Italian terrorism. Working from different points of view, they developed conspiracy theories that linked Italian terrorist groups to both antagonist superpowers. In this regard, they focused mainly on the left-wing phenomenon, while criminal actions, massacres and murders by neo-Fascist organisations went almost unnoticed.

In Italy, too, research on terrorism has focused for many years on the left-wing groups, but with different concerns from those of international scholars. Italian social scientists and historians, by considering structural aspects, the social, ideological and cultural background of terrorists, their relationships to established political cultures and ideologies, the enhanced challenge of terrorist groups and the responses to terrorism from political institutions, tried to explain the phenomenon within the complex national context. Since the end of the 1970s, the 'Italian crisis' (L. Graziano and S. Tarrow [eds], *La crisi italiana*, Turin 1979) became a leading category within which to explore the connections of social upheavals, right-wing and left-wing terrorisms, and the incapacity of the State to respond adequately to these manifold challenges. The questions investigated by the Italian researchers inspired international colleagues to further explore certain aspects. The field became more and more complex and interdisciplinary. As Ceci shows in the subsequent chapters of his study, the interests and the methodologies that drove the investigations grew and became more and more varied, as did the resulting interpretations.

The outcome of Ceci's survey is a very wide overview on the state of the art, both comprehensive and well constructed, which proves an extremely useful starting point for every researcher interested in the topic. But the book is more than a rich review of this wide research field. Although Ceci does

not add new insights, he retraces the construction of a *narrative* on terrorism as it developed in Western countries since the end of the 1970s. A narrative that strongly emphasises terrorism as a fundamental threat, one of the most serious challenges to democracy, but which does not investigate how in democratic societies political violence, armed struggle and terrorism as a political strategy can succeed and legitimate the agency of social minorities.

Ceci is aware that the scientific literature on terrorism is vast, and that there is a widespread knowledge of Italian contributions to the field. Nevertheless, he stresses questions and aspects which could help advance the research on terrorism: rejecting previous conspiracy theories, he calls for new investigations into the actual international networks within which terrorist groups acted, through which they derived legitimacy and supported each other. Furthermore, he suggests that research should develop new methodological approaches in order to explore the real impact of terrorism on the processes of political decision making and on the dominant political cultures, as well as on Italian society as a whole. This would be useful not only for a more comprehensive understanding of Italian terrorism *per se*, since this is just one way of rejecting the rules of democratic life – an issue which is nowadays more relevant than ever.

Ceci's study makes clear that after more than 40 years of research, we have several analytical categories: sociological, political, historical appraisals and interpretations. Understanding of the Italian and other cases of terrorism has evidently grown. However, it seems that governments and policy makers have still not found efficient tools to prevent or outpace the terrorist critics. In times of globalisation, juxtapositions like *they* and *we*, *Occident* and *Orient* are no longer useful to disarm terrorism, probably because terrorism is more a political than a historical category. The universalistic connotation that social scientists in particular have ascribed to the term has often impeded a proper understanding of its different manifestations and meanings in different time and space. It is probably more useful to differentiate between the manifold cases of armed struggle aiming at destabilising a social order through the threat of terror, and to try and understand them within the specific contexts in which the phenomenon appears.

Marica Tolomelli

*University of Bologna*

*marica.tolomelli@unibo.it*

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**L'Italia e la questione adriatica. Dibattiti parlamentari e panorama internazionale (1918-1926)**, by Marina Cattaruzza, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2014, 604 pp., €35.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-88-15-24708-7

In a departure from her earlier works, which offered innovative interpretations and new research on the Adriatic and north-eastern Italy, Marina Cattaruzza presents here a valuable work of synthesis that combines a diplomatic and political overview of the complexities of the Adriatic question in the years following the First World War with a selection of documents relating to parliamentary debates of the period. Intended to commemorate the First World War centenary, the volume provides a historiographical perspective on the transformation of Liberal Italy as a result of wartime upheaval and violence and the post-war rise of Fascism and transformation of Italian