

## Chapter 3

# Origins and Development of the 'Ndrangheta

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The word Mafia, as a term, has been very successful and has gone beyond the regional boundaries of Sicily, the Italian region where it was born. Mafia is, without a doubt, the most well-known Italian word in the world. The other Italian organizations, 'Ndrangheta and Camorra, have not had the same amount of international success.

Mafia, 'Ndrangheta, and Camorra are an original Italian criminal product of the nineteenth century, particularly from the Southern regions of Sicily, Calabria, and Campania, respectively. Since their beginnings, they have represented, in the eyes of their contemporaries, a shocking and innovative change compared with other criminal systems from previous centuries. They have built an organization with a precise hierarchy, given a set of rules starting with the most important *omertà*, developed affiliation codes with legends designed to entice and fascinate young people, as well as provided a long-term criminal initiative. For these reasons, such criminal organizations were able to thrive for decades and are still active today, having survived various political regimes, each one different among themselves, whether Bourbon, Liberal, Fascist, or Republican.<sup>1</sup>

Today, the 'Ndrangheta is the strongest and most well-established organization in Italy and Europe, let alone numerous countries outside of Europe. It is the *dominus* of the international drug trade because, in accordance with the big producers, it controls cocaine flows and has not hesitated to commit massacres outside Calabria. This very thing happened in Duisburg, Germany, on August 15, 2007, and has had a remarkable influence not only on the Calabrian political world, but also in some Northern regions like Lombardy, Liguria, and Piedmont.

This is no recent phenomenon. Its history is deeply rooted in the heart of the nineteenth century, even if it was known at the time by other names like *picciotteria*,

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<sup>1</sup> For those aspects see Cicone (2008). For the history of Sicilian Mafia, it is useful to see Lupu (1997).

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*onorata società, famiglia Montalbano, maffia* (with two f), or *camorra*. The term 'Ndrangheta only came into use during the 1960s.<sup>2</sup>

How could all of this have happened, especially since it has always been considered a “Bush League” version of the Mafia: That is, less important than its Sicilian cousin and, moreover, born in such a poor and marginal region as Calabria?<sup>3</sup> To answer this question, we must travel through time, learning about the legend and observing its organizational structure very closely.

It is not easy to spot *'ndranghetisti* in official documents because among the most important characteristics of the 'Ndrangheta, there is the tendency to work far from the surface, protected, and hidden as much as possible from resounding actions that would attract law enforcement and public opinion. Kidnappings began to attract public attention only during the second half of the twentieth century. But even then, only some were exposed, not all.

In the Italian historiography, the 'Ndrangheta is surely the least studied and least well-known Mafia organization. In an ideal bookstore, books on the Mafia would take up at least three walls of a room. Those regarding the Camorra would occupy one entire wall, while those regarding the 'Ndrangheta would be so few that they could fit on just over two shelves. Only in the past 2 years—following the *Infinito* and *Crimine* investigations coordinated by the courts of Reggio Calabria and Milan—there has been a revived interest of the subject and, consequently, an increase in publications.<sup>4</sup>

For a long time, the Calabrian Mafia was considered by all—not just historians—to be an appendage of Cosa Nostra, like an archaic Mafia: Folkloristic and wrought with occult cruelty. It was thought to be an expression of the underdevelopment typical of Calabria because its organizational structure had the natural family of the *capobastone* as its foundation, as it does to this day. However, a closer analysis of the Calabrian Mafia shatters this image, showing a mature and modern organization similar to Cosa Nostra and Camorra, but with considerably different and peculiar qualities.<sup>5</sup>

One distinctive trait should not go underestimated. The centuries-old history of the 'Ndrangheta has been characterized by a strong sense of anti-statism. This was rooted in the disapproval of the Italian State born during the unification of Italy, which was considered to be far away and hostile. In the years immediately following World War II, a particular phenomenon was produced: The meeting, in certain areas of the province of Reggio Calabria, of 'Ndrangheta groups with left-leaning political parties, thanks to the common experience of being confined during the

<sup>2</sup> For those elements, please, see Cicone (1992). This book is the first book on the history of the 'Ndrangheta.

<sup>3</sup> For a highly interesting description of Calabria, refer to what notable Calabrian writer Corradi (1990) wrote in *Calabria* with a preface of Libero Bigiaretti (see also Corradi (1951)).

<sup>4</sup> For those arguments, see Cicone (2010, pp. 7–21). The entire events of *Operazione Crimine* have been narrated by the direct protagonists as it is possible to read in Pignatone and Prestipino (2012).

<sup>5</sup> For this problem, it is useful to consult two reports of the Commissione Parlamentare Antimafia (Anti-Mafia Parliamentary Commission) (2000, 2008) in two different legislations.

reign of Fascism. Until the end of the 1970s, the PCI and PSI<sup>6</sup> were supported during elections by Mafiosi. Then the romance ended and the PCI became the most fervent Anti-Mafia party.<sup>7</sup>

The 'Ndrangheta had the extraordinary capability to make itself invisible; thus, its presence was generally off the radar to the people of that time. As a result, court documents and police reports, along with various trial verdicts, hardly contain any traces of their involvement. After the unification, the Italian government thought that the main problem was the Camorra, which was the first Mafia organization to be discovered. Then, attention began to spread to the Sicilian Mafia. Only recently, with considerable and inexcusable delay, has the government taken up interest with the 'Ndrangheta.

For a long period of history stretching from the Unification of Italy until nearly the end of the twentieth century, the 'Ndrangheta has, for the most part, lived in an informational and investigative darkness that has protected it from the prying eyes of the forces of repression. While it became stronger and more extensive, the mass media did not see it and police did not investigate with much attention.

