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The Modernity of the Mafia: Public Mistrust, Personalised Networks, Organised Crime

Abstract

For a long time, the Mafia had been considered an anti-modern phenomenon that would have come to an end with society's evolution. Contrary to this expectation, the Mafia proved to be far more resilient – so much so that it could respond effectively to the challenge of globalisation. The research paper highlights how the Mafia has shown itself to be more modern than the State on account of its strategic use of personalised networks. The personalised and informal Mafia networks turned out to be much more efficient and better organised both in public mistrust societies, in which the Mafia finds its most favourable habitat to flourish, and in the vast context of globalisation, where formal institutions have trouble as to establishing themselves and imposing their rule for structural reasons.

Keywords: *personalised networks, informality, the State's inefficiency, public mistrust, folkloristic approach, social structure*

An Enchanted View of the Mafia

Ever since the Mafia was discovered in Sicily in the second half of the 19th century, both experts and laymen have looked upon it as both a monstrous and fascinating indecipherable phenomenon. This enchantment, quite conspicuous among researchers (particularly among sociologists, jurists and, in the past, physical anthropologists) and artists alike (writers and film directors foremost), highlights a deep-rooted ethnocentric paradox, which, from the very first, characterised the debate on this global social phenomenon nowadays.

The first aspect of this paradox may be summarised as follows: among Mafia experts, we can detect the opinion, at times implicit and often unconscious, that the Mafia is an obsolete manifestation, unworthy of modernity and pertaining to “Dark Ages” connoting social barbarism. According to this view, which, at least

potentially, is certainly brought on by the 18th century rationalism, Mafia and quasi-Mafia phenomena are interpreted as a relic of a dying archaic world.

In the meantime, we realise that an optimistic evolutionist scenario is a far cry from reality. The fact that the Mafia in Palermo does not kill anymore does not mean that it has been defeated or dismantled: it is only an indication that it no longer needs to resort to physical violence. Judges, police authorities and some politicians committed to the anti-Mafia fight appropriately point out that in Sicily, particularly in Palermo, the Mafia is alive, flourishing and *has nothing to fear anymore*. According to this disquieting remark, made on 12 October 2003 by Luciano Violante, former president of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, we must assume that at present the Mafia in Sicily can once again weave its political intrigues and manage its illegal economic enterprises without fearing the state's intervention — contrary to what occurred in the early nineties of the past century (La Repubblica, 13 October 2003). Therefore, the Mafia does not need to resort to startling violent actions as it kills *persone eccellenti*¹ only when it feels threatened by the public authority. Luciano Violante's statement also means that the Mafia in Sicily has successfully managed to overcome the critical phase in which the State had waged war against it. If this forecast, which, moreover, had been expressed in 2000 by a senior investigative judge Ferdinando Imposimato, is correct, then we can draw the conclusion that the Mafia is capable of reproducing itself and prospering even in late modernity [Imposimato, 2000].

At this point, we can introduce the second aspect of the paradox. Regretfully, experts have to admit once more that the Mafia is extremely resistant. In several representations and discourses, the Mafia is likened to those singularly vicious viruses that, through their incessant mutations, are able to permanently endanger a human group's collective health. More specifically, in Sicily we can observe that over the years the State has fought against the Mafia by using some repressive strategies, yet we must also acknowledge that the Mafia has never been annihilated.

The paradox that mystifies experts and concurrently kindles their interest in the Mafia can thus be expressed as follows: Mafia phenomena are manifestations that are regarded as archaic, yet they are able to reproduce themselves in any type of modernity. There is a blatant contradiction in this view of the Mafia. If the Mafia actually continues to reproduce itself to this day, it cannot be regarded as a typical example of obsolete social organisations.

Such a paradox, as the original meaning of this notion shows, is based on the mystified astonishment at a seemingly contradictory reality. This deceptive inconsistency is rooted, as Max Weber would state, in the ongoing confusion between the criteria based on value judgements and the scientific interpretation of facts. In other words, it lies in the discrepancy between the prevailing (and undoubtedly legitimate) eagerness to finally vanquish the Mafia and the frustrating sociological fact of its persistence that experts have to invariably face. However, remaining perplexed about this paradox certainly does not help us understand the Mafia nor why it is so resistant. In any case, this paradox can even be misleading since it is highly incorrect to think that the Mafia, as a socially relevant phe-

¹ Excellencies, i. e. notables and representatives of the State's authority.

nomenon, is on its way to extinction only because, at first glance, it may be construed as an organisation whose structure and culture places it in pre-modernity's "Dark Ages".

In this article, therefore, we will try to clarify above all the following aspects:

- The Mafia has specific socio-structural characteristics that further its reproduction and expansion in late modernity (or postmodernity, as the case may be).
- These specific socio-structural characteristics are typified by highly personalised informal networks that make the Mafia particularly flexible, thus more efficient in comparison with the rigidity of the State founded on a formalised apparatus.
- In Sicily and other areas of the world, the Mafia's current *raison d'être* lies in the chronic lack of trust in everything public. As a legacy of the past, distrust is a social production permanently reproduced in the present.

