

Chapter 6

'Ndrangheta: A Reticular Organization

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A Long Underestimation

The development of the Calabrian Mafia was followed by the historical underestimation of its dangerousness, that had consequences in terms of lack of attention both in terms of law enforcement strategies and research and analysis strategies.¹ Until recently the 'Ndrangheta was considered a minor criminal organization, residual expression of an underdeveloped society, thus more “primitive” compared to the Sicilian and Neapolitan Mafias (Cosa Nostra and Camorra). This vision was extensively diffused in the public discussion for a long time shared by politicians, scholars, and judges.²

A different reading approach was proposed in a report approved in the 2008 by the Anti-Mafia Parliament Commission, in which the 'Ndrangheta was defined “liquid Mafia.” It is a striking metaphor that was borrowed from a successful work of sociologist Zygmunt Bauman that actually spoke about “liquidity” to try “to grasp the nature of the present, in many ways *novel*, phrase in the history of modernity” (Bauman 2002, p. 2). In my opinion, the metaphor risks of being misleading if it is applied to the 'Ndrangheta or, more generally, to the Mafia. As well as inadequate are other analogies used in the report of the Anti-Mafia Parliament Commission when the Calabrian Mafia is compared to the “big fast food chains” and to the “tentacular structure” of Al Qaida, but also to the vitality of the “neoplasm” (Commissione Parlamentare Antimafia (CPA) 2008, p. 23). In this way, a true association of

¹ The status of the knowledge of the 'Ndrangheta—despite recent increased interest—continues to be very unsatisfactory. Among the “historical” Mafia, the Calabrian remains the least studied.

² For more information, see Violante (1994, p. 89); Becchi (2000, p. 101). Furthermore, Eric Hobsbawm (1971, pp. 29–52) had already mentioned the 'Ndrangheta as a primitive form and a pre-political social revolt, of which shepherds, farmers, and small artisans were protagonists that were trying to defend themselves from feudal and State power.

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different phenomena very different among themselves for organizational structure, modality of action, and operation, is made.

An interpretation of this nature can lead to distorted information also in terms of policy and contrast strategies. If the peculiar character of the 'Ndrangheta was liquidity, it would follow that countering and would require being equipped with special tools, or with “containers” that can “contain” it. The “modern liquidity” that Bauman talks about is characterized by “transience,” “friability,” “brittleness,” and “until-further-noticeness” of human bond and networks (Bauman 2002). All these characteristics are hardly associable with the actual Mafia organizations, not only the Calabrian one. If we take into consideration Bauman’s analysis, the presence of a phenomenon as that of the Mafia, it would even be in contradiction on how to explain “liquid modernity.” Compared to the latter, as the author observed: “Any dense and tight network of social bond, and particularly a territorial rooted tight network, is an obstacle to be cleared out of the way” (Bauman 2002, p. 14). Mafia networks have precisely these characteristics: They are built by dense social bonds and have always been profoundly settled in the territory. In particular, the 'Ndrangheta—as we will see—is a “solid” reality, constituted by consistent and resistant “material,” namely by a stable structure and powerfully close even though geometrically variant.

The perspective adopted in the report of 2008 of the Anti-Mafia Parliament Commission, thus, appears paradoxical that, looking to surpass the reading of the 'Ndrangheta as an archaic phenomenon, proposes an interpretation in terms of a *postmodern* phenomenon, exactly like “liquid Mafia,” able to infiltrate everywhere and to “coexist with unexpected efficiency a *tribal dimension* with an attitude modern and global” (Commissione Parlamentare Antimafia (CPA) 2008, p. 23, my italics).

Actually, just like the other types of Mafia, even the Calabrian one can be considered the product of a process of hybridization between modern and traditional elements, which have fostered its great capacity of adaptation and social variations. The supposed “primordial” 'Ndrangheta is difficult to reconcile with its success of the last decades, in particular with the capacity of territorial expansion and entrenchment, besides the integration into vast transnational illegal traffics.³

Recently, it was recognized as one of the most powerful criminal organizations. Today, it is repeated with persistence that the 'Ndrangheta has become the *most* dangerous Italian criminal organization, omitting the fact that for a very long time, its force was underestimated and that the contrast action against it was always insufficient. Its dangerousness also derives from this historical lack of attention, above all political and institutional.

³ Regarding the diffusion of the 'Ndrangheta in nontraditional areas, namely where it was historically born, see Commissione Parlamentare Antimafia (CPA) (2008); Sciarrone (2009); Varese (2011); Dalla Chiesa and Panzarasa (2012); Sciarrone and Storti (2014).

In this article, I will focus my attention, in a selective way, on the organizational dimension of the 'Ndrangheta⁴ considering in particular the hierarchic structure and reticular configuration, aspects that are often neglected or superficially analyzed in current studies of the phenomenon.

Family and Blood Connections

The *cosca* or *'ndrina* is the basic unit of the organizational structure of the 'Ndrangheta and corresponds to a Mafia family that takes the name of the boss. Within the *cosca*, a strict hierarchy is in force, established according to the reputation and criminal capacity of the single members. A normative and symbolic apparatus that regulate the entrance and the behavior of affiliates: Charters, formula of identification, codes, and initiation rites set a limit between those who belong to the organization and those who do not. The affiliation—defined by the same Mafiosi “baptism” (Ciconte 1992, p. 30)—offers the possibility to enter to an elective world and to have a disposal a formidable channel of social rise.

