

Research Article

WHO DO I KNOW? COSA NOSTRA AS AN INFORMAL POLICING FORCE IN PALERMO

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Abstract:

A *cu'canusciu?*—that is, "Who do I know?"—is the question many residents of a Sicilian city ask themselves when they are victimized by street crimes. The question about acquaintances concerns the possibility (for the victim) of approaching a member of Cosa Nostra to regain possession of private belongings such as cars and motorbikes, or, in the case of burglary, stolen jewels and other objects. Such a question also concerns those who want to avoid robberies or vandalism—for example, shopkeepers—and many other potential victims of street crimes. This paper will discuss the role of Cosa Nostra as an informal but de facto policing actor within the metropolitan context of a Sicilian city. Following the path drawn by Norberto Bobbio, who defined the mafia as a vicarious extralegal power, I will analyse how Cosa Nostra operates in the maintenance of public order, in particular in the control of street crime activities. Besides this, the ambiguous nature of nation-states in Europe, often originating in the enactment of extortive practices, will be considered.

Keywords: Sicily, Mafia, Policing, Public Value, State



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INTRODUCTION

A cu'canusciu?—that is: “who do I know?” is the question many Palermo residents ask themselves when they are victimized by street crimes. The question about the acquaintance concerns the possibility (for the victim) of approaching a member of Cosa Nostra, that is the Sicilian mafia, to regain the possession of private belongings, such as cars and motorbikes or in the case of burglar, to recover jewels and other objects. Such a question also concerns those who want to avoid robberies or vandalism, such as shopkeepers, and other potential victims of street crime.

Unlike other contexts, especially in Northern Europe, where victims think it is normal to go right to the police to report the damage they suffered, this is not the case in Palermo, Sicily. Many inhabitants of the Sicilian capital, despite many years of anti-mafia awareness¹ still deem Cosa Nostra as a more efficient and effective actor than the police in dealing both with the prevention and with the repression of street crimes, due to the firm control of the territory by the criminal organization².

Such a widespread attitude does not concern only the marginal, roughest areas of the city, but also the most affluent districts. Moreover, people do not perceive it as a legitimization of Cosa Nostra's power, but rather as a functional behaviour, aimed at solving a specific, temporary problem. The overwhelming majority of those who benefit from the help of Cosa Nostra will keep on declaring themselves pro-legality, maybe by showing the picture of the anti-mafia magistrates Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, who were bombed dead by Cosa Nostra in 1992³.

Another aspect to be discussed concerns the attitude of police forces towards this attitude. Rather than investigating this attitude and prosecuting those citizens who dodge legality and turn to the mafia for help, officers take for granted that the victims of street crimes will never ask them to solve their problems. The explanations of this attitude are that the police partly consider this behaviour by citizens as a *habitus*⁴, or as the manifestation of incorporated categories; partly they see Cosa Nostra as a sort of a “partner”, helping them keeping street crime under control. The short-term aim of governing street crimes overshadows the long-term purpose of promoting, enhancing and legitimizing legality, that is the prosecution of crime under the law and by the legitimate State forces.

This paper will discuss the role of Cosa Nostra as an informal but de facto policing actor within the metropolitan context of Palermo. Following the path drawn by Norberto Bobbio⁵, who defined the mafia as a *vicar extralegal power*, it will analyse how Cosa Nostra operates in maintaining public order, in particular in the control of street crime activities. Besides this, the ambiguous nature of Nation-States in Europe, often originated by the enactment of extortive practices (Tilly, 1982) will be considered. After explaining the role of Cosa Nostra as an *industry of violent protection*⁶, the discussion outlines the importance of the relational context the Sicilian mafia operates in⁷ as a powerful lever to create public value⁸. In order to discuss this aspect more in depth.

