
Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

Sorge, Antonio, *Legacies of Violence: History, Society, and the State in Sardinia*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015, 232 pages.

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My research experience with Sicilian culture and world view has taught me that there are a series of complexities and subtleties that make it difficult for outsiders to fully fathom the way of thinking of Sicilians (particularly in the rural areas). I realise that most, if not all, anthropologists could say the same thing about the various groups with which they work. What I find significant in the Sicilian case is that we also are dealing with a stereotype that has developed both outside of Sicily as a negative representation of the island's people and within Sicily as a tool that certain individuals, depending on circumstances, sometimes use to represent themselves to the outside world. During my first field trip to Sicily, it came as a surprise to me when research participants began to discuss the news of kidnappings and violence in the Sardinian highlands in terms of how impossible it was to understand Sardinian thought and action. It was my first research observation of how a marginalised people could use similar stereotypes as those applied to them in order to marginalise others. Reading Antonio Sorge's *Legacies of Violence* has been a real treat. Sorge has succeeded in producing an interesting, well-written ethnography of Sardinian culture and world view as manifested in the highland community of Orgosolo. The book goes a long way toward breaking down popular stereotypes of highland Sardinia and in making familiar what at first appears foreign.

The ethnography itself addresses issues of family and friendship, the role of honour (*balentia*) in everyday life, aspects of hospitality, and, in general, what it means to be Orgolese. It also provides some comparison with what scholars have documented for other areas of the Mediterranean region. Sorge, however, is not content with describing specific customs and practices. *Legacies of Violence* is not a simple ethnography. Sorge places the discussion of these aspects of life in Orgosolo within the much broader context of the history and geography of highland Sardinia. The real strength of the book is in how the author addresses aspects of local thought and the agency of specific members of the community, while, at the same time,

identifying and extensively discussing the various historical and structural factors that have an influence on people's current thoughts and actions.

At the same time, Sorge avoids the trap of essentialising Sardinian "culture" and its role in community life. He does not shy away from ambiguity and variability within the community. He succeeds in drawing out the alternative points of view of people within Orgosolo, particularly the complex divide between those linked to a more pastoral way of life and those who embrace a cosmopolitan lifestyle. In the process, however, Sorge demonstrates how these alternative positions themselves can also be linked to the historical processes that have brought the community into closer contact with the Italian state (and beyond). External forces may provide a strong basis for change, but Sorge demonstrates how people of different walks of life react to these external forces and adapt differently to the situation depending on their outlook on life and their interpretation of what is locally appropriate and desirable. He is also careful to show that, although there are these strong opposing views, the community's historical interactions with a series of outsiders have generated the basis for a degree of unity within the community. Geography and history continue to play an important role in how people see themselves as Orgolese. To quote Sorge, "the mountains, and the shared history of dissidence vis-à-vis the outside world, are key to local perceptions of self, even if cosmopolitans and localists differ in their understanding of the past" (p. 111).

As part of the structure and presentation of the book, Sorge provides a detailed literature review as a backdrop to his discussion of both the past and the current life experiences of people in Orgosolo. The inclusion of some personal examples from his research, as well as strategically placed case vignettes, help support specific points and should appeal to both students and professionals. In my view, *Legacies of Violence* is the type of historical ethnography that anthropologists should be attempting to achieve. It would make an excellent text for both undergraduate and graduate courses in historical anthropology, the anthropology of Italy, and studies of the Mediterranean region. At a more general level, the book is appropriate for any course dealing with the interplay of complex factors – historical, geographic, economic, political, and social (especially those that are gender based) – within the overarching context of the tensions between the local and the global.
