

Chapter 9

Sacra Corona Unita and 'Ndrangheta: “Structural” Differences of Organized Crime

Andrea Apollonio

Sacra Corona Unita and 'Ndrangheta

The history of Italian criminal organizations has always been marked, in large part, by the events of four Mafia organizations, each of which have a specific geographical location: Cosa Nostra in Sicily, Camorra in Campania, 'Ndrangheta in Calabria, and Sacra Corona Unita (SCU) in Apulia. Of these, the first two have always had a high media emphasis and benefit particular attention from scholars. Indeed, we might say that the history of the Mafia corresponds with the period from the unification of Italy to the beginning of the 1990s, with that of Cosa Nostra and Camorra: The first relevant work of the 'Ndrangheta was, in fact, dated 1990 (Nicaso 1990).

Although it is one of the oldest types of Mafia, only in those years did interest in the 'Ndrangheta grow; more recently attention has turned toward the Apulia region, where, for at least a couple of decades, the SCU has operated. In 1994, the latter region “officially” joined the group of Mafia associations, becoming, thus, the “Fourth Mafia” (Commissione 1994).

The SCU and the 'Ndrangheta have always been considered “twin Mafias.” Certainly, for reasons of territorial influences and supremacy that almost border each other; a geographical disposition that made the Ionic Sea a proper *mare nostrum* of the two Mafias, and the whole Ionic coast from Gallipoli to Reggio Calabria, the ideal breeding ground for any sort of maritime illegal activity, often comanaged from both organizations. So much so that the whole southern area of Basilicata could have been considered, until a couple of decades ago, a laboratory of exchanging of criminal techniques, a meeting point, and place for the planning of illicit activities of both organizations (Sergi 2001, p. 73).

Geographical proximity is not the mere reason for this conceptual closeness of the two organizations. The 'Ndrangheta had a primary role in the creation of the SCU, a true “sponsorship” of the organization, (Massari 1998, p. 22) since the

A. Apollonio (✉)

Dipartimento di Giurisprudenza—Diritto e procedura penale, Università di Pavia,
Strada Nuova 65, 27100 Pavia, Italy

e-mail: andrea.apollonio01@universitadipavia.it

founder of the Apulian group, Pino Rogoli—a man was very close to the 'Ndrangheta boss Giuseppe Bellocco—would be annexed to the 'Ndrangheta with a formal rite of affiliation. As has been authoritatively affirmed: “In Apulia, ties between the 'Ndrangheta and the SCU were long established. The SCU was founded in 1983 as a sort of Calabrian *'ndrina*” [in Puglia i legami tra la 'Ndrangheta e la criminalità pugliese sono da tempo consolidati. La “Sacra corona unita” venne costituita nel 1983 come una sorta di *'ndrina* calabrese] (Gratteri and Nicaso 2006, p. 200). Therefore, it is evident that the moment of the constitution of the Apulian organization is strictly connected with the more deep and secret dynamics of the 'Ndrangheta.

In addition, as mentioned before, both groups had the benefit of a persisting and generalized undervaluation of cause and effect of the Mafia phenomenon. Being considered minor criminal groups has allowed them an uncontested proliferation of their dangerousness in their respective regions of origin.

These are only some of the more evident reasons that have allowed these two Mafia groups a close collaboration in vast transnational drug trafficking—coming from the West—or the numerous routes of weapons or human smuggling—beginning in the East—both reaching the arrival point in Calabria. This partnership has also permitted them to “operate as a sort of intellectual collective, able to analyze in a short amount of time their weak points, and to learn from their mistakes [...] to progressively impart their own knowledge within the organization” [operare come una sorta di intellettuale collettivo, in grado di analizzare in breve tempo i propri punti deboli, di imparare dai propri errori [...] di socializzare progressivamente all'interno dell'organizzazione il proprio sapere] (Scarpinato 2005). That which the two Mafias accomplish is a continuous re-elaboration of the criminal model and method, an overlapping and sharing of experiences that put the two groups in contact on both a conceptual and concrete level.

