

Facts about the field of study

- Anti-mafia sentiments in Italy have been expressed collectively since the mid-nineteenth century
- Differently from previous waves of anti-mafia protest, which were clearly class-based and often followed murders of activists, today's panorama is characterised more by everyday disruptive practices than by mass protest events.
- Confiscating mafia assets (buildings, businesses, cars) has been preventive and punitive measure that has been in place since 1982.
- After a mass petition in 1996 it became possible, as ordinary citizens, to reutilise these assets to realise social projects.
- In the past 35 years 27,000 mafia assets have been frozen or confiscated from organised crime, and are now state property. 11,000 of these have been re-allocated to the collective and used for welfare projects.

About Christina Jerne

Christina Jerne is a political scientist with an MSc in Human Security. She wrote her PhD dissertation at the School of Culture and Communication, Aarhus University, where she has been part of the research programme Cultural Transformations and the unit on Body Politics. Her research focuses on political economy and social movements.

Time and place for defence

Monday 4 December 1pm, Tvillingeauditoriet, Building 1324, room 011, Bartholins Allé 10, DK-8000 Aarhus C

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MOVEMENTS OF RUPTURE: EFFECTUATING, ASSEMBLING AND DESIRING ANTI-MAFIA ECONOMIES



PhD dissertation by Christina Jerne



AARHUS UNIVERSITET

MOVEMENTS OF RUPTURE: EFFECTUATING, ASSEMBLING AND DESIRING ANTI-MAFIA ECONOMIES

This is a study of grassroots practices and organisational forms that are used to counter mafias in Italy. It explores in particular, how the boundary between what is mafia and what is anti-mafia made, that is on how the contention, “the anti-“, is spelled out in praxis. More broadly, it discusses how these forms of contention can be understood in relation to other forms of activism and their theorisations.

Economy is a type of practice, not a realm

The way we think about and do economy often implies that economy is something outside of politics: a monolith that travels on a track parallel to politics. It is either something that allows for politics to happen or something that needs to be contested by politics. Anti-mafia politics, being economic in form, challenge this separation, suggesting that economy should be considered as a type of practice rather than a realm. This means that economic action can be highly political in and of itself.

Activists orient bodies against mafias through immersive experiences

Since 2007, thousands of volunteers spend 1-2 weeks farming produce that counters human trafficking, or buy tourist packages to meet victims of mafia related violence. This turn expresses a corporal, experiential dimension of politics. Yet many theorists look at desire with suspicion, particularly when it overlaps with economy. However, because politics is in general

increasingly affective, it is a prerogative to better understand how to work with desire (rather than trying to repress it) to shape novel political projects.

Mafia power is an array of weaknesses, not a strength

Mafias are heterogeneous organisations that thrive because certain objects (e.g. corrupt officials, abandoned land, waste legislation) are arranged and expressed in a way that increases its movement and influence. Anti-mafia politics is thereby concerned with pragmatically rearranging the relationships between humans and non-humans in ways that decrease the possibility of the actualisation of mafia-type bonds on a given territory (e.g. monopoly of labour relations, land usage, reputation).

Collective action should be conceptualised without predetermining where, with whom and how it should take place

Most often, collective action is associated to a particular space and is thought of as being carried out by certain types of actors. These are for example street demonstrations, petitions and riots that are directed at those who are in power: the politicians. Yet anti-mafia politics can take place on the technical reconfiguration of stickers, inside jars of marmalade and in musical psychiatric wards. This is not only the case of the anti-mafia movement. Contemporary politics calls for a novel language and horizon of imagination that does not confine politics to specific sites and classical representations.

Perspectives

The dissertation enriches social science approaches to collective action (sociology, political science) with methodological, analytical and theoretical tools drawn from humanistic disciplines (philosophy, cultural studies, aesthetics). These bridges propose novel directions for the study of contentious politics, suggesting the need to move beyond rigid disciplinary boundaries in order to think and do politics differently.

The empirical basis of the dissertation

The work is based on 3 years of ongoing fieldwork in Campania, Sicily, Apulia and Emilia Romagna (Italy), where I worked on mafia confiscated assets, organised workshops, took part in anti-mafia tours, and participated in demonstrations and commemorative ceremonies. I used qualitative methodologies to record my interactions with 147 anti-mafia activists, in the form of participant observation, interviews, volunteering and auto ethnography.