

## Mafia as a Spontaneous Order

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**Abstract:** Can we say that the mafia is a spontaneous order, an unplanned but orderly association, the result of human action but not of human design? The paper investigates how the lack of a founding moment for the entity called the “mafia” points toward a positive answer. It seems plausible to say that the continuous turnover of different foreign dominations over the island of Sicily generated two important phenomena: 1) a lack of trust between individuals, and between individuals and institutions, and 2) the absence of centralized institutions recognized as the centre of the monopoly of force that would have been able to dictate and enforce a code of social conduct.

These two phenomena created both the need for mediators for individual transactions, and more generally, a demand for the role of institutions. Mafia people filled the gap, initially as “persons of respect” whose authority was recognized, accepted and feared, and then by becoming actual institutions themselves, blending with official institutions and creating a recognized and followed code of social conduct.

**Keywords:** Mafia, Spontaneous Order, History of Italy, History of Sicily, History of Mafia, Racketeering, Protection business

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### 1. INTRODUCTION AND DEFINITIONS

“I heard you paint houses”, were the first words that trade union leader Jimmy Hoffa spoke to Frank “The Irishman” Sheeran, who, stammering, replied: “Y-Y-Yeah, and I d-do my own carpentry work, too” (Brandt 2004, p. 101). This episode, made famous thanks to Netflix’s *The Irishman* by Martin Scorsese (starring Al Pacino as Jimmy Hoffa and Robert de Niro as Frank Sheeran), is just a little example witnessing to the complexity of communication within a world—the *mafia*—that is the subject of this paper.

Communication codes (Gambetta 2009) and methods (like the *pizzini*<sup>1</sup> used by Bernardo Provenzano during his period spent in hiding) are only part of the mystery and fascination surrounding an “institution” that is not merely a source of concern for public authorities, but also a phenomenon of popular culture—particularly outside Italy—thanks to a vast cinematographic and bibliographic production. As an example, the website *cosanostranews.com* reveals very accurate information, while the YouTube channel of Michael Franzese, a former *caporegime*—a very

high-ranking member—in the Colombo family<sup>2</sup> turned motivational speaker and bible preacher, has to date reached more than one million subscribers.

Despite the immense scholarly and popular literature on the topic, the actual origin of the mafia, understood as a founding moment, remains obscure. Such a lack of a decisive founding moment by an individual or group is what gives rise to this paper's claim: the mafia is a spontaneous order.

Before further proceeding, however, it is necessary here to clarify what we mean both by “spontaneous order” and by “mafia”. Narrowing the scope of our work will help and hopefully avoid misunderstandings.

With regard to the definition of “spontaneous order”, we refer to Hayek's (1979) distinction between spontaneous and planned orders. As explained by Andersson (2013, p. 1), a “spontaneous order evolves in an orderly but unplanned fashion because of the presence of shared rules, simplified feedback, and status equality among the order's participants”. Paving the way for the scholarly works published in this journal, DiZerega (2013, p. 3) clarified how “[e]mergent orders are nonlinear, meaning they do not arise through chains of causation. They are instead networks shaped by the back and forth influences of mutual causation. Each node in such a network influences and is influenced by other nodes through positive and negative feedback signals that, taken together, generate the order as a whole”.

Dealing with spontaneous orders means, then, dealing with organized complexity (Ibid). While the examples of languages and money have been often used to explain the concept of spontaneous order, Ikeda (2020), following Jane Jacobs, applied the framework to the emergence of cities, defining “a spontaneous order as a stable set of relations among individuals that emerges unplanned from their collective interactions and that is sufficiently coherent to enable them to form and carry out their plans with a reasonable expectation of success” (Ikeda 2020, p. 4).

It is also important to distinguish between spontaneous order and organization. While a spontaneous order is means-related, an organization is ends-related. In other words, people acting within a spontaneous order—such as within the economy itself—do not share a common end, goal, or purpose. Each follows their own interest, and pursues their own plans through the means of the institutional order, such as the use of money, prices, calculation, budgeting, and so on. This contrasts with an organization—such as a business firm—in which all of the participants are arranged and pursue activities that share a common objective, specifically the operation and success of the firm. Here, the participants in an organization not only share means, but are arranged to fit a common plan, a goal, an end, a purpose.

