

**Local ‘ndrangheta.  
Discussing mafia behaviours, cultural transmission and children protection in  
Calabria.**

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**Abstract**

Local approaches to mafia groups have often focused on the characterisation of mafias as deviant subcultures, without necessarily looking at what mafia groups share with their own culture of origin. By advocating the need to look at mafias as sets of behaviours, embedded in, and organic to, their local culture this paper will focus on the transmission of mafia values in families in Calabria, south of Italy.

This paper will look at the youth in Calabrian mafia clans - known with the collective name “‘ndrangheta” – through the discourse in proceedings - approved by both the Youth Tribunal and the Antimafia Directorate of Reggio Calabria - to revoke the patria potestas when one or both parents have been involved in mafia-related crimes.

The qualitative analysis of confidential prosecution and court proceedings confirms how in certain areas mafias are indeed understood as sets of learned and transmitted behaviours, embedded in Calabrian local culture. Only when considering mafias as set of behaviours, within shared cultural codes, receding the bonds between children and parents can be justified for the protection of children.

## Introduction and methods

Studies on Italian mafias have been historically dominated by a focus on Sicilian Cosa Nostra, both in Sicily and in the United States. Scholars have looked at the Sicilian-American mafia as a qualified and prototypical form of organised crime (Finckenauer, 2005; Von Lampe, 2008), which not only engages in violent acts and serious criminal activities over an extended period of time (Lupo, 2011; Von Lampe, 2008), but also maintains a social dimension, through an entrepreneurial ability to control markets, to monopolise private protection (Gambetta, 1993; Arlacchi, 1986; Blok, 1988) and to keep successful connections with political and financial elites (Dalla Chiesa, 2010; Sciarrone, 2011). The tension in these studies has always been between a conceptualisation of mafias as *organisations* committing crimes and a conceptualisation of mafias as *(sub)cultures* deeply rooted in the territories of the south of Italy (Paoli, 2003). The former approach is concerned with organisational and network analysis also for the evaluation of trends and movements in illicit markets (Mattina, 2011). The (sub)cultural element of mafia-type groups, instead, focuses on mafias' anthropological dimensions made of rituals, symbols and codes of affiliation, language shared and used among members, practices shared and tolerated by local communities, and the value given to those practices and other social structures, such as family, church or school (Schneider and Schneider, 2005).

Antimafia prosecutors refer to the 'ndrangheta – the collective name given to mafia clans in the Calabrian region at the toe of Italy – as the most powerful mafia Italian mafia also abroad (Sergi and Lavorgna, 2016; DNA, 2016). Most of today's literature on the 'ndrangheta classifies this mafia as truly global and transnational. However, this paper looks at the local dimension of the Calabrian mafia, at mafia *behaviours* in Calabria, at the intersection between mafia and Calabrian culture and most of all at the way mafia behaviours and culture are transmitted and learned in mafia families in Calabria. This study advances knowledge on the 'ndrangheta at the local level in times when the focus of literature is mainly on the criminal markets of this mafia-type group and on its international presence. The final aim of this paper is to support a cultural view in the study of mafia-type criminality starting from an analysis of behaviours in mafia families.

This paper will analyse 18 proceedings from the Youth Tribunal (hereinafter the Tribunal) and the Antimafia District Directorate (DDA) in the capital city of Reggio Calabria. These are folders with witnesses' statements and interceptions together with orders issued by the Youth Tribunal to separate children from mafia families (families in which one or both parents have been involved in investigations or trials for mafia offences). These proceedings are testimonies of mafia cultural transmission in both individual and societal contexts. Access has been granted by the DDA in Reggio Calabria. Not all cases analysed can be made public as they might be still open, and not all cases, at the moment of access, were final, making it quite difficult to present

numerical findings. The number of cases obtained can be considered representative for a qualitative analysis as there have been no more than 30 cases using the same legal grounds at the time of writing; 18 is the number of cases consulted. All names have been changed for privacy reasons when examples have been extrapolated as particularly representative for the analysis.

This study will first present theoretical considerations relevant to discuss 'ndrangheta families and children from a perspective more linked to mafia studies rather than youth crime; second, it will present a selection of representative materials from the cases consulted to bring forward the analysis of cultural transmission.