This precise lack of attention, on both local and national levels regarding the expansive force of the 'Ndrangheta, has been one of the factors that allowed this organization to grow and extend its power over new territories. The spotlight of public interest was pointed at Cosa Nostra since the beginning of the nineteenth century and, thus, the attention of the State was also on the Sicilian Mafia.

Then, as time passed by, the tide began to turn. Following the massacre of 1992 that killed judges Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, the Sicilian Mafia took a severe blow by the Italian State with the help of the numerous testimonies of collaborators of justice that followed Tommaso Buscetta's example.

The voids that the repressive actions of the State had created in the Sicilian Mafia were quickly filled by the 'Ndrangheta. Today the Calabrian organization has a monopoly on the Italian regions of Piedmont, Valle d'Aosta, Lombardy, and Liguria; and has a significant presence in Tuscany, Emilia-Romagna, and Lazio. It also maintains a solid presence in other foreign countries—both in and outside of Europe—where it has its own colonies, such as France, Belgium, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, the Balkans, Australia, the United States, Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela, Mexico, Ecuador, Bolivia, Dominican Republic, Morocco, and Turkey.

Its real strength is represented by an organizational structure based on blood family relationships of the *capobastone*, which is the boss of the *'ndrina*, the basic cell. Nearly all-immediate relatives of the *capobastone*: Children, siblings, cousins, and grandchildren are members of the organization.

This family and parental net, extended by arranged marriages with daughters or sons of other Mafiosi, allows the 'Ndrangheta to be present in every Italian region,

<sup>6</sup> PCI stands for Partito Comunista Italiano (Italian Communist Party), while PSI is Partito Socialista Italiano (Italian Socialist Party).

<sup>7</sup> For this argument, see Ammendolia and Frammartino (1975); Manfredi (1981); Ciconte (1992); Ciconte (1996).

as well as in European and extra-European countries. If one were to draw a map of 'Ndrangheta presence around the world, he or she could see that the same surnames are found in Calabria, in the other Italian regions, and in foreign countries.

A structure that exhibits these characteristics has prevented the uprising of the collaborators of justice. While the Mafia and Camorra have been shaken by so-called *pentiti*, the 'Ndrangheta has had very few because a Calabrian Mafioso who decides to collaborate would have to denounce his father, children, siblings, uncles, grandchildren, cousins, and in-laws. To be clear, not all close relatives of the *capobastone* are Mafiosi, but this is the case more times than not. For various reasons, some of them do not participate in 'ndrina life, nor are they ritually affiliated with it (Cicone 1996, pp. 17–40).

'Ndrine (plural of 'ndrina) increase in size by following the institution of cross-marriage between families, a practice used by European nobility in past centuries. The only difference is that this time it is not aristocracy, but Mafiosi. Thus, it is very common for a woman from one 'ndrina to be forced to marry a man who belongs to a Mafia family; and so, she ends up being incorporated into the main clan.<sup>8</sup>

Often the most solid and long-lasting alliances between *cosche* had—and still have—cross-marrying as the basis. The crossings are dense and the tangle of relationships is difficult to untangle. Mafia families tend to be very large, and in them the ones who have more male members carry the most weight. A *cosca* with more men is a more powerful *cosca*, from a military point of view. This is very important in Mafia wars where the number—like in all wars—has significant importance; nonetheless, the number is also important for the territorial expansion of the 'ndrina itself. In fact, the 'Ndrangheta's method for expansion in Northern Italy is based on what we might call “colonies” or “branches.”

In the 'Ndrangheta and in the Mafia subconscious, the very notable legend of Osso, Mastrosso, and Carcagnosso have played a key role. Terrible names, but at the same time captivating; so intriguing that, since the nineteenth century, they have stirred curiosity and ignited fantasies in young people wishing to become affiliated.

Who were these mythical characters that had such unlikely names? Osso, Mastrosso, and Carcagnosso never existed except in the legend that tells of three Spanish knights—probably young, though their age remains unknown—belonging to a secret society in Toledo named *Garduña*, who arrived in Italy around 1412.

Their trip was not for pleasure, nor was it of free will. In fact, they were fleeing from their own land—today they would be defined as fugitives—because they defended the honor of their own family, vindicating with blood the offense committed against their sister.

Legend has it that they stayed on the island of Favignana for 29 long years. No one knows why the Spanish knights chose that mysterious and fascinating island, nor does anyone know if someone had suggested this location to them. All that is known is that, while they were hidden from everybody and working underground in the island's abundant caves, they prepared the social rules for the largest Mafia organizations. No islander had noticed their presence and, until just a few years ago, the legend itself was unknown to the island's very inhabitants.

<sup>8</sup> For the role of women in different Mafia organizations, see Siebert (1994).

When they reemerged, Osso went to Sicily and founded the Mafia; Mastrosso headed to Campania to organize the Camorra; and Carcagnosso, having passed through the Strait of Messina, landed in Calabria to give birth to the 'Ndrangheta.

A ritual from the 'Ndrangheta affirms that Osso represents Jesus Christ; Mastrosso, Saint Michael the Archangel; and Carcagnosso, Saint Peter, who is seated upon a white horse at the front door of the Society. Other sources entrust the protection of Saint George to Osso, that of the Virgin Mary to Mastrosso, while Saint Michael the Archangel, or the Archangel Gabriel, would be under the protection of Carcagnosso.<sup>9</sup>

It is a fairy tale, of course, but it has played a decisive role in the construction of the culture and ideology of the 'Ndrangheta and for young Mafiosi. It is fraught with extraordinary symbolic elements: The reference to Spain as the base myth of all three criminal organizations, validated by noble origins—a fact of crucial significance for the identity to be transmitted to new affiliates—and, finally, it has been built purposefully to reclaim honor, family, secrecy, and rules. There is also an allusion to the importance of jail in the formation and mythology of the Mafia as is easily understood by the reference to the island of Favignana, location of a Bourbon penitentiary.