Nevertheless, there are numerous differences between the SCU and the 'Ndrangheta. These, to some extent, must be considered “structural” as they constitute different species of Mafia criminal organizations, different models of illicit capitalism. Relevant dissimilarities also demonstrated in terms of offensiveness and obstinacy compared to the social structures of reference.

A Horizontal Structure with “Fragmented” Behavior, a “Pure” Reticular Structure

The SCU was never successful in becoming a complete Mafia: It lacks a well-defined structure, bosses who know how to impose themselves within the organization, a decision-making structure, and a well-defined territory. This is an assumption that will often recur in writing as an underground fracture that is there to remind all that this group and the 'Ndrangheta represent, regardless of their undeniable similarities, two distinct continents.

The “Fourth Mafia” was born from the reactive impulses of Apulian criminality to a massive presence of affiliates of the Nuova Camorra Organizzata of Raffaele

Cutolo, who intended to take advantage of the Adriatic coasts to open new maritime routes for cigarette smuggling, (Apollonio 2010, p. 74; Tornesello 2013, p. 60) by adopting “a strategy of proper assimilation of the Apulian men” [una strategia di vera e propria assimilazione dei pugliesi] (Massari 1998, p. 11). As Cataldo Motta, one of the protagonists of the contrastive phenomenon of those years, wrote:

In the prison of Bari and in the other penitential institutions of the region, at the beginning of the 1980s, not only a great number of affiliations of Apulian detainees to the *Nuova Camorra Organizzata* occurred, but also an attitude of submission to Neapolitan prisoners belonging to the organization: This was the first sign for those who from the criminal part understood—more promptly from the other side!—the gravity of the phenomenon and the risk of losing control of Apulian criminal activities (p. 54).

[Nel carcere di Bari e negli altri istituti penitenziari della regione, all’inizio degli anni Ottanta, si verificarono non soltanto un gran numero di affiliazioni di detenuti pugliesi alla Nuova camorra organizzata, ma anche atteggiamenti di loro sottomissione ai detenuti napoletani appartenenti alla stessa organizzazione: questo fu un primo segnale d’allarme per chi da parte criminale, comprese — più tempestivamente dell’altra parte! — la gravità del fenomeno e il rischio della perdita del controllo delle attività criminali pugliesi].

For these reasons, the organization employed, since its beginning, an attitude of “Protest Mafia.” In this way, lands that had until then remained untouched, as they were extraneous to Mafia activity, suddenly fell into the hands of a criminal organization—the SCU, in fact—that in the course of a few years replaced the presence of the Neapolitans in the handling of the same illegal trafficking.

Since its establishment, the SCU appeared as something slightly different from the classic phenotype of a Mafia association, but rather as a federation among clans located in the Salento and Bari areas, whose criminal strategies were arranged, at the most, among bosses, and were focused on the management of cigarette smuggling and other illicit maritime trafficking (Tornesello 2009). Not having a socio-family connection (usually present in other organizations), but at the base a vast profit that maritime traffickers assured, the organizational structure is subject to continuous detachments and frequent fragmentations. For instance, in 1987, in the peak of its military potency, the SCU could already be considered as divided into three units, inside which a series of capo-Mafia operated: The Brindisi unit, that of the south of Bari, and finally those in the Salento area (Massari 1998, p. 39).

