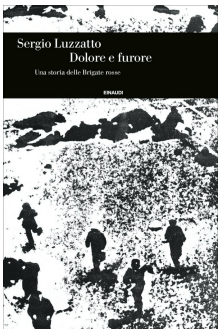


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Sergio Luzzatto  
Dolore e furore

Review by: John Foot



**Authors:** Sergio Luzzatto

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*Dolore e furore* by Sergio Luzzatto is an extraordinary piece of research and writing, but it is also a very difficult book to describe and review. It is easy to read and beautifully constructed, but it also contains a wealth information, analysis, and what Italians call 'spunti', which often go way beyond the declared focus of the volume – which is also why it is a 'magnum opus', reaching to over 700 pages as well as a series of maps, photos and other images. So, what is this book, and what is it trying to do? On the surface, it is a history of the Red Brigades in Genova. The story of one 'cell' of that important, but in the end tiny, left-wing armed organisation in one city in the 1960s (before the BR – Brigate Rosse/Red Brigades – existed) and in the 1970s and 1980s. But, if we dig deeper, this book is also a collective biography of two key figures in that organisation: Riccardo Dura and Giovanni Senzani. Above all, Dura's incredible life is at the heart of the book.

Born in Genova in 1950, Dura had an extremely difficult upbringing, with an absent father and a possessive and violent mother, with whom he often clashed. Using a wealth of documents, Luzzatto traces Dura's journey from his internment in a psychiatric hospital, through a period in an incredible Genovese institution – a large ship moored in the harbour which was ostensibly involved in 'good' work in providing boarding and an education for poor or orphaned children. The Garaventa as it was known was in reality a violent 'total institution', which formed part of Dura's chaotic 'education'. Following his time in the Garaventa, Dura became a merchant seaman, travelling the world in various ships and boats (again, the deep research here is incredible). He then became involved in the rich and growing world of far-left politics in Genova in the wake of the 1968-1969 uprisings. Luzzatto traces Dura's political journey through interviews and documents. Finally, Dura became part of the Red Brigades, and its most cold-blooded killer in Genova. He would go on

to murder a number of people on behalf of that organisation, including, most shockingly, the Communist trade unionist Guido Rossa in January 1979 (see also Luzzatto's spin-off book about Rossa for Einaudi, *Giù in mezzo agli uomini. Vita e morte di Guido Rossa*, 2021) a moment which Luzzatto points to as the 'death of the Red Brigades'. Dura was not on the radar of the police or the authorities and when he himself was shot dead by carabinieri in March 1980, they didn't know who he was. Eventually, he was identified by the BR itself. His funeral was attended by one person – his mother.

Dura's story allows Luzzatto to make links between the radicalism of the 1970s and the 'unmasking' of various institutions typical of the 1960s and 1970s – psychiatric hospitals, prisons, borstals – by intellectuals and activists in that period. Here Giovanni Senzani enters the scene, a researcher and militant whose shocking exposé of the hideous conditions inside Italy's child prisons system hit the front pages of magazines, and was discussed in Parliament, accompanied by the searing photos of the Genovese Giorgio Bergami. From the opposite side of the spectrum to Dura – as someone analysing and denouncing those institutions, as opposed to a person who actually *experienced* them as a patient or an inmate – Senzani nonetheless went on a similar political journey, from the far left to – in his case – leader of part of the Red Brigades in the early 1980s, and – as with Dura – he became someone who was ready to use extreme violence. Parts of Senzani's story as outlined by Luzzatto are barely believable, such as the fact that he was claiming back expenses from the Italian state for his 'research' projects, whilst almost certainly also working for the Red Brigades.

