

Book Review

Niccolò Bertuzzi

I movimenti animalisti in Italia. Strategie, politiche e pratiche di attivismo

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Abstract

Italian animal advocacy is a complex reality, the actors of which have different origins, ideas and relations even within the same group. Niccolò Bertuzzi, Research Fellow at the Scuola Normale of Pisa (Italy) dealt with this topic from a sociological perspective. His investigation is presented in a book published in 2018, in which he describes the socio-political aspects of this phenomenon with a critical analysis of the results. This book provides a deep insight on a dynamic part of society, whose ethical needs could contribute to enrich the debate of the XXI.

Keywords: animal advocacy; social and political movements; strategies for activists.

Resumen

El activismo animalista italiano es una realidad compleja, cuyos actores tienen diferentes orígenes, ideas y relaciones entre ellos, incluso dentro del mismo grupo. Niccolò Bertuzzi, investigador en la Scuola Normale de Pisa (Italia) ha tratado este tema desde una perspectiva sociológica. Su investigación se presenta en un libro publicado en 2018, en el que se describen los aspectos sociopolíticos de este fenómeno con un análisis crítico de los resultados. Este libro proporciona una visión profunda de una parte dinámica de la sociedad, cuyas exigencias éticas podrían contribuir a enriquecer el debate del XXI.

Palabras clave: defensa de los animales; movimientos sociales y políticos; estrategias para activistas.

Animal protection and rights groups have been present in Italian society for decades. These groups exist under various denominations, which identify a reality that goes from structured national organisations to smaller and more local ones. These groups have different historic and cultural backgrounds, different goals and ways to advocate in favour of animals. For a period of time, animal advocacy was considered a part of environmentalism,¹ even though the issues are different: in general terms, animal advocacy considers animals as individuals and defends them for their intrinsic value; environmentalism refers to animals rather as being part of a species and asks for their safeguard especially when this species risks extinction.²

¹ See generally, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/environmentalism> [last consulted 10 April 2019].

² Despite the different issues, both movements could act together. See, FITZGERALD, A.J., *Animal Advocacy and* <https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/da.436>

Although larger animal protection organisations have means of communication (such as publishing, websites, etc.), little is yet known on animal advocacy from a systematic point of view. In fact, scholars have rarely manifested an interest in this field, also on an international level. What surprises mostly is that there is little research in sociology,³ which is a discipline that should take more interest in a phenomenon that continues to grow in the current democratic societies, even though with characteristics and methods which are often difficult to grasp.

A book published in 2018 enriches the academic literature. Written by Niccolò Bertuzzi, Research Fellow at the Scuola Normale Superiore of Pisa, with a foreword by Donatella della Porta⁴, this book offers a contribution to understanding this multi-faceted world.⁵ The investigation was carried out on Italian animal advocates and concentrated on their strategies, their political positions and their impact on the society. The author was driven by the desire to fill in the existing void in literature, to study a phenomenon that public opinion does not know enough about, notwithstanding the increase of social attention to the issues related to the relationship between humans and animals, which emerges also from some European and national surveys.⁶

The research question is whether Italian animal advocacy is homogeneous.⁷ To answer this question, the author investigated in these directions: which is the identity of animal advocacy; what do groups express politically; how do they interact with the institutions; how are relations between the groups and the areas they represent.

The composition of the book is clear and allows to understand the origin of the animal protection and rights groups, their characteristics, the politics they follow, the lack of relations between them, and the contribution they can offer to the society in which they act. Even the methodology, used by the author, allows to have a picture of this complex reality: research brings together analysis based on social movements studies⁸ and interpretation of empirical data.⁹ To obtain this data the author used primary and secondary sources: a questionnaire distributed on the national territory (that takes into consideration activism, civic commitment, ethical values and demography), some personal interviews to leaders of groups that are active in the area of Milan, the examination of material regarding these groups and the review of relevant protest events.

The book also contains a historic reference of the main facts related to Italian animal advocacy, together with a chronology.¹⁰ These elements offer a synthetic and useful picture that shows the main fields of action of the groups, from the battles against vivisection up to those against hunting, animal abandonment, the production of fur coats, and meat consumption.¹¹ These pages also illustrate that traditional, institutional and radical groups always existed, but have not managed to merge their positions into one political party. Above all, the animal issues still remain a sideline of political affairs, especially leftist, which should instead make them its own.¹² Recently, only the centre-right politics managed to create an animalist movement,¹³ in response to the demand of a part of the electorate. In any event, the problems regarding animals are transversal on an institutional level, as shown by the bills presented by different parties.