What the Mafia Is and Is Not

The Myth of the Accursed Race

In the last quarter of the 19th century, a famous school of criminology that was called *Scuola positiva italiana* (Italian Positivist School) developed around Cesare Lombroso (1835–1909). It was acknowledged both nationally and internationally (for example, in Spain) thanks to its studies on the *uomo delinquente* (criminal man) that were based on those methods of physical anthropology and craniometry, which, at that time, were considered the most up-to-date. To the most renowned Lombroso's disciples belonged Enrico Ferri (1856–1929), a criminal lawyer and socialist politician, Giuseppe Sergi (1841–1936), an experimental psychologist and philosopher, and, last but not least, Alfredo Niceforo (1876–1960), a sociologist and criminologist. Especially the latter, being one of the youngest representatives of the *Scuola positiva italiana*, may be regarded as the mastermind of the racial-criminological myth about the Mezzogiorno¹ and the Mafia, though the crucial points of his argumentation are present in some observations made by Lombroso and Ferri. In fact, Lombroso stressed literally that all the people from the Mezzogiorno have the traits of an atavistic criminal while Ferri added that lower crime rates in Italy's northern regions could be traced back to the Celtic influence.

Niceforo himself – of Sicilian extraction, take note – in his two main works "L'Italia barbara contemporanea" ("Contemporary barbarian Italy") and "Italiani del nord e italiani del sud" ("Northern Italians and southern Italians") theorised the existence of two different races that made up the Italian nation [Niceforo, 1898; Niceforo, 1901]. Using craniometrical data, he emphasised the difference between Aryans of Celtic origin who lived in the northern area of the peninsula all the way to Tuscany and the Mediterraneans who lived in Italy's south and its islands. The population of the South, whom Niceforo in no uncertain terms called the *razza maledetta* (accursed race), is characterised by an inborn and biologically predetermined tendency towards deviant behaviour in general and

¹ The southern part of Italy and its islands.

crime in particular, which could explain high crime rates in the South. According to Niceforo, systematic robberies, homicides, countless property torts, banditry and, finally, the Mafia represent the most striking proofs of this tendency caused by the specific racial background.

At first sight and from our present-day perspective, we could think that the *Scuola positiva italiana* and particularly Niceforo favoured far-right ideas. We need to note instead that the production of the racial-criminological stigma concerning the population of southern Italy is above all the dreadful consequence of the progressive enchantment mentioned in the introduction. In those days, the *Scuola positiva italiana* was a sort of temple of progress whose members, as a historian Claudia Petraccone has shown in detail, were almost without exception politically active in the socialist or anticlerical area [Petraccone, 1994; Petraccone, 2000]. This combination of racism and progressivism, hardly conceivable nowadays, can be seen as an indication of the astonishment of the *Scuola positiva italiana* at a phenomenon that was nearly unfathomable to most of its representatives; i. e. the strong persistence of behavioural models in the South that could only be interpreted as obsolete and barbaric, according to the optimistic modernist outlook. In addition, as Petraccone appropriately stresses, there was a political aspect. The fact that the peasants of the Mezzogiorno, despite living in a situation of extreme poverty and semi-feudal dependence, would still back the old notables and landlords — who in Sicily were often regarded as Mafiosi — and would not vote for left-wing liberals or Socialist Party representatives, was totally inexplicable for members of the *Scuola positiva italiana*. Italy's south was steadfastly such a conservative bastion that even Filippo Turati, the undisputed leader of the Italian Socialist Party at that time, embraced the thesis of the two races and two civilisations and made use of it in the political arena.

Therefore, the mystified astonishment due to the enigmatic persistence of specific behavioural models induced the *Scuola positiva italiana* to create and spread the myth of the accursed race. In Niceforo's case, we can also assume the existence of a *negative patriotism*. He perceived the islanders' conservative attitude and their refusal of any type of innovation almost as a national shame, which he himself, as a Sicilian, tried to avoid. By denouncing his own fellow countrymen as belonging to an inferior race, and thus distancing himself from them, he was apparently striving to prove that not all Sicilians were unenlightened. For an explanatory model developed by the *Scuola positiva italiana*, the anti-progressive strength of the persistence of illegal, deviant or aberrant actions becomes creditable only due to the existence of an invariable hereditary trait defined by belonging to a specific race.

Paradoxically, the ideas and arguments of the *Scuola positiva italiana* and Niceforo, which at that time were regarded as progressive, are now being taken up again by extreme right-wing, xenophobic and racist circles linked to the *Lega Nord*¹ to add credibility to the representation of a today's barbarism in Italy's south. Thus, due to such a political exploitation, we cannot look upon the myth of the accursed race only as a curio.

¹ Lega Nord (literally “North League”) is a far-right party advocating the independence of northern and central Italy.

The Folkloristic Myth

According to this approach, Mafia and quasi-Mafia associations are regarded as being practically identical to shady and undercover organisations or occult secret societies. The Sicilian Mafia is regarded as an emanation of a legendary secret fraternity, the notable and notorious *Beati Paoli* (the Blessed Pauls, also known as Beati di San Paolo), which, in the 17th and 18th centuries, excelled at applying its personal justice via threats or systematic recourse to physical violence against the ruling class's abuse of power and against the Spanish law's arbitrariness [Mühlmann, 1969; Giordano, 1992: p. 406]. Moreover, the Mafia is compared or even assimilated to Masonic lodges or Carbonarism, i. e. those secret societies that drew inspiration from Giuseppe Mazzini during the Italian Risorgimento¹. Some experts would even have the term "Mafia" derive from this origin, as it would be the acronym of *Mazzini autorizza furti, incendi, avvelenamenti* ("Mazzini authorises robberies, arsons, poisonings") [Hess, 1988: p. 4]. Such an argument of etymological nature, though rather bizarre, has maintained some credibility to date, probably because these acronyms were quite popular in the secret verbal codes of the Risorgimento.