The organization has never been able to express vertical decision making. The Apulian Mafia could be defined, for this, as a horizontal Mafia with a fragmental behavior, characterized by the absence of top brass and from the maximum autonomy of the single clans that create an innovative criminal *network* (Longo 1997, p. 73). It is, without doubt, capable of managing hundreds of kilometers of coastline and a good part of inland Bari and Lecce, but at the same time proves itself quite weak confronted with judicial offenses. “The Apulian criminal organizations, more than large hegemonic groups, is characterized by heterogeneous reticular delinquent clans, who, from time to time, but not necessarily, interact according to some agreement of reciprocal benefit” [La criminalità organizzata pugliese è connotata, più che da grossi gruppi egemoni, da un reticolo eterogeneo di formazioni delinquenziali, che talora—ma non necessariamente—interagiscono secondo intese di rispetto reciproco] (Mantovano 2001, p. 109). This demonstrates how the interactions and the reciprocal relationships among affiliates, or the concatenate

relationships that merge in the center—these phenomena that have always been observed within Mafia associations (Hess 1993, p. 190)—are almost absent in the SCU, making it an *unicum* in the Italian situation; more “a project of a Mafia association than a completed model” [un progetto di associazione mafiosa che non un modello compiuto] (Arlacchi 1998, XIII).

Shifting attention toward the 'Ndrangheta, every reflection needs to be looked at on a different scale. It should be sufficient to say that no other organization, in their own territorial declination, can better realize the image of *cosca*: The heart of the artichoke, a fruit closed in on itself, whose leathery leaves do not allow anyone to reach the most internal, edible part.

What strongly characterizes the 'Ndrangheta are the blood ties of its affiliates. So much so that, very often, the “criminal” family tends to coincide with the “natural” family: *La cosca* (or *'ndrina*) is based in large measure on a blood-related family, and that sometimes enlarges and develops itself through weddings that absorb other nuclei. The pervading of family relations determine, thus, the hierarchies of command within the *'ndrina* and the power tends to be transmitted via inheritance (Sciarrone 2008, p. 74).

Moving forward with the analysis of the structure, more *cosche* connected among them give birth to a *locale* that represents the core of the Mafia aggregation in a certain territory. The most important element is without doubt the *'ndrina*, managed in absolute autonomy by the *capobastone*. The *locale*, on the contrary, can be defined a sort of “compensation room” to prepare common strategies and make important decisions.

The dominion of the *capobastone* must not be misleading: We are in the presence of a rigidly top-down Mafia (i.e., vertical structure), since the vertex (absolute) command exists only within the clan. Outside of it, there is a purely horizontal structure, aimed at regulating relations between the *cosche*.

At least, formally, all *cosche* in the 'Ndrangheta are on the same level: This, within a Mafioso context in which (dis)values prevail as vendetta and violence, might determine irremediable internal feuds and often generate bitter and bloody fights among them. Thus, between the 1980s and the 1990s, due to a feud among *cosche* in Reggio Calabria, which led to a degeneration of killings on public roads, 'Ndrangheta heads began to create a “network” “that from one side decreased the fighting level and on the other side allowed to maximize the social share of a more consolidated criminal organization” [che da un lato abbassa il livello di conflittualità e dall'altro consente di massimizzare il capitale sociale delle organizzazioni criminali più consolidate] (Sciarrone 2008, p. 80). An efficient and solid network that put in contact representatives of prominent families by avoiding further margins of hate: Far from the fragmented context of the Apulia organization where bosses of each family could not count on the liability of blood ties.

More specifically, making reference to the 'Ndrangheta as more than a horizontal structure, it would be appropriate to define it as a species: A “pure” reticular structure. Indicating with this latter affirmation, a substantial difference with the other Mafia that in a way or another are complex (i.e. with clans connected among them), but that does not reach the informative and logistic interexchange level present in the Calabrian model.

Institutional Connections

Another reason for which the SCU can be considered an atypical Mafia is that it does not possess the most important requirement that would allow it to construct a wider and more powerful system, which in hindsight presents what makes a Mafia group a well-rooted organization in the territory: Institutional connections.