The author carried out the research by identifying the three areas of animal advocacy,¹⁴ as if there were, in a figurative sense, three dwellings in which to host those participating at the investigation. His choice was appropriate. In fact, empirical results confirmed that these three fields exist, notwithstanding the

Environmentalism: Understanding and Bridging the Divide (Medford 2019)

³ See generally, MUNRO, L., *The Animal Rights Movement in Theory and Practice: A Review of the Sociological Literature*, in *Sociology Compass* 6/2 (2012) 166-181.

⁴ Donatella della Porta is a renowned international expert in social movements. See generally, DELLA PORTA, D., DIANI, M., *The Oxford Handbook of Social Movements* (Oxford 2015)

⁵ See also, BERTUZZI, N., *The Italian Animal Advocacy Archipelago and the Four Animalisms*, in *Partecipazione e Conflitto*, 11/3 (2018) 865-890, doi: 10.1285/i20356609v11i3p865; and the book review, BERTUZZI, N., *I movimenti animalisti in Italia. Strategie, politiche e pratiche di attivismo*, 2018, rev. LO DUCA, L., in *Studi culturali, Rivista quadrimestrale*, 2 (2018) 319-322, doi: 10.1405/91347. For a useful socio-anthropological work on Italian animal advocacy see, TONUTTI, S., *Diritti animali: storia e antropologia di un movimento* (Udine 2007). For a comprehensive historical research on the the protection of animals in Italy see GUZZALOCA, G., *Primo: non maltrattare. Storia della protezione degli animali in Italia* (Bari-Roma 2018).

⁶ BERTUZZI, N., *I movimenti animalisti in Italia. Strategie, politiche e pratiche di attivismo* (Milano 2018) 19-20.

⁷ *Ibid.* 76

⁸ *Ibid.* 69

⁹ *Ibid.* 77-83

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 43-44

¹¹ *Ibid.* 34-51

¹² *Ibid.* 15-16

¹³ *Ibid.* 13-14

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 79

divisions that emerged within the single areas.¹⁵ These areas are the following: “care”, “protection” and “antispeciesism”.¹⁶ The first area refers to traditional zoophile groups, which act by counting on benevolent sentiment and charity for animals. This area is characterised by its attention for pets. For example, some organisations, which manage animal shelters and fight against stray conditions for cats and dogs, belong to this area.¹⁷ The second area incorporates those organisations that act to promote animal welfare, not only on a social level through public awareness, but also institutional, through campaigns to promote the adoption of animal welfare legislations in favour of domestic and wild animals. This area also includes the larger animal advocacy organisations,¹⁸ which showed to be capable to dialogue with politics and society, obtaining better results compared to more radical groups. The third area supports the end of animal exploitation by humans. In fact, their groups advocate animal’s liberation and rights. However, it needs to be specified that the latter refer to moral rights, since animals are not entitled to legal rights, as they are still considered as property.¹⁹

The antispeciesism is a complicated topic. In fact, the same protagonists of this area do not agree on its meaning.²⁰ The left parties should develop this theme, because it deals with the abolition of the exploitation of weak subjects (animals) by strong subjects (humans), and is inserted in a more general theme of equality and justice. In any case, if one excludes the commitment of some of its members, the Italian left did not engage in animal matters, leaving space for other political forces that focus on the welfare of animals, particularly in their use by humans.²¹ Rather, antispeciesism deals with these issues in more radical terms, since it is based on the overcoming of the anthropocentric approach towards animals on which even the economy is based.²²

Many of those belonging to the antispeciesism area declare to be vegan. They adopt a lifestyle that results mostly in consumer attitudes that exclude the use of products (food, clothes, etc.) and services (pet therapy, sports, etc.) of animal origin. Veganism is the object of a lively debate within Italian society, in which there is still scepticism towards dietary habits that could reveal to be dangerous for human health. Even veganism is declined in different ways: many followers are not motivated by an ethic concern related to the fate of animals, but by a healthy, environmental, and fashionable choice.²³ Empirical data shows that veganism is increasing, with a larger presence in successful economic areas and in families with children.²⁴ Although limited to a part of the population, this social change deserves to be taken into account, regardless of whether it is motivated by antispeciesism or other reasons. It will be interesting to see the evolution of the market on this matter.