This article draws on interviews with police officers, economic actors and activists conducted in Palermo in 2022 to highlight how Cosa Nostra has evolved in two ways: the first is the despondent attitude of police forces, who accept the fact that citizens do not report to them the street crimes they are victim of. The second aspect concerns the attitude of citizens, who, on the one hand, deem the State as inefficient, on the other, they don't consider the negative role Cosa Nostra plays within Sicilian society⁹. While they keep being respectful of Falcone and Borsellino, they think Cosa Nostra helps in some situation, making a peculiar distinction between the bombing of magistrates and the daily dealing with “petty” aspects of daily life. By doing so, they neglect that the Sicilian mafia, as well as hampering the development of shared public values, wields its power through the use of violence and intimidation. This latter aspect raises the issue of *administrative evil*¹⁰ insofar as the efficiency and effectiveness of Cosa Nostra in managing public order overshadow, for the actor involved, the ethical issues concerning the fact that the mafia is a criminal organization. Such attitudes, while solving in the short term the problems related with having back one's own car and motorbike, create a consent for the mafia that makes its

reproduction and thriving in politics and society possible, thus leaving Sicily wallowing in intimidation and abuses.

The conclusion will argue about the necessity of developing a public value that makes it possible to overturn the cynical drifts of administrative evil. This change is possible through the empowerment of those activists who have been operating in the anti-mafia domain, as well as through an active support by politics. It is though important to consider how the neoliberal changes might affect the public and making new rooms for the power of Cosa Nostra, also in the maintenance of public order.

1.The Political Nature of Cosa Nostra: Blurring border with the State?

The academic discussion about organized crime, and, more specifically, about the Sicilian Cosa Nostra, has not shed a clear light about the “political” role the criminal organization plays. This confusion is due partly to the doubts some authors have about the role politics play in shaping the Sicilian mafia, partly because those scholars who have focused on the political role of the organization do not agree on its peculiarities. I am not referring to politics under the aspects of democratic legitimacy. My point is that Cosa Nostra plays a political role as its paramilitary structure, its hierarchical organization, its relational resources allow the control of a territory both through the use of force and by the creation of a certain degree of consent¹¹.

Diego Gambetta¹², has influenced the analysis of the Sicilian Mafia and, more at large, of organize crime, with its definition of Cosa Nostra as *an industry of private protection*. His analysis, based on the rational choice theory, has thus made possible the exclusion of the political aspects of organized crime activities. Umberto Santino¹³, has outlined the flaws in Gambetta’s analysis, as his interpretation of the mafia relies on poor empirical material, as well as reproducing some of the stereotypes about Sicily.

The weak side of Gambetta’s analysis, in particular, concerns its insisting on private protection as a performance Cosa Nostra would provide under the regulation of the demand-supply mechanism underpinning market economy. By this token, the actors who demand protection, would do it spontaneously, thus making legitimate the request of payment issued by the Mafioso. Raimondo Catanzaro¹⁴, has emphasized the fact that Cosa Nostra protects from itself, as it forces to require its protection through the use of violence. Those actors who ask protection from the mafia, have been intimidated and victimized by Cosa Nostra, either directly or indirectly. For this reason, Raimondo Catanzaro, argues that Cosa Nostra is an *industry of violent protection*. Protection is not demanded, but imposed upon either single or collective actors through the use of violence, as well as by controlling the territory. The paramilitary organization of Cosa Nostra, as well as its social capital of *strong* and *weak* ties¹⁵, allows its members both to patrol and to control the territory.

This latter aspect tells us more about the political nature of Cosa Nostra. Violence could not be enough if not coupled with a network of both close-knit and functional relations that legitimize the role of the Mafia as a key actor that regulates social and economic relations. The Sicilian mafia does not only rely on its paramilitary force and organization, but also on relationships and knowledge of the territory. Such a singular know-how has often been exploited by the Italian state to its advantage, in order both to repress social movements¹⁶ and to keep crime rates low¹⁷. Although there has never been a formal agreement between Italian governments and Cosa Nostra, that recognized the pivotal role the criminal organization has been playing as order keeper, its role as an actor wielding a *vicar extralegal power*¹⁸ has been widely recognized across 160 years of Italian history.