Speaking of the 'Ndrangheta, the thesis of “amoral familism” (Banfield 1958), endorsing for example that Mafia groups would have created a real “close family model” (Prefettura di Reggio Calabria 2006, p. 4) that will be diffused in Calabrian society. There is no document or publication regarding the 'Ndrangheta that does not reiterate this aspect, assuming, however, as an obvious and self-evident. It is an aspect that is rarely contextualized from an empirical and analytic level: On one hand, it is not understood according to which elements Calabria should be more family-oriented than the other Southern regions; on the other hand, the social mechanisms that put in relations family connection with action and organizational models are not pinpointed. Thus, it is appropriate to pause on this argument, observing it from a wider perspective that takes into consideration the organizational and relational configuration of the Calabrian Mafia.

Undoubtedly, blood connections are very important: A *cosca* created from a family nucleus is developed, then, through arranged marriages that connect and absorb others.⁵ This characteristic is not, however, found only in criminal organizations. For example, also the cohesion of the banking community of the City in London

⁴ For a long time the organizational dimension of the Mafia—and in particular of the 'Ndrangheta—was considered less relevant, according to a perspective mainly “culturalist” shared also by notorious scholars (for example Arlacchi 1986) and by institutions. Among judges, it was supported, for example, that the 'Ndrangheta had “a primitive structure [...] based more on a familiar than organizational aspect” (Pinotti and Tesaroli 2008, pp. 297–298). On the distinction between culturalist and organizational paradigm in the Mafia phenomenon, see Sciarrone (2009, Chap. 1).

⁵ In 'Ndrangheta families, the central figure is of the women that, for example, had often a fundamental role in matrimonial strategies finalized to create alliances between *cosche*. More in general, “Mafia women” as wives, cohabitants, sisters, and mothers are a material, symbolic, and affective support indispensable to honored men. See Siebert (1994, 1997); Fiandanca (2007); Ingrassi (2007); Gribaudo and Marmo (2010).

was based on high confidence and loyalty levels, guaranteed by the tendency to maintain in the family businesses, assuming relatives and marrying other bankers' families (Coleman 1990, p. 110).

In our case, it is important to underline that starting from the family network of the *cosche*, Calabrian Mafiosi forge relationships in every social milieu, looking for references especially in the politico-institutional arena. In this way, around the central nucleus of *cosca*, an extensive and pervasive network of collusion and complicity is structured that allows the accumulation and reproduction of social capital, namely the ensemble of relational resources that represent one of the most important strengths of this criminal organization.⁶

The solidity and cohesion of the Calabrian groups do not only depend on family connections. The significance of these last ones are often attributed to the hypothetical archaic and tribal character of the 'Ndrangheta, while it would probably be read as an effect of the modernization process that created profound transformations in its original structure.⁷ The presence of family connections does not impede, furthermore, the explosion of violent conflicts: Often the *cosche*, even those extremely cemented by blood ties, "broke" more for internal disagreement than to conflicts with other criminal groups.⁸

In the same way, nonetheless, a largely diffused opinion, pervading family ties are not the only variable to call into question to explain the limited number of collaborator of justice coming from the Calabrian Mafia. Even in this case, the analysis would be complicated: Instead of re-proposing the same images of the supposed impenetrability of the Calabrian Mafia,⁹ it is necessary to understand which are the

⁶ Social capital is understood here with reference to theoretical perspectives that consider it as the kind of resource available to an actor on the basis of its position in networks of social relations (See Bourdieu 1986; Coleman 1990). In this context, Mafiosi can be seen as specialists in social relations, characterized by a high level of social capital that are derived from relationships established with other actors. From this depends their ability to network, namely the ability to act, depending on the circumstances, as mediators, patrons, and/or protectors in relational structures of a different nature. It might be argued that the strength of the Mafia largely depends on this ability to accumulate and use social capital, but also to establish "external relations" and to rely on a wide and varied "reservoir" of relational resources can be used for different purposes. For the social capital of the Mafia, see Sciarrone (2006a, 2009, 2010, 2011).

⁷ A hypothesis of this type seems to be advanced by John Dickie (2011), according to which the organizational model of the 'Ndrangheta has emphasized, over time, his familiar character especially to meet the requirements to make it more cohesive and more impenetrable to the repressive action. As was noted: "Future research should explore when and why organization of the 'Ndrangheta came to be based mainly on blood-related family units, as now seems to be the case" (Truzzolillo 2011, p. 372). In the first judicial documents available, the Calabrian organized group does not seem to rest on 'ndrine based strictly on family, although it is plausible to assume that the family constitutes the most important recruitment channel.

⁸ An emblematic case is that relating to the *cosca* of Piromalli-Molè, one of the most powerful of the 'Ndrangheta (Sciarrone 2010), whose cohesion failed despite strong blood connections (Tribunale di Reggio Calabria 2008).

⁹ The dominant theory is that in the 'Ndrangheta, there would be a smaller number of collaborators of justice because of the importance of blood ties: *Repentance* would in fact be discouraged because, first of all, they should accuse their families. They forget, however, that this same constraint

mechanisms and the circumstances that might have favored or not the possibility of collaborating with law enforcement.¹⁰ Definitely, family ties are certainly relevant, but it is also necessary to take into account the organizational structure and the relational system that configure relations within the *cosca* as well as between them.

To pursue the matter it could be useful to make a comparison between the Sicilian and Calabrian Mafia.¹¹ First of all, we must observe that, in both organizations, the Mafia “families” are distinguished from the biological families of their members. In Cosa Nostra, the Mafia family corresponds in a modest amount to the blood family. This, however, does not mean that blood ties are not important; indeed the parental tie between honored men “is certainly one of the most important elements of the organization” (Dino 2002, p. 73).

