This is the submitted version of the review of:

Chiaramonte, Xenia (2019). *Governare il Conflitto. La Criminalizzazione del Movimento No TAV* [Governing Conflict. The Criminalization of No TAV Movement]. Milano: Meltemi. 374 pp. 20.00€ (paperback).

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‘Giù le mani dalla Val di Susa!’, ‘Off the hands from Val di Susa!’: thus claimed, in 1991, the first slogan of the No TAV (short for Treno ad Alta Velocità) movement against the high-speed railway Lyon-Turin (Griseri 2005).¹ Originally a local movement concerned with the environmental effects of the project – and particularly of the 57 kilometers long tunnel below the Alps – over the Italian valley, the No TAV has in time become a nation-wide movement, with a crucial role being played by activists and groups from near Turin, concerned with national and global models of development. Three decades later, while only a reconnaissance gallery has been completed, the No TAV is one of the most contentious, longest-standing active conflicts in Italy, and definitely Europe.

Much has been written about the No TAV, mostly in Italian and mostly from the perspective of social movement studies. Similarly, virtually all the few handfuls of studies published in English² are written from the same perspective: see, for instance, Della Porta and Piazza’s comparative study (2007) of framings of conflict in the No TAV and ‘No Bridge’ (Messina straits) movements; and a symposium in *Capitalism Nature Socialism* on post-capitalist prefigurative politics in Val di Susa (Engel-Di Mauro 2013).

Quite surprisingly for such a long-standing conflict that has seen the use of direct action on the side of activists and of significant force on the side of the police, resulting in numerous legal proceedings, including one for terrorism – a word that has been widely used by politicians and media –, virtually no studies existed from a criminological perspective. *Governare il Conflitto*, the book stemming from Xenia Chiaramonte’s doctoral research, fills precisely this void, by setting out an ethnography of the media and legal criminalization of the No TAV movement.

¹ Early news about the project were released in 1989. In 1991, the Agnelli Foundation (created by Gianni Agnelli, historical leader of automotive corporation FIAT) organised a conference in support of the project, met by the very first protest organised by the No TAV.

² A search with the string “NO Tav” OR “NO-Tav” on Scopus (November 18, 2019) results in 16 hits, of which 2 in Italian and 2 in unrelated fields.

The book is organized in two sections, plus an introductory and a conclusive chapter. The introduction (chapter 1) sets out the Foucauldian theoretical framework used throughout the book, alongside concepts like governmentality and the defense of the society.

The first section (chapter 2) moves to the case study, and particularly media criminalization and the counter-narrative of activists. By focusing above all on some of the tensest moments of the conflict, the clashes between police and activists in December 2005 and July 2011, as well as the activist 'blitz' of May 2013 (more on this below), Chiaramonte reconstructs the *crescendo* in the framing, by mainstream media, of the movement as criminal and ultimately 'terrorist'. May 2013 events are crucial in this latter regard. On the night of the 14th of that month, some activists attacked the construction site, launching Molotovs and damaging some machineries: four of the activists would be later on processed for terrorism. The reconstruction of the narrative shows the label of terrorism, which had been used sporadically up to that moment, becoming a central argument deployed by media, politicians and also former prosecutor Giancarlo Caselli.

The second, and most extensive, section of the book (chapters 3 to 5) reports from the ethnography of the legal proceedings. Chapter 3 focuses on the so-called Maxiprocesso (Maxi Trial), stemming from the clashes of July 2011, with 54 defendants.³ Chapter 4 focuses on the trial for terrorism stemming from the events of May 2013, which resulted in stripping of the accusation of terrorism and the condemnation of four activists for the crimes of possess and use of weapons (the Molotovs), and resistance to arrest. This chapter, and particularly the spontaneous declarations by the defendants (pp. 237-241), is crucial for the counter-narrative of the movement: indeed, the defendants would never deny having committed the 'blitz', but would rather bring the argument to a different level, that of the 'context' (a concept that will be crucial in determining the stripping of the accusation of terrorism), and of the structural and direct violence of the infrastructural works. In the words of one of the defendants:

As far as the accusation of terrorism is concerned, I have no intention to defend myself. The solidarity we have received from the day we have been arrested up until today has deconstructed such an insolent [*ardito*] accusation more than enough. If the bottom line of this operation was the, not so subtle indeed, attempt to get rid of the No TAV struggle once and for all, I would argue that it has miserably failed (Claudio, p. 239).⁴

Chapter 5 focuses on the 'micromechanics' of control – and the preventive measures typical of the deployment of police power (cf. Neocleous 2001) – and counter-actions from the activists.

The sixth, and concluding, chapter brings the ethnographic material together to reflect on a number of theoretical points for understanding the governmentality of conflict in the case of No TAV. For Chiaramonte, the case of No TAV shows, on the one hand, the appropriation of the concept of *défendre la société* for a political economic agenda centered on the role of infrastructural development for social progress. On the other hand, the case shows the deployment of the *dispositif* of prevention and the prosecution of individuals in the perspective of a totalizing control over the 'deviant' components of the society – in short, the consolidation of the Foucauldian paradigm of biopolitics or security. In this context, the state, 'of which the death

³ The careful reader may have noticed that the name Maxiprocesso is reminiscent of the more famous trial against the Sicilian Mafia held in Palermo between 1986 and 1992 with almost 500 defendants.

⁴ This and following translations are mine.

has been celebrated, has rather been hanging on balance, covering up for the lost of sovereignty through an excess of force' (pp. 345-346) – a particularly effective remark on the state of the state, so to speak.

Crucially, then, the counter-argument expressed by the activists is not so much one of victimization, but rather the development of the movement's own 'counter-behaviors':

The risk is omnipresent of abiding by an (inexistent) *normality*, of falling into conforming frameworks in order to justify a stone throwing. Denying makes indeed sense in a trial, for the obvious reason that no obligation exists to confess (and regret). What is truly necessary, though less simple, outside of the tribunal hall, however, is to invalidate an order of discourse that calls *violence* a stone throwing, at the same time as it legitimately overlooks the *invisible violence* [of infrastructural development] (p. 337; emphases in the original).

Governare il Conflitto is quite a long book, rich of ethnographic detail, which provides a lot of material, especially to the reader interested in the working of the legal proceedings. The detailed descriptions at times imply some loss of analytical grasp – it seems that some pages would have benefitted of a better editorial accompaniment in the transformation from dissertation to book. Still, the argument flows quite well, and the conclusions make an excellent work in putting the various pieces together.

Chiaramonte has set out an important contribution to critical criminology – and social movement studies – precisely by bringing one of the most relevant conflicts of the last few decades right into the theoretical discussion over the deconstruction and reconstruction of the argument of criminalization. If Italy has always been a laboratory for the production of strategies of governmentality and counter-governmental tactics,⁵ the case of the No TAV is an exemplary one for the construction of the legal and security fields – and, together with this book, would deserve a work of 'trans-lation' to the international arena.

References

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⁵ One could name Lombroso's positivist school, the anti-mafia and anti-terrorism legislation of the 1970s and 1980s – including, for instance, the 41-bis 'hard prison' regime – but also the long-standing experiences of political squatting or, obviously, the tradition of autonomy.

Neocleous, M. (2001) *The Fabrication of the Social Order. A Critical Theory of Police Power*.
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