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## RESEARCH NOTE

## A book festival dedicated to the Mafia(s): a report from the first two editions of the Trame Festival, Lamezia Terme, 2011–2012

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This article provides a detailed report on the first two editions of the festival of books about the Mafia held in Lamezia Terme (Calabria, Italy) in June 2011 and June 2012. The article reviews the 101 books presented in the two festivals. The analysis of the books presented at the public event gives us the opportunity to analyse the ways in which the Mafia's public image has been constructed in recent times. The books presented at the first two Festival editions have been divided by the authors into four main categories: books written by journalists, by magistrates, by Mafia researchers and books by activists from the anti-mafia movement. The debate on Mafia and anti-mafia seems to have a number of different 'voices', some of which (like those of magistrates and journalists) prevail over others, and this has led to a public debate about organised crime at a series of levels.

**Keywords:** Mafia; anti-mafia movement; book festival; Lamezia Terme

The level of public attention accorded to organised crime, as with many other issues, tends to move in cycles. But compared with other social problems, the question of the mafias is more susceptible to this kind of fluctuation because of the spectacular nature of the news it generates. Murders, corruption, blackmail, conspiracies, personalised conflicts, decade-long feuds, illegal trafficking, betrayals and supergrasses are all ingredients which for the public hold a certain fascination and which are also common themes in TV shows. In many cases, cycles of attention are linked to tragic events, as with the murders of important figures from the state apparatus, a massacre, or the arrest of well-known personalities (be they from the mafias, civil society or public institutions). As well as an increase in public attention, this kind of event has also led, in recent decades, to changes in the law regarding the mafias as the state has reacted to certain events. There have also been examples of mobilisation against the mafias from within civil society, which have led to important anti-mafia events and to the construction of increasingly active and widespread anti-mafia organisations.

But these attention cycles are not only connected to murderous events or illegal activities. In many other instances the success or attention generated by cultural events – films or books, for example – sparks a renewed public interest in these themes, and this has been a consistent trend. From the mid-1980s onwards, the popular TV series *La Piovra* (*The Octopus*, which is also a name given to the Sicilian Mafia) helped to change in an important way the collective

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48 imagination of Italians regarding the *mafias* (this term is used in the plural here to denote all the  
 49 criminal organisations in Italy, and not just the Sicilian Mafia). Later, a new generation of men  
 50 and women, not all from the South, discovered and then looked further into the issue of the  
 51 mafias after having seen the film *I cento passi* (2000) in the cinema or on TV. The film tells the  
 52 story of Peppino Impastato, a young communist who was killed by the Sicilian Mafia in 1978.  
 53 Roberto Saviano's novel *Gomorra*, which has sold more than two million copies in Italy and  
 54 more than 10 million in the 52 countries where it has been translated, has grabbed the public's  
 55 attention and provoked debate, transforming its author into an anti-mafia icon and the symbol of  
 56 civil resistance against the Camorra.

57 Thus, if we take a long-term view, we could argue that public focus on the mafias has  
 58 remained at a high level in recent years, especially in comparison with previous historical  
 59 periods. The proliferation of journalistic coverage of the mafias is an example of this interest, as  
 60 is the appearance of periodicals and numerous books dedicated to the issue. The numerical  
 61 increase in cultural products has also been accompanied by an increasing diversity of areas  
 62 covered – from biographies about famous mafiosi to studies of the role of women, to the  
 63 question of the relationship of mafiosi with religion to stories of how those on the run have  
 64 finally been arrested.

65 The time had come for a Mafia Book Festival, and the first was held in Lamezia Terme,  
 66 Calabria, from 22 to 26 June 2011. The force behind the festival was Tano Grasso, the historic  
 67 leader of the anti-racket and anti-usury movement, who at that time was responsible for cultural  
 68 policies for the local council in Lamezia Terme. The artistic direction of the festival was  
 69 entrusted to Lirio Abbate, journalist for *L'Espresso* magazine, who has been forced to live under  
 70 protection for years due to his investigative work into the mafia. The festival attracted a large  
 71 audience and was widely covered in the mass media. This encouraged the organisers to mount a  
 72 second event, which was held from 20 to 24 June 2012.