As in the 'Ndrangheta, in Cosa Nostra, blood ties, likewise, have weight in determining the power position, so that in some Mafia families, the power positions are transmitted from father to son in virtue of a sort of hereditary charisma (Paoli 2002, p. 45). This explains, moreover, how it is possible to find over time the same organogram of Mafia groups in power in areas of traditional settlement (Lupo 2009; Coco 2013). However, it is interesting to observe how Sicilian Mafiosi have tried to institute a rule to limit the relevance of blood ties, in order to make Mafia power less familiar and personalized.

During mid 1970s, the institution of the *Commissione*, namely the top legal entity of the Sicilian Cosa Nostra,¹² in fact also had as an objective to avoid that the power would convey in an excessive manner in blood families. As it is well-known, an association can be formalized precisely to reduce the impact of family

is also present in other Mafias. As noted by Pignatone and Prestipino (2012, pp. 135+), two judges involved in the first line in the most important investigations against the 'Ndrangheta in recent years, also Sicilian collaborators of justice had to accuse their families. On the other hand, it does not seem that the 'Ndrangheta is talking about less than in other Mafias: “The 'ndranghetisti are not so silent: They talk, and how they talk!” (Pignatone and Prestipino 2012, p. 139). The explanation for the lower number of Calabrian collaborators of justice must be sought elsewhere. For example, in the fact that in Calabria has long been a privileged investigative practices that pointed to “confident” (namely on informally information provided to the police and not according to the criteria laid down by the law on collaborators of justice). By doing so, the two judges continued, it has overlooked the fact that “the collaborator must be sought, built, and followed” (Pignatone and Prestipino 2012, p. 139) and, therefore, “it was necessary to create the conditions so potential collaborators of justice could decide to speak with the judicial authorities” (Pignatone and Prestipino, 2012, p. 137).

¹⁰ For a more profound analysis of these aspects—in particular regarding the organizational and relational nature—that impede the exit of the 'Ndrangheta and, thus, the collaboration with judiciary authorities, see Sciarrone (2006b, p. 6).

¹¹ For a comparative analysis of these two Mafia, see Paoli (2000).

¹² The *Commissione* is a collegiate entity on regional basis (called also Region), comprised by representatives of Cosa Nostra of the different “provincial commissions.” Among the latter one, Palermo has always been in predominant positions. The “province” is in turn made up of representatives of the *mandamenti* that refer to more families territorially contiguous. From what we know, this organizational structure was created at the beginning of the 1950s, changing the model adopted by the American Cosa Nostra, but it was temporarily dissolved in 1960. It was later rebuilt in the mid 1970s (See Paoli, 2000; Dino 2002; Lupo 2009).

relationships when they are no longer a limit and a resource for its operation. This seems to be the case for the Cosa Nostra, as demonstrated by the attempt to give the organization a higher level of formality and to develop a regulatory system partially released from the importance of family relationships.

On the other side, in the Calabrian Mafia, it does not seem that blood ties were a commitment for the amplification of the organization, and neither can it be said that their importance is inversely proportional to the introduction of ritual and formal elements.

Inside the 'Ndrangheta, a distinction also exists, at least on a normative level, between the blood and the Mafia family. The organization of an 'Ndrangheta group is not completely overlaid to the structure of the biological family of their counterparts (Paoli 2000, p. 49). As collaborator of justice, Zagari has stated, the affiliation of a new member could be neither promoted nor completed by people connected to the initiated by parental ties (1992, p 36). This rule is not, however, enough to limit the relevance of blood ties, so that, from birth, the sons of Mafia bosses are considered by right *giovani d'onore* (honored youth). As declared by another collaborator of justice: "One can become an 'ndranghetista for family heritage" (Tribunale di Reggio Calabria 1995, p. 233).

Summarizing, even if in both criminal organizations, the equivalence between the blood and Mafia families cannot be deceptive, the fact remains that in the 'Ndrangheta, the command positions are determined in large measure by family relations and often the power tends to be transmitted though heredity, not necessarily from father to son, but to family members that have demonstrated the capacity to inherit.

The pervading of family ties constitute, thus, a controlling cohesive power for the *cosche* of the 'Ndrangheta. However, it would be reductive to think that the force of the latter is summarized in this element. Blood ties create only one aspect of its complex configuration. The organizational system is anything but close and bent on itself: Rather, it shows an adaptability grade, so that it was imitated by other criminal groups,¹³ and is characterized by the presence of a wide range of external relations, in particular with exponents of the bureaucratic-institutional apparatus and the entrepreneurial world.¹⁴

¹³ Raffaele Cutolo, one of the most important Neapolitan Camorra bosses, had been "baptized" in the 1970s by some prestigious leaders of the 'Ndrangheta and formed the Nuova Camorra Organizzata (New Organized Camorra), taking as a model several characters of the Calabrian Mafia. It also established the role of the 'Ndrangheta in the genesis of the Sacra Corona Unita (United Sacred Crown) in Apulia, a criminal organization developed in the early 1980s, which has imitated and borrowed organizational models and symbolic apparatus right from the Calabrian Mafia (Massari 1998; Sciarrone 2009).

¹⁴ As evident by numerous legal proceedings, in Calabria, there is a strong blend of business committees and Mafia groups at the institutional, political, and business level, especially with reference to the management of public funds (Commissione Parlamentare Antimafia (CPA) 2008). To remember then that large companies operating in the region often tend to agree closely with the Mafia groups, establishing with them a mutually beneficial exchange. In many cases, the same entrepreneurs research and solicit a pact of collusion (Sciarrone 2009, 2010, 2011).