As the building of Nation-States is the outcome of conflicts between organized paramilitary gangs¹⁹ and tax-levying can be considered as a sort of legalized extortion the winners impose over the losers, the Italian state has chosen to find a *modus vivendi* with a potential competitor, trying to create some forms of co-existence. My point is that three different patterns of relations between the Italian State and Cosa Nostra have existed in these 160 years: *coexistence, cooperation and conflicts*.

The first pattern is that of *coexistence*. At this stage the two actors are aware of each other's existence, and they try not to interfere with one another's activities. For example, the Mafioso let the police investigate serious crimes that do not involve any member of the organization; on the other hand, police forces, let Cosa Nostra run their business and to patrol the territory, insofar as these activities do not cause public disorder. This is one of the reasons why mafia wars are rare and related to the changing power relations inside the organization²⁰. The less public attention is drawn, the more successful the activities of the organization will be. Within the context of co-existence, the State will not have to deploy its apparatus to ascertain the crimes committed, and public opinion won't demand a fully-fledged repressive action.

The second pattern is that of *co-operation*. The State and Cosa Nostra, within this context, share either an interest or an aim, and work together, either formally or informally, to reach their goal. In 1947, when 11 peasants, communist militants, were killed while celebrating May Day and the victory of the left in the first Sicilian elections, shots were fired both by the Italian police and by Cosa Nostra members, as well as by the notorious Giuliano gang²¹. In this case, both the actors shared the anti-communist stance that made them cooperate to maintain the existing power relations. The role Cosa Nostra played in helping the Allied landing in Sicily is still controversial, as historians have not found yet enough evidence in one or another direction²². It is certain, though, that the first administration appointed after the Nazi-fascists were chased out of Sicily were ruled by members of the Mafia. Such anti-communist convergence between the State and the Mafia might have sprung other forms of cooperation, like the relented prosecution of the Mafioso (the first sentence by an Italian court that explicitly convicts members of organized crime dates to 1992). Another informal cooperation is that of the control of the territory, so as to keep street crimes under control. State can draw the advantage of saving resources, while Cosa Nostra will increase its reputation as an organization capable of keeping order and mediating between conflicts. This aspect will be discussed in depth in the following pages.

The final pattern is that of *conflict*. It is a pattern that develops in relation to the issue of legitimacy. For example, organized crime in Italy became a problem of national relevance only in 1982, when Cosa Nostra killed the *prefetto* (Crime Commissioner) of Palermo, Carlo Alberto Dalla Chiesa, who had earned a reputation as the main planner and enforcers of the anti-terrorist policies that had led to the defeat of the Red Brigades. The death of such a popular public officer raged the Italian public, who demanded a reaction the State could not deny, in order not to risk to undermine its legitimacy²³. It was after the killing of Dalla Chiesa that the Italian Parliament passed both a Bill that introduced the crime of Mafia Association in the penal law and another that introduced the confiscation of the Mafioso assets. Cosa Nostra reacted by killing other magistrates and police officer, provoking a harsher reaction by the government, which reached its peak in 1986, when the main mafia bosses were put on trial. Organized crime had invaded the sphere of legitimacy every state relies on, thus provoking a reaction²⁴.

Through interviews with privileged witnesses, such as police officers, citizens, shopkeepers and anti-mafia activists, the dimension of cynicism, despondency, unawareness and opposition will be explored. The first category encompasses the attitude of those who see a "positive" role of Cosa Nostra in ruling the territory. Despondency indicates those who would like to do away with the predominance of mafia but think it is impossible to make a change. Those who are unaware, act in such a way as to distinguish between *good mafia*, which solves public order problems, from *bad mafia*, which kills and bombs the magistrates alive. Opponents argue that the control of the territory by Cosa Nostra is a negative aspect of Palermo daily life, and mobilize in order to overturn the trend.