73 In 2011 and 2012 the festival programme (which can be found, alongside a series of other  
 74 documents and links, at: <http://www.tramefestival.it/festival/>), was rich and wide-ranging, with  
 75 the presentation of 52 books in 2011 and 49 books in 2012. As in many book festivals, authors  
 76 discussed their work with journalists, anti-mafia activists, magistrates, researchers, academics  
 77 and local politicians. These presentations, which were held in various places in Lamezia Terme  
 78 (a square, a historic palazzo, a park, a road closed to traffic) were packed with people of all kinds,  
 79 many of who had come from other parts of Calabria and the rest of Italy.

80 Given that this was a book festival and not an academic conference, the choice of books was  
 81 governed by two broad criteria: they had to have been published recently and it also helped that  
 82 the authors, or their books, were well known. Despite their wide-ranging nature (a characteristic  
 83 of work on the mafias) these books can be divided into four broad categories, of which the first  
 84 and biggest was of books written by journalists. Of the 101 books chosen in 2011 and 2012, 47  
 85 fell into this category. Since they are so important, it is interesting to think about the subjects  
 86 journalists who work on the mafia tend to look at. If we examine these 47 titles, we can see that in  
 87 some there is an account of a specific incident (for example, Manuela Latì and Giuseppe  
 88 Baldessarò's *Avvelenati* or Filippo Veltri's *Ritorno a San Luca. Dal paese dei sequestri alla*  
 89 *strage di Duisburg*); others tell the stories of mafiosi or victims of the mafias (as with Fabrizio  
 90 Feo, *Matteo Messina Denaro. La mafia del camaleonte*; Francesca Barra, *Il Quarto*  
 91 *comandamento. La vera storia di Mario Francese che osò sfidare la mafia e del figlio Giuseppe*  
 92 *che gli rese giustizia* or Vincenzo Vasile, *Era il figlio di un pentito*). Or they analyse a particular  
 93 area or region in detail, often with the use of judicial documents (Rosaria Capacchione, *L'oro*  
 94 *della camorra*; David Lane, *Terre profanate*; Gigi Di Fiore, *L'Impero*; Nino Amadore, *La*

95 Calabria *sottosopra*; Vincenzo Spagnolo, *Cocaina SpA*); or they underline the way the mafias  
 96 have moved into the north of Italy (Marta Chiavari, *La quinta mafia. Come e perché la mafia al*  
 97 *Nord è fatta anche da uomini del Nord*; Giovanni Tizian, *Gotica. 'Ndrangheta, mafia e camorra*  
 98 *oltrepassano la linea*). Finally, there were books about the victims of the mafia, above all the  
 99 magistrates Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, especially with the twentieth anniversary of  
 100 when they were killed along with their bodyguards (Attilio Bolzoni, *Uomini soli. Pio La Torre e*  
 101 *Carlo Alberto dalla Chiesa, Giovanni Falcone e Paolo Borsellino*; John Follain, *I 57 giorni che*  
 102 *hanno sconvolto l'Italia. Perché Falcone e Borsellino dovevano morire?*; Francesco Viviano e  
 103 Alessandra Ziniti, *Visti da vicino. Falcone e Borsellino, gli uomini e gli eroi*).

104 The second largest category at the festival was the 22 books written by magistrates who have  
 105 played important institutional roles in the struggle against the mafias. For this reason, they are  
 106 often well known and many people have read their articles, heard them on the radio or seen them  
 107 on television. This is true, for example, of the Procuratore Nazionale Antimafia Piero Grasso; the  
 108 ex-Procuratore of Palermo Giancarlo Caselli; the ex-Procuratore of Reggio Calabria Giuseppe  
 109 Pignatone; and others such as Antonio Ingroia, Nicola Gratteri, Maurizio De Lucia, Roberto  
 110 Scarpinato, Raffaele Cantone, Michele Prestipino, Piercamillo Davigo, Armando Spataro, and  
 111 Piergiorgio Morosini. These magistrates have been protagonists of the fight against organised  
 112 crime over a long period of time and they have built up a deep knowledge and wide-ranging  
 113 experience of the mafias and the anti-mafia movement. What do magistrates write when they  
 114 write about the mafia, often in collaboration with journalists? As with some journalists, they tend  
 115 to focus on broad analyses of the problems, which are often linked to their own life experiences  
 116 rather than their professional careers. An example of this type of work is Giancarlo Caselli's  
 117 book, written with his son Stefano (*Le due guerre. Perché l'Italia ha sconfitto il terrorismo e non*  
 118 *la mafia*), which compares political terrorism and the mafias – the two phenomena which might  
 119 be described as the most difficult problems faced by Italy in the post-war period. Caselli, the  
 120 current Procuratore in Turin, like many other important magistrates, policemen and carabinieri,  
 121 experienced these issues at a personal and at a professional level. This is also the case with  
 122 Armando Spataro, who has written about his long experience within the Milanese judiciary in *Ne*  
 123 *valeva la pena. Storie di terrorismi e di mafie, di segreti di Stato e di giustizia offesa*. Magistrates  
 124 have also discussed the factors that hamper the efficiency of the judicial system or hold back  
 125 their work (this is particularly true of the books by Piercamillo Davigo and Leo Sisti, *Processo*  
 126 *all'italiana* and Piergiorgio Morosini, *Attentato alla giustizia. Magistrati, mafie e impunità*).