The key concept of emergent orders has been at the core of the reflections along an economic line of thought recently labelled “mainline economics” (Mitchell and Boettke 2017; Boettke, Haefele-Blach and Storr 2016). A comprehensive, holistic approach to economics and economic policy based on the concept of emergent orders is developed in Wagner (2020), while Hayek summarized the idea by saying that spontaneous orders are the result of human action but not of human design (Ikeda 2020, p. 4).

We need also to clarify the meaning we attach to the word *mafia*. In fact, we may say that *mafia* can be interpreted in a narrow or a broad sense. In the first case, the word simply refers to a certain type of organized crime, with its specific hierarchy and codes, that is typical of Sicily; in this narrower understanding, it can be extended to the criminal families of Sicilian origin that developed in the United States and Canada (Lupo 2015). In the popular jargon, instead, the word *mafia* is often used to talk about *the mob* or organized crime in general, so that we have a Russian mafia, the Albanian mafia, the Japanese mafia (Yakuza), the Chinese mafia (Triad), and so on. In this paper, “mafia” will be discussed in its original and narrower meaning, which is the Sicilian criminal body whose mysteries were fully revealed for the first time by *the rat par excellence*, Tommaso Buscetta, the *Boss of the Two Worlds* (Lodato 1999).

The paper is organized as follows. In section 2 we will attempt to summarize what we know of the origin of the word *mafia*; its actual meaning is in fact still obscure. And it cannot be easy to shed light on a phenomenon when the meaning of the name has not been completely clarified. In section 3 the concept of spontaneous order will be analysed with reference to the Sicilian mafia. Section 4 concludes.

## 2. AN OBSCURE WORD

If we were entrusted with the task of giving a definition to the word *mafia per se* we would fail. While we do know that the word is used to identify a certain type of organized crime, its proper meaning and etymology remain obscure; even the famous Treccani dictionary prefers to describe what we mean by the word, but it specifies that its etymology is uncertain.<sup>3</sup>

The literature so far has clarified that originally the word was not necessarily used to identify a criminal group, or even criminal behaviour. Benigno (2015, p. 186) explained how in 1865 the newspaper *Il Corriere Siciliano* started to deal with public security issues; specifically, in an article dated 18 April 1865, the word *omertà* (code of silence) is found, and the journalist explained that it was a dangerous and very widespread element within the Bourbon government, affecting even the less *mafiosi* among the Sicilians (Benigno 2015, p. 187). However, the word had no criminal meaning and, in particular in certain areas of Palermo, the adjective *mafiusu* was used to label prominent individuals, or handsome or brave guys; *Li mafiusi di la Vicaria*,<sup>4</sup> furthermore, was the title of a 1862 play by Giuseppe Rizzotto and Gaspare Mosca (Ibid.).

Similarly, Dickie (2011, p. 86) explained how the word *mafia* was originally not associated with criminality, but rather used to label someone with an overinflated ego, which forced the individual to solve his problems without recourse to official channels; according to Dickie, the word is of Arabic origins.<sup>5</sup> However, an official report dated 25 April 1865 indicated the *maffia* as a criminal association, specifying that such an association counted several members and was of ancient origins (Benigno, 2015, p. 187). We do know however that its origins must be found in the passage between the end of the Bourbon domination in Southern Italy and the establishment of the new Kingdom of Italy (Dickie 2004, p. 38).

It seems that in 1875 the word was already popular and in general used to indicate an intricate network of secret societies operating in Sicily for several criminal purposes (Crisantino 2000, p. 13). The word was used together with *camorra* to indicate the illegal control of markets, tenders and elections; on different occasions the word *camorra* was used with reference to urban criminality and *mafia* to its rural form, but on other occasions just the opposite happened (Lupo 1993, pp. 164-172).<sup>6</sup>

Under the historical governance of the Right,<sup>7</sup> however, the word began to be misused and abused to indicate not only criminals, but also to negatively label political enemies (Lupo 1993, p. 172), as often happened later during the Italian Republic. Similarly, political authorities came to use the word to indicate those forces hostile to the “renewal” that the Italian kingdom brought to Sicily, that is, the reactionary forces who wanted to remain loyal to 19<sup>th</sup> century political, social and cultural organization (Lupo 1993, p. 204).