And finally, there is a mix between the sacred and the profane: The will, at all costs, to cling to the cloaks of the Catholic saints and to every Madonna in order to gain strength and authority under their protection. All the principal ingredients to create a good Mafioso are there. The rest will be created by experiences and daily practices that, for an 'ndranghetista, begin very early, right from adolescence.

Someone, upon hearing this legend, would probably either smile or just shake their head in disbelief that it could have been so important in the training of *picciotti* (young boys). And yet it was, and still is, the case.

This aspect clearly emerges in the baptism—that is to say, the affiliation rite—of a young man who is becoming a member of the organization. More than in the other Mafia organization, the rituals that articulate the life of the organization have always played a crucial role in the 'Ndrangheta for new affiliates.

One enters the 'Ndrangheta through the rite of baptism, a term analogous to the similar rite in the Catholic religion. It was the custom for the son of the *capo-bastone* to receive a double baptism in his crib: One by the Catholic Church and that by the 'Ndrangheta, thus elevating the baby to a *giovane d'onore* (honored youth). Obviously, this symbolic baptism would find an official and ritual confirmation only when, in due time, the young boy had proven himself worthy after having committed crimes of blood.

Since this is an absolute ritualistic ceremony, it is of enormous importance to the young affiliate. For the first time in his life, he is crossing the invisible threshold from the legal to the illegal world, which will transform him into a *picciotto* at the exclusive service of the 'ndrina.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> For the importance of the fable, see Malafrina (1986); Ciconte and Macri (2009); Ciconte et al. (2010).

<sup>10</sup> Judge Saverio Mannino (1997) has observed how rituals in the 'Ndrangheta are “instruments of an ideology that is used to give to the associative relation a legitimation, based on presumption of sentiments of honor and superiority” (p. 372).

It has already been said that the structure of the 'Ndrangheta rests upon the family of the *capobastone*, but the use of formal rituals among relatives should not be a surprise. Mafia ceremonies, in which non family members of the *capobastone* also participate, are highly symbolic and full of grandeur.

Among other things, the ubiquitous allegorical figures of rituality and symbolism serve to solidify relationships and connections. The ritual is a celebration, just like a birthday party, Saint's day, baptism, first communion, or a wedding. Like the others, it is a reason to get together, to celebrate, to be recognized, and to affirm supremacy and hierarchies.

Collaborators of justice have recounted the moment of the affiliation and waiting for the ritual, which stirs up emotions and even anxiety. Many witnesses that were baptized have confirmed that the rite of baptism was never taken for granted. The young candidate-to-be is full of mixed emotions. It is a memorable day that will be etched in his memory. The Calabrian collaborators of justice said this, and it has also been well-represented in the works of some Calabrian writers like Saverio Strati and Don Luca Asprea.

Before the baptism there is a ceremony that decontaminates the room from external presences. In one such ceremony, these words were uttered:

I baptize this room as our three Spanish knights did [...] our three Spanish knights that departed from Spain [...] if they baptized using chains and iron, with chains and iron so do I baptize it (Cicone 2011, p. 3).

[Io lo battezzo come lo hanno battezzato i nostri tre cavalieri di Spagna (...) i nostri tre cavalieri che dalla Spagna sono partiti (...) se loro hanno battezzato con ferri e catene, con ferri e catene lo battezzo io].

These words were intercepted during an electronic eavesdropping in a bar in Singen, Germany, on December 20, 2009. This formula is similar to a Calabrian version from the mid-twentieth century. Other examples have been recorded in lands as far away as Australia whose rituals closely resemble this very example.

The 'Ndrangheta is an organization that swims like a fish in water in the wake of modern globalization; yet, one cannot fully comprehend its expansive force if there is no reference to these ancient rituals. It very well may seem like a paradox, but it is a reality, like it or not.

It may seem obsessive to read about wiretappings of honored men who often talk about affiliation rituals, or about *doti* (endowments), or rather, the ranks that each member possesses within the organization.

Throughout the entire second half of the nineteenth century and during the Fascist period, the 'Ndrangheta grew without finding any major obstacles in its path. But during the early 1950s, the organization started its upward phase. This period represents a real about-face to the history of the Calabrian organization. During those years, the 'ndrine entered the arena of trafficking "foreign tobacco," a term donned by police for cigarettes imported from foreign countries. At that time they were precious goods and were offered in illegal circuits at lower prices compared to the Italian cigarettes sold legally through the State's monopoly on tobacco shops.

The smuggling of foreign tobacco was favored by the presence of Anglo-American forces in Italy, particularly in Naples. That port hosted the first ships full of cigarettes. There were men belonging to the Allied Forces that gave way to this lucrative criminal activity, which favored criminal groups of the area that at the time were not Mafiosi; but in a couple of years, they would be affiliated enough to have an influence on them.

This period set the pace for the decades to come. The ascent of the 'Ndrangheta was becoming refined by the second half of the 1960s, predominantly with the construction of the *Autostrada del Sole* (Highway of the Sun), in the section that connects Salerno with Reggio Calabria. Building the highway meant overcoming a historical setback, thus unifying Calabria with the rest of Italy. This had a positive effect on many aspects of Calabrian society.