Such a representation of the Mafia shows a combination of exotic and orientalist oddities. Thus, the Mafia is downgraded to a bizarre jumble of

- shady and occasionally gory initiation rites to confirm the candidate's admission to the association,
- mysterious ceremonies to certify and confirm ties of reciprocity, as well as
- specific friendship and kinship social practices to strengthen solidarity among members of the alleged secret societies [Alongi, 1887: pp. 140 ff.; Cutrera, 1900: pp. 140 ff.; Hess, 1988: pp. 106–110].

Moreover, the folkloristic approach permanently refers to the existence of specific Mafia-style attire, secret phraseology and jargon.

However, the folkloristic approach cannot be dismissed as a bizarre collection of arbitrary fantasies of the authors who created it and made it popular. In all these representations of the Mafia, there is certainly a kernel of truth. Nevertheless, the voyeuristic overstatement of the covert or mysterious aspect and the fascinated exaltation of ritual and ceremonial oddities are both disturbing and misleading.

The most conspicuous case in which Italian magistrates drew on the folkloristic approach involves the "ritual kiss" between Giulio Andreotti, a politician and three-time prime minister, and Totò Riina, the alleged *capo dei capi* (chief of all chiefs) of the Sicilian Mafia. The "kiss", testified by a Mafia *pentito*², would have proven the collusion between Andreotti and the Mafia. However, no further evidence emerged except for this false testimony and Andreotti was acquitted. Ultimately, in the author's opinion, the magistrates in Palermo made a bungling

¹ Risorgimento (literally "revival") is a movement for the unification and independence of Italy.

² *The person who repents*, i. e. a member of a criminal (or terrorist) organisation who after being arrested collaborates in the investigations with the authorities in exchange for benefits such as more lenient sentences and witness protection programmes. The formal judicial definition is *collaboratore di giustizia* (collaborator of justice).

use of the folkloristic approach in the “kiss” incident since these rituals are pieces of fiction that sociological research has ascertained no longer exist and probably never did exist [Hess, 1988: p. 108; Paoli, 2000].

In this case, we can also see the enchanted view's consequences. In fact, ever since Italy's Unity (1860), i. e. when the Mafia was thought to be discovered, the police, the law and the press have always stressed the aberrance of the Mafia phenomenon through the unmistakable overstatement of deviant characteristics and/or the most gruesome specificity. This was carried out so that both the *honourable society's* apparently unfathomable behaviour and its unyielding cohesion could become more plausible both for themselves and for the Italian and Sicilian public opinion. Thus, the folkloristic approach was produced even thanks to eloquent and imaginative prosecuting witnesses [Hess, 1988: p. 107]. Over a period of 150 years, it has been reproduced, reconfirmed, strengthened and modified, but never totally dismissed. The paradoxical fact is that the main producers and users, among whom there are also very conscientious and highly qualified representatives of the law, are prey to their own construction.

Due to exoticisation and orientalising, the folkloristic approach of the Mafia in the end has created an artificial negative alterity [Giordano, 2001: p. 44] that has provided it with unique and practically unlimited characteristics. Thus, paraphrasing a German theologian Rudolf Otto, the Mafia boasts a quasi-numinous aura in which *tremendum* (fearsome) merges with *energicum* (vigorous) and consequently with the *fascinans* (fascination) [Otto, 2004]. The folkloristic approach spread by the Mafia's enemies has turned into one of its trumps. In fact, the Mafia has been fully able to exploit it, especially to increase its influence, improve its image and strengthen its actual authority over a population that is quite sceptical about all public institutions.

The Culturalistic Myth

The correlations and analogies with the previously analysed myths are plain to see: the questionable structure of the culturalistic myth has unmistakable affinities with those of the racial-criminological discourse while the illustrations often possess a folkloristic trait. This myth is based on the following hypothesis: between the Mafia as an organisation on the one hand and the system of social representations and its associated spiritual attitudes on the other hand there is a binding and necessary link with the Sicilian cultural identity, i. e. a purported *sicilianità*.

Such a conception is based on the non-corroborated supposition that signs of the Mafia are detectable as early as ancient times, or indeed even in dimmer prehistoric ages. Therefore, some historians stress that the Mafia's origins can be traced back to the *Magna Graecia* or the ancient Roman world. Other experts instead believe that at first the Mafia developed during the Arab domination¹ [Titone, 1957; Titone, 1964; Mack-Smith, 1968; Falzone, 1974: pp. 13 ff.]. Thus, what is implied is that there has always been a culture or, better yet, a *cultural stock* in Sicily induced by a primordial Mafia inclination. The Mafia, in this case, would be above all a body of specific attitudes called *spirito di mafia* (the Mafia

¹ For instance, the Emirate of Sicily existed from 831 to 1090. Its capital was Palermo called by the Arab conquerors *al-Madinah*.