Historically, Mafia power claims a direct connection with the institutional government of the territory in order to establish a network of protection in higher administration levels. As Pino Arlacchi argues: “The Mafia system is a project of power and conquer” [l’ordinamento mafioso è un progetto di potere e di conquista] (2007, p. 91) as it presumes massive infiltrations in politics and institutional offices. Indeed, the forms of control-coordination in institutions must be considered as mere territorial dominance for the Mafia, a constitutive character of its nature of a political group that exercises its function in a specific area controlling everything that takes place within it (Santino 1994, p. 133).

None of this is part of the experience of the SCU in Apulia, which has failed to become whole, to become a “politico-institutional” Mafia. The numerous episodes of corruption and dishonest behavior in the Public Administration in Apulia in the 1990s—remembering that on a national level it was the period of “Tangentopoli”—cannot be counted with the development of the Mafia organization, which is contrary to what some may hypothesize (Sciarrone 1998, p. 158; Gorgoni 1995, p. 98). The expansion of the Mafia model in Apulia did not “hook” politics: The master proof of this assertion can be found in judicial records, where there are no convictions for Apulian politicians for Mafia collusion, in particular with the SCU.

On the other hand, the 'Ndrangheta could be considered the political “Mafia” of all organizations: This organization has expressed its own “Mafia bourgeoisie” better than any other (Santino 2007, p. 108).

Mafia organizations are not extraneous to society, but are on the contrary an integral part of it. It is within society that they must search for consensus, and specifically in those areas in which it is difficult to reach, it is in the collective fear generated by intimidation that Mafia finds its *raison d'être*. Society is a reference point through which the Mafia places itself diagonally compared to other social circles: In fact, they create their own, wider social circle, which spans from underprivileged families to well-off economical operators that manage their operations of smuggling and reinvestment of capital, passing and flowing through both the business and political world. In a similar social circle on Mafia hegemony, which reaches well beyond the narrow confines of the criminal organization, every boundary between legal and illegal is blurred, and subjects that work within are the heart of the *Mafia bourgeoisie*. This concept, developed in the 1990s by Umberto Santino, takes for granted the intertwining of politics and the Mafia because it places people performing illegal (the boss) and legal (professionals, businessmen, especially politicians) functions in the same social circle, all connected by common interests and sharing the same cultural code.

It is well known that when Santino developed the category of *Mafia bourgeoisie*, he had in mind a complex and contradictory Sicilian society. Still, the best representation of an institutionalized criminality and closeness to the Italian State was not provided by Cosa Nostra, but from the 'Ndrangheta in its *bourgeois* aspect: The Santa.

In the mid 1970s, the 'Ndrangheta, which up until then operated mostly as an agro-pastoral organization and closed into its archaic traditions, felt the need to assign new rules and a new criminal structure that could better infiltrate society. That was the birth of the Santa: “A new structure, elitist, a new management, unrelated to the hierarchical tradition of *locali* that was able to move without hesitation, without the limits of the old Honored Society and its subculture” [una struttura nuova, elitaria, una nuova dirigenza, estranea alle tradizionali gerarchie dei *locali* in grado di muoversi in maniera spregiudicata, senza i limiti della vecchia onorata società e della sua subcultura] (Fierro and Oliva 2007, p. 57). The idea is to penetrate into that gray zone that represents the deviated freemasonry in which they could create a better *bourgeoisie*: Judges, lawyers, businessmen, and politicians. The change is epic since the elite of the 'Ndrangheta—those who were able to reach this secret rank—could have relations, even more lucrative, with members of the freemasonry.

With the *Santa*, the 'Ndrangheta succeeds in entering into a gray zone that had been until that time unapproachable, in the place of privileged contact between Mafiosi and politicians. La *Santa*, in conclusion, represents the “bourgeois” evolution of Mafia organizations. Above all, it embodies the tendency of the 'Ndrangheta to solidify connections at the highest institutional levels, which allowed the organization to be considered a “complete” Mafia because it is “political.”