There was, however, also a negative side. In fact, the largest firms in the North, winners of the contracts, contacted the *capibastone* and made veritable agreements with them; in particular, they established the payment of the “pizzo” in exchange for protection of their construction site, the employment of 'ndranghetisti as watchmen, the integration of Mafia firms in subcontracts, the supply of building materials, and the transportation thereof.<sup>11</sup>

At that time, there was a construction of a real business model between the Northern firms and the 'Ndrangheta. All parties made pacts of non-violence. This model would be adopted in the following years. We will see in relation to the construction—which never came to fruition—of the fifth iron and steel center in Gioia Tauro,<sup>12</sup> in the construction of road linking the Ionic and the Tyrrhenian seas, in the construction of the airport and industrialization of Lamezia Terme, in the coal-burning power plant of ENEL in Gioia Tauro—which was also never finished—in the contract for the still-under-construction NATO base in Crotone that should have hosted F16 planes—another unfinished job—and in many more public activities, big or small that they may have been, including a recent amplification of the *Autostrada del Sole*.<sup>13</sup>

For all those endeavors, even in those that were not carried out, the work was launched and the 'Ndrangheta found a way to insert itself and earn huge amount of money. The question of economic income was very important, but the possibility of gaining prestige also weight heavily on the organization because it was forced to work side by side with important national firms. People saw Mafiosi arm in arm with managers of firms and with politicians. It was a real leap forward for the honored men during that time.

<sup>11</sup> For the history of Calabria in this period is useful to see Cingari (1982).

<sup>12</sup> The decision to build a new iron and steel center had an outstanding effect on the 'Ndrangheta during that time, consecrating the power and prestige of the Piromallis. For those aspects of the event, it is crucial to see Arlacchi (1983). For the further development of the 'Ndrangheta in Gioia Tauro see Forgione (2012).

<sup>13</sup> For those aspects, see Forgione and Mondani (1993). Regarding the power plant of ENEL, see Commissione Parlamentare (1990).



The expansion of the economic intervention of the Italian State in the *Mezzogiorno* (Southern Italy) would last throughout the 1970s. In Calabria—from the so-called Colombo Block onward—the distribution of State funds was considerable, but its concrete management got out of the hands of the state. The Italian government began to finance the 'Ndrangheta, although indirectly, thus contributing to its growth and power. The State provided money, but could no longer manage the majority of it. The State often appeared evanescent, and intervention instruments—from *Cassa per il Mezzogiorno* to different agricultural authorities and consortia for industrial development—often folded to the interests of clientele, whether illegal or partial. Its action was substituted by a veritable illegal control of the economy.

The 1960s and 1970s were the “magic” years for the 'ndrine because they “de-provincialized” themselves, dispersing all over the world in search of new business. The 'Ndrangheta would no longer be locked in the narrow confines of its origins, in the recesses of rural society, in the badlands of Aspromonte; but it would have made the choice to extend beyond national and international boundaries.<sup>14</sup>

This was, without a doubt, a pivotal turning point that would propel the Calabrian Mafia into far and unknown lands.<sup>15</sup> With its many transnational connections solidified throughout the preceding decades, the 'Ndrangheta worked like an enormous magnet, attracting drug markets as well as weapons and explosives dealers with its criminal reliability. The drugs, at first heroin, but soon followed by cocaine, represented the most lucrative trade in the entire history of the criminal organization.

Having already laid the foundation in previous decades, during the 1970s and 1980s there was a huge transformation within the Calabrian Mafia. It went beyond regional borders, exporting its activities to the North with kidnappings, consequently gaining a leading role in international weapons and drug trades; and in the 1990s, it demonstrated itself to be equipped with an organizational and action capacity similar to its Sicilian sister, Cosa Nostra.<sup>16</sup>

Surely taking advantage of the underestimation and misunderstanding that continued to surround it, its dynamic development would fully unfold within the framework of cultural and economic trends, and in political conditions existing at regional and national levels. Those years were characterized by a cohabitation—or coexistence—of the State with the various Mafias, which, since the beginning of the Cold War, had entered the complex and diverse anti-communist block that had characterized the Italian post-war movement, becoming an important component in a short time. This period in history, dominated by blocks and the impossibility of political change, meant that the fundamental task of the institutions and the State apparatus was to maintain in power of a given social and political block.

Throughout the 'Ndrangheta's history, there are two distinct periodical moments: First, the relations with the Fascist world and, secondly, that of the legitimization that led the Calabrian Mafia to become a structure of economic and political power.

<sup>14</sup> For the 'Ndrangheta of Aspromonte, see the classic and ever-useful Stajano (1979). The description of Africo facilitates the understanding of social change and the particular reasoning of the 'Ndrangheta. Also regarding the Aspromonte, see Bianco (1959).

<sup>15</sup> For those arguments see Gambino (1976, 1986). See also Malafrina (1981).

<sup>16</sup> For the kidnapping season see Cicone (1997).



The two phases are not clearly distinguished because they partly overlap temporally. In the same period some 'ndrine chose the path of subversive corruption, rather than that of power. Then, the former leveled their behavior to the latter (De Stefanos and allies) and put themselves to the service of the local and national power without exception.

The 'Ndrangheta is perhaps the Mafia organization that had the most contact with the subversive world. While the crucial period happened between the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, the 2-year period from 1969 to 1970 were the most significant. Looking back at the town of San Luca, in the heart of Aspromonte, the *Montalto* Mafia meeting took place on October 26, 1969. This meeting, which included the most influential 'ndrine leaders, was apparently held the same way every year for time immemorial.