spirit) [Mosca, 1980: p. 3] that could almost be regarded as a consistent trait of the *Sicilian national character*. For example, Luigi Barzini, one of the principal founders of contemporary Italian journalism, described the Sicilians' (culturally defined) Mafia inclination as "...a state of mind, a philosophy of life, a conception of society, a moral code, a particular susceptibility, prevailing among all Sicilians. They are taught in the cradle, or are born already knowing, that they must aid each other, side with their friends and fight the common enemies even when the friends are wrong and the enemies are right; each must defend his dignity at all costs and never allow the smallest slights and insults to go unavenged; they must keep secrets and always beware of official authorities and laws. These principles are shared by all Sicilians, by the upright gentleman and the petty thief, the penniless prince living in his dusty 'palazzo' or the heroin smuggler with relatives in the United States, the erudite scholar lost in his research and the illiterate sulphur miner. These principles are also carefully preserved among Sicilians living in the rest of Italy and abroad. In fact, a Sicilian who does not feel these compulsions should no longer consider himself a Sicilian" [Barzini, 1996: pp. 253–254].

A similar viewpoint rooted in the culturalistic myth is currently noticeable in the analysis of Mafia or quasi-Mafia phenomena in Eastern Europe, Asia and Latin America, chiefly in specific journalistic approaches that try to explain these manifestations through an oversimplified view of national traits using adjectives such as Russian, Albanian, Romanian, Caucasian, Balkan, Chinese, Colombian and so on. Furthermore, operating with culturalistic details, as Barzini does in the above excerpt, is disconcerting.

Nevertheless, we ought to bear in mind that the culturalistic myth can also be read from a positive standpoint. Such a *pro-Mafia* about-turn, based on an antithetical interpretation and evaluation of events, is perfectly discernible when the *Mafia spirit* is consciously or unconsciously recognised as one's own concept of national honour. As Julian Pitt-Rivers aptly highlighted in his definition of honour, this feeling is based on the belief that as a Sicilian, an Albanian, etc., an individual has nothing to blame himself for and can only be proud of his actions, though the latter may even be Mafia-like [Pitt-Rivers, 1966]. This outlook, as well as the reinterpretation of Mafia phenomena, is detectable among radical representatives of *Sicilianism* and *Sicilianist ideology*, who are the advocates and backers of the Sicilian separatist movement. To this day, they perceive the Mafia and the brigandage¹ (which is now extinct) as a type of insurgency against various forms of foreign domination and rulers oppressing the islanders ever since ancient times [Marino, 1971; Kehr, 1984; Lupo, 1993; Paoli, 2000: pp. 20 ff.; Sacca-Reuter, 2005]. However, the adherents of the culturalistic myth often refuse to accept the fact that the *onorata società* (honourable society) is a criminal association.

The Pyramid Approach

This representation is based on the belief that the Sicilian Mafia, as well as corresponding phenomena in Italy, Europe and around the world, is a monolithic, centralised and rigidly structured organisation. Thus, Mafia associations are

¹ *Brigandage* literally means "highway robbery".

characterised by strongly hierarchical pyramidal structures. As associations, they involve a vertical chain of various formally defined ranks and roles. The so-called *cupola* (i. e. the Mafia's government) with the *capo dei capi* is at the top of the pyramid. The intermediate rank consists of a socially differentiated stratum of *sottocapi* (deputy chiefs) while the *manovali* (unskilled workers), who carry out what is considered less prestigious and dirty work, are at the bottom. Giuseppe Fava, a Sicilian journalist who was killed by the Mafia in 1984, likewise drew a distinction between the three levels in its organisational structure: the basic level (consisting of killers), the middle (thinkers and planners) and the top (consisting of politicians) [Fava, 1983: pp. 27 ff.].

If we analyse these representations in detail, we will notice that the Mafia, according to the pyramid metaphor, displays structural analogies with the organisation of modern states. Thus, through this metaphor, the impression is that the Mafia has been set up in accordance with the modern territorial State's model. Hence, the Mafia seems to be a sort of the anti-State, which, in the end, turns out to be a mirror image of the State itself.

It is common knowledge that empirical evidence substantiating the above metaphor has been lacking so far: Italian police and legal authorities that have dealt with *associazione di malfattori* (association of malefactors) and *associazione per delinquere* (criminal conspiracy) have never been able to prove the existence of fixed organisational structures within Mafia groups. This is certainly one of the reasons why several Mafia bosses in the past managed to get acquitted on the grounds of insufficient evidence. The fight against the Mafia in Sicily and southern Italy suddenly became more efficient at the time of public prosecutors Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, i. e. when the paradigm of a pyramidal Mafia organisation, due mainly to their remarkable competence and insight, was relativised and the far more flexible notion of *associazione a delinquere di stampo mafioso* (Mafia-like criminal association) was introduced into the juridical apparatus. Practically, the fact that the Mafia has specific structures that are unlike those of other types of organised crime was acknowledged. Therefore, the explanatory strength of the Mafia as an organised pyramid-like entity mirroring the State and being in direct opposition to it turned out to be quite questionable, from both the standpoint of criminal practice and theoretical perspectives.

However, we must admit that the pyramid metaphor is very convenient: due to its similarities with the State, it takes on a more familiar, thus less mystifying aspect. Concurrently, this metaphor embodies an ethnocentric prejudice that proved fatal to the criminal justice system's efficiency (or at least hindering it). We are talking about the belief typical of Western modernity that any organisation, in order to be efficient (as in the case of the Mafia), should definitely have a system of rational-bureaucratic institutions analogous or identical to those of the territorial State.