People accused of *mafiosità* used this link with “the Tradition” to claim that the mafia did not exist as a criminal organization, but instead as a virile resistance toward the abuse of power from official authorities (Lupo 1993, p. 226). It is not by chance that Joseph Bonanno always referred to the people of Cosa Nostra as *the men of my Tradition* (Bonanno and Lalli 1983).<sup>8</sup>

And it is precisely in Bonanno and Lalli (1983, p. 39) that we find a completely different alternative version of the origin of the word *mafia*, which is worth reporting here in its entirety:

In this regard, the story of the Sicilian Vespers bears repeating. The story describes another insurrection, this one when the island was under French domination. During Easter week of 1282, while the people of Palermo were making their way to evening worship (vespers), agents of the treasury waited outside the churches to apprehend tax debtors. The agents handcuffed and dragged many citizens to jail, publicly shaming them by slapping their faces—an intolerable insult.

As it happened, a young lady of rare beauty, who was soon to be married, was going to church with her mother when a French soldier by the name of Droetto, under the pretext of helping the tax agents, manhandled the young lady. Then he dragged her behind the church and raped her.

The terrified mother ran through the streets, crying,  
—*Ma fia, ma fia!*

This means “My daughter, my daughter” in Sicilian.

The boyfriend of the young lady found Droetto and killed him with a knife.

The mother’s cry, repeated by others, rang out through the streets, throughout Palermo and throughout Sicily. *Ma fia* soon became the rallying cry of the resistance movement, which adopted the phrase as an acronym for *Morte alla Francia, Italia anela*—“Death to France, Italy cries out.”

This was the version of the Sicilian Vespers story as told to me. Scholars now consider parts of the story to be legend or folklore. That may be true, but so what? The important element of the story is not its factual veracity, but the Sicilian spirit which it exemplifies. It speaks to me to this day of the living ideals of personal honor, personal justice and personal dignity.

Personal honour, justice and dignity: indeed, these elements seem to be what matters when discussing mafia peculiarities, the actual *fil rouge* in a narrative that seems to escape the attempt to find an initial moment. And it was also by virtue of these values that Buscetta felt himself legitimated in revealing his secrets to Italian prosecutor Giovanni Falcone: the “new” mafia led by Totò Riina, *il capo dei capi*<sup>9</sup> (Bolzoni and D’Avanzo 2007), had betrayed the fundamental values of true men of honour (Lodato 1990 and 1999).

### 3. THE SICILIAN MAFIA

If the etymological origin of the word is not clear, similarly it appears impossible to say that the Sicilian mafia began on a certain day as an act of will of a certain man or group of men. The absence of a founding moment has paved the way for the emergence of curious and folkloristic theories, such as the one that sees the mafia as the continuation of a mythic sect, the *Beati Paoli*, a group of private justice-makers who, in approximately the XI-XII centuries, defended the weak from the power abuses from members of the civic and religious elites. “Natoli narrated the legend of a secret society—I *Beati Paoli*—that, centuries ago, had defended Sicilians, primarily the poor and the weak, from the tyranny of the Spanish occupation” (Lupo 2015, p. 161).

Like the future mafiosi, the *Beati Paoli* required an oath to become a member, as reported in the famous novel authored by Luigi Natoli (1910, p. 134):

Andrea Lo Bianco—the boss resumed—this book contains the holy gospels and the letters of the holy apostle Paul. Affix a cross on this page with your blood, and swear to blindly obey what is imposed upon you; swear by the holy gospels, by the holy apostle Paul, by your blood, which will be shed drop by drop; swear that you will keep the secret of what you will hear and see and that neither torture nor enticements will rip a single syllable out of your mouth; swear that your body and your soul will now and always belong to this venerable society of the *Beati Paoli*, in the service of justice, in defense of the weak, against all violence and arrogance of government, of lords, of priests.<sup>10</sup>

It goes without saying that, although the *Beati Paoli* connection is very much liked by the mafiosi who truly consider themselves as honourable *giustizieri*—justice-makers, or avengers—within a community ruled by power abuses perpetrated by official authorities, the actual historical existence of the sect is far from confirmed.