### **The 'ndrangheta in Calabria: mafia behaviour and Calabrian culture**

The 'ndrangheta has been classified as "mafia", for the purposes of article 416-bis of the Penal Code only in 2010<sup>1</sup>, even though its origins are much older and date back at least to the unification of Italy in 1861 (Ciconte, 2011). The Calabrian mafia today is object of very current debate, with contemporary scholarly work on the structure of the clans (Sergi and Lavorgna, 2016), its criminal activities, especially drugs, in Italy and abroad (Calderoni, 2012; Calderoni and Caneppele, 2009; Lavorgna, 2015a; Lavorgna, 2015b) and its movements and expansion worldwide (Calderoni et al., 2015; Varese, 2011; Sciarrone and Storti, 2014; Sergi, 2015a). The 'ndrangheta is fundamentally the new threat associated to Italian mafias worldwide. Here we are concerned with the micro-level analysis of Calabria. The local focus is even more justified because of the increasing global attention to the 'ndrangheta considering the risks of removing the phenomenon from its social context associated to the transnationalisation of the threat (Edwards and Gill, 2002). Any criminal phenomenon, including mafias, is, at the end of the day, made of individuals and social interactions at the local level.

At the micro-level, in Calabria, the term 'ndrangheta means two different things. First, the 'ndrangheta is a criminal organisation rooted in the city and hinterland of the capital city Reggio Calabria (Sergi, 2015b). Operation Crimine<sup>2</sup> in 2010 has confirmed that the Southern part of Calabria, the 'ndrangheta is dense, made of different clans ('ndrine), organised around alliances of surnames and families by blood or marriage (Pignatone and Prestipino, 2013; Paoli, 2003). In a territory as diverse and fragmented as Calabria (Sergi, 1993), however, we could indeed talk about different 'ndranghete (plural); the other provinces in the Calabrian region, are definitely not free from the mafia behaviour. In all areas of Calabria, the clans share organisational features (such as the family units). These shared features represent the second meaning of the word

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<sup>1</sup> With Law Decree 50/2010

<sup>2</sup> Operation Crimine, No. 1389/08 R.G.R.N DDA, No. 3655/11 R.G. GIP/GUP, No. 106/12 Sentenza

'ndrangheta: a collective indication of a *set of behaviours*, a “way of being” and “doing” mafia in Calabria, which can be referred to as *'ndranghetism* (Sergi and Lavorgna, 2016). Different 'ndrangheta clans have delocalised their activities and their structures abroad. However, no mafia group is detached from their environment; no mafia clan is a separate and marginal entity, but they are *organic* to their communities (Paoli, 2003). Some cultural elements of Calabrian society can, and have been, absorbed into the mafia culture and vice versa. For example, there has always been among Calabrians a recognition of what the *'ndranghetist* behaviour is and how it manifests out of common knowledge (Piselli and Arrighi, 1985). This is very well portrayed, for example, in the verb *'ndranghitijàri*, which in Calabrian dialect means to publicly adopt a cocky behaviour of superiority, typical of a (male) mafia affiliate, who is respected and feared, and who voices a strong disregard for authorities and formal control. This attitude is the *'ndranghetist* behaviour, which everyone in the community – affiliates and non-affiliates – can recognise.

This does not mean that the Calabrian culture is ontologically criminogenic. Being Calabrian does not mean being automatically born into the mafia behaviour. Rather, under a cultural perspective, all Calabrians share (not necessarily agree upon) social and cultural codes and values – what they take to be ‘common sense’ (Christopher et al., 2014). These meanings form ‘webs of significance’ in the way people communicate, do things together, explore and foster relationships with one another, so that it is not necessary to question behaviours all the time, but behaviours, good or bad, are nevertheless recognised a priori by members of the same communities (Geertz, 1973).