In Senzani's case, what remains unexplained is the final 'leap' from militancy and legitimate intellectual activity – for example within radical criminology academic circles – to his illegal and underground activities with the BR. Although his language was radical, was there really anything in that previous life which pointed to his brutality as a BR leader, for example with the kidnap and execution of Roberto Peci, the brother of the BR *pentito* Patrizio Peci? Perhaps this is something that remains unknowable for any historian? What is the moment when a red line is crossed, when violent 'language' becomes violent 'action'? This is a further key theme of this book: the connection, or disconnection between words and acts. Luzzatto identifies a number of figures in Genova who seemingly created an environment within which terrorism could flourish – priests, doctors, academics – and he writes, tellingly, that «Non compete allo storico decidere se siano stati cattivi: ma compete allo storico stabilire, dietro verifica, che sono stati maestri» – but the 'precise link' between sermons, activism, books – and the actual carrying out of kneecappings, bombings, and murders, remains something which is perhaps unreachable. Luzzatto admits this in his book, writing «Domanda: quali fili ideologici, politici, morali, sociali, potevano mai tenere unite le immagini di denuncia dei proletari minorenni in catene all'immagine di denuncia del proletario venticinquenne in catene, gli uni da emancipare nel 1969, l'altro da trucidare nel 1981? Risposta: i fili che in questo libro ho cercato di dipanare». The 'threads' are there, but how were they connected? How did they descent into darkness take place? Not everyone who talked the revolution took up arms, but some did. Senzani is in this book, but he is also not all there. He is the most 'mysterious' character in this volume. The most difficult to capture. And he is still alive, but has only told his story in vague fragments.

Luzzatto's micro-focus on Genova is effective as a strategy for understanding the Red Brigades, and that focus almost never lets up. It is supported by a strong understanding of 'place' – in part connected to Luzzatto's own links to these stories and that city, where he was brought up and went to school. Often, he himself appears in the story – on demonstrations, or when trying to get to Guido Rossa's funeral (and not being allowed out of his school to do so). Throughout the book we live and breathe the streets, university lecture halls, port areas and extraordinary urban spaces of Genova, with its chaotic growth around and after the time of the economic boom, and the concrete monstrosities of the poor housing estates which grew like mushrooms on the steep hillsides of the city, leading to isolation and to collapses and landslides which caused scandal and shock (and radicalised many). Guido Rossa lived (and died), for example, in the neighbourhood of Oregina, perched up on the steep slopes above Genova, reached only by roads which were (and still are) inadequate and dangerous. Riccardo Dura, Rossa's killer, also died in the same neighbourhood. The geography and social make-up of Genova is laid out in detail – above all the city's huge, state-supported factories and massive industrial working-class – a class which was largely impermeable to the Red Brigades, but also reluctant to denounce *brigatisti* to the police, and this forms a backdrop against which stories of violence, tragedy and – sometimes – heroism are played out. This sense of geography is backed by numerous maps which locate the places Luzzatto discusses in urban reality – of where attacks took place, of where Dura lived, of where the far left had its *sedì* and so on. Luzzatto weaves a rich tapestry which is deeply rooted in the complicated and class-ridden urban fabric of that 'divided' city, and where key places – the radical lecture halls of Via Balbi, and the site of the first planned BR killing in 1976 – are mere yards away from each other.

Extraordinary figures emerge in these pages. Sergio Adamoli, son of the venerated post-war Communist Mayor of Genova – Galasio Adamoli – was a surgeon and also a member of the BR. Despite the fact that he was never convicted, Luzzatto names Adamoli as an *ex-brigatista*, who he also interviewed, as he did with many other living *ex-brigatisti*. Adamoli – like other figures in this book – provided both logistical support (at one point he seemingly designed a kind of Red Brigades operating theatre for the organisation – which was never built) and indications of possible targets. His 'surprising' acquittal (surely an understatement by Luzzatto) does not prevent this book telling its historical truth, which are not always supported by judicial sentences. Clearly, it was assumed that Adamoli would not sue for defamation. The fact that so many of the figures in this book are still alive, and many are still living in Genova, only adds to the power of the story/stories it has to tell.

