

Myths, Legends, and Affiliation Practices in the Italian Mafioso Imagery: the Local Dimension of Power of a Global Phenomenon

by Ercole Giap Parini

The study of the Italian Mafia organisations represents an useful perspective in order to evaluate the extent of organised crime in the scenery of a global economy that is characterised by the existence of a thick network of exchanges that envelops the planet.

In fact, the way these kind of criminal groups have traditionally organised their illicit international traffics has somehow introduced the today's globalisation phase. If "globalisation" is - widely speaking - a particular way of organising the relations between the local level of social and economic practices and the global one, so that the fortunes of the one are strongly dependent upon the fortunes of the other and vice-versa (among the wide literature upon globalisation, see in particular Bauman 1998; Giddens 2000), the Italian Mafia organisations have produced this kind of interrelation between the local and the global contexts since almost a century, since when it is possible to observe Mafia groups actively interested in the world-wide illicit traffics (such as drugs, weapons, smuggling and so on).

The main hypothesis of this paper is that the specific traits of the Mafia organisations are to be investigated in the particular functional links by which they are able to connect local territories and global contexts in order to pursue their purposes.

In particular, I will study here the local dimension of the Mafia and its "secret" character, that is sustained by the esoteric rites ruling the affiliation of the new adepts and the internal functioning, by providing specific tasks and obligations to anyone belonging to the organisation. If this specific traits appear to be derived directly from the past, as the remains of an ancient way to carry out criminal activities, I'll try to show that they are tightly linked to the most modern activities and the international dimension of the Mafia organisations. In fact, these elements of

the Mafia are not a folkloric heritage but are strongly connected to their organisation, and strategically related to its whole criminal economy.

In Italy, the Mafia is constituted by at least four macro organisations (Cosa Nostra in Sicily, 'Ndrangheta in Calabria, Sacra Corona Unita in Apulia, and Camorra in Campania) and, inside those, there is a plethora of organisations quite different one from the other. I have chosen to focus on the Calabrian macro organisation, since it represents – under certain aspects – the example that approximates better than the others an *ideal-type* for the Mafia organisation. Its peculiar characters are the independence among different cells called *'ndrine* constituting the macro organisation; the fact that they are strictly based upon the family of blood, and that only recently (and following bloody fights among the Mafia's families) a light co-ordination has been built in order to unify different cells to manage big and complex international traffics¹. In a recent report, following a visit in Calabria, the Parliamentary Anti-Mafia Commission has pointed out the topical importance of these elements in order to investigate the Calabrian Mafia:

The 'Ndrangheta is a characteristic Mafia organisation, different from Cosa Nostra or Camorra. Basic element is the *'ndrina* or *cosca* or *famiglia*, deeply rooted in a town or in a neighbourhood. In a single town more than one *'ndrina* can exist; in this case they all constitute a *locale*. *'Ndrina* is basically constituted by the blood's family of the *capobastone*, to which other families, that are generally or initially subaltern, aggregate. Aggregated families are often related to the *capobastone's* one. A long chain of marriages has marked *cosche's* life, so it is possible to state that this is a common tendency of all the families. (...) Any *'ndrina* is independent on its territory; on this territory the *capobastone* is not subject to any other power. For a very long time *'ndrangheta* lacked a unique power structure, such as the one characterising Cosa Nostra. Many *'ndrine* used to establish federative pacts among them, and co-operated to deal with businesses of relevant dimensions, such as cigarettes smuggling, before, and drug traffic afterwards. (PAC 2002, pp. 93-94)

Besides the aspects concerning the structure of the Calabrian Mafia, the main character constituting the phenomenon is the stronger presence of rites, myths and legends even today.

The Parliamentary Anti-Mafia Commission gave a wide relevance to esoteric images, rules and language in its last report.

The 'Ndrangheta is characterised by internal rules, hierarchies and statutes for providing “dignity” to its actions and the consensus of the initiate. The symbol of the *'Ndrina* is the knowledge tree that is divided into three parts: the trunk (the head of the society of *capobastone*, who exerts power of life and dead over the other affiliated), the smaller part of the trunk (*rifusto*) (the ‘accounting’ or ceremony chief), the branches (*camorristi di sgarro* and of blood), the smaller branches (*picciotti*), the flowers (young men of honour) and the leaves (betrayers destined to fall down). (PAC 2003, pp. 27-28)

¹ The fact that the word *'ndrina* – defining the single cell of the organisation – represents the root of the word 'Ndrangheta – defining the whole organisation – testifies to the traditional prominence of the single cell upon the macro organisation.

While taking into account these elements of the Mafia organisation and mythology, the risk is to put the Mafia in a romantic background. By exalting these aspects, in fact, the result could be an underestimation of its dangerousness and efficiency, that is to say, of its being a rationally oriented criminal organisation. Consequently, apart from the particular way the Mafia is organised and from the symbolic elements which integrate its structure, it is worth mentioning the definition given by the Judge Cesare Terranova, assassinated by the Mafia in the '80s.

It is necessary to dismantle the myth of the *mafioso* as a brave and generous “man of honour”, since the *mafioso* is characterised by a totally opposite character...the *mafioso* shoots to the shoulder, by treachery, when he is secure to have the total control upon the victim...He is ready to any compromise, to any renunciation and to the worst mean actions in order to save himself in a dangerous situation... the consciousness that nobody will denounce him, and that hidden and influential forces will rush to his help, gives the *mafioso* arrogance and boldness, at least until the right and severe application of the law will reach him. (Terranova cit. in Nicaso e Minuti 1994, p. 38)

What the Judge Terranova calls ‘mean actions’ and ‘compromises’ are nothing but the cruel economic orientation, aimed to the optimisation of the Mafia resources by implementing efficient practices and techniques.