127 The third largest category of books included those by researchers and historians of the  
 128 mafias. There were 13 of these, of which eight were by university researchers or professors.  
 129 Obviously, these books have a different outlook from many of the others we have discussed.  
 130 They are based on research carried out with the use of 'scientific' methodologies, and are trying  
 131 to create new levels of knowledge about the mafias. Subjects covered here include extortion  
 132 rackets in Campania (Giacomo Di Gennaro and Antonio La Spina, eds., *I costi dell'illegalità.*  
 133 *Camorra ed estorsioni in Campania*); the history of the Camorra around the time of the  
 134 unification of Italy (Marcella Marmo, *Il coltello e il mercato. La camorra prima e dopo l'unità*  
 135 *d'Italia*); the historical origins of the Sicilian Mafia and the other mafias (John Dickie, who  
 136 presented books at both festivals, *Cosa nostra. Storia della mafia siciliana* in 2011 and *Onorate*  
 137 *Società* in 2012); the links between mafiosi and local elites who were willing to set up alliances  
 138 with them, the so-called 'grey zone' (Rocco Sciarrone, ed., *Alleanze nell'ombra. Mafie ed*  
 139 *economie locali in Sicilia e nel Mezzogiorno*); and the ways in which criminal groups grow  
 140 territorially (Enzo Cicone, *'Ndrangheta padana*; Federico Varese, *Mafie in movimento. Come il*  
 141 *crimine organizzato conquista nuovi territori*).

142 The fourth and final category of books presented at the festival was those written by anti-mafia  
 143 activists. However, it is not always easy, given the subject matter, to distinguish between activists  
 144 and other categories of author. There are authors who carry out research alongside active work in  
 145 the anti-mafia movement, and militants who have spent many years studying the mafias. For  
 146 example, we might place Umberto Santino and Nando Dalla Chiesa in this hybrid category.  
 147 Santino, with his wife Anna Puglisi, is the founder of the Centro Siciliano di documentazione  
 148 ‘Giuseppe Impastato’, which remains one of the most important anti-mafia organisations on the  
 149 national scene. Nando Dalla Chiesa is the son of the Carabinieri general and one-time Prefect of  
 150 Palermo, Carlo Alberto Dalla Chiesa, who was killed by the Sicilian Mafia in 1982.

151 At the first festival, Umberto Santino presented a book which, through a critical review of  
 152 books about the mafia, analyses the way that debates and shifts in public opinion have been  
 153 constructed around these issues (*Don Vito a Gomorra. Mafia e antimafia tra papelli, pizzini e*  
 154 *bestseller*). Meanwhile, Dalla Chiesa discussed an anthology of classic texts on the Mafia (of  
 155 which he was editor) made up of texts which, he argued, have been largely forgotten. Other  
 156 activists at the festival have included Aldo Pecora from the Calabrian group ‘Ammazzateci  
 157 tutti’, who presented a volume about the magistrate Antonino Scopelliti, killed by the  
 158 ‘Ndrangheta in 1991 (*Primo sangue*); Anna Maria Santoro, a teacher from Palermo and an  
 159 activist in the ‘addiopizzo’ committee (*Una mamma in addiopizzo*); and Claudio La Camera,  
 160 who discussed a collection of papers he edited from a conference about the ‘Ndrangheta held in  
 161 Reggio Calabria in November 2010 (*Vincere la ‘ndrangheta. Metodologie di contrasto e*  
 162 *continuità di azioni*). Giovanni Impastato told the story of his brother Peppino, an innocent  
 163 victim of the Corleonese Mafia (*Resistere a Mafiopoli. La storia di mio fratello Peppino*  
 164 *Impastato*); and Francesco Forgione spoke about his published investigation into the business  
 165 affairs and connections of some important criminal groups linked to the ‘Ndrangheta (*Porto*  
 166 *franco. Politici, manager e spioni nella repubblica della ‘ndrangheta*).