The striking differences articulated so far in this work (regarding the structure and the institutional connections) demonstrate a concrete confirmation on an empirical-criminological level compared to the well-known “pentitismo”: That is, from one side, the first cause of the scattering of the organization at the turn of the twenty-first century; on the other side, rendered harmless by the complex and impenetrable structure of the 'Ndrangheta. Undeniably, one of the most evident reasons for the defeat of the SCU is to be found in the spread of *pentitismo* in the 1990s that allowed judiciary organisms to break into families with arrests and convictions.

The absence of institutional protection and of a widespread *affectio societatis* meant that once captured, the SCU Mafioso realized to have definitively failed the extremely personal goal of enrichment through illicit activity. Not having—in most cases—blood ties between the various affiliates, and no “common” management of Mafia association, it was possible to begin a collaborative relationship with the judges to diminish the heavy consequences of sanctions: “The fierceness of internal conflict that has characterized the various factions in the Apulian association and the resulting fear to deal directly with the murderous violence of their opponents resulted for many in the urge to cooperate with the authorities” (Massari and Motta 2006, p. 168).

Additional Differences: Expansion Models, Entrepreneurial Strategies, and the Social Milieu

In general, all four Italian criminal organizations can be defined as prototypes of transnational Mafia with a strong centrifugal propulsion compared to the socio-geographic contexts of their regions. The particular geographic collocation of Southern Italy, placed in the center of the Euro-Asian macro-region, has undeniably benefited from the realization of the peculiar transnational feature of the Italian Mafias. Examples of this are the trafficking of drugs, weapons, tobacco, human, and “new slaves,” traffics that have always privileged the (less dangerous) maritime routes and the (often chaotic) harbor passages. Additional examples are the immense cycles of money laundering that represents Northern Italy and even Northern Europe. It is there where Mafia commits a systematic camouflaging of its amounted wealth. It goes without saying, the unstoppable globalization of recent decades has had a considerable impact, and allowed capital to “travel with great speed and simplicity, and this speed and simplicity of movement has proved to be the main source of uncertainty for all the rest. They have become the basis of today’s dominion” [viaggiare con grande rapidità e facilità, e tale rapidità e facilità di movimento si sono rivelate la principale fonte di incertezza per tutto il resto. Sono diventate l’odierna base di dominio] (Bauman 2011, p. 137). In this context, exporting the Mafia model beyond the territories of its original roots is a phenomenon observed for a long time by scholars, thus repudiating the assumption that the Mafia is a trademark difficult to export (Gambetta 1992).

That which has been described so far is a general framework with which certain substantial differences among organizations, especially the SCU and the 'Ndrangheta, can be noticed. Looking closer, however, the expansion capacity of the SCU is sure enough unequaled to the other Italian groups. Although tobacco trafficking and smuggling are characterized by an intrinsic transnationality, the SCU was never able—both outside Apulia and Italy—to establish organizational cells. The only exception was Montenegro. Here, as journalistic services had documented (Di Napoli 1995; Sisti 2009), some members of the organization had found not only a secure place to hide, as they were fugitives, but at the same time, necessary collusion within the Montenegro government to make the coastline of that country a comfortable logistic base for the crossing of loads of cigarettes.

Ultimately, the criminal history of the Apulian Mafia has a strong territorial peculiarity and is enclosed in regional boundaries, pressed by the 'Ndrangheta and the Camorra from West, and from East by the powerful Albanian and Eastern Europe Mafia groups (Raufer 2000).

On the contrary, it is interesting to analyze how the 'Ndrangheta was successful at “physically” exporting some operational cells in northern areas of Italy, as well as in Southern France or Germany. In this case, we might talk about a “transplant” or “hard exportation”: Two concepts, developed by scholars of criminal organizations, that indicate the possibility for a Mafia group to “decide around a table and with scientific rationality to open a branch in a new area” [decidere a tavolino e con

razionalità scientifica di aprire una filiale in una nuova zona] (Varese 2011, p. 11), suggesting, thus, the capacity of the group to operate outside their original territory for a long period, so as to take advantage of the economic resources available in that specific territory (Apollonio 2012a, p. 130).