I do not recognise behind the Mafia behaviour any cultural myth, any perspective of honour but the one that moves all economically oriented organisations. If these symbols, legends and esoteric myths exist, it is only because they are resources to give more efficiency to the actions of the Mafia.

If the specific proposal of the paper is to show that the symbolic reality and its secret character is nothing but a resource well integrated in managing both the local and the global dimension of its power and its affairs, it is also true that they are peculiar aspects useful for constructing an exhaustive definition of the Mafia that can distinguish it from other criminal phenomena. Hence, the *implicit* proposal of this paper is to give answers to a series of questions emerging in the actual scenery of international crime, such as: in which sense we can talk about Mafia organisations to identify other’s than Italian Mafia groups – that is the so called Albanian or Russian Mafia – ? and – besides that – which are characters in common between Italian and other world-wide criminal groups?

In the following paragraph, I will focus on the today’s state of health of the Calabrian Mafia, in order to give more evidence of its relevance and consequently of the importance for the success of the organisation of the symbolic and secret character of its structure.

The 'Ndrangheta in the today's scenery of organised crime

After Cosa Nostra crisis due to the State and civil society reaction to the '92 slaughters, the 'Ndrangheta has shown all its power and strength. Consequently, investigators and scholars paid more attention to the Calabrian Mafia.

The 'Ndrangheta showed its stronger capability to resist to the State's attack compared to Cosa Nostra, that until that moment had been considered the leader among the Mafia organisations. In fact, a synchronous action from different sectors of the State – politics, judges, investigators and civil society – put in very serious difficulties the Sicilian Mafia that simultaneously experienced a lack of protection and of wide social consensus². These difficulties did compromise the Cosa Nostra inner structure and its abilities to deal with illicit international traffics.

A greater stability of the 'Ndrangheta, if compared to other Mafia groups, has been ascribed first of all to the negligible presence of repentant members, then to the deeper rootedness on its territory, since 'Ndrangheta is so able in building up a thick network of consensus and interests where it has settled, that guarantees to the organisation economic resources, protection and proselytism.

Besides that, the structure of the 'Ndrangheta based on blood links had revealed itself to be an extraordinary defence against the repentant members. While stigmatising the oppressing 'Ndrangheta's influence upon the territory, the drafters of the last Anti-Mafia Commission report quoted the words of Antonio Zagari, a former *picciotto* of the Gioia Tauro area, on the Calabrian coast:

For the people born in such surroundings and trained to silence, it is not easy to denounce their friends, so that they become dangerously enemies. To cause the arrest and the imprisonment of relatives brings to moral and psychological problems, that are worse than the fear of revenges and retorts. (PAC 2003, p. 30)

Still speaking about the strategic level, in the new report of the Anti-Mafia Parliamentary Commission there is great evidence of the prominent role performed by the 'Ndrangheta in the nowadays Italian and international Mafia scenery. In particular the members of the Parliament have highlighted the fact that the Calabrian Mafia has gained primacy upon the other Mafia organizations and centrality in the biggest illicit international traffics.

The investigators of the DIA too agreed to give to the 'Ndrangheta such a prominent role. In the 2002's report, they stated:

² The most visible civil society attack to Cosa Nostra was the 'white sheet' movement, when common people used to spread out from their windows sheets with scripts against Cosa Nostra. This was an attack to Cosa Nostra legitimacy and consensus in Sicily.

Second semester 2002 data acquisitions show (...) that the *'Ndrangheta* goes on in the process of affirmation in the criminal scenery (not only the national one) through great determination and authority. The organisation consolidated its role into the international drug traffic by controlling the most important import channels, so that, as resulting from the last police operations in this sector (...) and as magistrates of Reggio Calabria confirm, (...) other criminal groups, among which Cosa Nostra, are supplied by the *'Ndrangheta*. On the inner front, the dangerous infiltration of the organization in the economic and entrepreneurial tissue of the region (Calabria) is more and more worrying, also considering the forecast flows of capitals aimed at the realization of important public works, first of all the Messina bridge. (DIA 2002)

The vice-president of the Anti-Mafia Parliamentary Commission, On. Angela Napoli, stigmatised the role and the strength of the Calabrian Mafia, based on local protection and power and on international traffics. In a very controversial interview, she declared that the *'Ndrangheta* is the most dangerous Mafia organisation, since it has extended its economic interests to the control of the drug and weapons' market of wide areas of Italy. Besides that, by facilitating the landing operated by foreign criminal organisations, it controls also the illegal immigration.