The Organizational Configuration

Attention will be focused on the organizational dimension. In general, we will talk about a horizontal character of the 'Ndrangheta, counterpointing it to the vertical organization of Cosa Nostra. Analyzing the problem from a dichotomy point of view is deceiving. The question does not only involve the 'Ndrangheta, but all Mafia organizations characterized by a peculiar combination of closure toward the internal and maximum opening toward the external. Closure guarantees internal cohesion, making the group less exposed to enemies' pressure and contrastive actions. The opening, on the contrary, is important because it makes extremely flexible and adaptable criminal groups toward the external, allowing the reproduction of their social networks, as well as facilitating extensions and diversification of their fields of activity. We are not dealing with a faction folded back on themselves, nor structures assimilated to the classical bureaucracy model; but a reticular organizational asset that tries to conciliate—in various forms—internal closure and external opening. Historically, all Mafia groups were crossed by opposite trends between centralization and autonomy together with dispersion. In this perspective, we can read some specific dynamics that affect the 'Ndrangheta.

Since relatively recent times, we did not have any information regarding the existence within the 'Ndrangheta of a superordinate body to the various *cosche*, even if in the past, temporary alliances emerged to manage common business matters. In reality, the presence of forms of territorial coordination seems to be a long-lasting characteristic of the 'Ndrangheta (Nicaso 1990; Mannino 1997; Gratteri and Nicaso 2006).¹⁵ Only in the last years, however, important judiciary investigations, held not only in Calabria, but also in other northern regions (in particular Lombardy, Piedmont and Liguria),¹⁶ have shed light on how the main *cosche* of the 'Ndrangheta—especially those that refer to the province of Reggio Calabria—are connected through a governing and regulating entity for internal conflicts, superior to all individual families.

Also in this situation, one must analyze the structure of the 'Ndrangheta, regarding comparison with some aspect of organizational model of Cosa Nostra. The vertical and hierarchic dimension of the latter is functional to guarantee a greater cohesion from an inter-organizational point of view: It is manifested in particular in the regulation of relationships between different Mafiosi groups. Within a single

¹⁵ Organic connections between *cosche* are documented in several judicial investigations since the mid nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century (Mannino 1997, pp. 284+; Truzzolillo 2011, pp. 371–2) in which are described associative structure in some aspects very similar to those emerged in recent investigations.

¹⁶ Tribunale di Reggio Calabria (2010); Tribunale di Milano (2010); Tribunale di Torino (2011); Tribunale di Genova (2011). These judiciary documents, together with others of previous periods (in particular, Tribunale di Reggio Calabria 1995) constitute the empiric base used in the proposed analysis. The more recent judiciary operations have highlighted the “unitary” character of the 'Ndrangheta, proposing a different vision from the past, in which it was supported on the contrary the existence of a “fragmented” or “fractionated” model of the Calabrian organizations (see Direzione Nazionale Antimafia 2012, pp. 91+; Pignatone and Prestipino 2012).

family, the organizational structure might appear simpler compared to those found in higher levels: There is a command top, but the power positions formalized in specific roles are relatively few.¹⁷ Individual Sicilian families, thus, do not represent an elevated internal difference; in some cases, an honored man might benefit from a more prestigious status compared to the formal role covered, in virtue of his capacities demonstrated in the field, as for example the ability to exercise violence or to do business. By contrast, in Cosa Nostra, a more complex inter-organizational structure might be observed with a different hierarchy position to coordinate and control the organization on the whole.¹⁸ Control positions within the family settled in a given area are, therefore, directed at ensuring the functioning of the supra-territorial hierarchical level, with coordination and control entities with which they try to give a unified strategic direction to all groups recognized in Cosa Nostra.

Very different is the organization of the 'Ndrangheta where it is revealed a horizontal structure from an inter-organizational point of view,¹⁹ from which basically all *cosche* are at the same level (even if, in fact, some are more powerful than others due to the size of their military, economic, and political capacities and resources).

In the 'Ndrangheta is highlighted, however, at the level of a single *cosca*, a more accentuated internal stratification, a more defined and articulated hierarchy. The career of an honored man has different possibilities to achieve diverse ranks that correspond to specific positions in the hierarchy and internal scale of the *cosca*. The rank fulfilled by an individual is formally recognized by all affiliates of the different groups of the 'Ndrangheta, but actually the exercise of power and the influence associated with a determined role find full legitimation only inside the belonging *cosca*. In other words, only the bosses of the *cosche* are able to exercise superior power, whereas the other command roles are important within the group and sign the progression of the career of the affiliates. This organizational structure—more vertical on the inside and more horizontal on the outside—guarantees in the 'Ndrangheta a more intra-organizational cohesion that is reinforced by a rigid compartment between affiliates that fulfill different ranks.²⁰

¹⁷ Schematizing and resuming the description provided by one of the most important collaborators of justice of Cosa Nostra, Antonio Calderone, at the base, there are honored man, called also *soldiers* structured in organized group led by a *capo decina*, whereas at the top, there is *capo famiglia* also called *rappresentante* that can be supported by a *vice rappresentante* and one or more *consiglieri* (Arlacchi 1993; Paoli 2000).

¹⁸ Think, for example, of *mandamenti* or *commission*. See note 12.

¹⁹ As collaborator of justice Antonio Zagari has explained: “Each *cosca* is independent from another and is controlled by *capi società* who have the faculty and the power to act autonomously from boss of other *cosche* even if from a superior rank. This is subject to the rule of respecting each other’s territorial boundaries and always remaining one to the other for more general interests of the entire organization, which although divided into many cells still refers to a single basic regulation” (Tribunale of Reggio Calabria 1995, p. 374). Ultimately, each group works formally equal with all others, acting independently in their own territory or in areas of origin and in those of the new expansion (Direzione Nazionale Antimafia 2012, p. 93).