For example, Calabrian culture historically places considerable importance on family bonds, in line with a more general tendency of Southern cultures. Kinship, in Calabria, has been historically the foundation of the socio-economic system, acting as both expression of social interactions and as agent of informal social control (Piselli and Arrighi, 1985). Anthropologists have argued that families in certain areas of Calabria are still majorly rooted in a “traditional” world where masculinity and machismo are the rule and where family relationships are still largely hierarchical, with the superior role of the father (Teti, 2015). The typical Calabrian family, especially in secluded areas of the region, still works as an *enclave* where family matters are dealt internally, gender inequalities are not easily discussed, homosexuality is still not easily of public dominion, masculinity is still predominant as gender inequalities are visible instead. It has been argued that, in the name of family, Calabrians can justify most of their social behaviours, from the choice of vacation places to the celebration of weddings in the most sought-after venues (Tarsia, 2015). Mafia families, notwithstanding their criminal nature, are *also* Calabrian families. Not only the 'ndrangheta basic unit is the family (the *'ndrina* that expands through family bonds of marriage and blood), but also matters related to

each *'ndrina* are certainly dealt with through the recognised and uncontested authority of the *pater familias* who often is a mafia boss as well (Paoli, 1994).

Together with the importance of family bonds, Calabrian social systems have been historically based on *clientele*. Especially in the province of Reggio Calabria, *clientele* has been the “dominant type of [social] aggregation, which subsumes all the other types”, including families (Piselli and Arrighi, 1985: 397). In certain areas of the region - because of different local needs and opportunities linked to the demands and the pressures of national and international markets – *clientele* bonds have been reinforced by kinship, thus creating personal networks and reciprocal obligations based both on mutual respect among families and on instrumental *friendships* (Blok, 1988). Even today, the relationship between the local economic dimensions and national or international trades in Calabria is based on a very difficult equilibrium between the principles of market competition at the national and international levels and the customs and traditions of family-*clientele* relationships at the local level (Banca d'Italia, 2015). Through family-*clientele* bonds, mafia families have legitimised themselves and their affairs in order to keep privileges and maintain a static order, which functions as long as it is preserved and transmitted intact (Catanzaro, 1988; Fantozzi, 1990).

### **The youth of the *'ndrangheta*: mafia families and cultural transmission**

There is a parallelism between cultural values of Calabrian society and *'ndranghetist* behaviours. This parallelism relates both to the hermeneutics of culture in Calabria and to the transmission of cultural codes within families. Classical theories of social learning of deviance, such as differential association theory, postulate how not only criminal behaviour is learned through interaction and communication within intimate groups, but also how a person becomes delinquent because he/she receives more definitions in favour of violation of the law than definitions in favour of law-abiding behaviours (Sutherland, 1947). Additionally, groups engage with the environment and interact among each other, to share and learn cultures of delinquency (Cloward and Ohlin, 1960). This is true also for mafia behaviours, which can be taught and learned. According to Schermi (2015), the mafia's *pedagogy* is characterised by an authoritative dogmatic mentality and the awareness that only what is near and close is of most value. Mafia culture is based on an order and on a system of values, which can and is transmitted in what Schermi (2015: 257) calls a “*black pedagogy*”, a reversed form of education.

In studies of mafia families, cultural transmission has often been linked to the figure of mothers and therefore, more generally, to studies on the roles of women. In *'ndrangheta* families some (deserving) women have a recognised role as “*sorelle d'omertà*” (sister of *omertà*), which, according to some authors (Ciconte, 2015) is a recognition of the substantial power of certain women in certain families. In all mafia families the prominent role is the one of the father both for running the family as well as

the (mafia) family business (Mastrobuoni and Patacchini, 2010). As demonstrated by Ingrasci (2007: 51) in her analysis of interviews with 'ndrangheta women, all mafia mothers are educators: they educate to revenge, they "*instil*" – "*inculcate*" – mafia values (such as the code of silence to protect family members), they are responsible for "*the act of rooting a set of values that later become normality and as such help the children to carry out criminal activities*". It does not surprise that there have been cases of mothers in sheer adoration of their first-born sons; they will become potential leaders of the clan (Siebert, 2007) in perfect parallelism with the primary role of the first born in traditional Calabrian families (Piselli and Arrighi, 1985). In any case, mothers, whether or not they are willingly or unwillingly supporting the family's criminal activities, are always protective of their children (Ingrasci, 2011; Dino, 2007). This means teaching them how to *behave* in a mafia family to avoid conflicts with other family members; what is *expected* of them; how to cultivate their *philotimia*<sup>3</sup>; what are the rules of a "career" within the mafia family.