Chronologically speaking, the emergence of the Sicilian mafia must be dated to the period between the fall of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and the instauration of the Kingdom of Italy. Dickie (2004, p. 38)

explained that the mafia's origins are not ancient. The mafia began at roughly the time when beleaguered Italian government officials first heard talk of it. The mafia and the new nation of Italy were born together. In fact, the way that the word "mafia" surfaced and became widely used is a curious affair, not least because the Italian government that discovered the name also played a part in nurturing the association that bore it.

As perhaps befits the mafia's own fiendish ingenuity, its genesis involves not just one story, but a knot of them. Untying those narrative threads and laying them out in the following chapters requires a little chronological dexterity; it means moving back and forth in the turbulent period from 1860 to 1876, and a brief loop back through the half-century before then. It also means borrowing the testimonies of the people caught up in the story, the people who were participants and onlookers in the mafia's beginnings.

Furthermore, the mafia truly became a public affair only with the 1893 homicide of Marquis Notarbartolo, who, when Mayor of Palermo, began to reveal to the government some details about the intricate network of relationships between criminals, politicians and the Bank of Sicily (Mack Smith 1968, p. 663).

The *when*, however, does not tell us much about the *how* of the mafia's emergence. It seems that beginning in the first half of the nineteenth century, an initial nucleus of organized criminal activities in Sicily was carried out by secret societies, mainly devoted to the crime of *abigeato* (rustling, or stealing farm animals). These organizations, which evolved from gangs of bandits that had existed on the island for centuries (Cimino 2017, p. 7), began as *unions* or *brotherhoods* to support their various members in case of difficulties, but they were very much involved in, and on good terms with, the public administrations, so that any serious investigation about them was impossible. Already in 1838, the presence of armed gangs was an issue in Palermo, Trapani and Girgenti, with a high number of people living in hiding (Crisantino 2000, p. 22).

It is possible that at the beginning there was little difference—or very uncertain boundaries—between secret groups organized with the aim of perpetrating crimes and those that were mainly devoted to political rebellion, as those were the years that preceded the revolutionary movement for the unification of Italy emphatically called the *Risorgimento* (Crisantino 2000, p. 23).

It seems that the first trial ending in the conviction of a group of people under the crime of (*mafia*) association concluded in 1878 in Palermo, where 12 members of a group called *stuppaghieri* were sentenced to prison. According to Crisantino (2000, p. 11), the *stuppaghieri* should be regarded as the first nucleus of the mafia.

The narratives and facts reported so far, however, fail to identify a founding moment, a sort of big bang from which the mafia would have emerged. We may say then that the mafia emerged spontaneously from a mix of conditions, and that it established itself as a spontaneous order, as an unintended consequence—but as an unintended consequence of what?

For several decades an interpretation prevailed that persistently refuses to die; it emerged within the context of historical materialism (Casanuovi 1977; Tomiolo 1970), which has always played an important role in the reading and teaching of historical facts in Italy (Tranfaglia 1990). According to this view, the mafia emerged because of the backward economic environment that was prevalent in Sicily before the unification of Italy, an environment characterized by the presence of large estates that were poorly run by their owners, while the day-to-day administration was left to middlemen in charge of dealing with production and labour issues. According to a certain view, these people created problems and then proposed themselves as problem solvers.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, they had every interest in preserving the backward conditions of the economic mode of production prevailing in Sicily. In a nutshell, this primary group of mafiosi represented conservative forces fighting against the forces of modernization and development that, if the latter were to prevail, would have benefited the working class.