²⁰ Antonio Zagari has pointed out: “It is not always easy to know ranks and special rules of affiliates of the 'Ndrangheta, especially if those occupy positions and high levels of the organization

The Structure of the Locale

When a group of the 'Ndrangheta extends itself beyond the intimate family unit or when on the same territory there are more *cosche*, affiliates tend to coordinate themselves by adopting a specific structure known as a *locale* in the jargon of the honored men. To a *locale*—that takes the name of the municipality or the area where it refers—a limited number of affiliates should formally belong,²¹ but actually the composition can vary and might change according to the situation. This results in the *locale* being fundamentally “authorized” and recognized by other already existing *locali*, among which a primary symbolic role is covered by San Luca, also called the “mother” of the 'Ndrangheta.²²

The organization of a *locale* expects an articulated structure and with inter-independence among the ranks and command positions. On one side, there are ranks or endowments that establish the hierarchy between affiliates; on the other, the ranks are fulfilled within each structure.²³ Even with some variations throughout time or with a difference from one case to the other,²⁴ the internal stratification has the following ranks: *Giovane d'onore* (honored youth), *picciotto* (young boy), *camorrista*, *sgarrista*, *santista*, *vangelo* (gospel), *quartino*, *trequartino*, *quintino* or *padrino* (godfather), and *associazione* (association) or *società* (society).²⁵ On the contrary, regarding the highest ranks, there are *capobastone* or *capo locale* (local boss) and eventually *capo società* (boss of the society), following the roles of *contabile* (account), *crimine* (crime), and *mastro di giornata* (master of the day).

The organizational structure is articulated in two levels: One inferior called *società minore*, and the other one superior named *società maggiore*. Young men

because the rule wants that people from a high level are not required to disclose their rank to lower levels. Indeed, affiliates of lower levels are strictly prohibited from addressing questions regarding the hierarchy positions of superiors and elders” (Tribunale di Reggio Calabria 1995, p. 375).

²¹ Some collaborators of justice have indicated that 49 or 50 is the minimum amount of members necessary to create a *locale*. It is a rough indication because judiciary investigations have shown the existence of *locali* comprised with an inferior number of members.

²² It is the *locale* that refers to the village of San Luca, a small municipality in the hinterland of Calabria. The honored man's tradition appoint a high symbolic value, considering it like a sort of originating nucleus of the 'Ndrangheta. See Ciconte (1992); Gratteri and Nicaso (2006); Tribunale di Reggio Calabria (2010).

²³ *Doti* (endowments) are appointed with criminal capacities of affiliates and, thus, they represent a value of merit. To have a determined role, a person needs to have gained a certain *dote*, namely have reached a certain rank inside the hierarchical stratification of the organization.

²⁴ The sources we are referring to are the declarations of several collaborators of justice (Tribunale di Reggio Calabria 1995) and the reconstructions by investigators based on wiretappings and environmental interceptions (Regione Carabinieri “Lombardia” 2008; Tribunale di Reggio Calabria 2010; Tribunale di Milano 2010; Tribunale di Torino 2011).

²⁵ Each rank can have additional differentiations: For example, *picciotto* (young boy) might be distinguished by the *picciotto liscio* and *picciotto sgarrista* titles achieved after a certain period of Mafia internship; while *camorrista* might have the following rank of *camorrista di sgarro* or *sgarrista*, but he could have the additional rank of *sgarrista di fibbia* and *camorrista formato*. Therefore, the creation of new ranks gradually creates a differentiation and an increment of hierarchical levels.

belonging to the subgroup of *società minore* to whose top it is possible to find the roles of *capo giovane* (young boss), *picciotto di giornata* (daily young boy), and *puntaio*. In the *società maggiore*, on the contrary, it is possible to find a rank superior to *sgarrista* or *camorrista di sgarro*. In the course of time, the internal organization of the *società maggiore* have introduced new ranks: Thus, to the top positions were added already cited ranks of *santista*, *vangelo* (gospel), *quartino*, *trequartino*, *quintino* or *padrino*, and *associazione* or *società*. This last one “is a special rank reserved to superior bosses” (Tribunale di Reggio Calabria 1995, p. 372). These new ranks are, in fact, given to those who have access to the top structure created in the 1970s and called *Santa*. It is an organizational level that is hidden to inferior level affiliates and to which, originally, only important boss can access. At the beginning, the ranks of *santista* could be given to only 33 people, but later, there was a certain oversaturation in the attribution of this title and, therefore, it was deemed appropriate to establish new higher-level ranks. This decision was dictated by the need, on one hand, to facilitate the relationships between the most powerful bosses in the management of the business, and on the other hand, especially, to foster relations with external parties. Just to increase this type of relationship, the *santisti* were given the opportunity to join the deviated freemasonry (Sergi 1991; Cicone 1996; Mannino 1997; Guarino 2004). The latter was in fact for the 'Ndrangheta, more than for other Mafia organizations, the place of meeting and connecting with members of the institutions, politics, the bureaucratic apparatus, the business world, and free-lance professionals (Commissione Parlamentare Antimafia (CPA) 2000, 2008).²⁶

Collaborator of justice Giuseppe Albanese has declared that:

A *santista*, in order to save the organization, could even betray one hundred *camorristi* or *sgarristi*. There were even examples of this revolutionary principle and even became customary tip-offs to the police with real denunciations by *santisti* (Tribunale di Reggio Calabria 1995, p. 6602).

