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Title: Book Review: *The Mafia in Italian Lives and Literature: Life Sentences and Their Geographies* by Robin Pickering-Iazzi

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In her detailed and insightful study of the Italian Mafia since 1990, Robin Pickering-Iazzi guides readers through multilayered, cultural, and sociological narratives by women. She points out the dearth of the female perspective and the importance of introducing these neglected voices to the discourse on Mafia Studies in order to gain a better understanding of geographical spaces, real and imagined, in which the Mafia operates in works of fiction and nonfiction. In so doing, she highlights a gender-oriented approach to understanding and contextualizing organized crime.

By pointing out the relevance of female voices in the fight against the Mafia, Pickering-Iazzi fills this gap analyzing works of women who have written about the Mafia, shedding light on an important phenomenon and, consequently, enriching the academic canon on this topic. In her analysis of these marginalized literary works, the author investigates the "microgeographies" defined by the narration of stories that can lead the reader to interpret Mafia culture and the resistance to it. In so doing, Pickering-Iazzi describes the relationship between citizens and the spaces they inhabit, thereby identifying a powerful tool to combat organized crime. Among the theorists she considers are Ian Chambers, Donatella Mazzoleni, and Edward W. Soja. With their help, Pickering-Iazzi explores the *microspatiality* (perceived space, real, imagined or desired) and the *city as performative geography* (the interaction "between built, social, psychic, and fantasy components") (13). These concepts enable the author to think creatively about a "postmodern urban imaginary," and "postmodern *impegno*," as well as fragmented social commitment to defeat the Mafia. By considering the ways in which subjects interact within built cities, Pickering-Iazzi shows how giving a voice to often unheard victims of violence can generate new ideological tools for understanding and stimulating a social commitment to fight against or oppose organized crime. This study, therefore, makes an important contribution to the field of Mafia studies in so far as it breaks free from many of the traditional limitations of gender, space, and medium.

In *The Mafia in Italian Lives and Literature*, the author takes the reader on a journey through various Mafia territories, underpinning the experience with innovative and fearless female perspectives that reach well beyond Sicily, and, thereby, showing how the problem of organized crime extends nationwide to reveal the power and affirm the validity of imaginary work in fashioning an ideology of anti-Mafia *impegno*.

The first chapter titled "The Female Mafia Imagery: Contemporary Mafiose and Gabriella Badalamenti's *Come l'oleandro,*" introduces the reader to the Badalamentis' criminal activity. Related to a famous Cosa Nostra family, Gabriella was the wife of Silvio Badalamenti, nephew of the famous Cosa Nostra boss Tano Badalamenti. Though Silvio was never involved in Mafia activities, he was nevertheless assassinated by Cosa Nostra in a vendetta against his uncle. Gabriella was given the task of writing the biography of Faro Badalamenti, the patriarch of the Badalamenti family. In her creative act, however, Gabriella Badalamenti mixes real life and fantasy to recount Faro's world. The biography, therefore, can be considered a Mafia fairytale. It develops intertextually by citing famous Mafia's texts (e.g. Sciascia, Pirandello, Tomasi di Lampedusa) and by integrating them with inedited ones. Like the canonical texts to which she makes reference, Gabriella Badalamenti, too, aims to portray Sicilian identities in Sicilian spaces. For this reason, her characters move between the opposite parameters of law and criminality, that is the troubled space of politics and power that, as such, has often been represented in an obscure or intangible way.

In Badalamenti's portrayal of the Mafioso "night wolf," Pickering-Iazzi finds the old Mafia romanticized (which might account for scholars' dismissal of this text), but nevertheless of value for understanding today's new Mafia as a criminal association that extends its affiliation to white collar workers with powerful commercial and political associations. Pickering-Iazzi notes the idealization of the Faro Badalamenti story, but also identifies its underlying realism. This has the effect of demystifying Mafia myths such as those portraying bosses as potent, rich, and revered. This demystification is further achieved by portraying women not as the silent victims of brutal men but as participatory figures with a will of their own to act. In other words, women have agency within organized crime structures. In *Come l'oleandro* (Like Oleander), for example, Angelina is portrayed as a devoted and submissive wife, but she will not hesitate to help her brothers kill Faro. Similarly, Faro's sister Rosalia will take over for him while he is in prison. The author's investigation into female representation reveals a difference between imagination and reality, and between the perpetuation and destruction of old myths.