The Montalto meeting that year was very different from previous meetings throughout the 'Ndrangheta's history. It was distinct because some of the honored men, the Nirtas from San Luca and the De Stefanos from Reggio Calabria being among them, wished to discuss the possibility of the organization endorsing the political project having survived the Fascist regime—Prince Junio Valerio Borghese—who had proposed a coup d'état. The choice was difficult because it would require an imminent and direct political dislocation of the 'Ndrangheta. A providential interruption by the police, who were informed of the meeting, prevented the project from being carried out.<sup>17</sup>

Another meaningful event happened in July of 1970, with the revolt for the state capital in Reggio Calabria, named “boia chi non molla” (executioner who does not give up) as its famous slogan.<sup>18</sup> It was a revolt with subversive traits, led by the Fascist right and recruiting a wide participation of 'Ndrangheta men. In those episodes, relationships were formed between some 'Ndrangheta groups and men of the subversive right wing.

At that time, two more events took place: On one hand, some people of the subversive right were affiliated with the 'Ndrangheta. On the other hand, however, the secret services also came into contact with certain men of the 'Ndrangheta, not to mention the extreme right-wingers. Some of these men had a double position because they were both honored men and representatives of the extreme right.<sup>19</sup> But an important development was afoot: The workers for the State were taking advantage of both parties. The failing of the coup d'état in the 2-year period of 1969–1970 does not interrupt the relations between the 'Ndrangheta and the subversion world that will continue for the following years.

By the middle of the 1970s a significant new development occurred. The most influential *capibastone* decided to join the freemasonry. They were, however, covered lodges and did not actually have anything to do with official freemasonry. The decision came from the necessity to build relationships with the professional

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<sup>17</sup> About Montalto, see Marino (1971) who describes the events of the memorable day.

<sup>18</sup> More information on that historical period has been narrated by Cuzzola (2007). *Storie e memorie della rivolta*.

<sup>19</sup> See Misiama (1994). The article summarizes the internal debate of the PCI of Reggio Calabria.

world—in which freemasonry has a substantial presence—in order to maintain a direct connection with those circles and find a fast track for business.

The *'ndranghetisti* who maintained close relationships with the subversive right wing were mainly the ones who orchestrated this operation. This [thing] was facilitated with tools provided by the government and with secret services.

The decision to join the freemasonry warranted a modification of the *'Ndrangheta* structure; a superior command level named *Santa* was introduced which involved the elite members of the Mafia, known as *santisti*. The *santisti* were authorized to build relationships with sectors whose prior contact had been strictly prohibited, starting with the *Carabinieri* and police officers. Many *capibastone* became informants for law enforcement, which created chaotic and ambiguous relations. This explains the recurring “confidential source” theme in police and *Carabinieri* records.

Being protected by covered lodges made it easier to develop relationships with state officials. Beginning with magistrates, these connections would prove to be vital components in determining the course of legal proceedings. But in the meantime, they were still able to make direct contact with politicians, freelance workers, and managers of public companies that were able to ensure, or procure, new business ventures.<sup>20</sup>

The 1980s were characterized by the ideological conviction that the huge expansion of the market and of the companies themselves would result in a process of modernization, thus bringing the “questione meridionale” to an end. However, by the end of the century, the *'Ndrangheta* would come to be portrayed as one of the causes of the warped and corrupt modernization of the current Mezzogiorno region.

During those decades, the Mafia had a profound influence on the economy. It created a sort of double market, one legal and the other illegal; the first undergoing heavy intervention and conditioning by the second. Mafia companies, or at least those dealing with Mafia funds, penetrated the legal market, altering the rules, destroying healthy companies, and preventing the creation of new economic enterprises. Violence, especially of the organized variety, thus became not only a problem of public order, but it also became a new economic entity capable of acting on the open market and making economic choices. These selections lead to the failure of many companies and, in turn, the promotion of Mafia entrepreneurs. These are the essential and warped aspects that have represented the so-called modernization in Calabria and other parts of the Mezzogiorno.

The Mafia was quickly gaining control of the economies of many areas within the region. This was possible through the inadequate and incompetent management of power by the local ruling classes. In Calabria, the formation of the ruling classes had a distinctive feature because it was marked by the historic weakness of society and the Calabrian middle class, which—having lived in the shadows of large estates—had internalized certain behavioral patterns and ambitions by the agricultural upper class, above all the acquisition and ownership of land.

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<sup>20</sup> See Fantò (2007).

The middle class later became clerical and bureaucratic, daughter of urban growth and public service, attracted in the cities by the flow of public funds, fascinated by occupations that were once considered liberal; primarily the legal profession. That explains both the political and economic dependence from the domestic power centers and the particular formation of the Calabrian political class. This also explains the frailness of the civil society, whose historical and structural weakness left a void. Throughout the 1980s, this void was filled by politics, which was the true mistress of the region's development and destiny.<sup>21</sup>

An extraordinary turning point was the decision of nearly all *'ndrine* to settle in Northern Italy, a strategic choice that would allow the 'Ndrangheta to become rooted in places that the Mafia and Camorra were never able to achieve over the long term.

Using Milan and Lombardy as the central location to conduct the organization's business matters was no accident. Milan is not only a big industrial and financial city (considering that in 1990, there were 8,000 financial societies and 173,000 commercial societies), but it is a vital center for the Italian economy and strategically located with regard to the rest of Europe.

It was, therefore, a very attractive geographical position for the Mafia strategic interests. In May 1991, Giovanni Falcone highlighted the importance of Milan as the "center of the international heroin trade from the Middle and Far East" and as well as a "hub for cocaine trafficking in Central Europe" (1). The most significant element that demonstrated Milan's centrality was the fact that "the most important illegal money laundering base" was located there due to its proximity to Austria and Switzerland (1).

When Falcone made that diagnosis, he could not have predicted the subsequent developments that would lead to the decline of the presence of Cosa Nostra in the North, let alone could he imagine the impetuous development of the 'Ndrangheta.