According to On. Napoli, the *'Ndrangheta* is able of creating false enterprises in order to gain sub-contracts, and this happens by exploiting blameless entrepreneurs who participate to the tenders for contracts. Besides that, the *'Ndrangheta* is in the high favour with large sectors of the ruling class, well articulated on the territory, that provide protection and complicity to it. In fact, the *'Ndrangheta* has managed to penetrate public institutions and can rely on influential backing, thanks to a network of unsuspected 'white collars' belonging who to the judicial and the administration's sectors (Gazzetta del Sud, 11.3.2002). The complementary aspect to the local power is a very dense and articulated system of international crime:

After the historical sorties in the United States and in Canada, Calabrian organised crime has definitely directed its attention to Romania, Russia, Albania, Germany and Greece. In the eastern Europe the gangs have invested conspicuous capitals, by gaining the market created after the Berlin Wall fell. In Albania, they buy light drugs that are cultivated in the immense valleys of the 'Eagles' Country', the heroine that comes from Turkish and Afghan markets, and so the weapons coming from the army of the former Hoxa's regime. In Germany, they sell drugs and acquire public stores, and in Greece they do contract to buy tobaccos destined to the smuggling. (Gazzetta del Sud, 11.3.2002)

The evidence of the power of the *'Ndrangheta* induces us to think over its constitutive elements. In particular, I think that the explanation of why it managed to gain the first position in the *mafioso* scenery can be found in its inner organisation.

With the following paragraph, I will provide the historical evidence about the functional relations that link the territorial dimension of its power with its international attitude, by taking into account that the *'Ndrangheta* managed better than the other criminal groups in keeping together the two dimensions.

Understanding the local level in order to explain the global one

A characteristic aspect of the Mafia in general, and of the 'Ndrangheta in particular, is the tight relation between territorial power and global dimension of its traffics. In particular, this emerges by thinking back to the history of the Mafia.

Even since the '50s a Calabrian Mafia group interested in the drug traffic was operating in Canada and in Australia. This group was called by Canadian investigators 'Siderno Group of Organised Crime'. Siderno is the name of a little town on the Ionic Coast in Calabria, the place from where those *mafiosi* had come.

In Canada the group was built up by a man, Michele (Mike) Racco, come from Siderno in the first '50s where he had been initiated to the local *'ndrina*. The new organisation was at the centre of a big criminal business whose activities were smuggling, extortions, and gambling. Though the organisation managed to gain a very high level of income from these activities in Canada, the affiliated persons to the Mafia used to maintain tight links with a poor southern Italy's town as Siderno. In fact the organisation of the whole criminal business had to be controlled from Siderno or in accordance with *mafiosi* living there. Besides that, the showdowns usually took place in Siderno.

Links between the Calabrian Mafia in Toronto and the headquarters in Siderno have always been very strong, as recent events confirm (...). These links are so strong that events that revealed themselves to be of capital importance for the 'family' had as protagonists individuals belonging to the Calabrian and the Toronto's branch of the group. (Nicaso e Minuti 1994, p. 86)

This example shows that even when *mafiosi* could emancipate on the economic level from the places where the Mafia is traditionally settled, they prefer to maintain such a functional link that seems to be concerned with organisation and logistic aspects.

Although the definition of Siderno Group of Organised Crime had been first used to identify the group operating in that country, the same name was attributed to another group operating its illicit traffic in Australia. According to Ciconte (1996) the decision to extent the 'Ndrangheta's activities in the Australian continent had been taken by Frank Costello and Albert Anastasia who were very careful not to disturb siculo American gang's activities; probably their strategy was to take the control of important illicit international traffics where *siciliani* were not present. The Australian version of the Siderno Group was involved in the drug and in the weapons' traffic, a business that would have revealed itself to be of capital importance only some years later. In the Australian case too, businesses were carried out in very tight relation with the Siderno families or families coming from the surroundings of the little Southern Italy town.

Since the '50s, the investigators not only were acknowledged of the existence in Australia and in Canada of groups depending on Calabrian families, but also that:

Relations between different groups operating internationally and the mother country were frequent during the years. In 1979 in a meeting in Siderno, to which representatives from Canada and from the US took part, it was decided that the whole heroin traffic had to be carried out by referring to the Siderno Group that, in its turn, addressed towards Palermo's groups which were in charge of establishing links with French seaports. (Ciconte 1996, p. 173)

Therefore the scenery is very significant: the ways an international traffic of drugs, involving a number of countries such as Canada, US, Australia and France and different groups of the Mafia, had to be carried out was decided in a meeting that took place in Siderno, the same poor and apparently insignificant town of Southern Italy.

It is commonly believed that between the local level in the Mafia's traditional territories and the international traffics there are not but few connections. People think that there is a traditional Mafia living on 'non entrepreneurial' activities such as kidnapping, extortions, and so on, that is separated from the one performing its activities on the international jet set of crime. That is a 'class A' Mafia separated from a 'class B' Mafia. Nevertheless direct testimonies describe a very different situation. Repentant Vincenzo Cavallaro said that his uncle,

Giuseppe Zagari, had been arrested in October 1967 and in that occasion seven tons of cigarettes had been sequestered. Francesco Gattini, coming from Sambiasi, and then condemned to 30 years of prison for kidnapping and killing of Cristina Mazzotta, used to work with his father in the cigarettes' smuggling. (Ciconte 1996, p. 177)

Perspicacely Ciconte concluded:

Zagari's telling is important because, while describing a ten-year period of the history of the 'ndrina controlled by his father, since it was involved in the kidnapping and in the drug traffic, confirms an element in common among different 'ndrine: many of them used to finance the import of big quantities of drug, through the kidnapping. They reconverted its activity from cigarettes' smuggling to drug traffic, while contemporarily they continued to operate in the field of the kidnapping. (Ciconte 1996, p. 177)

From the recent Report by the Anti-Mafia Parliamentary Commission it is possible to deduce that this link of the traditional place of the Mafia and the international traffics still subsists now. Moreover, it seems to be a strategic element: <<the 'Ndrangheta [that is to say, the Calabrian families] has assumed the most important role at both the national and the international level, by carrying out illicit traffics through the capillary control of the most important crime trade routes>> (PAC 2003, p. 355). An investigative operation called 'IGRES', carried out by Guardia di Finanza and coordinated by the Reggio Calabria DDA, pointed out the existence of a complex organisation aimed at controlling the cocaine international traffic from Colombia to Europa; the

bosses of the Plati's families were at the centre of the organization <<financing and managing different phases of the illicit affairs>> (PAC 2003, p. 356).