Finally, we might wonder whether the Mafia would have survived to this day had it actually been a bureaucratic-like and rigidly centralised organisation. In fact, we ought to keep in mind that the Mafia invariably seems to be at least one step ahead of the State that is fighting it back. In order to survive, the Mafia must always be able to foresee the public authorities' next move. Without laying any claims to thoroughness or conclusive answers, we have formulated the following five questions that further challenge to the pyramid metaphor's validity:

- Could the Mafia have infiltrated the State's politico-bureaucratic institutions so extensively if its administrative apparatus were really as ponderous and immovable as the State's?
- Would the irrationality of rational bureaucracy, typical of modernity and mentioned by Max Weber [Weber, 1956: pp. 577 ff.], not have impaired the Mafia's specific efficiency?
- Does the Mafia not need a more streamlined and changeable organisational structure that allows it to develop extremely flexible strategies which anticipate the State's actions and help conceal its own illegalities? Giovanni Falcone commented on this fundamental question with great insight when he wrote that his *greatest worry is that the Mafia is able to stay one step ahead* [Falcone, 2005: p. 121].
- If the Mafia, as the pyramid metaphor suggests, is really a close-knit bloc, why do bloody conflicts, which can even turn into long-lasting Mafia wars, constantly flare up?
- If the Mafia actually were solely a type of anti-State, mirroring a modern State, would it have been able to turn so quickly into transnational or even global phenomena, as, for instance, the case of *ecomafia*¹ with its supranational business activities seems to be?

The Network Approach

This representation of the Mafia, which was developed chiefly by a German sociologist Henner Hess [Hess, 1988: pp. 82 ff.], may be regarded as the most convincing attempt to invalidate the previous approaches we have introduced, particularly the pyramid metaphor. According to the network approach, the Mafia is to all appearances an association that is indeed hierarchical, but also loosely structured, scarcely formalised and, above all, non-centralised. Hence, it appears to be a very complex social entity resembling a net-like system of temporary and flexible alliances. These Mafia groupings are permanently characterised by being created, broken up and, if necessary, recreated according to changing social situations and personal circumstances. In his analysis, Hess shows that the classic Sicilian Mafia associations, particularly the *cosca* (which in the Sicilian dialect literally means “tightly bound leaves of an artichoke”; in other words, the tough core surrounding the Mafia's *uomo di rispetto*, i. e. respectable man) and the *partito* (the Mafioso's system of long-term social relations including his relations with public power representatives, i. e. politicians, magistrates and bureaucrats in general) are not corporate groups from a structural point of view [Boissevain, 1974: pp. 203–205]. In the Sicilian honourable society, the essential formal elements (statutes, official ranks and roles) are lacking since Mafia associations consist of one or more networks in which pragmatic exchange relations are noticeable. To illustrate this structural specificity, we need only recall that particularly in Sicily (even outside the island nowadays) the expression *amici degli amici* (friends of friends) is used in common parlance as a synonym for the Mafia.

Social relations within such an evident plurality of Mafia networks are quite informal and extremely personalised, as the previously mentioned expression re-

¹ Mafia-controlled waste trafficking, toxic dumping and environmental crimes.

veals. Essentially, there are three types of ties: family or kinship (including fictitious or ritual kinship), instrumental friendships and the dyadic patron-client relationships [Hess, 1988: pp. 119–133; Giordano, 1992: pp. 374–399].

Yet, as an Austrian historian Karl Kaser suggests, we ought to draw a fundamental distinction between societies in which mutual support among family members and relatives is prevalent and societies in which relationships based on asymmetrical and vertical protection (e. g. patron-client relationships) become the mainstay of the entire social structure [Kaser, 1995: pp. 167 ff.; Kaser, 2001: pp. 71 ff.].

In the former type of society such as Albania (especially in the northern regions), there is a prevalence of clan groups, lineages, stock and various kinds of extended families. In the latter type, as the case of Sicily shows, family and kinship structures are quite limited and the nuclear family is the only basis for any type of solidarity and trust. In order to broaden this finite sphere of sociability, other types of personal ties are adopted in these societies, such as instrumental friendships and long-term dyadic relations between patron and client. The different solidarity and trust structures have a strong influence on the specific makeup of Mafia networks. Thus, family and kinship ties characterise the first type of society rather than the second type, where clientelistic relations are far more significant.

Therefore, in the first case, as the example of Albania shows (which we analysed through evidence gathered by the Office of the Attorney General of Switzerland), Mafia networks currently seem to be relatively limited since they mirror the structures and rules of a patriarchal family [Mutschke, 2000]. As Cristina Matei notes, Mafia-like structures based on a patriarchal kinship system and family ties are noticeable in the Caucasus area as well [Matei, 2001].