Such an interpretation has been instrumental for both mafiosi and anti-mafiosi. In fact, as mentioned above, several important representatives of Cosa Nostra liked to depict themselves as guardians of a noble tradition that was always at risk of disappearing; this was the case of Joseph Bonanno against the new wave of American mafiosi (Lupo 2015; Bonanno and Lalli 1983) or of Tommaso Buscetta against the emerging ruling faction of the Corleonesi (Lodato 1999). However, the contraposition between tradition and moder-

nity has also been useful to the communist interpretation of facts; leftist political parties, journalists and prosecutors have played an important role in the fight against the mafia. But, while their courageous work must not be underestimated, it has contributed to propagating a certain interpretation based on traditional historical materialism, which tends to see economic underdevelopment as the cause of any sort of negative characteristic of a given society.

However, Lupo (1993) explained very well the weak points of this view. In fact, Cosa Nostra was active in backward rural Sicily when this was the prevalent status of the island. But the mafia soon flourished in richer parts of Sicily, such as the Conca d'Oro (Palermo), and thrived through very lucrative trade businesses; as an example, Dimico, Isopi and Olsson (2017) found that the emergence of the lucrative business of trading lemons and other citrus products in the late 1800s was instrumental in the emergence of the mafia: "Operating in an environment with a weak rule of law, the mafia protected citrus production from predation and acted as intermediaries between producers and exporters. Using original data from a parliamentary inquiry in 1881–1886 on Sicilian towns, the Damiani Inquiry, we show that mafia presence is strongly related to the production of oranges and lemons" (Dimico, Isopi and Olsson 2017, p. 1083). Similarly, the mafia demonstrated itself capable of adapting to an evolving economic scenario, flourishing after World War II thanks to real estate speculations (Pirrelli 2009), narcotics production<sup>12</sup> and smuggling, money laundering, and financial schemes (Thevenin 2021). The romantic view of Vito Corleone, portrayed as a traditional man who renounced lucrative businesses in the name of traditional values, belongs strictly to the cinema.

Thus the mafia is not the unintended consequence of poverty and backwardness. Otherwise, it could have not survived until now, becoming one of the biggest multinationals ever. So it is the unintended consequence of what, then? Although probably from a wrong perspective, Bonanno and Lalli (1983, pp. 29-30) got something right:

Although it is easy for outsiders to list Sicily's foreign invaders, it is difficult for them fully to appreciate what this perpetual turmoil did to the Sicilian character. [...]  
Sicily has been buffeted by foreign influences for well over two thousand years. [...]  
It is obvious that without a genius for survival, Sicilians would have long ago lost their identity. Greek genius built the temple at Segesta, but Sicilian genius made it possible to endure subjugation and to survive long after the Greek town fell to ruin.  
Out of necessity, Sicilians put all their talents and energy into creating a life-style of survival, a peculiar and distinctive way of life that over the years became Tradition.

We will not indulge Bonanno's narrative about the Tradition and its purity, but the point on the role of multiple invaders is a fact; it is important because it contributed to instilling not only a lack of trust toward the ruling authorities of the moment, but also a lack of trust between individuals. Most importantly, that lack of trust mixed with the absence of the rule of law, or in any case with the absence of proper institutions providing what institutions should in terms of services and certainty of the law (if we exclude the role of "enlightened" rulers who brought progress more thanks to their personal authority than to a proper set of institutions).

The lack of proper, solid ruling institutions, rooted in an emerging lack of trust, generated a demand for them. Such a demand was not met by official institutions, which—because of their ever-changing character—failed to build the traditional centre of a monopoly of force that is able to create rules, with the power to enforce them.

At the macro level, the mafia provided services on behalf of absent institutions (Sardell, Pavlov and Saeed 2009). But there is an even more important micro level, which is explained very well by Gambetta (1993): the lack of trust developed not only in the relationship between individuals and ever-changing institutions, but also between individuals. Gambetta (1993, p. 77) explained:



I have argued that the mafia can be understood as a response to the lack of trust specifically affecting southern Italy, and that endemic distrust is the crucial difference which explains why the mafia did not emerge elsewhere in the Mediterranean world. [...] one can argue that as a result of a deliberate policy of divide and conquer implemented by the Spanish Hapsburgs, *la fede pubblica*—the public trust, the basis for a well-ordered society—was undermined. All that remained was *la fede privata*, that private realm populated only by kin and close friends in which people take refuge from high levels of social unpredictability, aggression, and injustice.