The distinction between territorial power of the 'Ndrangheta and international traffic is somehow coincident with the one proposed by Alan Block (1982) between *enterprise syndicate* and *power syndicate*. Block's theory was proposed in order to study a very different case of organised crime, the one operating in the New York area during the '50s, but it has been sometimes utilised in order to study the Italian Mafia (See Lupo 1996)³.

Nevertheless, such a dichotomy is not so useful for understanding the Italian Mafia groups.

First of all, Block's proposal of distinguishing these two species of crime groups is too sharp if applied to Mafia organisations. In fact, it presumes there is a well defined protector-protected relationship – though defined on a territorial basis so that criminal groups that operate as *enterprise syndicate* in a place can play as *power syndicate* in another one. The empirical evidence shows that these two aspects are very often part of the same phenomenon, or that this distinction is vaguer than expected on the basis of Block's theory. There are several cases in which international traffics – what Block would call *enterprise syndicate* because of the entrepreneurial aspects of this activity – are tightly linked to the territorial power. Antonio Macri was one of the most powerful boss belonging to the Mafia's 'old guard'. While living in Siderno – where he was well known as the true authority in his town - he was able of controlling a complex illicit system well ramified with its international criminal traffics. Macri's strategy of creating and controlling such a network of crime testifies the links between a local power in Siderno and the international activities. In order to organise illicit traffics, he used to rely on other persons coming from Calabria. I have just mentioned before the case of Michele Racco, to whom Macri ordered to create the Siderno criminal group in Canada, on the basis of the Calabrian model. Moreover, in the '50s Macri convinced immigrant families in the United States to extend in that country his criminal affairs. Macri's case gives us evidence of the fact that the territorial power is tightly related to the international traffics, in particular because in the Mafia case very often the same persons are involved in both.

Secondarily, when Block mentions the territorial power (*power syndicate*), he refers almost exclusively to non capitalistic or parasitic and violent activities such as extortions, usury or protection through violence. Such an analysis is particularly suited to describe the condition of territories not traditionally controlled by the Mafia. In these cases, in fact, a kind of territorial

³ In particular Santino criticised Lupo's utilisation of Block's theory. See Santino 1996, pp 75-82.

power could be activated through the mere use of violence, or by spreading fear among people. If applied to the Italian Mafia, this could be the case of some territories of new ‘colonisation’, such a - for instance - the case of Milan hinterland, where the Calabrian Mafia exerts a kind of territorial control in a ‘non-traditional’ place⁴. Nevertheless, while studying the Mafia, the most important aspects of its territorial power emerge in the places where it has traditionally settled its activities. That’s the case of large areas in the South of Italy, where the Mafia’s power is not only based upon violence and the fear that it produces among people living there. In order to emphasize the characters of such a power, it has been proposed the concept of ‘territorial mastery’ (Chinnici and Santino, 1991; Siebert 1996): an extensive interpretation of this concept (see also Parini, 1999; 2003) defines it as a way to manage the power in which the violent aspects are articulated with the people’s loyalty to the Mafia, intended as a kind of pre-modern authority, alternative to the one expressed by the official State.

In third place, when Block tells about illicit traffics, he under-evaluates the level (local, national or international) at which these traffics are carried on. A peculiar characteristic of the Italian Mafia is that it has been traditionally interested in international traffics, and that these represent the main way to provide economical resources to the criminal groups.

While studying the Mafia, I think it is more useful to adopt a perspective that highlights the articulation between the local power of the Mafia in its traditional places and the international affairs in which it is involved. This could be an aspect of the ‘complexity’ of the Mafia phenomenon that Umberto Santino pointed out in 1995 (see Santino 1995 and also Parini 1997).

A secret world guarded by myths and rites

As a consequence of the previous considerations, I suggest that it could be helpful to study the symbolic level of the Mafia, in order to grasp its specificity of connecting its local power to the international traffics. I am convinced that in order to carry out its traffics, being at the same time so efficient and dangerous, the Mafia needs to cultivate a symbolic level of the local power in order to gain protection, proselithism and social consensus.

⁴ According to 2003 Antimafia Commission Report, in the Milan area important ‘Ndrangheta families such as Mazzaferro and Piromalli have settled their activities. They control the territory through extortions and through the practice of usury. In this case it would be out of the place talking about any kind of cultural contiguity or involvement of the people living there with the Mafia. Any kind of legitimacy to the Mafia coming from the people is excluded.

Where the Mafia has traditionally settled its activities, it is not only seen as a violent and criminal phenomenon. Besides the fear and anguish it produces, the social legitimacy and consensus on which it can rely are to be considered as well. These are linked to a promise – moreover never kept by the Mafia – of redemption and emancipation. These feelings are culturally rooted in people who have seen themselves as traditionally excluded from the processes of economic development and of modernisation, and are strengthened by the distorted or marginal characters of the economy of large areas of Southern Italy. This is not an academic matter, since it has a vivid result in the drama of young men doomed to unemployment or to selling for nothing their abilities and hopes (incidentally: this is a condition reproduced through the complicity of the Mafia).