Children's behaviours, especially males', in 'ndrangheta families have not been object of specialist scholarly enquiry. However, as reminded by Mastrobuoni and Patacchini (2010: 5) in mafia families "*children might be important, both because of strategic endogamy, and because male descendants represent trusted potential associates*". In 'ndrangheta families influence and trust are established and preserved throughout family bonds; family surnames are already an indication of the family status among other families. Both sons and daughters, therefore, play a role in preserving the family's surname and its influence (Pignatone and Prestipino, 2013). Even though this study is situated primarily within mafia and organised crime studies, the links with scholarly literature, which looks at delinquent sons and daughters of delinquent parents and has investigated to what extent "delinquency runs in the family" (Wilson, 1987; Farrington et al., 1975) is obvious. In particular, this research has considered studies investigating the centrality of incarcerated fathers when predicting delinquency in children, as well as the weight of "*intergenerational continuities in exposure to multiple risks*" of delinquency in children (Farrington et al., 2001: 593).

When it comes to potentially deviant children of delinquent families, protection has often been a core concern for law enforcement in Calabria. For example, the need to protect the children during mafia feuds - a constant of Calabrian history for over two decades (1960-1990) - has reached alarming levels of concerns for the authorities (Ingrasci, 2007; Dino, 2007), while becoming an issue of public safety. Scholars have noticed how "*in some towns in Calabria marked by bloody feuds during the 1970s and*

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<sup>3</sup> *Philotimia* is the love of honour. As a concept, it dominated the matrix of values in the Greco-Roman world. In particular the males of a society are tasked with obtaining, maintaining and sustaining the honour of their families and their families' name by doing what is expected of him, by having *philotimia*.

1980s, the entire civil context is compromised” and this “carries lasting consequences for new generations” (Siebert, 2007: 29). In 1975 in the so-called “Strage di Pasquetta” (Easter Monday Murders) in Cittanova (a small village near Reggio Calabria), for the first time during a mafia feud, two children, aged 11 and 8, were killed. The Youth Tribunal in Reggio Calabria ordered, also for the first time, to “send away” the children for their own protection in order to preserve them from a certain mafia life (Sergi, 1991a; Sergi, 1991b).

While it is arguably easier to understand past dynamics, it is more difficult to have a clear picture of today’s methods of reinforcement and transmission of mafia values and tradition especially considering how the ‘ndrangheta is today mainly associated to the most creative and successful criminal activities around the globe (Sergi and Lavorgna, 2016). Indeed, the questions of what constitutes a mafia (sub)culture today and how this culture is transmitted remain central to understand both the local and the global dimensions of the Calabrian mafia.

### **Revoking *Patria Potestas* in mafia families**

Italian legislation has a number of ways to allow the separation of a minor from his/her “inadequate” parents, when they do not meet the legal requirements for an appropriate education. The duties and the powers to educate and support children’s welfare, both personally and financially, are protected by the Constitution (article 30) in line with international charts for children protection and civil law provisions. In various occasions courts have used article 34 of the Italian Penal Code (loss/withdrawal of parental authority) as ancillary punishment to a conviction sentence. These procedures are meant as additional punishment for the parent rather than protection measure for the child (Todini, 2015).

The proceedings used in this study are based on articles 330 and 333 of the Civil Code, family law. Article 330 provides for the separation of the child from home with subsequent loss of parental authority in cases of gross negligence. Article 333, more interestingly, allows a unilateral decision (*inaudita altera parte*) by the Tribunal to separate the child from his/her home and parents when the parents’ conducts and the family context are prejudicial to the child’s education and wellbeing. The justification for this provision is based on judgements of the child’s delinquent behaviour and risky conducts as well as gross negligence of the parents. On the 21 of March 2015 a judicial protocol was circulated among both juvenile and adult courts in the Reggio Calabria district to resolve competence issues and facilitate the sharing of information in cases involving children of individuals investigated/charged by the District Antimafia Directorate in Reggio Calabria. This protocol validates already existing practices and recognises how Antimafia operations often involve children, either committing

delinquent acts or in supporting roles to the adults in the family: this calls for combined efforts from Antimafia authorities and youth courts.

First and foremost, the stated purpose of the Youth Tribunal is to protect the children. To reach this objective, the Tribunal seeks to connect delinquency risks of children to the negligence of their parents as educators. Furthermore, interceptions and statements from both parents and children offer an insight on the actual cultural transmission and perpetuation of mafia values.