In a nutshell, the historical development of Sicily, with a constant change of foreign powers ruling over the island, instilled in the populace a profound sense of distrust. Every kind of transaction then required the presence of an intermediary, a guarantor for trust, which evolved into the business of private protection as an alternative to the lack of any form of rule of law. The tradition of paying the “pizzo”—originally an offer of a glass of wine, but now synonymous with the protection fee paid by businesses to a local mafia group—arose as payment for this kind of guarantee function (Cimino 2017, p. 15; Gambetta 1993).

At the macro level, the business of private protection evolved into alternative “political” institutions, which often acted in the name of and on behalf of official rulers (or even blended with them, as in the case of the presence of mafiosi within Christian Democrat ranks), but *de facto* followed their own set of rules and values.

From this perspective, it is useful to refer to how Andersson (2021) adds “culture” as a spontaneous order in addition to markets, science and democracy. The mafia can be seen as an example of such a culture in the context of Sicilian history.

For culture as a spontaneous order, Andersson (2021) indicates social approval as the systemic resource: this fits very well in the case of the mafia, which indeed established itself on the basis of tacit social approval (at least up to a certain moment in history). It also fits in the scheme of the typical *taxis* that Andersson identifies as the form of association for culture: the mafia is divided into different families, and preferences are revealed continuously due to the existence of *connections*.

The Sicilian mafia is then the unintended consequence of a society characterized by the lack of trust and the absence of proper enforcement institutions as part of the rule of law. In its evolution, it produced its own set of internally accepted, and often externally imposed, set of rules and codes of conduct that profoundly affected private lives and the public sphere well beyond Italy.

In fact, examining the mafia as it was at its apex, and partially still is in certain areas of Sicily, it is because of the non-emergence of the traditional centre of a monopoly of force (the State) that the mafia could become that very centre. And, confirming the spontaneous order hypothesis, this was possible without the written codification of rules of conduct and enforcement procedures; on the contrary, those rules and procedures emerged and became widely accepted both in laypeople’s everyday lives, and, to a certain extent, at the institutional level.

Its prosperity is due to a certain degree of social approval and its values are continuously communicated through connections organized in associations (families) whose mutual cooperation alternates with conflicts of interest.

In conclusion, however, it is necessary to clarify an important point. The thesis that the Sicilian mafia originated as a spontaneous order does not imply that it kept on functioning as such: the emergence moment and the successive evolution and function need to be kept separate. While the spontaneous order category can be applied to the birth of the mafia, it must be added that the more “mature” mafia, while aiming at replacing the State, became a coercive structure, and as such it does not follow the bottom-up feedback mechanisms that we find in truly spontaneous orders like the market. In this sense, Murphy (2005) was right in criticizing Gambetta’s idea according to which the mafia would be a private service of justice of the type advocated by Murray N. Rothbard and his followers. In fact, as Murphy (2005) pointed out, if the business of protection, that Gambetta identifies as the core of mafia activity, was to be liberalized and open

to the market, competition would emerge and it would lose the coercive nature which it presents under the mafia.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Can we say that the mafia is a spontaneous order, an unplanned but orderly association, the result of human action but not of human design? Our answer is “yes”. Surely it is an orderly association, ruled by codes of conduct that were first revealed, at least partially, by Tommaso Buscetta. Furthermore, the study of the history of the organization so far demonstrates that we cannot find a human design, or a founding moment, at the beginning of its history.

It seems plausible to say that the continuous alternation of different foreign dominations over the island of Sicily generated two important phenomena: 1) a lack of trust between individuals, and between individuals and institutions, and 2) the absence of centralized institutions recognized as the centre of a monopoly of force that was able to dictate and enforce a code of social conduct.

These two phenomena created both the need for mediators for individual transactions and, more generally, a demand for the role of institutions. Mafia people filled the gap, initially as “persons of respect” whose authority was recognized, accepted and feared, and then by becoming actual institution themselves, blending with official institutions and creating a recognized and followed code of social conduct.

