

International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy**Book Review**

Monica Massari and Vittorio Martone (2019) *Mafia Violence: Political, Symbolic, and Economic Forms of Violence in Camorra Clans*. Great Britain: Routledge

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Mafia-type groups—a specific type of group involving organised crime—aim to acquire profit and gain power. However, the criminal dimension is only one part of these complex social structures (Sergi 2017). Indeed, mafias are part of the realities in which they exist; they adapt to legal frameworks as much as they evolve intervening variables within their own communities by seizing financial opportunities, using mobility inside and outside their home territory or embracing evolutions of gender, generational and family relations.

The edited collection of work titled *Mafia Violence: Political, Symbolic, and Economic Forms of Violence in Camorra Clans*, edited by Monica Massari and Vittorio Martone, aims to examine how mafia clans—collectively known as ‘Camorra’—from the region of Campania, Southern Italy employ violence in urban and rural areas of the region and country. The Camorra clans are well known for their exhibition of violence and their ability to diversify their portfolio of organised crime activities in Italy and beyond (Allum 2016). Spanning from extortion, murder and street crime to political corruption, infiltration into the legal economy and various forms of fraud and bribery, Camorra clans have been studied especially for their brutality and blood-spilling feuds (Dickie 2013).

The book is a collection of 13 chapters written by scholars renowned in the field of mafia studies who specialise in both the Camorra and the Campania region. The main topic of each contribution is how mafia groups employ violence and, in particular, how violence affects communities and how it is instrumental in the clans’ quest for profit and power. The book is divided into two parts. Part I (‘Violence and Mafias’) presents essays on mafia violence in a broad sense and in relation to other mafia groups in Italy, such as the Sicilian Cosa Nostra. Part II (‘Camorra Clans and the Use of Violence’) presents mafia violence specific to Campania and the Camorra.

The focus of Part I is various profiles of mafia power that manifest through violence. Five chapters focus on the communicative aspects and meanings of violence in the Camorra (Chapter 1) compared to other mafias (i.e., Cosa Nostra in Chapter 2 and 5). The focus is then shifted to mafia murders as a specific type of violent outburst (Chapter 3) and to the forms of capital that mafias use and abuse, including fear and intimidation and threats of violence, (Chapter 4). Part II comprises eight chapters that dig deeper into the

microcosm of the Campania region and the Camorra clans. In this section, the local contexts are the protagonists: they are the objects of the geographical analysis of criminal phenomena (Chapter 6) and are scrutinised for the symbolic meanings that violence assumes in mafia contexts (Chapter 7). Further, studies in this section focused on public perceptions of violence (e.g., in the local press; Chapter 8) as much as on what using violence means for recruitment strategies in one of the main Camorra clans, the Casalesi (Chapter 9). These studies also focused on how violence is used not only for political gain (Chapter 11) but also to regulate the labour market, using the example of the construction sector (Chapter 10) to highlight how violence facilitates the clans' pervasiveness in different aspects of local communities. The last chapters push the analysis further to examine the changing nature of the local contexts in which mafia violence exists by considering gender dynamics (Chapter 12) and the role of collective memory building (Chapter 13).

Throughout the text, the authors and editors reflect not only on how mafia groups control territories through violence but also on the social and economic effects this carries. In fact, the contributing authors offer their perspectives on subjects as diverse as urban criminology, policing, corruption studies and organisational studies. On one side, studying the Camorra calls for a specific focus on the urban environment (i.e., primarily the city of Naples) and its idiosyncrasies, social conflicts and economic torsions and distortions. On the other side, studies on violence must examine the symbolism this violence yields in different environments, not only in the city—where violence resonates more in the public eye—but also outside the cities, in more rural spaces and on virtual and digital platforms, such as the web or media. Indeed, as the social sciences have discovered after having had the chance to investigate on a large scale, violence often carries a message, and how this message is interpreted, studied, rejected or accepted by bystanders could change how victims are eventually treated and how harm is levied.

One of the successful traits that makes this book a good publication is found in the effective proposition of a world, the one of mafias in which provincial or rural events intersect with urban ones, even if they do not mirror them. The city's fabric shapes clans away from being less cohesive and towards having more chaotic and more violent structures of power in convergence with Naples' identity as a Mediterranean city that has some unregulated metropolitan areas. In provincial or rural settings, mafia clans appear more capable of blurring the lines between what is legal and illegal, and using violence appears more strategic, less widespread and more likely to benefit political and semi-legal investments. Discussing mafia violence and rooting the analysis in Campania with specific reference to Camorra clans might seem, *prima facie*, limited or too specialised in scope. The highly specialised content of this edited collection, however, does not limit the breadth of the publication, which is as vast as every discussion on mafia power, violence and local context must be. It is clear from a coherent reading of this publication that the authors examined social issues such as public disorder, street crime and youth deviance as part of a complex picture. The focus of the book is mafia violence, and mafia violence, as argued in other publications on organised crime (see Barker 2014; von Lampe 2016) relates to how different organised crime groups exercise power over communities, abuse the territory and economy by investing in licit and illicit economies, and maintain their structure (Aranda 2014; Catino 2019).

This book succeeds in presenting the complex picture of mafia-type organised crime through the lens of violence because it uses a microsociological approach comprised of case studies that examine the intertwining of various topics from the bottom up. It is never easy to draw lines, both geographically and socially, across areas so severely affected by the power of individuals and unlawful organisations whose aim is to exploit the economy, politics and institutions by blurring the legal-illegal divide of markets and institutions. This is why academic efforts, such as those in the chapters of this book, must examine different aspects simultaneously, even when doing so might result in painting a complex picture. Reality is complex, and microsociological research can support policy-oriented frameworks as much as, if not more than, macrosociological approaches can.

Current geopolitical challenges and settings tend to exacerbate societal tensions and risks by including security discourses in national threat assessments. Perhaps this book could have been more complete if it were to also spell out how an understanding of violence in local contexts becomes paramount for such

national threat assessments. This would have helped make the microsociological argument more robust and the findings of this book more directly applicable to other realities of the world. Overall, however, this edited collection is a great read for those interested in modern society's challenges from macro perspectives to micro approaches.

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