An important clarification is necessary: all the participants, in their views, might have a certain degree of cynicism and despondency, insofar as they describe and analyze the context. On the one hand, all of them agree that it would be necessary to do away with the mafia; on the other hand, not all of them think that it is possible to make a radical change. There is a split between *the way it is* and *the way it should be*. A conflict that shows how the role of Cosa Nostra in the maintenance of public order is not regarded as the best way to deal with these matters but rather as a sort of a necessary evil to cope with. In the conclusion will argue that, despite a long-time acceptance of Cosa Nostra's extralegal rule of the

territory, reality is fluid and dynamic, and changes have occurred over the last thirty years, but a massive effort is still necessary if we want to build public value and defeat the mafia.

2. Methodology

This work relies on the material collected during research in Palermo, in March 2025. It was possible to develop a qualitative research²⁵, based on in-depth interviews. 10 people accepted to participate to the research: two recently retired police officers, two citizens, two shopkeepers, two activists of the anti-mafia movement, a local journalist covering street crime matters and a trade union activist. These people were sampled through the use of snowball method, because, as well as living in Palermo and having a thorough knowledge of social dynamics that take place, some of them have worked in the direction of creating public values, some others have been victimized either by Cosa Nostra, and were forced to demand violent protection, or by street criminals, and decided to ask the mafia to help them. All participant provided a broad perspective on the phenomenon that is discussed in the subsequent sessions. More specifically, they were sampled because they provide similar perspectives from different points of view. They were selected with the help of other consultants, such as shopkeeper associations, anti-mafia NGOs, journalists, magistrates, police trade unions, who ensured they were credible witnesses because of their experience, as well as because their long-term operating in the territory of Palermo. All the ethical aspects were complied with, as anonymity was granted, participants signed a consent form and none of them was in any personal relation with the researcher.

3. Cynicism or despondency? *It works*

This section addresses the way both citizens and police forces coexist and cooperate with Cosa Nostra. The idea that a victim of a crime must ask the mafia, rather than the police, to solve its problems is quite common in Palermo:

If you are stolen a car, a scooter, or burglars who busted into your flat stole something important for you, it is just pointless to go to the police. They don't know what to do and how to do it. You ask yourself the question you probably have heard since you were born: A cu'canusciu? (who do I know?). A question that might be uncomfortable, because you don't know who you will be dealing with. But a positive answer to the question will spare you many troubles, such as that of buying anew a car or a scooter you are still paying for. [Journalist]

When asked the reason why the police is supposed to be so ineffective, an ex-police officers explains:

Because nobody would trust us. Neither the victims, who maybe are disappointed by previous experiences by friends or relatives, nor the other citizens. You start investigating, but, who helps you? They are scared of police, and in the districts street criminals are from, there is a sort of solidarity. They stole or burgled because they have no money and they need to survive. So we just step aside. They just don't want us around, and it's less trouble and less hustling for us. [POLICEMAN 1]

These two participants describe a reality that everyone takes for granted, in order to reach positive outcomes: for victims, there are higher chances of getting their stolen belongings back; for police forces, one might find a paradox. Non investigation of property crimes has two advantages: the first is that of sparing a stress for what is deemed as the performing unusual activities. The second one relates to the relation between police forces and the community. Looks like citizens, in particulars those from the context the offenders come from, side with the latter rather than with law. If police forces abstain from

investigating and prosecuting property offenders, the risk of strained relation between police forces and the community is lower. Moreover, they are less at risk of becoming victims of Mafioso retaliations.

A similar view is shared by a shopkeeper, whose family shoes shop has been located in the city centre of Palermo for almost a century:

This is Palermo. If you want to work, you have to deal with these people, otherwise there is no chance of survival, both physically and economically. My nephews have started running a business by themselves, and I strongly recommended them to get to know someone. [SHOPKEEPER 1]

A citizen tells what happened to him a few years ago:

I had built a house to live in. A week after I moved there, the house started being vandalized. It was the beginning of a month of nightmares. They punctured the wheels of my wife's car, sent via mail the chopped head of a goat. Until I bumped accidentally into a friend of mine who told me: who do you know there? That is the zone where zu Pippinu (imaginary name of the boss) rules. I can arrange you a meeting with him if you like. Two days later, I met zu Pippinu, who asked me why I didn't take care of my garden! He suggested me to hire a gardener, he knew one he could recommend. Of course I took up his suggestion and all the vandalization and threats ceased. This is Palermo! Thing will never change around here! [CITIZEN 1]