The creation of the *Santa* testifies, among other things, how within the 'Ndrangheta there is periodically a proliferation of ranks and hierarchy levels. This strategy, besides answering the need to affiliate new members, is able to guarantee another important need: Reinforcing the loyalty of associates and cement the cohesion of the group.

The organizational configuration that results, therefore, confirmed as the tendency to structure the relationship between the *cosche* at a horizontal level is compensated by the tendency to strengthen the vertical character of each *locale*, differentiating roles and leadership positions. This, on one hand, reduces the autonomy of individual members, but on the other hand offers the same incentives to abide by the rules of the organization. Loyalty, along with the ability to drive action

²⁶ The relationship with deviated freemasonry was also important for Cosa Nostra. There are, however, some differences between the two Mafia organizations: “While for Cosa Nostra the pact [with the freemasonry] never represented an influence to its power, for the 'Ndrangheta the alliance went beyond a mere utilitarian relationship that represents the essential characteristics through which it has obtained the current supremacy and diffusion” (Commissione Parlamentare Antimafia (CPA) 2000, p. 128).

demonstrated in the field, can be rewarded by the opportunity to advance in the hierarchy. In other words, the high internal differentiation of roles and positions is useful to the career progression of the affiliates; their loyalty and their commitment can be constantly rewarded by the opportunity to achieve a higher rank within the *cosca*. Career opportunities strengthen the ties of belonging and increase the degree of loyalty and cohesion of the affiliates of the organization.

Rules and Symbols

The perspective of the analysis conducted also suggested focusing on the aspect regarding the rules, which are the base of the framework of criminal organizations. More recent investigations have provided a rich picture of information compared to the “constitution”²⁷ of the 'Ndrangheta from a formal point of view. For this purpose, it is important to ask how these rules are actually binding, and in particular, in what measure their normative cogency is more or less diversified compared to other roles and to the specific people that fulfill that position. As it is notorious, a hypertrophic normative structure—which seems to characterize the 'Ndrangheta—leaves a lot of room for power games. The latter is not held only by those who know more than others to enforce the rules, but especially by those who can control areas of uncertainty that are created between statement of the rules and their practical application (Crozier and Friedberg 1977).

Another important area to analyze pertains to symbolic dimension.²⁸ Inside the 'Ndrangheta, there is a vast catalogue of symbols and cultural codes, which is the result of a constant process of “invention of the tradition” (Hobsbawn and Ranger 1983). On the other side, Mafiosi are always identified for their capacity to manipulate and instrumentalize traditional values with the objective to obtain consensus and legitimacy.

Rules, symbols, and cultural codes are then strictly tied to practice and behavior, thus to the concrete function of the organization. It is here where the issue of family ties lies. In general, one may argue that the degree of rituals tends to increase when an association extends beyond the family relationship. If an organization is based only on blood ties, it does not need to be formalized on a ritual level. It is a very important aspect of the 'Ndrangheta: In fact, if anything it is due to the family, as has been repeated for some time, it is not understood why it would require specific mechanisms (such as the rites of affiliation) to make “solemn” the bond of membership or organizational structures articulated in so many hierarchical levels.

²⁷ Regarding the relevance and the function of the “constitution” for the criminal organization, see Leeson and Skarbek (2010).

²⁸ For example, initiation rites that still today represent the entrance into the Mafia organization, more than a tradition heritage, fulfilling important symbolic functions. Like all boundaries, they divide and unify at the same time: They create barriers, but also connections. For 'Ndrangheta's rituals, see Malafarina (1986); Ciconte (1992); Paoli (2000), Gratteri and Nicaso (2006); Tribunale di Reggio Calabria (2010).

It is true that a criminal organization might be formalized even to redistribute the weight of family relations. It is a concern that emerges periodically as part of some 'Ndrangheta groups, against the resistance of others who want to preserve a greater margin of autonomy and action.

Coordination Among Locali

It is now important to bring into focus the operation of the inter-organizational level trying to understand how it was historically configured, how it changed throughout time, and what its peculiarities are.

During the mid 1980s, a bloody fight between *cosche* in the area of Reggio Calabria caused hundreds of deaths. The Mafia war suddenly finished in 1991 and, according to the declarations of some collaborators of justice, that happened thanks to the intervention of some members of Cosa Nostra and 'ndranghetisti located in Canada. From this moment, they began to talk about a new united entity of the 'ndrine, a sort of Calabrian "commission" similar to the Sicilian model. It seems, however, more of a coordination structure between groups that does not crush the traditional organizational structure, but on the contrary, it proposes to put in relations the networks of the single Mafiosi with those of the *cosche* and the different *locali*.

The existence of a superior entity was revealed with more evidence in recent years via judiciary investigation (Tribunale di Reggio Calabria 2010, 2012; Tribunale di Milano 2010). As a result, the main *cosche* of the province of Reggio Calabria became connected through territorial structures called *mandamenti*²⁹ that gather the Ionic, Tyrrhenian, and the urban area of Reggio Calabria's *locali* (Direzione Nazionale Antimafia 2012). These three *mandamenti* express an additional superior entity that coordinates, called *Crimine* or *Provincia* that is overseen by an elected member of different representatives of *locali* for a defined period. This role of *capo-crimine*³⁰ is not assimilated to that of "capo dei capi" (as it has usually been simplified in journalistic reports), but a figure that has mainly symbolic and delegations' roles.³¹ The same affiliates represent those who fulfill this position as a depositary and guarantor of rules and tradition of the 'Ndrangheta.

²⁹ As it is evident, the term is taken from that used in the Sicilian Mafia, see note 12.