In this scenery, an organisation that presents itself as a secret society, to enter which it is necessary to be affiliated through esoteric rites and promising hopes of redemption, is dramatically attractive to potential *picciotti*. Moreover, the existence of an organisation that recalls ancient rules and codes of honour is very popular in such territories and excites the admiration among people who devote to the Mafia a high social consideration.

My proposal is to bear evidence of the role of myths and rites in the Mafia strategies, particularly in the Calabrian case. In fact, together with the capacity of the Mafia of creating an extended network of complicity and convenience, a set of codes, rites and myths defining a secret society contributes to social acceptance of the Mafia phenomenon. Through these, for instance, Mafia's violence become more acceptable to common people, since it is seen as an expression of some esoteric or ancient form of justice. And this is the case of its arrogant power too, hidden by a cover of legends and secrecy that provide a kind of legitimacy to these organisations. This is what I mean for instrumental use of culture and symbols, since the Mafia is interested in the results these can provide and not in the implicit value of them.

In the Report that former Minister of the Interiors, On. Nicola Mancino, presented to the Parliament, rites and formal ways to access the organisation are outlined as a crucial phenomenon in the Calabrian Mafia.

The 'Ndrangheta, differently to Cosa Nostra, has always widely utilised written codes, rites and symbols. Still now, during inspections and perquisitions by the police in Calabria "secret codes" are often found, and these are the copies – mainly written in dialect, with clumsy handwriting, by semi-literate persons – of the rite and the esoteric formula through which it is possible entering the 'Honoured society'. In these 'codes' internal hierarchies were presented; tasks and characteristics of the affiliated were predicated together with the behaviour rules and sanctions to the adepts.

Ciconte (1996) asks himself – and devoted an entire book to that question – why it has been possible that an organisation based upon an apparently primitive structure succeeded in entering as a protagonist in the big illicit world-wide traffics, passing through the pervasive conditioning of national parties and democratic institution? The answer is, somehow: thanks to that structure!

If you want to fight the Mafia, study its tradition

In June 1999, anti-Mafia Judge Nicola Gratteri, well known for his commitment in the fight against Calabrian Mafia groups, in a report for the Anti-Mafia Public Prosecution (PNA) outlined the relevant role and the centrality of these rites in the constitution of the Calabrian Mafia organisations, and also their vitality and functionality in the preservation and legitimisation of that structure.

According to Gratteri, although the Mafia is transforming itself and new rules are emerging with the strengthening of the new generations of *mafiosi*, “the structure and Mafia myths are always the same” (Gazzetta del Sud, 29.6.1999). Gratteri identified in the persistence of such elements the function of guaranteeing its monolithic model and its impermeability, together with the symbolic legitimisation, both internal and external to the organisation.

Certainly, the new generation of organised crime have eliminated, together with the old bosses, also old rules, but rites are still maintained, as a hypocrite cover of a ‘honourability’ that is lost. They have the function of maintaining a legitimisation internal to the criminal groups and a language that characterises itself to the external world. (Gazzetta del Sud, 29.6.1999)

It is particularly significant that a judge so committed in the fight against the Mafia gives such an importance to these elements of the Mafia organisations. It is worth referring some pieces of Gratteri report, not because he was the only one to tell about these, but because such an importance attributed by a judge induces us to consider them of capital importance in explaining the dangerousness of the Calabrian Mafia.

Mentioning the wide literature on it, the Judge points out even the ancestral myth that is considered constitutive of all the Mafia organisations: the legend of Osso, Mastrosso and Carcagnosso, the three knights come from the Spain because they were unfairly persecuted by the king.

After a long trip, they arrived at Favignana island and here they took different roads. “Osso” settled in Sicily and founded the Mafia; Carcagnosso went to Calabria and founded the ’Ndrangheta, while Carcagnosso, once arrived in Campania, founded the Camorra. According to

the legend, this is the way 'Honoured Society' divided into Mafia, 'Ndrangheta and Camorra. To describe the Mafia organisation, Gratteri reminds us the image of the '*knowledge tree*', already reported by the Anti-Mafia Parliamentary Commission.

Into such a tradition, the Judge tells about the capacity of the '*ndrine*' of vitalizing this world and these 'codes' by introducing changes regarding the organisation, that were maybe imported from other Mafia groups, such as the Sicilian ones.

While people tell about '*ndrine* and *cosche*', in order to identify the specific presence of the one or the other criminal group, the 'Ndrangheta gave to its ramifications on the territory a quite different name: the '*locale*' (...) The locale is the territory with more than forty-nine affiliated persons, with various dowries. Thanks to this concentration of adepts it is possible to ask for the possession of that territory, since the affiliated persons are able to maintain the control and the order over it. The request is made to the principal Locale, which has always been the little town of San Luca, since in this territory almost the totality of the male people belong to the 'Ndrangheta', and also since Polsi Sanctuary has been the traditional meeting place for the adepts. (Gazzetta del Sud, 29.6.1999)

In the annual meetings at the Polsi Sanctuary, each *locale* acknowledges a little percentage of its illicit incomes to the *Principale* of San Luca, as a recognition of its atavistic supremacy and since it represents - in their slang - the mother of all the adepts.

Each *locale* is composed of the *capobastone* or *capo locale*, of the 'accountant' and of the *crimine*. The *crimine* manages all the criminal actions. Both, the 'accountant' and the *crimine* are subjected to the *capobastone*.