Another citizen tells a similar story in a more positive attitude than the previous one, also explaining the width of the mafia network and the way it works, as well as the rituals:

I use to go to work with a scooter. It's handy, and simpler to park than a car. I usually park it under the block of flats I live in. One year ago I stepped out of the door and...f...my scooter wasn't there. I had to catch a bus, then I asked myself: A cu'canusciu? I thought that maybe my barber could help me. He knows everyone. I went in and asked. He suggested me to go to that bar...Bar X., you know where it is. The usual place where zu Nardu (imaginary name for a Mafioso) hangs out. I found him there, told him my barber had sent me, invited him to a coffee. He replied: -come again tomorrow and I'll let you know. The day after, he explained me a young guy, unemployed, with an ill mother had stolen my scooter. If I paid 500 euros, I could have my scooter back. I didn't think twice and bought zu Nardu another coffee. A new scooter would cost me 10 times as much. 500 euros and two coffee is nothing compare to that. I had my scooter back and now I park it again under my flat. Ok, it's the Mafia. But it works. [CITIZEN 2]

Privileged witnesses seem partly cynical, partly despondent. On the one hand, Cosa Nostra has been running this activity of de facto policing for centuries, and people are used to deal with such a scenario. On the other hand, all of them are aware that they are living under unusual conditions, as in the fifth largest city of Italy, after all the dramatic events of 1980s and 1990s, there should not be informal police, operating through intimidation and violence. The point is that nobody of the participants think that something can be done to turn the tie and make the rule of law prevail over informal law of the mafia. Looks like we are facing with a disempowered community, who refuses to take up the responsibility of making uncomfortable decisions, that is the opposite of what public value should be. But: are they cynical or despondent?

Another way to see it is that we are in a condition of perverted public value, or, as other authors argue²⁶, social capital works in such a way as to produce and reproduce private interest at the expenses of public goods. Fear caused by the intimidatory power of Cosa Nostra must be considered as an element that discourages the production of public value. The Palermo community, after being forced by the mafia to withdraw to the private sphere, develops alternative survival strategies, based on the idea that coping with the mafia is necessary if you one wants to feel safe. A politician remembers what the situation was like between 1986 and 1987, when the bosses of Cosa Nostra were put on trial²⁷:

Until mid-1980s, pickpocketing was the most serious street crime committed in Palermo. On the buses or at food markets. Robberies occurred to in the roughest area of the city, where most people avoided

to go. Ok, it was also because Palermo, in 1980s, had no nightlife for the fear of being killed or witnessing homicide discouraged it, but street crimes were quite rare compared to other big cities. Then, since 1986, you started having news of people threatened with knives out in the centre.

An ex-police officer endorses this scenario:

We hadn't dealt with much street crime until 1986. Then reports soared. Old ladies snitched as soon as they are out of the supermarket, students threatened with the gun and forced to give away their sunglasses. There is more: violent confrontation cases rose dramatically. I remember two groups of young people from a well off background-the ones we call baby gangs now. It was 1987. I was working at San Lorenzo at the time: they chased each other for a month with guns in their pockets! For a girlfriend a member of one of the two groups had stolen from another of the rival group! We had reports from the neighbors about shootouts and fights, and could not believe it. It wouldn't have happened two years before. [POLICEMAN 2]

Cosa Nostra was devoid of its bosses, thus slackening its grasp on the territory, as it was more difficult to patrol areas, check the existence of uncomfortable situations and deal with them accordingly. Moreover, there was a subtle message the organization wanted the public to know: if the mafia were put on trial, the city would become more and more unsafe. Since organized crime had become a leading topic in public discussion, and an effort to delegitimize the mafia and to enhance the values of legality was in the making, Cosa Nostra tried to re-establish its hegemony within Palermo society.

