

Book Reviews

Girolamo Lo Verso, *La mafia in psicoterapia*. [Mafia in Psychotherapy]
Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2013

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Mafia and Psychotherapy recount almost two decades of studies on the psychology of the Mafia, during which the working group, coordinated by Professor Girolamo Lo Verso, sought to understand first what happens in the mind of the Mafia families members and, subsequently, in mind of the Mafia suffers directly or indirectly. Using the model of “Gruppoanalisi Soggettuale” (Lo Verso 1989, 1994, 2011), the study of this phenomenon allowed to highlight not only Mafia members’ mental functioning, but unconscious link between these members and the Mafia family and between the Mafia family and the community. The use of this framework to understanding psyche allowed researchers and clinicians- led by Lo Verso -to give back to a reading of the Mafia phenomenon quite different from the previous because - as the headline in the first book on the subject - able to look "inside" the Mafia (Lo Verso, 1998). Not overlooking brutality of the massacres, offenses to citizenship, denial of the future, the working group -led by Professor Lo Verso -brought to light the psychological aspects that allow perpetration of violence both in offenders and suffers. This research group is a continuous work in progress which started after the massacres of the Nineties and has not yet stopped, and requested by Giovanni Falcone (who Professor Lo Verso had an intense and ancient friendship as it is recount in the book). In fact, during these years, the working group always remained attentive and interested to the changes of Mafia- that is a extremely chameleon, secular and futuristic phenomenon – by overtaking archaic and stereotypical representations which are often associated to Mafia. The story told in “Mafia and Psychotherapy” forces us to take a step back twenty years , since the first phase of the Mafia studies, was born in the historical and cultural climate of the biennium terribilis '92-'93 (Ingroia, 2007, 2008) and is achieved thanks to the numerous arrests for crimes of mafia association occurred in those years and, above all, thanks to the so-called phenomenon of "collaborating with justice" that by beginning to undermine the rigid organizational structure of the Mafia caused deep cracks in its organization. This allowed the working group (in collaboration with a group composed by magistrates and judges) to study the Mafia psyche, to put in evidence its impossibility of being, thinking and acting, the “overfilled” identities, crushed by 'hypertrophic' “We-family”.

Moreover, since the crisis of criminal organization led Mafia members’ relatives (particularly wives and children) to seek help at the psychological services of different districts in Sicily, the working group began to extend toward affective networks of affiliates and collaborating of Justice (which, allowed to revisit the stereotyped role of women within the criminal organization) (Lo Verso, Lo Coco, Mistretta, Zizzo, 1999).

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So by starting with psychiatric interviews (Lo Verso, 1995) with collaborating of Justice and, subsequently, by extending the scope of the survey toward the Mafia families, Lo Verso and his staff offered us an important first portrait of the Mafia psyche, by keeping vigilant attention to the directions of change that criminal organization had in front of itself, that is the so-called “white-collar Mafia” (Dino, 2002), the tendency to globalize ... to preside over macro-economy operations.

Subsequently, researchers began sensitive to specific aspects that the phenomenon took on different areas of Sicily (Giorgi, Giunta, Coppola, Lo Verso, 2009), the different representations that the Sicilian population proposed, and the different attitudes that they, consciously or unconsciously, they engage in the interface, sometimes forced, with this reality criminal and / or its ghosts.

So, as the dialogue with the collaborating of Mafia family members and/or victims of the Mafia has allowed researchers to approach and look closely at the "nerves" of the Mafia, the analysis of the phenomenon and its consequences were also extended to those who are (in fact and/or potentially) in his sights: entrepreneurs, traders, civil society, politicians and administrators, etc. All these figures were, slowly, involved in the research group in order to reflect on the insistence of the phenomenon in its context and on its own involvement - even if not personal - linked to a social role.

In this direction the investigation was made possible thanks to the use of a particular setting (called "group of clinical and social processing") that- consistent with the methodology of action research- has been designed both in order to access to anthropological narratives of specific territories, both in order to intervene on the psychological dynamics, the images, myths, prejudices, fears, etc.. that favor the exercise of territorial control. This method of study allowed to bring to light on the psychological mechanisms that induce subjects to collude with the Mafia, the psychic effect produced by organized crime in the local population (including, for example, the strong narrowing of design possibilities and personal training) and the strategies used to combat the Mafia oppression. Moreover by exporting experience and research on *Mafious Psychism* in Sicily, the research group engaged in a study that compared the "Mafia in Southern Italy" (Mafia, Ndrangheta and Camorra) and the specific ways through are involved kneeling economy and vital dimension of the three regions involved (Sicilia, Calabria and Campania). Also in this study remained double focus: on the one hand, the attention to the dynamics internal psychic criminal organizations, fundamentalist and psychopathological aspects that characterize them (with highlighting the differences between them), and on the other the 'attention on the effects to the detriment of the citizens who live and work in these areas.