In general, from the analysis of the proceedings we can note the following:

- I. In all cases the figure of the father represents the main concern: the *patria potestas* is always revoked to the father figure when he is a known mafia member or under indictment/charge for mafia-related crimes;
- II. Mothers are often given “second chances”; there is reluctance to revoke also the mother’s *potestas* even when they are under indictment/charge for mafia-related crimes;
- III. There is a gender issue: male children always seem to respect the stereotyped masculine behaviour expected of them in mafia environments, while female children are either eager to escape their destiny or victimised.

In brief, the cases suggest that the idiomatic expression “like father like son” is at the basis of the judgement of the Tribunal, whereas things get more complicated and nuanced with mothers and daughters.

### **The cases**

There is in the Tribunal’s discourse a very clear *prejudice*, in the literal meaning of unfavourable judgement formed beforehand. This prejudice relates to the knowledge of the local culture and the framing of mafias behaviours within this culture. The Tribunal’s discourse shows that “meanings” and “judgements” are indeed shared by the authorities of the same territory and relate to conceptualisations of what is mafia culture and how it is manifested, nourished and transmitted in the local context.

These proceedings also need to be critically scrutinised from a children protection perspective. The interface between criminal justice and child welfare - what Harris and Webb (1987: 7) famously referred to as “*the meeting place of two otherwise separate worlds*” - leads scholars to question the (il)legitimacy and practical effects (often iatrogenic) of relying on judicial intervention as a form of ‘child saving’ (Muncie and Goldson, 2012). For example, it is recognised that relying on civil legislation to address criminal transgressions (and/or vice versa) is deeply problematic both ethically and practically when it comes to children (Ahrens, 2000). In the US, studies have discussed the increased risks of children from the care system crossing over to the criminal justice one (Krinsky, 2010). In the UK the imposition of ‘care orders’ and the removal of children from their families in criminal (juvenile/youth justice) proceedings have long been debated and contested (Dingwall et al., 2014; Harding, 2014). In general,

in many jurisdictions the complex and contested nature of removing children from families on preventive grounds is well established and criticises the objectification of children in order to accuse parents (Featherstone et al., 2014). Whilst such complexities from a social work and youth justice perspectives form the backdrop of this paper, they go beyond its initial (and still preliminary) purpose.

There are three main angles to the Tribunal's discourse, which we can use for an analysis of mafia culture and its transmission within the legal requirements of the proceedings at hand and with all the *caveats* for the risks associated to such type of proceedings:

1. *The behaviours of fathers, mothers and children.* This relates to the condition of the family and the child/children (for example, whether or not the parents are in detention or have been convicted and whether or not the child has committed acts of delinquency or has shown any risk of deviance).
2. *The content of the transmitted mafia culture.* This relates to the actual sharing/transmitting of mafia behaviours within the family.
3. *Outcome and best options for the child.* This obviously includes the revocation of the *patria potestas* but also the separation of the child from his/her family, education programs, moving out of the region, foster care and health/psychological support.

#### *Fathers, mothers and children*

The Tribunal specifies in one of the cases<sup>4</sup> how the conducts of both parents “are not only relevant for criminal law, but they represent a clear disparagement of the most elementary rules of education and assistance of a minor, as well as being concrete violations of the duties imposed onto parents by the law”. In the Tribunal's judgements, the “successful” transmission of mafia culture is always linked to the figure of the father, his influence and his prestige in the family clan and in the local and global contexts. This is why the proceedings always result in the separation of children from their father. The role of mothers, instead, is often safeguarded in recognition of the different roles and behaviours of women in mafia families and in light of the recognised weight of the bond between mothers and their offspring. Even when the mother loses the *patria potestas* of the child, she is always allowed to keep some type of contact with him/her, she is given a chance of “redemption” as a mother. Notwithstanding this different mindset towards mothers and fathers, things are not so clear-cut. The Tribunal needs to operate a separate judgement on each parent for each case, as well as considering the influence of other members of the family on the education of children.