Conversely, in the second case, i. e. the Sicilian one, there are usually far more pervading Mafia associations since they are structurally similar to well-known clientelistic organisations in the political sphere. In this case, the networks are based on vertical and asymmetrical ties; in other words, patron-client dyads defining dependence and power relations within the Mafia's fabric. This explains why the authority of the *capimafia* in these remarkably complex organisations is less formal, yet not less hierarchical than first assumed. The Mafia's power, as Diego Gambetta has convincingly affirmed, depends on the leaders' transactional ability and specifically on the successful exchange of services between bosses and subordinate members in the network [Gambetta, 1992: pp. 48–53]. Practically, if a person expects to reach or maintain a dominant role within a Mafia network, he must constantly prove to his henchmen that he can honour commitments and provide the necessary services even through threats of physical violence or its actual use. For this reason, contrary to plain patrons, the Mafia bosses deemed capable and worthy of being regarded as such by other network members are intrinsically *violent entrepreneurs* [Blok, 1974].

Compared with the pyramid model, the network metaphor has obvious analytical advantages. The Mafia is conceptualised as an extremely flexible, variegated and changeable reality and, above all, one that can adapt to new situations. As such, in case of open conflict with the State it can react by carrying out startling terror attacks, as well as expand and diversify transnationally, as also indi-

cated in the Europol 2000 annual report [Europol, 2001]. In this context, we can point up the following aspects.

The Mafia, as a complex system of networks, does not necessarily have to be an anti-State or a State within the State. Instead, Mafia organisations can infiltrate into the State's structures by mobilising network links. Thanks to these infiltration strategies, Mafia associations are able to probe, neutralise and finally exploit specific people and institutions of the State's apparatus. Ferdinando Imposimato, the Honorary President of Italy's Supreme Court, who worked in the anti-Mafia team with Falcone and Borsellino, has aptly stressed that the State and its representatives (politicians and public functionaries), as legal guardians of the monopoly on the use of force, almost always inadvertently become accomplices of their own enemies [Imposimato, 2000]. Between the legal State and the illegal Mafia there is not a relation of mutual opposition, but rather a shifting dialectical match that creates a situation of permanent reciprocal interaction and interdependence. In this regard, we should also take into account the existence of very peculiar discursive and ideological ties between the State and the Mafia [Heyman and Smart, 1999: pp. 11 ff.]. If, on the one hand, the State needs a certain amount of the Mafia to endorse its own role as a watchdog and custodian of social order, the members of Mafia networks, on the other hand, try to justify their schemes and designs by emphasising the practical absence and untrustworthiness of the State, which, by (their) definition, is alien and indifferent.

Thanks to its net-like and thus very flexible structure, the Mafia can easily sidestep the boundaries of the national State and act very efficiently in the global arena. Consequently, it is able to take over and monopolise new transnational illegal markets. This phenomenon is noticeable not only in drug trafficking, but also, for instance, in human trafficking (illegal immigration, prostitution, etc.), contraband of goods (works of art, weapons, raw materials, radioactive materials, etc.), besides the transfer and disposal of all types of waste (see Europol's annual reports).

Though in principle the most qualified authors [Blok, 1974; Hess, 1988; Gambetta, 1992; Varese, 2001; Mappes-Niediek, 2003] do not question the soundness of the network metaphor, we ought to voice some significant reservations that highlight the need for revisions and adjustments. Thanks to an Italian sociologist Letizia Paoli, in recent years the network paradigm has been re-examined and improved, at least as far as the Italian case is concerned [Paoli, 2000]. Analysing the structural characteristics of *Cosa Nostra* in Sicily and *N'drangheta* in Calabria, the author of "Fratelli di Mafia" questions whether these Mafia associations are solely an aggregate of informal dyadic ties and coalitions. Her main argument, which is quite convincing, highlights the fact that the Mafia, as a network organisation, cannot avoid some amount of formality in relations, ranks and roles. Mafia networks, as depicted by Hess, are indeed very flexible, yet also very weak in terms of structure. Hence, in the context of transnational activities they would run the risk of proving inadequate and breaking off more easily [Paoli, 2000: pp. 5–8] if they lacked any formality. Compared with services performed within the framework of a formal agreement, it is more likely that mutual commitments established through informal dyadic agreements will not be honoured [Paoli, 2000: p. 7]. Furthermore, in order to guarantee their progressively diversified activities and interests, the increasingly multifunctional transnational Mafia

associations have to resort to professionals. Nowadays the Mafia cannot do without services of qualified accountants, lawyers, chemists, finance and computer experts, etc. The figure of a non-specific advisor (*consigliere*), which is almost mythical, has nearly disappeared or is currently being assisted by a team of specific pros. Therefore, we can say that the Mafia has become bureaucratic to some extent. Within this network of essentially informal dyadic relations, operations centres revolving around the *capimafia* have taken shape. These operations centres possess the characteristics of a close-knit extra-family subsystem containing a cluster of polyadic relations founded upon contracts.

These *consolidated cores* of the Mafia organisations, as Letizia Paoli has plausibly demonstrated, are based on *status contracts* vouched for by ritual actions whose proofs are symbolic brotherhood pacts [Weber, 1956: pp. 416 ff.; Paoli, 2000: p. 77]. These agreements are not set up for temporary or short-term activities; instead, they are marked by their continuance and formal character. Hence, these social relations have a different quality: more long-lasting and official compared to other ties within a broader Mafia network. Through status contracts, the members of consolidated nuclei become *comrades* and develop an *esprit du corps*, which we would have a hard time locating among other network members. Actually, within these relatively small operations centres of the Mafia we can observe a wide range of highly symbolic ritual behaviours that have been overly emphasised and generalised in the folkloristic approach. Going back to the example of Andreotti, we can reasonably presume that he was embedded in one or more Mafia networks without ever formally belonging to one of the above-mentioned consolidated cores. If this were true, then we would have a plausible explanation for the public prosecutor's non-success at the trial against the former prime minister. For the time being, whether Andreotti's alleged behaviour was unintentional or a remarkably well-contrived ploy is still a wild guess.

