

BOOK REVIEW

## Introduzione alla politologia storica

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The recent Italian debate on social sciences has repeatedly outlined the need to overcome a cultural and academic environment characterized by hyper-specialization and fragmentation, dominated by decontextualized research approaches. As convincingly argued by Pasquino, Regalia, and Valbruzzi (*Quarant'anni di scienza politica in Italia*, 2013), the inherent risk to such an environment is that its fragmentation might undermine the quality of theoretical reflection and the very social relevance of the discipline.

Persuaded of the necessity of a new research paradigm capable of recognizing the importance of long-term historical processes for the interpretation of contemporary phenomena, the authors of this volume bring a rich contribution to the discussion drawing upon their respective fields and research experiences, developing an insightful perspective to what they call historical political science.

The book's argument unfolds along three steps: a theoretical clarification and fine-tuning, a review of classic academic works relevant to more contemporary research, and the illustration of studies directly related to the Italian case.

The first chapter establishes a comprehensive methodological and conceptual overview of the interest of this volume to the wider spectrum of literature. Critical of the long-standing view of history as a mere 'control' for research hypotheses, drawing upon the Weberian lesson authors Marco Almagisti and Paolo Graziano argue in favour of a deeper, constant dialogue between the perspective of political science and of political sociology, through the lenses of historical comparative analysis and the use of causal narrative to explain political processes. To substantiate their theoretical proposition, the authors combine Rokkan's work on the structuring of collective identities based on long-term cleavages with Putnam's lesson on the sedimentation of social capital in different territorial contexts, addressing the diverging trajectories of the 'red' and 'white' subcultures in the political transition of the 1990s.

The second, third, fourth, and fifth chapters draw upon the contributions of classic authors in providing up-to-date interpretative categories for contemporary phenomena.

In Chapter 2, Paolo Pombeni reflects on the relevance of Max Weber's ideal types. Ranked among the fathers of sociology and political science, as a political thinker Weber felt compelled and challenged by the events of his time. Rejecting the normative, philosophical approach to history based on extrinsic criteria of 'right' and 'wrong', which he judged naive, but also the limited perspective of case-by-case reconstructions, he came to elaborate the notion of ideal types, series of abstract components used to define and contextualize a given phenomenon. In turn, the unravelling of unexpected historical events during his life allowed Weber to significantly refine his analytical approach. In other words, phenomena take place in various and combined ideal-typical forms, spurring the emergence of new analytical categories and improving the social scientists' understanding of the world.

In the third chapter, Marco Valbruzzi retraces Stein Rokkan's contribution to the dialogue between historiographic knowledge and the social sciences. Rokkan's methodologically eclectic work established a research agenda in which historical–institutional analysis and cross-national comparison intersected. In researching the formation of European nation-States, he did not aim at merely describing past events, but rather at explaining the variance in their formation and trajectories. This is why his research entailed a constant attention towards comparison, and the systematic combination of historical macro-sociology with the analysis of micro-political behaviours. As Valbruzzi fittingly spells out, such an eclectic approach entails a physiological precarity of research findings: Rokkan's maps themselves were meant to be rethought and refined in time, but his life's work can be seen as an open text, allowing for a multitude of interpretations and developments. Scholars have in fact been able to apply his conceptual apparatus to investigate further developments in both national and supranational European politics – in other words, his analytical models are still proving useful in explaining the transformations of the post-Rokkanian world.

In Chapter 4, Paola Bordandini and Roberto Cartocci critically revisit Putnam's renowned study on social capital in Italy. In the effort to move past the intrinsic conceptual ambiguity of social capital, the authors update Putnam's maps based on the notion of civic culture, updating Putnam's objective indicators of civic community, and integrating them with subjective indicators captured by national value surveys. Although findings from the objective indicators portray stronger differences between regions, the objective and subjective dimensions both appear to provide a similar geographic distribution. Interestingly, regardless of the operative definition attributed to civic culture, the authors' findings show a significant continuity with Putnam's results: though not adhering to his conclusions on path dependency factors to be retraced back to the 13th century, Bordandini and Cartocci indeed take up Putnam's prompt to move beyond short-term explanations.

In the fifth chapter, by Alfredo Ferrara, Gramsci's work is read through the powerful insights that stem from its theory of crisis and modernization processes and his reject of mono-causal and short-term explanations. He saw the affirmation of fascism itself as a case of 'reactionary modernization': after the failed attempts at a revolutionary breakthrough during the Biennio Rosso (1919–1920), fascism promised a new equilibrium, answering to both the fear of instability of the dominant classes and the claims of subaltern ones. The very objects of social research, the author maintains, are intrinsically historical: the inherent complexity of political phenomena are thus inevitably sacrificed in ahistorical research perspectives.

Through an overview of his case study on the 'red' subculture of Valdarno Inferiore, in Chapter 6 Mario Caciagli seeks the causes and electoral consequences of the memory of fascism and antifascism in Italy. History is investigated as a key determinant in the formation of political cultures, both as an empirical source of contents and as the biographical and cultural heritage of individuals. A combination of interviews and historiographic research concurs to his interpretation of the emergence, fading and resurgence of Valdarno's political subculture during profound socio-economic transformations.

In Chapter 7, Valentine Lomellini compares the international politics of the Italian and French communist parties and the evolution of their respective relations with the USA and the USSR. An interesting critical assessment of the two parties' identities is carried out, in which ideological elements appear deeply intertwined with the fortunes of an ephemeral Eurocommunist trajectory and the difficult equilibria of the struggles for leadership within the international communist movement.

In Chapter 8, Marco Damiani offers a concrete example of the comparative historical approach, with the analysis of the political transformations of the radical left in Mediterranean Europe between 1989 and 2018. The author grounds his analysis on a quadripartite ideal-typical classification, accounting on the one hand for the parties' approach to values (rigid or flexible), and, on the other hand, for their organizational model (open or closed).

Finally, in Chapter 9, Giorgia Bulli retraces the diverging trajectories of the research on the extreme right in Germany and Italy, since the end of World War II. This contribution shows how the different patterns of democratic reconstruction of the two countries appear to have significantly shaped the analytical approaches and forms of the research on the extreme right, including its periodization and objectives.

In sum, this volume provides a valuable and timely contribution to the debate on the boundaries between disciplines in the social sciences. Despite an ambitious scope, the book manages to prove compelling in its argument and rich of meaningful empirical and theoretical insights. A true stimulus for the scholars of today and tomorrow.