Also this study maintained a double focus: on one hand, the attention to the psychic dynamics internal to criminal organizations and to the fundamentalist and psychopathological aspects that characterize them. On the other hand the attention on the effects to the detriment of the citizens who live and work in these areas. Particular attention has been dedicated to the victims racket: scholars, in fact, contacted and the victims of extortion in Sicily, Calabria and Campania in order to understand the experiences: what psycho-relational dynamics such as codes and trans / cultural come into play in the complex and controversial relationship between victim and criminal system (Giannone, Ferraro, Pruiti Ciarello, 2011). Particular attention, in this way, has been committed to the racket victims: researchers, in fact, contacted the victims of extortion in Sicily, Calabria and Campania in order to understand their experiences: what kind of psycho-relational dynamics and trans / cultural codes come into play in the complex and controversial relationship between victim and criminal system (Giannone, Ferraro, Pruiti Ciarello, 2011).

“Mafia and psychotherapy” is a text that comes from this path and tells it in a new way, sometimes intimate, unusual when compared to other work that Lo Verso and his group have already published on the subject.

Throughout the first part of the book, in fact, after welcoming the reader "inside the consulting room" (through part of the therapy and exchanges with patients referred from various Mafia backgrounds), Lo Verso highlights patient's suffering and focuses on the necessary therapeutic attitude, resources, and more often on the limits that this patient reports. The author takes the reader more "inside" the Mafia question, by coming from his position as a therapist, toward people who felt, looked, touched "in turn" by the Mafia. The outcome of the numerous reports is varied. However, as notes Lo Verso, this kind of work often requires to be more supportive rather than exploratory.

Most obvious psychopathological issues are associated with anxiety and they often arise as a result of tragic or very severe family events (such as the disappearance or arrest of the fathers), who- by tearing the veil of Maya- throw patients in a crisis of 'identity difficult to live, to reconstruct, so much so that sometimes it can touch the psychosis. Lo Verso focuses on the difficulties that this type of patient brings to the therapy: first of all the stability of setting and the inability to work regularly because of continuing shake and absences that break the timing of therapy. Even for this reason, as the author says, a psychotherapeutic treatment is difficult (as classically understood), but not necessary with this type of patients: too much presence of elements of reality, too many suspicions anthropological, too many silences, too many ambiguities, overflow and dramatic involvement families, etc. Lo Verso focuses on the analytical skills and relationships necessary for those who work with these patients; in other words, therapist needs to be able to withstand the countertransference and co-transference elements not only to interpret and manage the relationship-as you would in a setting classically understood- but also to handle the situation, not to be emotionally overwhelmed, to be able to withstand even "the socio-cultural transference" inevitably present and active in this kind of treatment situations. Therefore, as the author underlines, awareness of the plurality of layers involved is essential to allow therapists to read and understand transferal and co-transferal processes. In essence, says Lo Verso "I realized that in this type of work is necessary to be together useful and tenacious, courageous and realistic, open but decided" (p. 60). In his book Lo Verso shifts his attention also to another type of patients: countless "forgotten victims" of criminal organizations, that is, all those people who because of their professions and / or their social roles have been – and there are - in the viewfinder of the Mafia, even if they are still alive. The author tells about the impact on the psychological and psychopathological level that this type of victims show (especially those who are directly contacted by the mafia): constant and generalized anxiety disorders (which often border on panic); prevalence of paranoid thinking; constant persecutory experiences, mistrust depression to the world, society, politics and the institutions due to breakdown of support networks (sometimes even those family members) as a result of its avowed intention not to submit to the mafia pression. The third part of the book also proposes an interesting review of the major research on the subject which we have mentioned above. For the language used, for intimacy proposal to the reader, for simplicity in describing and explaining the key issues but otherwise silenced, this book, as well as a guide to the experts, is a warm testimony given to the people who are involved in the Mafia in various ways. A book aimed at a wide audience, which involved, it's interesting, since it make the reader share of a economic and human suffering story, which can not and must not be stored.

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