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<sup>4</sup> Tribunale per i Minorenni di Reggio Calabria, Proc. No. 2/2012

Let us look at these judgements in action through the work of the Tribunal. In the case of Dario (13)<sup>5</sup>, both his parents have been arrested and charged for drugs and arms possession<sup>6</sup>. His father is a man of *“awful moral and civil reputation (...) clearly impermeable to any attempt to rehabilitation and unable of critical revision of his own actions”*. His mother is *“similarly incapable of containing her son and his repeated manifestations of irregular conduct, which she minimises”*. The Tribunal believes that the parents’ behaviours are prejudicial to the minor and amount to abuse against him as they *“induce him to commit offences”*. In fact Dario is aggressive to schoolmates, threatens teachers, vandalises school’s property, leaves school unauthorised, uses vulgar and offensive language towards school’s staff, roams daily in the streets of the village, he is even cruel towards animals (*“he threw a small dog from the outside balcony of the main church, six metre tall”*). These behaviours for the Tribunal are clearly linked to poor parental supervision and therefore connected to inadequate education. Dario’s father also sent a letter threatening revenge on the prosecutors and the judges, where we can read: *“my life has been spent in jail, so I don’t have any concern about consequences, but we all have children...my ruin can be paired with someone else’s ruin”*. He also sent a letter to Dario promising that *“we will see who this judge is and I swear to you that you will be home soon, whatever it takes”*. This is quite telling of mafia behaviour that Dario’s father teaches his son: a behaviour typically against the authority, blaming the authorities for the “persecution” against the family, twisting the meaning of justice and promising revenge. Dario’s mother, instead, *“does not show any hostility towards the actions taken by the Tribunal, which [...] makes us hope for her undertaking of a path of self-critique”*. Non-hostility is already a good enough reason to re-evaluate the mother’s behaviour and distance it from the father’s.

The separate judgement on parents happens also when there is no sign of delinquency of children. Gino and Rita are brother and sister aged only 1 and 2 years old when the Tribunal first deals with their case<sup>7</sup>. Their father is one of the most well-known bosses of the city of Reggio Calabria, convicted for various serious crimes including mafia offences; he is also a fugitive. In this peculiar case, the Tribunal assesses the *“actual, concrete danger that the father’s personality – characterised by the crimes committed – can determine the absorption of a mafia culture”* in the future. The Tribunal has the difficult task to evaluate how much the father’s criminal past and his reputation could *“facilitate the subjection of the children to the logics of preservation and predominance of mafia power or, more simply, the negative homologation to deviant cultural models, against the rules of the social contract”*. In this scenario, the role of the children’s mother is crucial. Not only she never participated

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<sup>5</sup> Tribunale per i minorenni di Reggio Calabria, procedimento n. 212/14 R.G. Vol. Giur. N.907

<sup>6</sup> Proc. N. 6363/13 DDA Reggio Calabria

<sup>7</sup> Tribunale per i Minorenni di Reggio Calabria, Proc. No. 58/2008, vol. giur. 786

to criminal activities, but also her family of origin was never historically involved in any mafia activities. Thus, while the children's mother and her family have been solely responsible for the education and the upbringing of the children, by revoking the *patria potestas* to the father, the Tribunal acts towards "*a guarantee that the children in the future will not be subjected to the father's influence and his deviant cultural models*". Basically, the engagement of a father in mafia business is sufficient to consider him unfit for his roles as educator, also when he has never been around at all. As further specified by the Tribunal in another similar case involving very young children and a father on the run<sup>8</sup>: "*the attitude of the man, his disregard for justice even after conviction, and his fleeing away, is clearly a selfish act to avoid custody and as such has essentially amounted to his absence as a father; this attitude has had serious repercussions for the children and needs to be punished with the loss of paternity rights*". The echo of studies on the delinquency, the incarceration and the absence of fathers as predicting factors for the delinquency of children is noteworthy (Porter and King, 2014; Farrington et al., 2001).