Extremely interesting is the analysis that Federico Varese does regarding the effort of some clans of the 'Ndrangheta to implant some cells in Northern Italy (49), confirming how far more than other factors, new markets (construction, excavation, etc.) look for a "Mafia request" and to determine, therefore, the establishment of clans somewhere else. Regarding the 'Ndrangheta presence in Germany, Francesco Forgione copiously discusses it, underlying how the opening of new commercial bases defines at the same time the establishment of logistic cells for international drug trafficking (Forgione 2009, p. 130). This same Calabria, nowadays, is described as a nerve center for illicit traffic of every type, and its harbor, especially that of Gioia Tauro, a true sorting center for drugs arriving from South America (Apollonio 2012b, p. 77).

The 'Ndrangheta today is present in almost every continent, and its expansion capacity is the subject to careful reflection. It has also succeeded, as in the example of the plain of Gioia Tauro, to transform its territory into a capital of illegal capitalism, injecting it with apparent wealth and thus altering the dynamics of the local economy. Regarding the drive toward migration and the simultaneous attention to the area of origin of the 'Ndrangheta, Francesco Cinnirella wrote: "The archaism with which this Mafia is cloaked is in contrast to the modernity with which it adapts to new situations and new challenges" [l'arcaicità di cui questa mafia si ammanta fa da contraltare alla modernità con cui si adatta ai nuovi scenari e alle nuove sfide] (Apollonio and Cinnirella 2013, p. 99).

Another substantial difference is found in its different kind of capitalistic behavior, or put differently, in the macroscopic errors of "entrepreneurial strategy" of the Apulian Mafia. The SCU, in fact, during the 1990s was never able to diversify its investments, focusing its criminal strategies on maritime trafficking and contraband, used later for drugs, weapons, and human beings. The capital obtained was then reinvested in the same activities to gain the "multiplier" effect. It is noteworthy how Mafia groups behave, in all respects, like real companies, economic utilities sensitive to supply and demand of markets, legal or illegal: An intuition that had come from 30 years of studies on criminal organizations (Arlacchi 1983), and which is now hardly arguable. The consequences of eliminating that area of the market represented by illicit smuggling are well-known, and it is the members of the SCU that subject the market to tight controls by acting as a "native" organization, and who claim to have an (almost) absolute monopoly.

In fact, in February 2000, following the death of two policemen killed by an armored off-road vehicle of the organization used to transport some "blondes," the Italian government reacted with an unprecedented repressive action: The territory was militarized, law enforcement bodies were strengthened, the Strait of Otranto was barred with an impressive amount of ships and patrol boats, and sophisticated radar were installed and were able to intercept any suspicious movement in the mirror of the sea in front the coast of the Lecce province. Within a year, all the fugitives were arrested, including those who ran the smuggling routes from abroad.

Operazione Primavera, as the Italian repressive action was called, was one of the most brilliant and effective police and judiciary operations in recent Italian history, and succeeded in totally ending the import of raw and essential material for the Apulian criminal organization: Foreign tobacco. As that trafficking was severely reduced, the entire share capital of the organization was dried up: All faded abruptly with the cessation of smuggling activities, and the “Fourth Mafia” proceeded to be downgraded to criminal associations linked to more traditional “ground” illegal activities: Usury, extortion, drugs, contracts, and other legal activities achieved through Mafioso modality.

Before moving to this work’s conclusions, it is important to emphasize another important point: Differences in the social contexts in Apulia and Calabria.

Apulia, until the advent of Campania criminality, was considered an “*isola felix*” (happy island) since it had not yet experienced the Mafia phenomenon in its territory, as had happened to the other southern Italian regions. The fact that a Mafia was suddenly created, and in such a way as was mentioned above, has determined a sharp contrast with the social fabric of the region, unlikely subjected to Mafia dynamics. This is the reason why the activities that led to the birth of the SCU are “external” to the region, tied to the interest of those territories and coasts of another organization.