³⁰ To which the same affiliates often refer simply using the term *Crimine*, identifying the role with the representative body. As anti-Mafia magistrates explain, this body plays "a decisive role in its organization, primarily through the protection of the basic rules of the organization (a sort of criminal 'Constitution'), those, in short, that characterize the 'Ndrangheta as such and ensure its recognition over time and space, even far away from the motherland of Calabria; thus ensuring the maintenance of general balance, the control of the appointment of the heads of *locali* and openings of other venues, the authorization for the transfer of charges, the resolution of any disputes, the submission to the judgment of any wrongdoing in place by persons inside the 'Ndrangheta." (Direzione Nazionale Antimafia 2012, p. 96).

³¹ It is a role of *primus inter pares*, (Direzione Nazionale Antimafia 2012, p. 94) which in fact collaborators of justice had already addressed. For example, Giacomo Lauro said that in the 1960s, Antonio Macri of Siderno was the *capo-crimine*: "Represented the crimine, namely he represented

We are, thus, not in the presence of a strictly vertical and pyramidal structure, but to a model that tries to put in contact and to reciprocate identification among different criminal groups active in different territorial areas.³² The same model is also reproduced by *cosche* that operate outside Calabria: In some regions of the North Italy, as Lombardy, Piedmont, and Liguria is possible to find the same organizational structure in *locali*, internally distinguished into *società maggiore* and *società minore*, and the attempt of inter-organizational coordination. In particular, in Lombardy, it results the creation of a regional entity called indeed “La Lombardia” with the goal of putting in connection the different *locali* active in the territory. There is also news of a “camera di controllo” (control chamber) created in Liguria and the attempt to create a similar entity in Piedmont.³³ It is important, however, to specify that both *locali* and the superior coordination structures need to obtain “recognition” from the top of the most important 'Ndrangheta *locali* settled in Calabria. In this sense, they need to accept to be under the control of the Calabrian *Crimine*.³⁴

From the information available, a network configuration seems to be emerging that, from one side, lower the level of conflict and, from the other side, maximize the social capital of the more consolidated criminal organization. It is an organizational innovation, which makes up a flexible coordination structure, which ensures the consultation for the most important decisions, without compromising the compartmentalization and the autonomy of each group.

the whole 'Ndrangheta in the province of Reggio Calabria” (Tribunale di Reggio Calabria 1995, p. 288; See also Ciconte 1996, p. 40+; Mannino 1997, pp. 419, 436, note 84). From what we know, the role of *capo-crimine* has long been covered with boss of the clans of the Ionian side of Calabria. The last judicial investigations show that it was awarded to a member of the clans of the Tyrrhenian coast, preferring, however, an elderly, the octogenarian Domenico Oppedisano, that while boasting a long belonging to the 'Ndrangheta not seem to have behind a career criminal with a high thickness (Tribunale di Reggio Calabria 2010, 2012). As noted by investigators, his “appointment was a compromise between multiple instances of power” related to the historical groups of the 'Ndrangheta (Tribunale di Reggio Calabria 2012, p. 178). In other words, the Ionian *cosche* and as well as those from the city of Reggio accept that this charge is attributed to the Tyrrhenian area, but not to a “strong” man, but to one “wise” person because of its seniority, able to represent the above “tradition.” This choice seems justified by the fact that he “looks man who groped mediations between aggressive criminal groups and, therefore, to avoid possible conflict” (Tribunale di Reggio Calabria 2012, p. 179; Pignatone and Prestipino 2012, pp. 6–7).

³² “In reality, this structure has confirmed the dominance of the leading families of the respective areas, formally legitimizing a function that is exercised in practice in benchmarks for agreements, alliances, and pacification” (Regione Carabinieri “Lombardia” 2008, p. 262).

³³ According to investigators, similar structures would be present also in Australia and Canada. In all cases they are bodies that have a function of both internal coordination both of dialogue and interface with the “motherland” (Direzione Nazionale Antimafia 2012, p.94). For an analysis of the different modes of relationships between groups active in nontraditional areas and those rooted in Calabria, see Sciarrone and Storti (2014).

³⁴ For example, when the representative of Lombardy tries to become independent from the “motherland,” claiming more autonomy compared to the Calabrian *Crimine*, he is killed (Tribunale di Milano 2010).

The 'Ndrangheta seems to have imitated Cosa Nostra to equip itself as a united organ of coordination, but paradoxically, at the same time, the Sicilian Mafiosi—to protect themselves from collaborators of justice and from more efficient repression strategies from the investigation apparatus—have revealed the tendency to reorganize themselves according to a model that is similar to the Calabrian one, segmenting families and groups in order to render the association more impenetrable.

Both Mafia organizations present a reticular configuration, but Cosa Nostra tends to structure itself more like a “organization network,” while the 'Ndrangheta continues to maintain a character of a “network of organizations” with more differentiated knots and ties with variable intensity.³⁵

A Pact-Based Organizational Model

Having an organizational structure is important for a group of people who wants to act in mutual agreement to reach specific goals. In this regard, it is possible to distinguish between organizations that are limited to only promoting the coordination of members' actions and others that will encourage the cooperation itself. In general terms, the coordination is easy to achieve, while the cooperation requires specific factors to be launched. As we have seen, in the case of the 'Ndrangheta, it has long been possible to recognize different elements that reveal the attempt to configure united coordinated structures, which, in turn, could encourage more concerted plans of action.³⁶

The last judiciary investigations (Tribunale di Reggio Calabria 2010; Tribunale di Milano 2010) have shed light on the dynamics through which the 'Ndrangheta has tried to “institutionalize” an inter-organizational model. The formalization of roles and connections has the goal of creating a legitimate exercise of the power, recognized by members of the groups based on trust and loyalty obtained through positive and negative sanctions. It is an apparent attempt to depersonalize some positions of authority, formalizing more precisely some leadership roles to be set up through election. This process of “democratization”, although more apparent than real, shows a commitment aimed at making power within the organization independent of specific forces or factions. It is in this way that it also tends to institutionalize the organization, as shared practices and cognitive schemes of reference are created, which serve to strengthen internal cohesion and solidarity.