The Lombard metropolis offered ideal conditions for the use and reemployment of illicit capital; for that reason it has long been a true hub for money laundering.<sup>22</sup> The 'Ndrangheta's economic activities went in several directions. Shortly after their arrival in the North, the 'ndranghetisti began buying bars, pizzerias, garages, Italian Treasury Bonds (BOT), Treasury Credit Certificates (CCT), commercial activities operating in the field of clothing, home furnishings, so-called "earth moving," (excavation) gas stations, car washes, gyms, financial and real estate agencies, construction companies or property management, demolition companies, auto scrap trades, and transportation companies; moreover, they also formed real estate and financial companies and bought several properties in an effort to hide through using dummy corporations.

Some 'ndranghetisti began using some relatives who voluntarily had been left out of the cocaine smuggling to reduce the risk of being arrested and identified. Their main task was to be holders and managers of those properties obtained

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<sup>21</sup> For the transformation of the middle class in Mafia, see Casaburi (2010).

<sup>22</sup> More information about Milan as a criminal place for money laundering may be found in Draghi (2011).

illegally. They were named “blockheads” and had been a central role in covering up Mafia funds.

The warning about the danger of the ’Ndrangheta in the North was given in good time. In fact, the Anti-Mafia Parliamentary Commission created by the Italian Parliament had pointed out in 1990 that:

In the municipality of Vimercate, Calabrian families operated with members integrated into construction companies as small or medium business owners who also had political activities in the local area that allowed them to gain influence over the sizeable Calabrian colony that was established there (pp. 9–11).

[Nel comune di Vimercate operano famiglie di origine calabrese, con elementi inseriti nell’attività edilizia come piccoli e medi imprenditori, le quali svolgono, a livello locale, anche attività politiche che consente loro di avere influenza sulla numerosa colonia calabrese ivi insediatisi].

Vimercate was hardly an exception. And, in fact, the Commission continued:

Similar situations are found in the municipalities of Saint Angelo Lodigiano, Lodivecchio, Solerano and Bareggio, where the establishment of Calabrian people in public administration was more copious. Mayors of the outer suburbs of Milan reported incidents that proved highly significant in terms of dangers faced by the local government (pp. 9–11).

[Situazioni analoghe si registrano nei comuni di S. Angelo Lodigiano, Lodivecchio, Solerano e Bareggio, dove l’insediamento nelle amministrazioni comunali di personaggi di origine calabrese è più numeroso. Taluni sindaci dell’hinterland milanese hanno riferito di episodi altamente significativi sotto il profilo dei pericoli cui sono esposte le amministrazioni locali].

During the time that the events took place, the situation continued to change. In fact, in Vimercate:

Two Calabrian men who had been working for a construction company were killed. They turned out to have links with political circles. In Segrate, certain companies that had been granted contracts during the previous administration were replaced by a single firm that succeeded in obtaining all public contracts (Commissione Parlamentare Antimafia 1990, pp. 9–11).

[Sono stati uccisi due calabresi che svolgevano attività edilizia e risultavano avere collegamenti con ambienti politici. A Segrate alcune ditte affidatarie di appalti concessi dalla precedente amministrazione sono state sostituite da un’unica impresa che riesce ad aggiudicarsi tutti gli appalti pubblici].

Extortion was a very common practice. Such a practice finally brought the covert practice of *omertà* to the forefront. A real master in the field of extortion was Giacomo Zagari, an ’ndranghetista who had arrived in Lombardy in the 1950s. His son, Antonio, described the particular technique used by his father. The men of his ’ndrina called some industries asking for a large amount of money in exchange for protection, asserting their ability to protect industries from damage of any kind.

Zagari was very well-known in his area and he had a very bad reputation because people knew about his criminal past. The meaningful thing is that victims turned to Zagari himself asking protection from extortionists. Zagari offered himself as a mediator faking a negotiation with his same men. It was evident that in a short span of time an agreement for the amount was reached. The “fake” negotiation made by Giacomo Zagari always had a positive outcome. The system was truly ingenious

and proved to be effective: The extortionists' boss introduced himself to the on-call victims, acting as a protector and a mediator!

The main interest of the story lies in the consequences that the extortion produces. Antonio Zagari continues:

This industrialist would have offered also to my father a figurative employment in this company, paying him a regular monthly salary. Of course, all this in exchange for not having troubles of any kind. The important thing was that people knew that there were Zaragis in his company (Ciconte 2010, pp. 41–42).

[Questo industriale avrebbe offerto anche a mio padre figurativamente un posto all'interno della sua ditta pagandolo regolarmente ogni mese. Tutto questo, ovviamente, per non andare incontro a noie di qualsiasi genere. L'importante era che si sapesse in giro che nella sua fabbrica c'erano gli Zagari].

The origins of this ancient way of protection can be traced back to nineteenth century in southern Italy.

In the North, the 'Ndrangheta is strong<sup>23</sup> and its authority has grown in recent years, especially since 1993. But the strength of the 'Ndrangheta continues to remain stable despite some recent events that have put it in the national and international spotlights.

In order to understand the transformation of the 'Ndrangheta in recent years, it is imperative to analyze two events that mark discontinuity with the history, with the tradition, and with the ancient inclination, of the Calabrian Mafiosi to not emerge and remain hidden. The first such event happened in Locri on October 16, 2005, with the homicide of Francesco Fortugno, who was the President of the Regional Council of Calabria at the time of the event.<sup>24</sup> The second event was the massacre of Duisburg in Germany on August 15, 2007, by 'ndranghetisti coming directly from San Luca—a village of one of the most important Calabrian writers, Corrado Alvaro, and of the *Madonna di Polsi*, a sanctuary venerated by all inhabitants of Reggio Calabria, which 'Ndrangheta had chosen as a symbol of its power.