The author focuses on the disconnection of society on the different issues involving animals.²⁵ On the one hand, there is more awareness of the fate of certain animals; on the other hand, there is an increase in the number of animals used to produce food, pharmaceuticals and other objects. In other words, a change in social sensibility does not correspond to a reduction of these animals sacrificed on a global level. This ambiguity is found also in mass media, which draws attention to clamorous cases,²⁶ such as the killing of wild animals, but does not focus on the miserable conditions of millions of other animals. In fact, if the current tendency does not change, the consumption of animal products will increase together with the growth of the world population.²⁷

Interesting data emerges from the research. For example, many animal advocates, especially young ones, place themselves in the progressive wing,²⁸ even though others prefer the conservative one. Most animal advocates belong to the social middle class, have degrees and are employees. The geographic distribution of the organisations is different, with a major presence in the northern regions. With regards to

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 196

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 79. The book reviewer has translated the Italian words: « cura », « protezionismo », « antispecismo ».

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 169, table 6.1.

¹⁸ For example, Ente Nazionale Protezione Animali, <http://www.enpa.it/> [last consulted 10 April 2019] and Lega Antivivisezione, <https://www.lav.it/> [last consulted 10 April 2019].

¹⁹ See for example, Articles 812, 820, 923, 924, 925, 926 and 2052 Italian Civil Code, <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/anteprema/codici/codiceCivile> [last consulted 10 April 2019]; see generally, MAZZONI, C.M., La questione dei diritti degli animali, in CASTIGNONE, S., LOMBARDI VALLAURI, L., La questione animale, in *Trattato di Biodiritto* (Milano 2012) 281-293

²⁰ BERTUZZI, N., I movimenti animalisti in Italia, *op. cit.* 115

²¹ *Ibid.* 14-16

²² *Ibid.* 17

²³ See also, BERTUZZI, N., Veganism : lifestyle or political movement ? Looking for relations beyond antispeciesism, in *Relations. Beyond Anthropocentrism*, 5/2 (2017) DOI: <http://doi.org/10.7358/rela-2017-002-ber1>

²⁴ BERTUZZI, N. I movimenti animalisti in Italia. *Op. cit.*, 20

²⁵ *Ibid.* 20.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 24.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 23. See also, HENNING, S., *Livestock’s Long Shadow. Environmental Issues and Options* (Rome 2006)

²⁸ *Ibid.* 162

the organisation network, communication between groups is missing²⁹. Another interesting fact regards the personal commitment.³⁰ The opinions also reflect the characteristics of the area. For example, to the question whether it is right or wrong to carry out illegal acts to improve the life of animals, the antispeciesists justify also violence,³¹ whereas the protectionists prefer dialogue.

In the book, the author does not explain the reasons of the various ways to advocate in favour of animals, nor does he express judgements on the various forms of activism. In fact, his analysis is descriptive and includes all the players from the Italian animal advocacy world. The aim of the research is to analyse the phenomenon in its multiple aspects, thanks to a solid knowledge of the social movements and a deep analysis of the data.

The book by Niccolò Bertuzzi is a precious reference in literature regarding animal issues, even those outside of sociology. The author must be praised for having investigated an unknown ground with scientific method, using different sources to prove the results of his research. The book offers a precise description of the animal advocacy, in which the author combines theory and empirical data. Even the academic prose is easy to understand and allows the reader to know more on a reality which has constructed its own discourse, even though with conflicting voices.

By reading the book, it emerges that the moderates are more successful than the radicals, as they have a greater capability of dialoguing with politics and society. This should bring those involved in animal advocacy to reflect on the direction to follow, if they want to obtain more results in favour of animals, by respecting legality. Animal advocacy has a relevant role to raise awareness among public opinion on serious issues regarding animals. Some organisations also carry out a lobbying activity to obtain legal changes. Their role in democratic society has been recognised by the European Court of Human Rights, even though their activity is subject to limitations.³² In particular, the Court recognized that “when an NGO draws attention to matters of public interest, it is exercising a public watchdog role of similar importance to that of the press”.³³ Thus, also a social-political analysis of the animal advocacy can be useful to know relevant aspects of this reality.

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²⁹ *Ibid.* 204

³⁰ *Ibid.* 212-214

³¹ *Ibid.* 190

³² See generally, *Tierbefreier E.V. v. Germany*, no. 45192/09, ECHR 2014. The Court has also recognized the role of individual activists (*Hashman and Harrup v. United Kingdom*, no. 25594/94, ECHR 1999) and the role of small groups of activists (*Steel and Morris v. United Kingdom*, no. 68416/01, ECHR 2005).

³³ *Animal Defenders International v. United Kingdom* [GC], no. 48876/08, § 103, ECHR 2013.

- Hashman and Harrup v. United Kingdom, no. 25594/94, ECHR 1999
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