There is, though, another important aspect one must take into consideration. The situation the latter participants have depicted makes room for a reflection about a paradox: when the Mafia doesn't provide public safety, the public turns to the police. It is a functional, utilitarian approach, based on the demand of performance by those actors who can provide security. An attitude that is still surviving, since Cosa Nostra is still active and its services are still requested, and deemed to be better than those provided by police forces. This way of behaving suggests that cynicism is more relevant than despondency, and repeating that things don't change is quite an instrumental claim, aimed to postponing or even reject any effort aimed at creating public values. Such behavior is enacted by using the strategies of administrative evil, in particular that of moral inversion through language. The lack of trust the police officer speaks of, and the statement that it is impossible to live and work in Palermo without coping with Cosa Nostra, are more than mere descriptions of reality, and are not dictated only by fear. It is more a justification of social order, aimed at its preservation²⁸, since under the technical and rational aspects related to the providing of security, the Mafia proves efficient and effective. Despite the facts that its bosses have been put on trial and sentenced to harsh convictions, no serious attempt to create public values, thus filling the vacuums caused by judicial actions, has been done. Consequently, Cosa Nostra, even if weakened in its international illegal trafficking and political relation, has always managed to rebuild its organizational structure and reaffirm its control of the territory.

A technical rationality seems prevailing both among former police officers and, especially, among the public. Cooperation develops out of the interest police has to keep public order, as well as out of the demand of security by citizens. Both these actors regard Cosa Nostra as the actor satisfying this request. Coexistence relates to the despondency towards the presence of the Mafia, whose force and organization cannot be ignored. There is not, though, a uniform feeling and attitude about the way to approach the issue of security. Public awareness about Cosa Nostra and its negative role has been growing in these late years, although there still is a long road to walk in order to expel the Mafia from Palermo society. Next session we will deal with unawareness and opposition.

4.It's not the same thing...Between unawareness and opposition

This section will cope with the conflict, potential and effective, between the public and the State on one side and Cosa Nostra on the other. The survival of Cosa Nostra cultural and political hegemony in

Palermo, might upset those who thought that the anti-mafia public consciousness had grown after 1992 bombings, and the subsequent mass indignation that sparked public demonstrations of hundred thousand people²⁹. Portraits and murals of Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino are spread across the city, and the enforcement of special detention measures against the Mafioso, such as the 41 bis regime³⁰, are quite popular among the public.

Those were incredible days. Us police officers protested in the cathedral against the President of the Republic, the Ministry of Interior and the Chief of Italian police. And people were with us, cheering at our protest and helping us holding up and insulting such important persons. Sometimes I wonder if they were more angry with politicians than on our side...[EX-POLICE OFFICER 2].

Palermo is a strange city, hard to understand. You remember 1993 local elections? Leoluca Orlando was elected mayor with a landslide 75% of votes. Four months later, there was a rightward shift, with Berlusconi gaining an overwhelming majority. And then 2001, when in the whole Sicily, the 100% of MPs elected were Berlusconi's MPs. 61-0, they said. And some of the elected were part of Mafioso networks. Almost everybody, though, praises Falcone and Borsellino in schools, at work, in public demonstration. Hypocrisy? Cynicism? I would say it's a lack of political conscience. Or maybe it just has to grow. But how long will it take to grow completely?[FORMER COMMUNIST MP].

Both the participants hint at different aspects, which share an aspect, that is the political one, though analyzed under different aspects. Whereas the ex-police officers see the demonstrations of 1992 as a protest against politicians, so that the support of police by the demonstrators could be considered as instrumental and temporary, the ex-MP points at the need of a political awareness, that could lead to the production of public value. Both aspects are certainly related, insofar as spontaneous mass mobilizations are inspired by fear, indignation and rage, whereas the development of a more articulated political awareness requires a longer path. Moreover, the process by which public consciousness grows, does not necessarily rule out the instrumental, rational, utilitarian parts of action. Finally, the habitus (Bourdieu, cit.), or those incorporated categories that orient both the understanding of reality and public behavior, keep structuring the map of daily acting (Schutz, 1998). The patrol of the territory by Cosa Nostra must be accepted as a matter of routine.