These three persons together are called *copiat'*. *Copiata* has to be convened anytime an adept intends to present himself to a different *locale*, or to a bigger one. In this way no one can abusively infiltrate a *locale* (Gazzetta del Sud, 29.6.1999).

These elements are not of a folkloristic or archaic nature. Their strategic importance is testified by the fact that any inquiry upon Calabrian criminal groups comes up against elements like these.

During the investigations carried out by the *carabinieri* on some criminal groups of the Aspromonte area interested in the international drug traffic and in the exploitation of immigrant manpower, 'codes' describing rules and Mafia symbols of an archaic taste were found.

In the police interceptions phrases like: «'Ndavimu nu locali d'oru e ndi l'amu a sapiri manteniri» (we have a precious *locale* and we must keep it) have been recorded.

The police's sophisticated electronic equipment recorded many things about this: the constitution of a *locale*, the designation of the *capobastone*, of the 'contabile', of the 'mastro di giornata' and even of the *picciotti*; they recorded affiliation rites (occurring after a big feast

among *mafiosi*, while eating goat meat) where the *mafiosi* used small holy pictures of the Madonna.

All things happen according to the rules, even the smallest details like the salutations that are preceded by the title of the members: “don” or “compare”. Mafia in archaic clothes, but with modern and well updated methods and traffics. Even the old *capobastone*, who has the power of <<constitute and dismantle the locale>> respects the traditional codes but at the same time follows modern and well tested systems of accumulating capitals. (Gazzetta del Sud, 13.4.2002)

If you want to create a new Mafia group, you have to be formally initiated before

What happened in the Cosenza area is particularly important because the *cosche* that operate here are relatively recent, in particular if compared to other groups in Calabria. In fact, this area was considered not characterised by the presence of the 'Ndrangheta until the end of '70s, when Luigi Palermo, called 'u zorru', the boss of the former 'non-mafiosa' *mala* of the town, had been killed. The shift to the Mafia model corresponds to the efforts aimed at gaining credit through a transfer of pieces of culture and symbolism from the traditional *cosche* of other areas. The new bosses who were trying to settle criminal activities in Cosenza area needed the charisma of the initiation rites.

The first one to be initiated was Francesco Pino, who then became the leader of some clans in Cosenza, during a bloody fight in the '70s and '80s. In these initial phases of affirmation of new 'Ndrangheta families, the relations with the more traditional ones have not only a strategic relevance (i.e. connected to the managing of criminal businesses) but also – and maybe primarily – a symbolic one. Following this concept, it is possible to state that the transformation of the common crime into Mafia crime is strictly related to the assumption of these rites, as a distinctive trait with respect to the former criminal groups.

The case of the settling and expansion of the Mafia groups in the Cosenza area is important not only because it reveals us once more the importance of those esoteric elements, but also because they have a crucial role in the infiltration into the modern economic tissue, so dynamic that needs highly sophisticated levels of organisation in order to be managed. In this case, the activities of the criminal group were well inserted in the criminal managing of the conspicuous economic resources offered by the context of Cosenza and its surroundings, that is one of the most important and modern of all Southern Italy. In particular, it is worth mentioning that the activities of the *cosche* in the area are extortions and the control of big firms involved in the

most important public works. Besides that, the *families* used to receive conspicuous contributions from building firms that were involved in the construction of big hotels and public buildings; from the board of directors of soccer teams; from the appaltant of highway builders and from the ones running the catering for big services (Gazzetta del Sud, 6.3.2001). Besides that, there are crucial interests of the *cosche* in the illicit traffics, in particular the drug ones.

Some years ago, the *carabinieri* found a notepad by reading which we learn of a new organisation characterised by *locali*, *families* and internal hierarchies. The notes are written in a language that seems to have remained the same since the initial phases of the 'Ndrangheta in Calabria. The activities of this *locale* started with the most traditional activity, such as the extortions against shopkeepers in Cosenza and in its surroundings. The career of its adepts is characterised by the same hierarchies seen in the other cases: they enter the organisation as *picciotti* and hope to become *capobastone*.

Two years ago, the public prosecutor of Cosenza discovered and confiscated a piece of paper at the home of Rinaldo Mandarino, affiliated to the 'Ndrangheta of the same area. It was a 'copiata' concerning the initiation of a number of *picciotti*, a kind of 'identity card' for the new adepts, and containing the name of the *capobastone* and of all the persons taking part to the initiation ceremony.

The affiliation 'codes' and the rites

The inner significance of those rites, myths and legends is to define the secret character of the organisation. Consequently, myths and rites are complementary aspects of the secrecy, aimed at separating the group from the rest of the society.

The 'codes' represent the *summa* of all these aspects, and characterise the entire history of Calabrian Mafia. According to Malafarina (1978), the first one was found in the '30s in San Luca by the legendary *carabinieri*'s marshal Giuseppe Delfino. According to Enzo Ciconte, the first 'code' was found in 1902 by *carabinieri* during an investigation on the *ndrina* of Catanzaro. In particular, they found some pieces of papers titled "Society of the Malavita and Statute of the Malavita of Catanzaro" (Ciconte 1992, p. 25).

In his memories, Serafino Castagna, a kind of *ante litteram* repentant person of the 'Ndrangheta, tells us of the 'code' utilised by the 'ndrina of Rombiolo when he was affiliated to the 'Ndrangheta. More recently, during the '90s a number of 'codes' were found by the police

during the investigations. In spring 2000, one more was found during the investigation on the Mafia of Cosenza, as already mentioned.