This crime was a politico-mafioso message and certainly could not have been brought to fruition and decided in Locri alone. It is possible to arrive at this conclusion by examining the blatant arrangements that have characterized it and by considering the objectives for which it was executed. Fortugno was killed in front of a polling place and in the presence of other people. He could have been killed in other different ways, perhaps less clamorous and resounding compared to what actually happened. So why was he killed in such a manner that inevitably drew national attention?

The safest way to kill him would have been to encircle his house, which always happened in similar cases. They would spread rumors of his death in order to muddle the truth of what actually happened, whether it was the vendetta of a betrayed husband to that of someone who could not keep his promises. Or, he could have perhaps been eliminated during a hunt since the politician was a hunter himself.

<sup>23</sup> On the dynamics of settling in the North, see Sciarrone (1998).

<sup>24</sup> See Fierro (2007); Ciconte (2013).

The way in which the homicide was committed confirms the intent to send a clear message to Calabrian politicians, to the Regional Council, and particularly to its President. As was later discovered, President of the Regional Council Agazio Loiero knew in advance that Fortugno would be elected because he had accumulated the majority of the votes of the province of Reggio Calabria, whereas Fortugno's direct opponent Domenico Crea was not elected because he was not helped by the President.

Everything indicates that the homicide had not been decided in Locri, but that the decision was made in a politico-mafioso environment that oversaw big business and 'Ndrangheta strategies. Those who had decided to kill him in such a theatrical way did so on purpose. The real instigators did not live in Locri. It is also possible that the decision was made by more *'ndrine*, by an assembly of men that make up an informal inter-cosche adjustment that is activated when making necessary choices that have a more general value in economic terms or a very strong impact outside.

There is a higher level than the territorial *'ndrine*; this has been known for a long time, even though it has no specific name or even a provable existence due to the chronic lack of collaborators, especially in the highest positions. Only in 2012 were the *Carabinieri* able to immortalize a *capibastone* meeting that occurred under the Statue of the *Madonna della Montagna of Polsi*, capturing it on film. The meeting made the appointment of Domenico Oppedisano official as the new head of *crime*, which had just happened the night before.

The choice to elect Oppedisano fell on an elderly person, respected by his past which he reminded to those present: "There were more than a thousand people present that night in the mountains" (Minniti 2011, line 1). Neither did he say when it happened, nor did he specify the year. He only remembered, however, that "they put me in between Peppe Nirta and 'Ntoni Nirta and there they gave me the rank of Santa" (Minniti 2011, line 24–25). It is probable, even if it is not certain, that he was referring to an event that happened during the years of the Borghese coup d'état, when as collaborators of justice have narrated, on the Aspromonte, there were more than a thousand people ready to take up arms when the call were to be made. Luckily for all, the much-awaited signal never came.

It is important to specify that Oppedisano was not elected boss of the 'Ndrangheta, but rather he represented a figure of balance and guarantee, perhaps because the choice to elect younger person to a high level position at that moment in history would not have been possible (Cicone 1996, p. 40).

The newness of the whole event rests in the fact that the *locali* of the 'Ndrangheta reached an agreement to elect a top legal entity that would be able to settle disputes, end or prevent blood feuds, and undo intricate knots that the contestants could not solve on their own. One thing seems clear: His personality did not even remotely resemble or compare to that of those who oversaw the fate of the provincial commission of Cosa Nostra in Palermo, bosses like Riina and Provenzano. He was not the *il capo dei capi* (boss of bosses) to repeat an expression used in some newspapers. He was a figurehead chosen in a short period, chosen perhaps because he was older and did not have much time ahead of him, thus rendering him anything but a threat.

And yet, many expressed their concern for that choice. Is it possible, they wondered, that the fate of the 'Ndrangheta would be entrusted to a man like Oppedisano, an old man who could frequently be seen on the streets of Reggio Calabria driving an *ape* (a type of small, three-wheeled Italian truck). People wondered the same thing when Riina was captured, which led to doubts and bewilderment. There are some substantial differences between the Calabrian *Crimine* structure and the so-known *Cupola* of Cosa Nostra. For the Calabrian one, we might talk about an informal level, not structured, more agile and sophisticated, and probably not only comprises affiliates, but also of people not belonging to the organization.

The homicide was committed while taking into account the strong State reaction that, as a matter of fact, was there with the arrival of prefect Luigi De Sena in Reggio Calabria. Those who decided to hit were aware of the State's reaction and could even afford the luxury of sacrificing someone in Locri. For that reason the message to the politicians was very clear.

It is only possible to comprehend what has become of the 'Ndrangheta nowadays if we understand the many different refined and superior levels that participate in the decision-making process. Yet not even the Fortugno homicide, after the numerous speeches of the immediately following days, had the strength to make the nature of the 'Ndrangheta and its power comprehensible. Other resounding events would be necessary; indeed, much louder than the Fortugno homicide.

The moment of Duisburg finally arrived and caused quite an uproar. The public opinion and European commenters discovered the 'Ndrangheta during the Feast of the Assumption's massacre of 2007 and had the opportunity, the strength, and the arrogance of those who felt strong enough to kill far away from home. That massacre, which was so devastating and so unusually out of scheme drew international attention. Six deaths in a place far away from San Luca had piqued the attention of many reporters that did not indulge in folkloristic and vivid interpretations, neglecting the evaluations of the reasons of that massacre and the consequences that would come of it.

The 'Ndrangheta, which operated in far-away Duisburg is a modern and dynamic organization that knew how to intertwine the ancient and post-modern, recalling its ancient origins as well as its globalized economy, rituals, bank accounts, and the strict dialect and languages of different countries where they have lived for years now.