Besides these aspects, though, unawareness plays a capital role within these dynamics. We are referring to the concept of *unaware evil* as explained by Adams and Balfour³¹, that is a behavior based on the lack of shared values between different parts of society, and defuses responsibilities, thus preventing the growth of public awareness. As a shopkeeper argues:

It's not Totò Riina I go to talk to if I want the robbery I was victim of sorted. Riina is in jail, along with his pals. There will be no more bombings. Probably they wear a gun, they say threatening sentences, but it's not the same thing as bombing and killing around...c'mon, that time is over, fortunately. [SHOPKEEPER 2]

These answer might mislead the reader to think of a warped, contradictory attitude, that on the one hand is in favor of the arrest and convictions of mafia bosses, on the other hand deems it convenient to give Cosa Nostra the role of informal police force. We are rather in the domain of language³², that is the use of linguistic, cognitive artifact to operate a moral inversion that makes it possible to consider administrative evil as a matter of fact. In this case, moral inversion, is developed by dividing between a *bad* mafia that kills and bombs and a *good* mafia that solves the conflicts taking place in Palermo. It is a long-time running attitude, that draws on an old habitus as the former Communist MP says:

-Do you remember 40 years ago? You talked to people about the mafia, and they replied: this new mafia is cruel, cynical and ruthless. It is not like the old mafia: Once the Mafioso never killed children and helped the poor. They forgot all the oppression in the latifundia. As well as neglecting the fact that if you had a new mafia, it was because it stemmed from the old mafia. [EX-COMMUNIST MP].

There is, indeed, something more, related to securitarianism (Garland, 2003), or the over-emphasization of individual security, and the consequent growth of moral panic (Cohen, 1971). As the anti-mafia activist puts it:

-The explosion of the bomb of via D'Amelio –when magistrate Paolo Borsellino was killed– was heard all across Palermo. People were scared. And started wondering: what if myself, my husband, my son was near the explosion? Same story in the case of killing. A bullet, if shot wrongly, can kill someone who is walking around. Moreover, throughout 1980s, people were forced to stay home after 9 pm because a sort of Mafioso curfew. They wanted all this to come to an end. And they think that now that the Corleonesi are in jail all this is over, and indeed it is. But they don't realize that, if they ask help from the mafia, they can fuel a new generation of ruthless Mafioso. [ANTI-MAFIA ACTIVIST].

The scenario described by the two participants- might suggest a sort of overturned securitarianism-that is a demand for security opposite to the traditional one: while in the main European and American cities it is street crimes to worry the public (Simon, 2007), the public of Palermo makes a selective splitting. Police forces and magistrates are requested to repress those crimes who are deemed more threatening, such as homicides, bombings, shootouts, whereas street crimes are considered as manageable crimes, despite mainly dealt through the intermediation of the same actors as those who commit the most heinous crimes, that is the Mafioso. There are, in other words, two degrees of conflicts: the first degree is minority, as only activists and citizens who have developed a public awareness enact a radical opposition against all the ways the Mafia operates. The second degree is more moderate, tolerant towards Cosa Nostra, as it relies on distinguishing between heinous and street crimes. An attitude that can be explained as a consequence of the violent crimes the Mafia has committed in the past. This explanation is valid to a certain extent, because of the widespread conviction, among the public, that there are a bad and a good mafia:

Bombs? This is a past story. They cut the nails of the most heinous beasts, now Palermo is a safe city again. Hadn't it been for the Corleonesi, things would have run smoothly. Fortunately they were caught and given the sentence they deserved for ruining people and wasting the image of Sicily [CITIZEN 1].