In the chapter titled "(Non) Sense of Place," Pickering-Iazzi explores Amelia Crisantino's novel – or "citytext" – *Cercando Palermo* (Searching for Palermo), referring to the work of Edward W. Soja who, in his *Postmetropolis,* describes the urban environment as "a conceived space of the imagination" (65). In Crisantino's postmodern novel, a young Armando is sent from Oxford University to Palermo to research the dynamic of "non-sense" cities, whose identities are not based on standard sociological models or urban development plans. Through this example, Pickering-Iazzi asserts that *Cercando Palermo* "performatively enacts the process by which diversified discourses contribute to the thoughts, fantasies, and fears forming the 'Palermos' in the imaginary each character carries within" (65). Thus she helps reveal the impact of our biases and prejudices.

Pickering-Iazzi's close reading of Armando's imaginary Palermo reveals the inaccuracy of the assumption that Palermo is a criminal and out-of-control city. For this reason, she writes, it is important to establish "practices for needed social and economic transformation" within smaller urban spaces (66). Pickering-Iazzi rightly points out that the multilayered structures of Palermo presented by Crisantino represent the strengths rather than the weaknesses of the city. They help us appreciate that Palermo is about much more than the Mafia/anti-Mafia dichotomy, encouraging multiple interpretations.

The chapter devoted to Maria Rosa Cutrufelli's *Canto al deserto*: *Storia di Tina soldato del deserto* (Song to the Desert: Story of Tina, Mafia Soldier, 1994) relates organized crime to postmodern *impegno*. Pickering-Iazzi emphasizes Cutrufelli's "fragmented attention to specific issues" in contrast with the collective and nationwide *impegno* after World War II, as per historian Jennifer Burns's *Re-thinking Impegno (again): Reading, Ethics, Pleasure*. Cutrufelli explores the story of Tina, a young girl who grows up in desolated Gela and becomes part of a gang (105). Here, Pickering-Iazzi is interested in exploring the "material and symbolic signs" of desertification within Tina's limited geography. (107). An urban space, once civilized and vibrant, has been transformed into an urban desert that "cannot sustain forms of civil life," and where young people like Tina rebel against society (107). In Mafia literature, an inescapable future of crime in a desolate land is a common topic – ineluctable destiny – but Pickering-Iazzi's fluid interpretation of the text shows that, in Cutrufelli's narrative, there is a collective call to *impegno,* a final fight. Applying Burns's idea about how *impegno* in postmodern society is expressed by giving priority to the recipients of the art, rather than to the authors, Pickering-Iazzi provides a strong geographic explanation of Cutrufelli's view of Gela's unjust world and argues that all of us should work to address this injustice. Pickering-Iazzi interprets the work of Cutrufelli as a call for the extension of *impegno* beyond the islands of crime, poverty and violence.

In the chapter "Mafia Geographies of Voicelessness: Silvana La Spina's *L'ultimo treno da Catania,*" Pickering-Iazzi is inspired by Adriana Cavarero's notion that the voice is the "unrepeatable singularity of each human being, the embodied uniqueness that distinguishes each one from every

other" (148). Relying on Cavarero's idea, the author emphasizes the importance of voices generally silenced by the Mafia.

L'ultimo treno per Catania (The Last Train for Catania) can be included among that conspicuous number of literary works about those who fought against the Mafia. In it, La Spina recounts the story of Generale Dalla Chiesa, the prefect of Palermo who was assassinated by the Mafia along with his wife Emanuela Setti Carraro and his bodyguard Domenico Russo. Pickering-Iazzi highlights how the author indirectly gives voice to the voiceless Dalla Chiesa, though not through dialogue, but by reclaiming his memory. To make the case about the importance of various literary perspectives on the Mafia, Pickering-Iazzi rightly suggests that giving voice to the voiceless is in itself a form a justice, because it refutes both the criminal system and the practice of "omertà," or promised silence (192).

In the last chapter, "Engendering Testimonial Geographies of Legality," Pickering-Iazzi examines anti-Mafia activities influenced both by specific historic moments and by gender roles. The author identifies a variety of strategies to fight the Mafia through the analysis of the diary of Rita Atria, a Mafia witness who testified against her family, and the writings of other witnesses. She uses Shoshana Feldman's notion of witnessing, which enables one to tell a story, as a form of narration and as an obligation to share the truth for the benefit of others. Applying this idea to her analysis of the diary, Pickering-Iazzi effectively underscores our moral obligation to share a truth.

In this important work, the author sheds light on the exclusion of female voices in the discussion and mapping of the Mafia. Her book gives scholars and students new tools and a set of original theoretical approaches to use in contemplating Southern Italian culture and its landscape. It offers a refreshing approach to understanding the geographies of organized crime and those who fight against it. Pickering-Iazzi's aim is to encourage new critical reflection on a broadened selection of literature in order to enrich our understanding of the geographies of the Mafia and the way narrative fiction and nonfiction can illuminate Sicilian identity and culture.

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