The fact that, in the 1990s, the Apulian Mafia had won a “share” of support from the lower social classes of Brindisi cannot remain hidden. In those years, smuggling required manpower (from transport to sale), and it was a labor resource for many people (Tornesello); so that, according to a parliamentary inquiry, smuggling had a turnover that far exceeded 10% of the wealth of the province of Brindisi (Commissione 2001). It was, regardless, a consensus of those “drugged” by the flow of capital into that region that was not based on a common cultural base of the organization. So much that, once flows were arrested, the consensus generated by the (blinded) support to the local economy also heavily diminished.

On the contrary, the 'Ndrangheta, as it is well-known, has ancient origins, and has been for a long time the expression of a rural and underdeveloped society, still marked by sores of banditry and dissatisfaction of the unification of Italy. In this context, an organization proliferated that was strictly connected with its inhabitants. Then, in a process of reciprocity and exchange with the society it referred to, the 'Ndrangheta gradually shaped it, injecting improper and misleading values, such as the concept of revenge, honor, and private justice. This depended on the fact that, at least in some ways, the 'Ndrangheta values and those of the lower classes corresponded, due to the underdevelopment of Calabria, which continued after the second world war in certain areas. As Enzo Ciconte wrote: “Over time it has become an organization of elite who won, albeit slowly and gradually, its autonomy and has had the ability to draw an ideological construct that merged the values of the dominant culture of the lower classes” [essa nel tempo è diventata un’organizzazione di élite che ha conquistato, seppur lentamente e progressivamente, una sua autonomia e ha avuto la capacità di elaborare una costruzione ideologica in cui sono confluiti valori della cultura dominante e delle classi subalterne] (p. 75). Although with different patterns and trends, the clans of the 'Ndrangheta were able to maintain a close

relationship of coexistence and legitimacy with local societies, even after having crossed the threshold of the twenty-first century.

The concept of “ideological construction” is what best suits the ’Ndrangheta, and what completely lacks in the SCU during its 20 years of criminal history: For not having found a fertile ground for Mafia values, a society in Apulia perhaps “healthier,” who had not known—before then—the stigma of the Mafia attitude.

The Calabrian Mafia and the Apulian “Mafia” Between Remote Past and Upcoming Present

The “structural” differences previously identified have determined, for the ’Ndrangheta and the SCU, two extremely different destinies. Today, the Calabrian Mafia is seen as the most powerful and able to resist any judiciary operation, so that investigations, even parliamentary, focus on this organization (Commissione 2008). Questions need to focus, on the contrary, on the real nature and essence that the SCU has currently adopted. Can the Apulian Mafia still be considered a Mafia, the fearful “Fourth Mafia”?

On one side, there are those who affirm that the SCU—after judicial investigations of the first years of the twenty-first century aimed at fighting the phenomenon of tobacco smuggling—has reinvested itself, operating underground without any noticeable manifestation of violence, and with more extortion activities (Chiarelli 2012). The management form one decade to another has brought on newer members, often sons or nephews of bosses in prison: A real “second generation” of the SCU (Mastrogiovanni 2013), which is not less-threatening than the first. Recalling the report of the *Procura Antimafia of Lecce*, Maria Luisa Mastrogiovanni argues: “Real international criminal networks are in construction that see the Sacra Corona protagonists of criminal affairs on the side of the Camorra and of Albanian, Montenegrin, Romanian, Russian, Turkish and Greek criminal organizations” [si stanno costruendo vere e proprie reti criminali internazionali che vedono la Sacra corona protagonisti di affari criminali al fianco della camorra e delle mafie albanese, montenegrina, romena, russa, turca e greca] (p. 33).