³⁵ Regarding the distinction between “network of organizations” and “organization network,” see Powell (1990); Podolny and Page (1998); Pichierra (2002).

³⁶ As we have seen, *cosche* of the 'Ndrangheta do not seem, however, to point to a primarily unitarian and centralized organizational structure, but tends to favor a model that, even preferring a certain level of cooperation, is able in particular to preserve and guarantee wise operational autonomy to each group.

This does not mean to eliminate all conflicts, nor does it ratify the claim of tyrannical domination. The recognition and consolidation of an organizational structure does not necessarily imply a situation of peace and a convergence of interests and objectives. In most cases, arenas instead constitute comparing individuals and groups competing—and often also in the fight—between them. The formation of a “dominant coalition,” that is an oligarchical power structure, is thus favored.

From the findings in the last judicial investigations, the *Crimine* appears, above all, as an organization that seeks to play a role in ensuring inter-organizational levels, whereas its power seems much reduced to impose binding decisions at the collective level. The constitution of this entity is important anyway because it shows the attempt to structure interests, to coordinate initiatives, to influence alliances, and, above all, to create meanings socially shared. Certainly, decision-making mechanisms (the executive power) are important, but the symbolic functions and those of representation, particularly the guarantee functions, count even more. In any case, it is important that there is a formalized role—the *capocrimine*—which seems to have the task of acting as a guarantor of the unity of the 'Ndrangheta. The presence of elective and temporary positions is meaningful, together with the mechanism of territorial rotation of the top positions. More than in front of a “corporate” model of organized crime, a “corporative” model emerges, we could also say “consociation,” which envisages a system of concertation (rather than a unified decision-making system) and especially shows the importance attributed to the functions of guarantee and recognition.

Conclusive Considerations

Like in other organizations, inside Mafia organizations, there is a complex articulation of positions and roles. For example, alongside activities that are managed and coordinated by the organization at different levels, other are conducted in autonomy by single affiliates who have different leeway and can act with a certain amount of independence in both legal and illegal markets. Furthermore, Mafiosi have an asset of external relations that often manage at a personal level, being careful not to share with others their social capital, so that it constitutes an exclusive advantage. Roles formalized inside the organization do not necessarily coincide with power positions effectively held. One may find a Mafioso who, while not occupying an important role in the criminal hierarchy of the association, is able to exert his influence and power by virtue of the relational resources at his disposal, namely the social capital that is derived for example from the fact to perform functions as intermediaries between social networks of different types. In Mafia organizations, it is possible to find a combination of variably “strong” and “weak”³⁷ connections. Strong con-

³⁷ As it is notorious, the distinction between strong ties and weak ties is due to Granovetter (1973, 1995).

nections are assimilated to family ties, whereas weak connections are more instrumental and less characterized on an effective level. For a Mafia group, as we said, formalizing the association can mean disempowering the strong connections. It is a process that cannot be pushed beyond a certain threshold: In fact, the attempt to de-personalize roles is mitigated by the recourse to a symbolic and ritual apparatus that are used anyway to strengthen connections of belonging. In the 'Ndrangheta, this is extremely evident if we think there is a proliferation of ranks, rules, and command positions. Reading these dynamics in terms of primitive or traditional elements is too reductive and misleading. In reality, the proliferation of positions and the modalities of assigning the same are functional in the delineation of possible "careers" inside the criminal organization. Moreover, this also happens in the legal organization when trying to reward the loyalty through the ability to stimulate and structure the internal career paths, or by distinctions and differences of roles, positions, and command structures.

The organizational structure that we have described additionally proves useful to that peculiar combination of business and power that characterize the Italian Mafia, and that is evident in the case of the 'Ndrangheta (Sciarrone 2010, 2011). It is in fact criminal organizations oriented not only to the accumulation of wealth, but also to the exercise of power. The presence of different organizational levels allows them to have together on one side the entrepreneur dimension through which Mafiosi seek economic objectives, and on the other side the dimension of "secret society" that characterize them as a group of power (that exercise territorial control through functions of protection and mediation in areas that are more or less confined).

This particular combination between business and power is reflected in the associated presence of strong and weak connections of the organizational configuration. As we said, strong connections are important because they are used to provide organizational and social cohesion, but this type of tie is not enough to guarantee the reproduction and extension of the criminal network. Mafiosi need also another type of "enlarged" social capital able to favor external connections. Hence the importance of weak ties, which are not to be understood as about to break, but as "loose" ties, namely elastic and flexible, such as those that underlie the relationship of complicity and collusion, the true strong point of the Mafia, in particular that of Calabria.

Ultimately, the high level of cohesion and compactness of the 'Ndrangheta not only depends on alleged archaic characters of an original cultural matrix, but also cannot be explained by the mere importance of family ties, which in any case are a powerful bond of association. It is rather necessary to keep in mind the multidimensionality of its organizational configuration, reticular type, and variable geometry, able to guarantee a valid combination of centralization and flexibility, together with an effective mix of strong and weak ties, or closing inward and opening outward.

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