The hope is that the current work was able to offer a meta-historical interpretation of the emergence of the mafia, using the available historical literature in order to apply the category of spontaneous order to the beginning of phenomenon. At the same time, an attempt was made to relaunch Gambetta’s hypothesis and to reconcile it with the criticism advanced by Murphy; this has been done by arguing that, while the spontaneous order category can be seen in the emergence of the mafia, it cannot instead be applied any longer to the evolution and functioning of mafia in successive moments.<sup>13</sup>

#### NOTES

- 1 Messages written on little pieces of paper used in particular by Bernardo Provenzano to communicate with his team during the time he spent in hiding. They were compiled using coded expressions and often religious metaphors (Merlino 2012).
- 2 One of the so-called Five Families ruling over organized crime in New York. The other four are the Genovese, Bonanno, Lucchese and Gambino (see, among others, Balsamo and Carpozi Jr (1988) and Davis (1993)).
- 3 <https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/mafia/>.
- 4 *The mafiosi of the Vicaria* (a jail in Palermo).
- 5 “Some think it derives from the Arabic slang word *mahyas*, meaning ‘aggressive boasting, bragging’, or *marfud*, meaning ‘rejected’, while others consider that it descends from the Arabic word *mu’afah*, meaning ‘exempt from the law’, or *mahfal*, meaning ‘a meeting or gathering’. And in Norman French there is the verb *se méfier*, which means ‘to beware’. Then there is the proper name Maufer, with which the medieval Knights Templar used to refer to the ‘God of Evil’” (Cimino 2017, p. 18).
- 6 The first official use of *camorra* as a word is found in 1735, in the context of a decree authorizing the establishment and operations of a certain number of gambling houses, after gambling was prohibited. It seems that the word originated from the merging of “capo” (boss) with “morra”, a street game in Naples. After the prohibition of gambling, game organizers started to ask the players to pay in order to get the police looking the other way (Behan 1996, pp. 9-10). The Camorra emerged after the Napoleonic era, during the power vacuum between 1799 and 1815. The first official mention of the Camorra as an organisation is from 1820, when police records detail a disciplinary meeting of the Camorra (Behan 1996, p. 12; Sales 1988, pp. 72-73).
- 7 *The Historical Right* was the political faction that led the first Italian governments after the creation of the Kingdom of Italy in 1861. It was characterized by the adherence to classical liberalism and laissez-faire. In 1876



- the Historical Right was replaced by the Historical Left at the leadership of the country. The adjective historical to both the Right and the Left in the Italian political scenario before World War I was added to avoid confusion with what the meaning that terms *right* and *left* came to assume afterwards (fascism and communism or socialism).
- 8 See also Lupo (2015, pp. 168-173).
  - 9 The Boss of Bosses.
  - 10 My translation. Original version: “Andrea Lo Bianco—riprese il capo—questo libro contiene i santi evangeli e le lettere del santo apostolo Paolo. Apponi la croce col tuo sangue su questa pagina; e giura di ubbidire ciecamente a quanto ti verrà imposto; giuralo per i santi evangeli, per il santo apostolo Paolo, per il tuo sangue, che sarà versato a stilla a stilla; giura che serberai il segreto di quanto udirai e vedrai e che né tortura né allettative ti strapperanno dalla bocca un solo accento; giura che il tuo corpo e l’anima tua apparterranno ora e sempre a questa venerabile società dei Beati Paoli, in servizio della giustizia, in difesa dei deboli, contro ogni violenza e prepotenza di governo, di signori, di preti”.
  - 11 Acemoglu, De Feo and De Luca (2020) argued instead that the first mafiosi did not create problems in order to propose themselves as problem-solvers. Rather, they were hired by landowners to deal with socialist insurgencies.
  - 12 See, in particular, the case of *The French Connection* (Siragusa and Wiedrich 1968).
  - 13 I would like to thank David Emanuel Andersson, David L. Prychitko, Sanford Ikeda and Francesco Di Iorio for their valuable comments and suggestions. I would like also to thank the reviewers for their thoughtful comments and efforts towards improving the manuscript. The usual caveat applies.

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