Mafia? Mafia is everywhere. You see what happens in Milan or in America? But they have always picked on us in Sicily. Do you think that those who settle down little business are able to prepare a bomb or to kill someone in cold blood? Come on! It takes a good deal of fantasy. Palermo is safe again, this is what matters. The Corleonesi are out of the way. [CITIZEN 2]

Both citizens denote a common way of thinking. Firstly, they split the Corleonesi from the rest of Cosa Nostra. The problem is not the Mafia by itself, but the existence of a heinous and ruthless group that has finally been detected and prosecuted accordingly. The Corleonesi become the perfect scapegoat for those who cherish or accept a role of Cosa Nostra within Palermo society. I am not denying the criminal acts that Totò Riina and his pals committed, but they were just a part of Cosa Nostra, despite the fact that, between late 1970s and 1993 took over the command of the organization. Secondly, the prevalence of a technical-rational approach. Security is the issue at stake, and, what matters, is that, also thanks to Cosa Nostra, the goal has been reached. Thirdly, they try to dodge the problem. Not only there is a good and a bad mafia, with the former deemed incapable of committing heinous crimes. There is also a problem of discrimination of Sicily by Northern Italians.

A combination of cynicism, victimism, and incorporated categories of interpreting reality can be found in this case. As Adams and Balfour³³ point out, there is an organization of administrative evil, that gives way to its legitimation. The distinction between a good and a bad mafia, as well as totally false, serves as an ideological tool to those who want to turn a blind eye on the presence of Cosa Nostra and on the capital role the organization plays in Palermo. A radical opposition against the Mafia happens only when Cosa Nostra trespasses the borders of street security, giving up its auxiliary role in the maintenance of public order and threatening the lives of a vast part of the public, either by making large scale killing across the city or by making violent attacks, such as bombings

The outcomes of these findings, though, should not suggest a total pessimism, or spread the idea that nothing changes in Palermo. As an activist suggests:

Consider that we have started late. 43 years ago, when Dalla Chiesa was killed, the mayor of Palermo denied that the Mafia existed. Now it's impossible to become a mayor if you don't declare you are for the rule of law and against the mafia. [ACTIVIST 1]

Many organizations of civil society, these late years, have created a support for those citizens and entrepreneurs who want to report extortions, also providing legal assistance to them. And their performances have been successful. Maybe we should find out a way to create an association acting to discourage citizens from requiring the help of the Mafioso. I am sure we will work something out. [ACTIVIST 2]

Reports to the police have increased these late years. I think that most of it is due to the programs oriented to the respect of laws that are enforced in schools. As well as to the weakening of Cosa Nostra in these late years. It is a matter of time. [EX-POLICE OFFICER 1].

Optimism seems to characterize our privileged witness. It is indeed true that things have changed for the better in Palermo these recent years. On the other hand, Cosa Nostra is still there, providing services of informal policing that appear to be appreciated by a large part of the local population. There also are other aspects to be considered, as social change rarely follows a linear path. In any case, let's take it: time is on our side.

CONCLUSIONS

This work focuses on how Cosa Nostra, in Palermo, still provides informal policing through its control of the territory, because of its paramilitary force and organization, the acceptance of the status quo by citizens, the despondent attitude of police forces. It has been outlined how the reproduction of this hegemonic role is possible because of the lack of public value, as individual interest prevails over a collectively shared idea of public good. Such a deficit results into the production of ideological justifications that work through the production of a narrative and the organization of thought that justifies administrative evil by splitting between a good and a bad mafia. On the other hand, in the conclusive section, some of the participants have evidenced how the development of an anti-mafia public awareness is but a recent phenomenon, which has been growing in late years. Such remarks can make me conclude this work with an optimistic mood, but there are a few caveats one should consider. Firstly, as it has been noted in the introduction, Cosa Nostra developed with the birth of modern capitalism, and thrived under the reproduction of unequal social relations, based on deep economic inequalities. The defeat of the mafia is possible only if Sicily manages to find a way to economic development, a goal that, in the present situation, seems very difficult to achieve. Moreover, public expenditure cuts, make room for the growth of private security groups and vigilantism. Cosa Nostra can rely on a paramilitary organization, on control of the territory, and on a network of consent based on its social capital. It would be easy for the Mafioso to offer their services and for private actors to draw advantage from them. This being the case, economic development must necessarily be accompanied by a growth of public value. Even if economic growth occurs, this is the main aspect to work upon. Otherwise, more and more people will keep asking themselves who they know.

Endnotes

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