The Trade Approach

This representation of the Mafia, suggested by Diego Gambetta (1988) for Sicily and by Federico Varese (2001) for post-communist Russia, is an attempt to reconstruct rational grounds on which Mafia organisations function. Both authors, who through empirical evidence confirm the Mafia's decentralised and net-like aspect, set out to prove, thanks to a keen though too universalistic interpretation of the *rational choice* paradigm, that the social fabric of Mafia criminality shares functional similarities with the main characteristics of industrial enterprises. Thus, Mafia associations in the end are firms or at times cartels that produce and manage private protection within the public sphere. To understand Gambetta's and Varese's lines of reasoning, yet without being able to delve into all the arguments they develop, we will try to illustrate their interpretation of one of the main functions of psychological pressure, besides threats and duress, using the trade metaphor.

Gambetta in particular highlights how physical and psychological violence, always present in the Mafia's context, may be regarded as a specific marketing scheme [Gambetta, 1992: p. 43]. If a Mafioso wants to be considered a competent patron, i. e. to appear as a successful producer of protection, he must constantly prove that in any given situation he can act resolutely and vigorously. Therefore, especially the *capomafia* must be capable of violence: by using violence he can

bolster or, better yet, add to his reputation of *uomo d'onore*, thus drawing new clients in need of private protection. According to Gambetta, the Mafia, as a private protection industry, operates just like an automobile factory. While the latter extols the safety and comfort offered by its automobiles, the Mafia promotes itself by displaying its purveyors' determination [Gambetta, 1992: p. 43].

However, the question is why a society and its members need a private protection industry. At this point, Gambetta and Varese introduce a notion that, in our opinion, gives the best understanding of the Mafia phenomenon in Sicily and elsewhere. It is the concept of trust, which may be regarded as a footing of interpersonal cooperation and — according to Niklas Luhmann's terminology — as a mechanism suited to reduce social complexity [Luhmann, 1973: pp. 23–40; Gambetta, 1988: pp. IX ff.]. Using the trade metaphor terminology, we can finally say that the Mafia, not being an exclusively Sicilian phenomenon, tenders its products successfully in those societies where trust, especially public trust, is in very short supply. Supply and demand of Mafia-like private protection emerge in societies with a widespread feeling of extensive distrust towards the State's organs and its representatives, as well as civil society institutions.

The Historical-Anthropological Perspective: The Mafia Between Historical Legacy and Globalisation Processes

With great insight, Giovanni Falcone strongly upheld a *disenchanted* view of the Mafia and associated phenomena [Falcone, 2005: pp. 82 ff.]. Through the reconstruction of different representations of the Mafia propounded by experts from various branches of social sciences, we have tried to answer the question posed by the assassinated public prosecutor¹: has the need for a disenchanted view at least partially been taken into account? At first sight, we can be certain that, as stated before, in almost every approach, besides misleading overstatements and overhasty or even inaccurate reflections, there are important and enlightening theoretical references. However, these are always half-truths, which help to understand what we may call the *planet Mafia* only to a limited extent.

Developing a general theory of Mafia phenomena might be illusory. All of the above-mentioned interpretative attempts lack a plausible explanation as to why

- the Mafia in Sicily, despite quite a strong anti-Mafia movement in the 1990s, is still such a vital and strong social fact and
- quasi-Mafia organisations in other parts of the world, particularly in post-socialist societies, have gained ground so sensationally.

We believe that Gambetta and Varese, by underscoring the importance of trust and respectively distrust in the public sphere, have brought to light a very important track, which to date has not been fully looked into, even by these two authors. Perhaps, the rational choice paradigm, being too universalistic, is not the most suitable theoretical tool for explaining the persistence of certain social facts; it eventually turned into a trap for the authors themselves. Gambetta considers the entrepreneurial logic and rationality inherent in the Mafia to be a general human constant while public distrust, in which the Mafia's persistence is

¹ Giovanni Falcone was murdered by the Sicilian Mafia in May 1992.

rooted, remains a reality that in effect is beyond social or historical context. Prior to these two authors, Falcone had also stressed the crucial consequence of public distrust (specifically towards the State's institutions) ensuring the Mafia's endurance in modernity. In his opinion, the lack of the sense of State as an inner value generates distortions, which are present in the Sicilian spirit: the dualism between society and State; falling back on the family, the group, the clan, etc. [Falcone, 2005: p. 71].

The historical-anthropological view should certainly employ concepts such as trust and distrust. Above all, it cannot settle for a supposition as apodictic (as the one formulated by Gambetta, which modelled on the *rational choice* paradigm). In fact, this course of action is contextual and not a priori general. Even the rise of distrust and a decline of trust belong to social production; therefore, they must be regarded as phenomena that are embedded in history.

