

Veronica Vegna. Donne, mafia e cinema. Una prospettiva interdisciplinare

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Volume 41, numéro 2, 2020

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1087437ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.33137/q.i.v41i2.36781>

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Éditeur(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0226-8043 (imprimé)

2293-7382 (numérique)

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Citer ce compte rendu

Balzano, W. (2020). Compte rendu de [Veronica Vegna. Donne, mafia e cinema. Una prospettiva interdisciplinare]. *Quaderni d'Italianistica*, 41(2), 217–219.
<https://doi.org/10.33137/q.i.v41i2.36781>

In the concluding remarks of part six, theologian Gemma Serrano and Valle deliberate on the volume and indicate persistent lacunae in need of future scrutiny. They summarize the book as a series of snapshots that intentionally renders a fragmentary outlook. Indeed, the volume's strength is its fragmentary character that enables narrow and comprehensive analyses of select case studies. However, amid such a myriad of stories, the voices of students, followers, believers, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit are lacking. References to the making and the content of the Declaration are wanting as well.

To sum up, on the one hand, even though the collection challenges the unilateral narrative stemming from the Catholic Church by entangling other power-yielding institutions such as missions, school commissions, and the state, the reports remain focused on the side struggling to deal with pluralities and rarely cross over to the pluralities' side. On the other hand, there is a lack of considerations of the Vatican II Declaration. Overall, the book is sensibly put together. Its interdisciplinary character could be valuable to a diverse audience comprising theologians, philosophers, historians, historiographers, and researchers from the political sciences and indigenous studies.

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Veronica Vegna. *Donne, mafia e cinema. Una prospettiva interdisciplinare.* Ravenna: Longo, 2017. Pp. 156. ISBN 9788880639664.

This elegantly written book on women, mafia, and cinema displays the experimental and favorable aspects of the approach and design of academic research. It has an introduction followed by three main chapters devoted, respectively, to mothers, wives, and lovers in relation to the mafia within the contextual study of specific films. The last part of the book contains a conclusion, as well as an appendix, with three interviews: one with Piera Aiello, who is a famous police informant and politician known for her stand against the mafia; another with Anna Puglisi, a sociologist and founder of the Sicilian Center of documentation "Giuseppe Impastato," which was the first study center of mafia in Italy; and the last one with Lucia Sardo, the actress who interprets the role of the mother in two films analyzed in this book. It contains a bibliography, a useful list of cited films, as well

as an essential index. The contents and the blueprint of this study are the very reasons for which professors of Italian culture might find it helpful when teaching a course, or a unit, on women, gender, sexuality, and the mafia in Sicily.

The book successfully associates the reality of the mafia with its fictionalized aspects expressed in films, using them to explain and translate these worlds and their dynamics to external spectators from the perspective of someone who, born and raised in Sicily, has an inside, sophisticated view. It might be because the author of this book, as it is mentioned on the back cover, has two undergraduate degrees, one in foreign languages and literatures and the other in journalism, that she knows how to expertly combine the narratives of real events with those imagined. Vegna quotes film critics, sociologists, as well as famous mafia judges, mafiosi, and 'pentiti di mafia' (police informers) in a complex interdisciplinary effort of fact and fiction that is similar to a quantum entanglement, where quantum particles remain connected so that actions performed on one affect the other, even when separated by great distances.

This study's central question is the representation of women as they relate to the Sicilian mafia in three main categories (mother-child relationships; wives; and lovers) and on both sides of the spectrum, embracing illegality and condemning it. Specifically, in the context of the patriarchal Italian society of the second half of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries, the process of women's emancipation generates a series of reflections: how do the feminist conquests of the civil society of the period affect the women of the mafia? Are these women deemed by the courts to be victims and objects of violence within 'Cosa Nostra,' according to an age-old view, or are they at this time in history recognized as criminal agents in their own right? Are women subservient to male power or are they its shrewd enablers? These are complex questions that Vegna carefully answers as she analyzes seven films: *Placido Rizzotto* (2000), *I cento passi* (2000), *Angela. Da una storia vera* (2002), *Il dolce e l'amaro* (2007), *L'uomo di vetro* (2007), *La siciliana ribelle* (2008), and *È stato il figlio* (2012).

One dominant view is that, although female power within the worlds of the mafia does indeed exist, it is nevertheless only temporary and handed over, not permanent and owned, because the entrance of women in the criminal sphere is only ancillary to the male universe of the mafia and their terrible goals. This subordinate position, of course, does not exclude that women connected to the men of the organization can get considerable material advantages for their roles. In synthesis, Vegna illustrates how the women of the mafia embody the contradiction

between a democratic world of the civil society outside, which now offers many more opportunities for equal rights and equal access to education, and the internal world of the criminal organization that is responsible for their denied emancipation. An excellent example of this paradoxical existence is discussed in the critical treatment of *Angela. Da una storia vera* (2002), which is the only film, included in this study, to be directed by a woman, Roberta Torre. It is indicative that this film presents, and quite unusually so, a female protagonist in full relief, with negative and positive qualities. While in the majority of films centered on the Sicilian mafia women occupy the margins of an all-male and powerful world, Roberta Torre's vision as a film-maker, instead, introduces a sort of liberation from the inevitable cinematic stereotypes that confine women to the typical representations of victim, champion of justice, or co-conspirator.

Precisely for this reason, one wishes that a more in-depth analysis of the differences between cinematic choices of male *versus* female film directors had been placed on the dissecting table (forgive the graphic metaphor) of this outstanding study. What are the conscious or unconscious objectives of the film directors in their representation of the women within the context of the Sicilian mafia? Why is it significant for readers of this book and observers of the films to consider how each director (whether a woman or a man, a Sicilian or an outsider) handles the themes that are here offered for the reader's consideration (Eros/Thanatos dualism; devotion to clan/religious faith; the redeeming qualities of art; psychoanalysis and oedipal desires; the use of mythology and symbolism)? Do such films mirror the reality of the society at the time of the narrated events or is there a dissident and emancipated view of the visual narratives?

The conclusion offers readers a preview of possible new directions for further cinematic explorations of gender: the role of sisters within family dynamics of the criminal organization; a study of various examples of linguistic violence against women (following Žižek's theories); the transgressive behaviors of transsexual or homosexual identities, and the consequent transphobia and homophobia inside this alternative, dystopic world of brutality and violence. A sequel to this study by Vegna on these topics would indeed be welcome.

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