167 In Italy, a key category in this area (and in general) is that associated with priests and other  
 168 representatives of organised religion. In the South in particular, the work of many priests  
 169 inevitably comes into conflict with the mafias. The important role played by some of them also  
 170 became clear because of the tragic murders of two priests in the 1990s, Padre Pino Puglisi and  
 171 Don Peppe Diana. The first festival featured two books by priests: one by Don Giacomo Panizza,  
 172 about his experiences as a young priest from the North who chose to live in Calabria (*Qui ho*  
 173 *conosciuto purgatorio, inferno e paradiso*); and the other by Don Tonino Palmese, who is linked  
 174 to the ‘Liberata’ organisation, and who looks at the victims of the mafias (*Patì sotto il peso delle*  
 175 *mafie. Via Crucis in memoria di tutte le vittime di mafia*). In the second festival three illustrated  
 176 books were presented, whose stories focused on important victims of the mafias and key  
 177 moments in the struggle against organised crime.

178 What conclusions can we draw about the books presented at the two festivals? If we take a  
 179 wider view it is clear that the selected books reflected current debates about the mafias – debates  
 180 that focus on certain areas and neglect others that are just as important. Books by journalists,  
 181 magistrates and activists often concentrate on the more spectacular aspects of the mafias, and help  
 182 to create a somewhat deformed picture of reality. For example, there are books that sold very well  
 183 which look at the mafia in the north of Italy and, even if they do often present an interesting  
 184 analysis of the ways the mafia has spread beyond its heartlands, they seem to underestimate the  
 185 weight and the role of the mafias in the regions where they were born, and exaggerate their  
 186 importance in terms of the economy and society in other regions where they have increased their  
 187 influence, thus underplaying the contextual factors which help the infiltration and bedding down  
 188 of these criminal groups. More generally, and almost certainly involuntarily, some books seem to



189 see the mafias as omnipotent and omnipresent – something which is, at the end of the day, more of  
 190 a myth than a reflection of reality. This type of representation of the mafia is exacerbated by  
 191 confusion over the role of many authors working in this area, which sometimes makes it difficult to  
 192 understand their point of view. So, there are magistrates who become historians or economists, or  
 193 journalists and anti-mafia activists who use problematic sociological categories in their work, or  
 194 researchers who combine historical research with intense levels of anti-mafia activity – and it is  
 195 not always clear whether they are writing as activists or researchers. Moreover, as we are dealing  
 196 with illegal and hidden organisations, the entire debate is often reduced to judicial issues. Trials  
 197 and investigations are the main areas where we are able to find information about mafiosi, their  
 198 business affairs, illegal activities, their victims and their allies. Social scientists, if the truth be told,  
 199 sometimes find it difficult to create any distance between their own work and the points of view  
 200 held by many magistrates, in part because of the intrinsic difficulty of researching into such a  
 201 complicated phenomenon beyond what is available in judicial records and the problems of  
 202 integrating these sources with other means of carrying out research; and in part because of the lack  
 203 of resources available to Italian universities in particular. In this complicated scenario, it is clear  
 204 that these mafia book festivals have successfully brought together a competent group of authors  
 205 who are among the main architects of the construction of a contemporary public narrative and  
 206 debate about organised crime in Italy. In this way, the festival organisers have transformed the  
 207 solitary voices of authors into a chorus which, in the creation of an event, has gained wide media  
 208 coverage. The coming of age of the anti-mafia movement provides hope for further future success  
 209 in the fight against organised crime.

210  
 211 *Translation by John Foot*  
 212  
 213

#### 214 **Notes on contributors**

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 218 *medio. Immagini sulla stampa e in politica* (with N. Bosco, A. Meo e L. Storti, 2011); *Alleanze nell'ombra.*  
 219 *Mafie ed economie locali in Sicilia e nel Mezzogiorno* (editor, 2011).

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 223 *nel Mezzogiorno*, edited by R. Sciarrone (2011); *Fuori dal Comune. Lo scioglimento delle amministrazioni*  
 224 *locali per infiltrazioni mafiose* (2009); (with Anna Carola Freschi) "The Political Meanings of Institutional  
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