



Dickinson

<http://www.gendersexualityitaly.com>

g/s/i is an annual peer-reviewed journal which publishes research on gendered identities and the ways they intersect with and produce Italian politics, culture, and society by way of a variety of cultural productions, discourses, and practices spanning historical, social, and geopolitical boundaries.

Title: Book Review: *Rappresentare la violenza di genere: Sguardi femministi tra critica, attivismo e scrittura* by Marina Bettaglio, Nicoletta Mandolini, and Silvia Ross, editors

Journal Issue: gender/sexuality/italy, 7 (2020)

Author: Vanessa Fanelli

Publication date: February 2021

Publication info: gender/sexuality/italy, “Reviews”

Permalink: <https://www.gendersexualityitaly.com/16-Rappresentare-violenza-di-genere>

Keywords: Book Review

Copyright information

g/s/i is published online and is an open-access journal. All content, including multimedia files, is freely available without charge to the user or his/her institution and is published according to the Creative Commons License, which does not allow commercial use of published work or its manipulation in derivative forms. Content can be downloaded and cited as specified by the author/s. **However, the Editorial Board recommends providing the link to the article (not sharing the PDF) so that the author/s can receive credit for each access to his/her work, which is only published online.**



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/)

Bettaglio, Marina, Nicoletta Mandolini, and Silvia Ross, eds. *Rappresentare la violenza di genere: Sguardi femministi tra critica, attivismo e scrittura*. Milano: Mimesis, 2018. Pp. 384. ISBN 978-8-857-54465-6 and 8857-5-44656. € 28.00 (paperback) and € 19.99 (eBook).

In *Rappresentare la violenza di genere*, eighteen contributors explore the representation and reproduction of gender violence as a structural phenomenon that affects contemporary Italian society. The volume's principal objective is to demystify the nature of *femminicidio*—femicide—as depicted by neoliberalist society. In fact, femicide is not an isolated incident, a *raptus* that is a violent reaction caused by overwhelming emotions, nor a sign of passionate and uncontrollable love. Rather, femicide is the outcome of daily and domestic violence resulting from patriarchal dynamics of domination and subjugation, which not only impact women, but also the LGBTQ+ community. Embracing a sociological and psychological approach, the volume analyzes contemporary Italian films, plays, books, and transmedia campaigns that tackle gender violence within the new millennium. Building upon the works of Pierre Bourdieu, Laura Mulvey, and Liz Kelly, the essays draw attention to the literary techniques put in place to draw attention to the voices of victims and survivors, while at the same time critiquing the exploitation of these stories as emotional spectacles by Italian media.

The book is divided into three sections: “Critica” [Criticism], “Attivismo” [Activism], and “Scrittura” [Writing]. In “Critica,” the longest section, scholars perform close textual analyses based on solid theoretical approaches. In “Attivismo,” Italian activists describe campaigns and other practices undertaken to fight against gender violence on Facebook, blogs, but also in newspapers and on TV news. Finally, in “Scrittura,” writers are free to address their stylistic and thematic choices when representing gender violence, thus offering a more idealistic explanation of their aesthetic approaches.

In the first section, scholars probe different narrative strategies in light of the challenges posed by *femminicidio*. Such challenges are the need to 1) represent women as non-victims, and 2) acknowledge that, in most cases, the only person entitled to tell her story is no longer alive. Scholars undertake their studies well aware of this intrinsic impasse and proceed to identify resisting strategies in biographies and works of fiction. Nicoletta Mandolini opens “Critica” by studying the representation of gender violence in the tetralogy of *L'amica geniale*, 2011-2014 (*Neapolitan Novels*, 2012-2015) by Elena Ferrante. She argues that through the act of writing, the protagonist Lila is able to subvert gender binaries thus offering an alternative to the violent life she was living. Robin Pickering-Iazzi examines the aesthetic mechanisms in the books of Marika Demeria (*La scelta di Lea*—Lea's choice, 2013), Serena Maiorana (*Quello che resta*—What remains, 2013), and Giuliana Covella (*Fiore... come me*—Flower like me, 2013). According to Pickering-Iazzi, by turning readers into witnesses, these biographies urge them to become aware of the socio-cultural mechanisms that generate gender violence, thereby compelling readers to actively oppose it. Similarly, Marina Bettaglio focuses on *Ferite a morte* (*Wounded to Death*, 2013) by Serena Dandini, a play in which the stories of women from all over the world prove that gender violence “transcends national borders as well as social, cultural, religious, and economic differences” (p. 140). Next, Carla Carotenuto structures her essay around the use of sexual violence as a war tool in the works of Elvira Mojčić. Similar to Ferrante's Lila, Mirsada confides in the act of writing to overcome her trauma caused by ethnic rape.