Not everybody agrees that the SCU is still a Mafia. Authoritatively, it has been denied the Mafia character of the criminal stratum present today in Apulia (Tartaglia Polcini 2010, p. 43). The organization, in fact, with the suspension of the maritime smuggling activities and the spread of *pentitismo* in the group, has been pulverized into a myriad of tiny criminal groups often in opposition to one another that are not able to plan or execute widespread trafficking.

Moreover, as the exceptional reservoir of wealth made from cigarette smuggling was once the real “name” of the SCU, a sort of *raison d’être*, it is now a matter consigned to history. The theorization of Ruggero (unpublished, for those years), according to which a crime must be assessed (also) on the basis of the abundance of opportunities (Ruggero 1992, p. 14), finds its perfect empiric coincidence in the criminal history of the SCU; less opportunities, not infrequently the family patchwork

falls apart: Precisely what happened in Apulia. The “Fourth Mafia” has turned into a heterogeneous amalgam with poor criminogenic qualities (Apollonio 2010, p. 76).

Thus, all arguments touch upon the distinction between a “simple” criminal organization and Mafia. The differential nodes are shown in the foregoing reflections: The claim over an “institutional” government in the territory, the tendency to monopolize violence and force, the absolute control of illicit trafficking, and the management of parts of legal local economy (Apollonio 2013, p. 134). Mafia organizations are not limited to committing crimes of various species and nature, aiming to some profit, but they pursue a more “institutional,” almost legal, goal: The creation of extra-legal governance structures can provide protection to their native land and settle conflicts between subsidiaries, thus legitimizing their presence and their own enrichment. Each regional Mafia’s purpose is to create a shadow-state, which can claim the right of life and death over its inhabitants, establish a system of taxation and effective and timely collection, and incorporate itself into circuits of sovereignty true of any state of law.

The SCU, as shown, was never able to complete itself in becoming a “Mafia.” Due to the failure of a politico-institutional liaison, the reduced capacity of expansion, an extremely permeable structure from the outside, a “healthier” social composition, and an altogether failure of its impressive smuggling trade, it can be considered *less* Mafia than yesterday. As said in the 1990s, it “legally fits well, as was the case with repeated judicial decisions, within article number 416-bis of the Penal Code, that is, the crime of Mafia-type associations, but does not fully correspond to the exceptional traditional term ‘Mafia,’ nor to its sociological profile” [ben si inquadra giuridicamente, com’è avvenuto con ripetute decisioni giudiziarie, nella previsione dell’art. 416 bis del codice penale, del delitto cioè di associazione di tipo mafioso; ma non corrisponde pienamente all’accezione tradizionale del termine “mafia”, nè al suo profilo sociologico] (Motta 2008, p. 53). Today in Apulia, and, in particular, in the Salento and Bari area, there is certainly a presence of groups of organized crime that can be also quite stubborn and sometimes well-organized. But these cannot be compared, as a whole, to a Mafia structure such as the 'Ndrangheta, which is true “project power and conquest.”

On the other hand, however, the 'Ndrangheta, has from the beginning of the last century managed to create in some areas of Calabria—as we have seen—a “new” legal system as opposed to the state (Ciconte 1992, p. 80).

Conclusively, the violent and bloody history of the SCU is exhausted in a couple of decades, spanning from the 1980s until the beginning of the 2000s. It has been a Mafia, although imperfect: This imperfection, ultimately, generated its defeat at the hands of the state, leaving on the ground pieces of a criminal association that cannot be considered the continuation of an Apulian Mafia history.

This, at least, is what can be found empirically. Although, in this field, scientific researches look a little like exploration voyages of past centuries: They are a mixture of experimental method and rational analysis, an epitome of science and empiricism. For this reason, the current situation can be summarized best by Rosario Tornesello: “Where we are is more or less known; however, you will see the end” [dove siamo arrivati è più o meno noto; e comunque lo si vedrà alla fine] (Tornesello 2013, p. 57).

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