The 'codes' represent both a symbolic act of glorification and a summa of rules that defines the structure of the organisation and of its hierarchy. It is striking that all the found 'codes' share the same structure and are based on the same legend about the three knights Osso, Mastrosso, Carcagnosso; similar are the rules defining the constitution of the *società*, and the admission of the new adepts.

In Serafino Castagna's book there is the description of the affiliation rite based on the local 'code' of Mileto (little town near Vibo Valentia) that is worth to be mentioned.

I remember as it were now the Holy Monday 1941, the seven of April to be precise, when the boss of the 'ndrina named me *picciotto*. The meeting was in a country little house belonging to my father, in the quarter called Sant'Agostino in Presinaci. It was late in the evening. Pietro Paoli, the boss, introduced me to the *picciotti* and the adepts of higher level; then, with a sign, started the ceremony. First of all, they seated in a circle, all bareheaded, but not the *mastro di giornata*, who, as I later knew, had the right to keep the cap on his head; then Paoli greeted all: «Good evening, wise comrades!>>. «Good evening!>> the others replied. As I had been warned, I did not answer to the greeting and stayed out of the circle. (Castagna 1967, p. 32)

The second step of the ceremony was the consecration of the place by the *mastro di giornata*.

In the name of the organized and sacred society, I consecrate this place in the same way our ancestors Osso, Mastrosso and Carcagnosso consecrated it, through irons and chains. I consecrate it through my faith and through my long words. If until now I used to know this place as an obscure one, since now I know it as a sacred, holy and inviolable place, where it is possible to set and to dismantle this honoured society». «Thanks!>> the others said together. (Castagna 1967, p. 33)

The ceremony went on with the consignment of all the weapons by the bystanders. Castagna tells us that this rite was not aimed at defending the secret society, but at verifying how many adepts were conform to the rule of bringing always some arms. Then the boss started the meeting.

«Arm ourselves [...] dear comrades of knife and misfortune in the same way our ancestors did, they who fought in Calabria and in Sicily and in the whole State of Naples. The society is a sphere that turns all over the world, cold like ice, hot like fire and thin like silk. Who will betray it – swear wise comrades – will pay through five of six strikes of knife in the chest, according to social rules. Silver cup, consecrated host through humble words I consecrate the society» (Castagna 1967, p. 33)

The bystanders tightened the circle keeping themselves hand by hand, except for the *mastro di giornata*; the discussion on the admission of the new members started by asking if anybody had something to say about it.

After a brief discussion, Serafino was going to be initiated:

Until now – said the boss – I had known Serafino Castagna as a common *contrasto*. Since now I will know him as a honoured young man, belonging to this honoured society». If the bystanders agreed they would have repeated the formula, or said: «I confirm». And this for three times. After the third voting, Pietro Paoli

said: «from now on, I know Serafino Castagna as a *picciotto* belonging to this honoured society. I swear with him to share the right and the bad fortune, here and anywhere. If he is dishonoured, tragedy and infamy will fall on him, but not on the society ». (Castagna 1967, p. 35)

Serafino Castagna was named *picciotto*, the first step in the Mafia career, according to the knowledge tree that I have already told about.

These rites are secret and only few people have the privilege to take part to them. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that the ‘codes’ are written, and represent a testimony of the presence of a secret society in a specific territory. This is an apparently irrational behaviour, since by finding them it was possible to know almost everything about the structure and the organisation of the *’ndrine*. Nevertheless, it is possible to suppose that this is part of a strategy aimed at bringing to light the secret character of the association and its mythology. It is also aimed at manipulating knowledge, that can provide some important contribution to the life of this kind of criminal society.

It should be fairly clear that it is just the maintenance of such an apparently archaic world in a context characterised by an economic power mainly derived from modern and sophisticated traffics, that makes the Mafia (and the *’Ndrangheta* in a peculiar way) that terrible and strong criminal organisation we know.

Interpreting the functions of the ‘codes’ and the rites for a modern organization

To sum up, like any other power, the ‘territorial mastery’ exerted by the Mafia in its traditional territories relies on a certain level of people’s involvement in it. People living side by side with the Mafia generally consider it an authoritarian system somehow alternative to the conventional State’s one and to its conventional culture, too.

On the other hand, the level of the big traffics represents an arena where the Mafia exclusively exerts its violent potential – in a Weberian sense – in order to efficiently manage its illicit affairs: on the international level, the Mafia doesn’t need any legitimacy!

These two levels only in part follow the Block’s dichotomy between *power* and *enterprise syndicates*, as I have already pointed out.

Within the same families there are individuals operating in the big international traffics because of their ability and ‘entrepreneurial rationality’, and others who are fitter at the daily managing of the ‘territorial mastery’ – in particular because they are more able in taking into account

resources as the legitimacy and the consensus. This means that in this criminal economy there are not two precisely separated levels, but rather a kind of division of work.

Those who daily deal in the international arena with illicit traffics need the support of the territorial level of power. Maybe to find harbour when they have to escape the international police, since every body will be well disposed at helping them⁵. Besides that, they have to launder their illicit income by investing in places where institutions are part of that Mafia network and consequently do not exert control. Nevertheless, the most important contribution to the international organisation of illicit traffics coming from such a territorial level is represented by the possibility of relying on a trustworthy potential manpower.