With Fortugno and Duisburg there was a new unexpected and fast change in the tradition of the history of the 'Ndrangheta. Should we expect more changes of this type, even more violent? It is not easy to answer this question. Of course, it is striking that the surge of criminal events has manifested itself in Locri who has appeared as the most unstable of the entire Calabrian criminal system.

The instability is a detriment to all Mafiosi, as the experience tells us. Therefore, it is true that bosses of the different families—not only those from San Luca, but also from those other important and respectful 'Ndrangheta families—have rushed to settle a meeting and call for peace. A new balance had to be found and was found indeed, with a rapidity that embarrassed peace mediators that often work, with no



success, in war zones and in different international arenas. In San Luca nobody else was killed after peace was reached.

According to the DIA, a profound change is being undergone in the 'Ndrangheta:

The illegal cocaine market allows the 'ndrine to entertain relations, through brokers and money launderers, with big South American criminal cartels. The bosses of the Calabrian cosche that manage big international trades of illegal narcotic and psychotropic substances are no longer living exclusively in the Mezzogiorno, but elsewhere, often abroad. The tendency is to control the illegal market less and less from the province of origin, and this is reflected in the judicial investigation of law enforcement, since in recent years there have been so many 'Ndrangheta fugitives, weavers of the drug market, under arrest in foreign territories (pp. 6–7).

[Il mercato illegale della cocaina permette alle 'ndrine di intrattenere rapporti, attraverso broker e riciclatori, con i grandi cartelli criminali sudamericani. I capi delle cosche calabresi che gestiscono i grandi traffici internazionali di sostanze stupefacenti e psicotrope non vivono più, solo ed esclusivamente, nel Mezzogiorno d'Italia, ma altrove, spesso all'estero. La tendenza è quella di pilotare il mercato illegale sempre meno dalle province di origine e questo trova un immediato riscontro nelle investigazioni giudiziarie esperite dalle Forze di polizia, giacché negli ultimi periodi sono stati diversi i latitanti affiliati alla 'ndrangheta, tessitori della rete del commercio di droga, tratti in arresto fuori dal territorio nazionale].

The DIA reports can be misleading. It is not impossible to imagine that 'ndrangheta are on the verge of leaving Calabria to relocate themselves in some vague area to manage illegal and criminal trades in utter peace. Calabria, and particularly Reggio Calabria, continues to be the command center where most decisions are made. The reason is simple: Calabria controls the territory; and without this control, there would be no Mafia criminal organization.

The territory is the symbol of power and command; it will never be abandoned, save for extenuating circumstances. One of the bosses of Nirta-Strangio use to control his neighborhood of San Luca directly from his home, where he had installed a big screen. He was a fugitive, but supervised and saw everything without being seen.

As for the other considerations made by the DIA, it is necessary to add that the *locali* of the 'Ndrangheta spread everywhere in Italy and abroad, acting—today more than yesterday—as investment centers for the enormous funds collected throughout the years. And now—more than ever—the economic crisis, affecting the capitalist economy like a heavy storm, can meet the demand for money that comes from the world of enterprises and banks with the liquidated supply, which the Mafia undoubtedly controls.

This is the time for economists, investors, recyclers, and brokers: Men that know the clefts of the finance. This is their moment, for they are the backbone of the 'Ndrangheta's future. In essence, the 'Ndrangheta is no longer a thing of the past, because it is not only concentrated in the province of Reggio Calabria or on the Ionian side where we saw the aforementioned turmoil. The Tyrrhenian side is also of crucial importance, especially for the port at Gioia Tauro that plays a strategic role in the trafficking of illegal goods of every imaginable nature. The Piromalli family has been there to oversee the territory for the longest time.

It is possible to find the 'Ndrangheta's *locali* in the municipalities of Crotona, Lamezia Terme, Vibo Valentia, and Cosenza. No province should be considered immune, even if the diffusion is not equally proportionate in all these areas.

The 'Ndrangheta has occupied spaces that once were empty. If we compare the police's 'Ndrangheta *locali* maps from 10 or 20 years ago with current ones, we can clearly see a dramatic progression of 'ndrine development and conquest of new territories. Some of the old 'ndrine are in decline, but none have completely disappeared. On the contrary, there are many new self-motivated and determined men.

This is the current situation in Calabria; yet, it is important to keep in mind that when speaking about the 'Ndrangheta, one talks about the only Italian Mafia organization that has stable and ancient branches in all Central-North regions of the country as well as abroad, and in all continents without exception. And it does business and money laundering in those far away localities, interweaving social relations and exhibiting a gaining interest in politics.

In many municipalities of Lombardy, Liguria and Piedmont, there is a heavy presence—ancient and well established—that is not well-understood because the public is not aware of its presence. It is the silent 'Ndrangheta, its only noise being the rustling of money, which allows business deals to take place. But, as it is well-known, the faint rustle makes a noise that only trained and attentive ears can perceive. The rest of the population is distracted by other, more deafening noise and words that put fear and anguish in people's hearts, whether it is illegal immigration, security, rape, armed robbery, or theft.

In recent years, the themes of security and street crime have been at the forefront of the Italian government's policies, whereas the Mafia has been confined to a corner as if it were now a resolved issue.

The 'Ndrangheta, in Calabrian everyday life, surpassed Fortugno and Duisburg, continue to operate with absolute power that heavily influences daily life, the economy, the actual conditions of the working class, and tries to undertake some kinds of commercial or entrepreneur activities that have to do with politics or administration of some small municipality or city. At the same time, it continues to occupy a large portion of territories in the North of Italy and in foreign countries.

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