History, however, cannot be reduced to a mechanical or automatic sequence of objective facts. Instead, it must be understood as an *interpreted past* activated by the actors themselves in their *present to be interpreted* [Ricoeur, 1985: p. 314]. Hence, the point is how history, being the past, is perceived, either in a direct or mediated way, and subsequently actualised [Giordano, 2005]. This concerns what has been defined as the *presence or efficacy* of history [Schaff, 1976: p. 129; Ricoeur, 1985: p. 495]. Unlike socio-genetic narratives, the historical-anthropological view does not deal so much with the Mafia's sociologically relevant roots as with the *social construction of continuity*, by which Mafia activities in the minds of members of some societies take on and maintain a specific meaning.

The question of the continuity and persistence, in Sicily and elsewhere, of the social fact called "Mafia" cannot be adequately answered within a culturalist approach, which usually employs an overly static notion of culture by which the actors are caged in a fixed frame and thus reduced to robots without a choice; the same goes for a now obsolete biologising paradigm. According to the historical-anthropological view, the endurance of Mafia phenomena, despite their inevitable socio-structural changes, springs from the tight and permanent interaction between *the collective spaces of experience*, in the sense of *interpreted past*, and the *horizons of expectation* to be considered instead of an *imagined future* (and thus to be interpreted) *in the present* [Koselleck, 1979: pp. 349 ff.].

The current public distrust and the Mafia as an adequate principle of social organisation are strictly linked with the dreadful experiences that members of a given society have continuously had with the State, in both the recent and distant past. Obviously, these negative spaces of experience, which have a marked influence on the actors and formation of their horizons of expectation, do not reproduce themselves automatically by tradition, i. e. just because they are passed down from generation to generation. Such spaces of experience must be constantly confirmed in the present. Traditions, as well as mindsets, are extremely mouldable phenomena whose plausibility and adequacy must be permanently verified and confirmed. In accordance with the members' perception of these experiences, the corresponding systems of representations and behavioural models will be strengthened, modified or discarded.

The reproduction of negative spaces of experience in societies of public distrust, such as the one in the Mezzogiorno or those of Eastern Europe, goes hand in hand with failures of the State and civil society institutions. Inability of public

authorities to carry out their duties is not only an objective fact that can be observed from the *outside*; it is also shared *inside* and built as such by the citizens themselves. Thus, for the actors affected by total inefficiency of public powers and civil society associations, the persistence, resurgence and expansion of Mafia action models are possible rational responses.

The case of Berlusconi, especially his sly and high-handed unwillingness to resolve the clash of interests on account of his appointment as prime minister and the concurrent persistence of control over several newspapers and magazines, as well as the entire national broadcasting network, is paradigmatic to prove the negative experiences handed down from the past (with their resultant actualisation). The Italian ex-premier's sensational and reprehensible behaviour can only confirm the citizen's social representations based on past experiences (those belonging to the cognitive capital grafted onto the collective memory). According to this social knowledge, the public sphere is a place where politicians, managers of civil society associations, public administrators, wheeler-dealers and profiteers can easily take hold of material, social and symbolic resources, obtaining enormous and utterly personal advantages at the expense of third parties. Through his unwillingness to resolve the conflict of interests, Berlusconi definitely reinforced the distrust in everything public, especially if it pertains to the State. Thus, the idea that in the non-strictly private sector (meaning kinship and family) one must rely on friends, godfathers, patrons and Mafiosi for help and protection has once again turned out to be the most reliable explanation of how to survive and thrive in that society.

Yet, this example also shows that the Mafia — in all those societies where it flourishes — should neither be regarded as a cultural relic nor as an anachronistic anomaly. From a historical-anthropological viewpoint, it is rather a historical legacy whose meaning is constantly confirmed, actualised and legitimised in the present thanks to the cognitive capital and social knowledge that are both congruent and shared by most members of a given collectivity.

Conclusions

Finally, we ought to ask ourselves whether the Mafia as a historical legacy has a future in a world enduring constant globalisation pressures. If we take a look at the major theories of globalisation, we will notice that overall they stress the importance of the following phenomena:

- the more or less forced transfer of sovereignty and thus of control from the national State to both the global market and localistic (or particularistic) organisations [Ong, 1999: pp. 214–217; Misztal, 2000: p. 55],
- the decline of public (or systemic) trust among citizens and the consequent legitimacy crisis of democratic states [Castells, 1997: pp. 343–346; Misztal, 2000: p. 51],
- the growing expansion of informality in human relations and thus the increase of non-public network structures lacking an official character [Mény, 1996: p. 116; Misztal, 2000: p. 56] and
- the increasing interconnection between political and economic interests [Misztal, 2000: pp. 56–57].

If this scenario is realistic, and it may well be, then it is certainly true, as supposed by a possibly too unilateral sociological view [Ryan, 1983], that the individualisation inherent in globalisation entails freedom of choice, pluralisation of world views and liberalisation of lifestyles. However, it is also true that these aspects of the globalisation process can forward the emergence or development of clientelism, corruption and, consequently, Mafia and quasi-Mafia activities. In fact, the planet Mafia, due to its net-like personalised and informal structures, offers an alternative to the State's legal and formal institutions. Thanks to its well-tested ability to provide private protection in place of the nearly absentee State mistrusted by their citizens, the Mafia is not in the least at risk of extinction. The risk is that it becomes a *criminal global player*, which will increasingly challenge the police forces of the entire world.

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