This is just the point that is strictly related to rites and secrecy. In fact, there must be a kind of policy concerning symbols carried out by the Mafia in order to strengthen the cultural consensus and to lure a number of potential adepts. The secret character of the 'honoured' society is backed by symbols and rites that give the Simmelian idea of the 'secrecy as ornament'.

Simmel, while speaking of secrecy, tell us about its ability of adorning what is kept secret. There is an apparent paradox in the secrecy as characteristic that has to be publicised. «What is kept hidden to the others' knowledge gains of importance in their conscience (...) the subject reveals itself as particularly noteworthy thanks to what it hide to them.» (Simmel 1908, p. 315). Serafino Castagna spent his entire childhood hoping to enter the secret society. Its secrecy was fascinating for him because it represented the opportunity of entering an elitist circle.

It is generally possible to outline the fact that the secrecy as ornament represents a recall and a desire of belonging for many young men of the profound South in Italy. This is the perverse fascination of the Mafia on contexts where it may represent an occasion of emancipation from poverty and from social marginality.

This is, in my opinion, the prime function that the territorial power – backed by symbolic elements – provides to the whole Mafia system. In particular, this means availability of people who wish to work for the Mafia, and maybe of faithful *picciotti* to insert in the international illicit traffic.

Tightly connected to this there is the 'reliving of responsibility-effect' that emerges inside a secret society. In order to carry out the big traffics from which the Mafia gains its main economic resources, it is necessary to have people ready to perpetrate terrible crimes. The

⁵ In a little town in the Gioia Tauro plane, a series of underground passages has been found linking all the homes of the town. These were utilised by fugitives from justice to escape the police. That's the level of social protection some area in the South of Italy is disposed to give them!

belonging to a secret society with its rules represents a kind of mask for the conscience. «The individual disappears as a person and becomes only an anonymous member of the circle, together with him his responsibility disappears» (Simmel 1908, p. 344). This could explain the brutality of the Mafia crimes that sometimes has a crucial importance in the success of its affairs, and that can be easily provided by such a territorial and cultural commitment.

With regards to the inner policy of the Mafia, technically, the secrecy is a typical need for any kind of organisation that plays in the illegal arena. The problem is not only to keep secret pieces of information regarding the identity of the adepts, criminal actions or place where weapons are stored or fugitive from justice are hidden. For any organisation it is reasonable to maintain the control over information by distinguishing between an *inside* and an *outside*: in fact defining that there are persons who can know specific pieces of information and persons who can not represents is a strategy of managing the power inside and outside the organisation. Besides that, for whom is going to enter the secret association through a ceremony of initiation – that is the importance of rites – a mark line becomes more evident and so the propensity of maintaining the secrecy over the major facts of the association.

Georg Simmel, in the well known chapter about *The secrecy and the secret society*, has highlighted some practical aspects of the secrecy backed by rites. According to him, there is a problem of protection of the organisation. Since what is secret is socialised among a number of adepts, it is necessary for the organisation to encourage the practice of silence. This can be obtained not only through a continuous and expensive policy based on menaces and violence, but through the ritual of swearing and the education to silence. In the rite there is what Simmel called the ‘moment of the generalised practice of silence’.

In the Mafia case, this corresponds to the objectification of silence as a value, out of specific strategic or related to organisation issues.⁶ Besides that, the ritual practices train individuals to speak by utilising formalised procedures and following a precise hierarchy, as in the case of Serafino Castagna initiation.

Secondarily, the constitution of a secret society is carried out by a differentiation process from the State; in this way it becomes impermeable to the State’s laws. This is the normative function of the ritual, that provides the association with an answer to the risk of internal anarchy. «By going outside of the collectivity the society may experience a lack of roots, of a vital and stable

⁶ The concept of *omertà* has stemmed from the popular Southern culture as moral value that has something to do with solidarity and is a kind of *humilitas*. In the Southern regions of Italy the honoured person is called *omu i panza*

sense and rules. This lack is compensated by the determination of the detailed character of its ritual. [...]. Through the rite the secret society spontaneously imposes to itself a formal coercion [...]» (Simmel 1908, p. 333).

If these elements are helpful in order to explain the function of rites and secrecy of the Mafia with regards to the performance of the internal activities and international traffics, they are also functioning by guaranteeing a general social consensus and legitimacy. In a Mafia territory all people know about the existence of a secret association whose behaviour is supposed to be ruled by an esoteric kind of justice and that represents an hope of redemption. Consequently, it is not only a violent and criminal association but, from a general perspective, it is considered desirable or worthy. Only in this way it is possible to explain why the Mafia can rely on a cultural consensus that provide to it protection and a generalised wish of belonging to.

Conclusions

There is a very long history about the attempts to give a definition of the Mafia. Through this paper, I hope I have given some new evidence in order to define the Mafia as a specific phenomenon in the wide family of organised crime. This evidence does not start from a theoretical perspective, but from the empirical observation of the Mafia behaviour.

The Italian Mafia is what it has become during its long criminal history. In the case of the 'Ndrangheta, it is the history of a number of little criminal groups of very poor people (this is an element that differentiates the Calabrian from the Sicilian Mafia) that used to carry out minor crimes (such us robberies of chickens and extortions to poor peasants). Later, they became the cruel and powerful organisations we know, largely thanks to the secret and ritual elements that had been characterizing their activities since the very beginning of their existence.

(man of stomach) to describe a man who keep secret pieces of information and – first of all – who doesn't need to denounce to the police any suffered crime.

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