Luzzatto does not shy away from judgements on the figures and tales he analyses in this book. He is very critical, for example, of the most effective opponent of the BR – General Dalla Chiesa whose special units and investigations put many of the *brigatisti* behind bars. In Luzzatto's analysis, Dalla Chiesa was too fixated on the university and intellectual origins of the BR (although, as Luzzatto himself

describes, these were certainly important, above all in Genova through two highly charismatic academics – Gianfranco Faina and Enrico Fenzi – who both played key roles in creating an environment in which the BR flourished, but also took part in direct recruitment to the organisation, and, in Fenzi's case, actually participated in shootings). The mass arrests of 1979-80 in Genova ordered by Dalla Chiesa were, for Luzzatto, a 'round-up' which pulled in many people who – he claims – had nothing to do with terrorism. Yet, within that 'round-up' there certainly were *brigatisti* – such as Fenzi himself. Here we return again to one key question raised by this book. How important was an environment where violence was not only tolerated, but actively called for, in creating actual acts of violence, and radicalising future terrorists? Where violent words empty slogans, or did they influence reality? Certainly, read today, the open support for groups like the Baader-Meinhoff gang feel jarring, and dangerous. But do we need to try and read those words with the 'eyes of that time'? And how could we do this?

The focus on Genova is almost always effective, but this becomes a problem for the book when it – necessarily – shifts away from that city. The BR was a flexible organisation, and its militants were constantly on the move, and its leaders were usually based elsewhere. The pages in this book on – for example – the Moro kidnap in murder in 1978, are the least interesting and convincing of the whole volume. Sometimes, Luzzatto perhaps tries to over-play the importance of Genova, as with his musings as to whether Riccardo Dura was in Via Fani in 1978 – something not really supported by much evidence, and certainly not by any of the almost innumerable trials and investigations into the Moro 'case'. Luzzatto generally steers clear of conspiracy theories, which so dominate much of the work on the BR, and in particular that around Moro and 1978, but when his focus leaves Genova he does occasionally dabble in some of these so-called 'mysteries'. And occasionally this world-view appears in his analysis of events in Genova itself, as with the story of supposed 'documents' in the garden of Via Fracchia, where Dura and three other *brigatisti* were killed in May 1980. Were there secret documents buried there? Who knows. Certainly, there is no evidence either way. And how can an historian work without evidence? Personally, moreover, I find the killings of the four *brigatisti* in Via Fracchia unsurprising. Carabinieri had been killed or seriously injured during numerous arrests of *brigatisti* from 1974 onwards. *Brigatisti* had often shot first while threatened with arrest, whatever their internal rules stated. Those killings seem entirely comprehensible – but not justifiable, of course - in the context of what had gone before. By then, it was a war, and the gloves were off.

Finally, Luzzatto's book raises questions for the role of the historian – questions he often poses himself. Is it legitimate to talk to people who murdered, and kidnapped, and killed, and treat them as 'normal' providers of testimony? How much should we believe, or not believe, of what we are told by those who formed such a tight-knit group of violent men and women, both in person and in their books? How far should research go? In the last part of the book, Luzzatto suggests that Riccardo Dura may have fathered a child, someone who is still alive, before he was killed in 1980. He presents this extraordinary possibility to us, before declaring that he didn't want to go any further, because: as he writes «[...] per qualche tempo ho coltivato questa idea di cui adesso quasi mi vergogno. Di partire alla caccia di una donna oggi sulla quarantina, e di arrogarmi il diritto di interrogarla sul padre che non ha mai conosciuto. Oppure, al limite, il diritto di farmi messaggero: di rivelargliela io, l'identità di quel padre. Poi, per fortuna, ci ho ripensato». At other times, he admits he didn't ask all the questions he perhaps should have asked. Luzzatto admits to his own fallibility ties and biases. Above all, this is a book which all historians should read, and think about carefully.