The final essays of “Critica” take into consideration the works of male authors, while also shifting the focus to the reproduction of sexism within the Italian film industry. The essays by Silvia Ross and Stefania Benini discuss the representation of sexual violence in Giampaolo Simi's *La notte alle mie spalle* [The Night Behind My Back, 2012] and Matteo Garrone *Primo amore* (*First Love*, 2004).

Both studies are rather unsettling for they show the narrative consequences of telling the story from the disturbing and amoral viewpoint of the male oppressor. Finally, Barbara Zecchi and Giacomo Manzoli close the “Critica” section by interrogating the role of female directors in Italian cinema and the ways in which the film industry still discriminates against them. Specifically, Manzoli explores the censorship mechanisms operated by the government which only finances films on stereotypical female victims. Overall, “Critica” offers different, but canonical, textual analyses, though the length of the essays does not always guarantee an in-depth study, especially when the entire artistic production of a given author is examined. For instance, Mandolini and Carotenuto include multiple novels in their analyses to capture the entire artistic trajectory of the authors. Yet, this results in condensed essays that those readers not acquainted with the novels might find difficult to understand. The essays by Ross and Manzoli, instead, are particularly praiseworthy for their concision and clarity; these essays represent the welcome novelty of investigating the (im)possibility of male authors’ treatment of femicide, and of unveiling government strategies that keep female directors and unconventional representations of gender under control.

The second part of the book “Attivismo” opens with Camilla Gaiaschi’s chapter on the different strategies of Gi.U.Li.A. and Rebel, associations fighting against misrepresentations of gender violence within the journalism community. The activist and blogger writing under the pen name of Eretica tells the story of the web awareness-raising campaign operated through her blog *Abbatto i Muri* [Breaking Walls Down]. As she explains, the aim of this campaign was to portray the manifold faces of gender violence and generate empathy for the Other. Similarly, Ethan Bonali shifts the focus to the delegitimizing narrative strategies operated by the media against transgender people who are not recognized as victims of equal forms of sexism. In the subsequent article Anna Pramstrahler and Cristina Karadole critique the dominant media’s strategy to blame women for provoking sexual violence. In this regard, crucial is the role of the *centri antiviolenza*, such as the Casa delle Donne in Bologna, where activists promote visual festivals to raise awareness about the recurring tropes deployed to represent sexual violence. Caterina Peroni explores similar strategies operated by Non Una di Meno within the context of the Italian #MeToo. The interview with Lola López Mondéjar, tackling the neoliberalist myth of women’s “freedom of choice,” transitions to the third and last part of the book, “Scrittura,” opened by a similar interview to Dacia Maraini. This second section of the volume, shorter and to the point, shows the dissimilar approach between scholars and activists who, with their enthusiasm and endless strength, renew the reader’s hope for a better future. “Attivismo” is perhaps the most accessible (and effective) section of the volume for it translates the theories analyzed in “Critica” into concrete examples taken from the daily fights of the activists and with accessible language.

In the third and last section, “Scrittura,” the writer Nicoletta Vallorani explains why she does not offer any emotional consolation to the reader; happy endings are not contemplated in *Oliva*¹ or “Nessun Lupo,” 2007 [No Wolf], for in reality, she maintains, there are none. Next, Marilù Oliva explores her collections of stories *Nessuna più. Quaranta autori contro il femminicidio* [Not One More. Forty Authors against Femicide, 2007] where fictional and real elements help to debunk myths about sexual violence. Impressive is also the depiction of prostitution in the volume *Il mestiere più antico del mondo?*, [The Oldest Profession in the World?, 2016], edited by Oliva. In agreement with López Mondéjar and Maraini, the collection of stories demystifies the ugly truth about modern prostitution; it is not a free choice but rather another form of neoliberalist exploitation. Finally, Gianpaolo Simi closes the volume by questioning the benefits of male authors who write about femicide from a female perspective. He positions his non-interest in investigating femicide from a female perspective, and, perhaps rightfully so, limits himself to the exploration of exaggerated masculinities

¹ As of the day of the publication of this review, this novel is still looking for a publishing house.

in light of individual and cultural responsibilities. The four authors of “Scrittura” do not offer any consolation; rather the whole section pushes the reader to reflect on the writer’s role as organic intellectual.

In conclusion, *Rappresentare la violenza di genere*’s most valuable contribution stands in promoting a transmedia analysis to Italian Gender Studies, exploring possibilities beyond traditional Italian feminism based on sexual difference. While presenting close readings of a vast archive of cultural products, the book’s approach is not merely formal, but contextualizes films, plays, books, and media campaigns within a larger socio-political and psychological context that points out the impossibility of finding a solution to gender violence without rejecting the values of neoliberalism. This innovative style makes *Rappresentare la violenza di genere* a useful resource for students, scholars, and everyday people interested in the phenomenon. Take note, also, that this volume does not always constitute easy reading from an emotional standpoint, hence, reader discretion is advised.

VANESSA FANELLI
The University of Texas at Austin