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BOOK REVIEWS

Andrea Hajek, *Negotiating Memories of Protest in Western Europe. The Case of Italy*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, pp.232.

Since the so called “cultural turn” of social movement studies, the interest towards collective memory and, in particular, its relationship with political contention has been regularly growing amongst scholars working on cases of participation and conflict.

In this context, memory studies, and in particular the sociology of memory based on the seminal work of Maurice Halbwachs, have become a fundamental tool for the development of research on social movements. In particular, the literature on memory has proved increasingly able to provide useful insights on the symbolic construction of the reality in which collective action takes place, interpreting memory not as a mere mirror of past events but the result of collective practices able to reveal insights into present sets of interpreting reality.

Andrea Hajek's work on the processes of public negotiation of a shared memory of the Lorusso case, in 1977 Bologna, interpreted as an example of more general mechanisms of coming to terms with the protests of the 1970s in Western Europe, is an interesting contribution in this context: an analysis deeply rooted in the cultural studies of memory, in particular in the recent British tradition, able to provide useful insight for social movement scholars.

In fact, *Negotiating Memories of Protest in Western Europe. The case of Italy* primarily focuses on the dynamics of memory rather than on those of protest. The Italian 1960s and 1970s, and in particular 1977 in Bologna, are interpreted as the mnemonic material to which a wide set of agents refer in the following decades, and only a few pages, in the sixth chapter, are dedicated to the impact of this past on contemporary activist groups. Nevertheless, the book is an interesting and relevant read for researchers on political contention, and in particular for those concerned with the legacy of the 1960s and 1970s.

Hajek's book is mainly built around the in-depth analysis of a case study, "the process of negotiating a publicly shared memory of the incidents of March 1977 in Bologna as performed by a variety of media of memory and memory agents" (p. 9), interpreted in the context of the public memory of the Italian and European 1970s. The focus of the analysis is the evolving representation of the story of Francesco Lorusso, a 25-year-old student and militant of the revolutionary left, shot and killed by a *carabiniere* during violent clashes between protesters and the police in the March of 1977. The first part of the book (chapters 1 and 2) is dedicated to a general overview of the representation of 1968 and the 1970s in the Italian public memory field. Then, chapter 3 briefly introduces the reader to the riots of 1977 in Bologna, while the remaining part of the book (chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7) illustrates the case study, focusing on the way in which three different social groups (Lorusso's family, the local institutions and Lorusso's comrades) negotiated the representation of the event in the local public sphere in the following 30 years, and mapping the competing memory sites in the city.

The most convincing and fascinating part of the book is the case study. The author reconstructs the 30-year-long debate on the Lorusso case with a wealth of details and clarity of analysis. In particular, two choices made by the author prove wise and effective, providing an innovative contribution to the scholarship on memory, in line with the most recent work in this field. On the one hand, conducting a diachronic analysis of the negotiation processes, instead of focusing on a synchronic description of the current representation of the Lorusso case, conveys in a more accurate way the dynamism of the social construction of memory. On the other hand, considering such a plurality of media and mnemonic agents contributes to an effective representation of the complexity of the field of public memory beyond the traditional model based on a bipolar struggle between institutional power and popular counter-power.

The methodological choice of the single case study, that provides such depth, richness and complexity to Hajek's work, has obviously some limits in terms of potential generalisation of the analysis. The author tries to compensate this limit with a brief overview on other relevant national contexts (France, Britain and Germany), paving the way for further attempts of cross-national comparison. Furthermore, the specificity of a case study focused on 1977 Bologna, characterised by the identification between the Communist Party and local institutions and by a quite peculiar and almost unique movement milieu, partially further reduces the scope of the author's argument. From this perspective, the necessity – still unaddressed by the scholarship – of a problematisation and a definition of the relationship between social movements, movement families and political subcultures emerges clearly.

Nevertheless, the book is effective in confirming with an unquestionable empirical analysis some of the most interesting outcomes of the research on the mechanisms that are embedded in the processes of social negotiation of the public memory of the 1960s and 1970s: in particular, Hajek's work, notwithstanding some minor inaccuracies, finds convincing empirical support for the thesis of the bipolarisation of the memory of the Italian 1960s and 1970s, between the "wonderful years" identified with 1968 and the "years of lead" identified with 1977. Furthermore, the problematic specificities of the context do not weaken the intrinsic relevance of the Lorusso case. In fact, the author is very acute in pointing out the peculiar status

of Francesco Lorusso as a controversial victim, a revolutionary militant killed by the police in the “Red City”, very different from the innocent victims of *stragismo*. It is this visible contradiction between the specific case and the general context what makes this piece of research particularly stimulating and interesting.

Negotiating Memories of Protest in Western Europe. The case of Italy sheds new light on the symbolic outcomes of a particularly controversial story of the Italian 1970s, contributing in an undeniably relevant way to the collective endeavour of refreshing the European scholarship on memory that is being conducted by a new generation of researchers all over the continent. It constitutes a welcome contribution to the field, a pleasant read and a stimulating repository of information for all the researchers interested in the symbolic construction of social and political contention.

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