The case of Lara (13) and Aldo (14)<sup>9</sup>, who also are brother and sister, is a very good case to exemplify gender differences in children of mafia families. In this case, both parents are in prison following Antimafia Operation "Cosa Mia"<sup>10</sup>, which has essentially dismantled one of the most prolific clans in the Reggio Calabria's hinterland. The father is one of the bosses of the clan. Aldo has also been charged for mafia association, as a minor; he will face trial. Lara too is formally under investigation<sup>11</sup> for her role in concealing sums of money, proceeds of extortion, on behalf of her parents. As predicted in youth crime literature, the incarceration of both parents has different consequences for the life courses of their son and daughter (Bijleveldt et al., 2016). By looking at her involvement in illegal activities, albeit of minor importance, the Tribunal, however, focuses Lara's condition of *subjection* to the family clan. Lara has firmly declared to the prosecutors how she considers herself "*alien to the family's activities*" and she has repeatedly tried to "*stay away from the extortion racket as it is not interesting*". Notwithstanding her declared distance from her family and her "*hope to leave Calabria in the future*", the Tribunal produces evidence that the risk of deviance for Lara is actually very high. Lara, in fact, appears terrified by the possibility of retaliation. She declares: "*I shouldn't have talked. They will make me pay for it*". Moreover, the family has "*a crucial position in the organised crime scenario of the town of reference, no-one can effectively provide for her*". Differently from his sister,

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<sup>8</sup> Tribunale per i Minorenni di Reggio Calabria, Proc. No. 8/2008

<sup>9</sup> Tribunale per i Minorenni di Reggio Calabria, Proc. No. 335/10 R.G. Vol. giur. No. 2100

<sup>10</sup> Operazione Cosa Mia 1 & 2, No 4508/06 R.G.N.R.-D.D.A.; No. 107/09 O.C.C.; No. 1/10/O.C.C., Reggio Calabria.

<sup>11</sup> Proc. No. 262/2013 R.G.N.R. Reggio Calabria

Aldo shows “*delinquent behaviour, by conducting a very chaotic life, avoiding any form of care and dismissing any form of education, by engaging in confrontational and at times aggressive conducts, by cultivating unhealthy friendships, by asking for money without reason, by coming home late at night without calling home*”. An interception of one of Aldo’s aunt, also charged with mafia association, reveals how she is “*certain that Aldo will give great satisfaction to the family*”<sup>12</sup>. The Tribunal fears the “*negative radicalisation of damaging life choices*”, made it worse by the family’s overall “*logic of usurpation and social parasitism that have certainly and diffusely conditioned and limited him, also by promoting emulation to engage in certain activities*”.

The interventions of the Tribunal also touch upon other family members beyond the parents. This is undeniably linked to the recognised value of the extended family life in Calabria together with the *prejudices* on the context these families are part of. It is emblematic for example the case of a woman, Norma, who had left her three children with her own parents upon entering a witness protection program<sup>13</sup>. Because of her decision to cooperate with the authorities, the family disowned her and brought her to commit suicide. The Youth Tribunal judges the grandparents unfit to educate Norma’s son and the two daughters. In fact, not only they had used the children to allure Norma back into the house, but they also had made it clear to the children how the mother was a traitor of the family honour and could not be forgiven for what she had done - turning evidence to the prosecutors. The Tribunal finds how the grandmother had actively “*used the children as commodity*” to trick her daughter to come back. Her position towards her daughter is fundamentally rooted in mafia culture while she says to Norma “*you are confused because of them [the prosecutors] and because you are in love [with another man other than her husband]. Come home, we will fix this, she [the youngest daughter] is confused as well by all this*”.

#### *Transmitted mafia culture*

The peculiarity of mafia crimes lies with the roots of mafias as social phenomena, their links with territories and their conceptualisation as a set of recognised and shared behaviours within a given culture. The starting point for the Youth Tribunal when addressing the best way to protect children in mafia families, is the consideration that mafia behaviours are indeed peculiar to the territory of Calabria. Says the Tribunal<sup>14</sup>: “*the cultural model based on the values and rules of mafia associations permeates significant parts of this territory. It generates deviant models of behaviours*

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<sup>12</sup> Operazione Cosa Mia 1 & 2, No 4508/06 R.G.N.R.-D.D.A.; No. 2815/07/ R.G.I.P. D.D.A.; No. 107/09 O.C.C.; No. 1/10/O.C.C., Reggio Calabria, page 585

<sup>13</sup> Operazione Onda 2, Proc. no. 3469/11 R.G.N.R + Proc. no. 1959/11 R.G. G.I.P., Tribunale di Palmi (Reggio Calabria)

<sup>14</sup> Tribunale per i Minorenni di Reggio Calabria, Proc. No. 58/2008, vol. giur. 786

*because mafia associations are based on usurpation and practices of violence and intimidation; they can even sacrifice the highest value of life*". In a mafia family children *normalise* mafia values and behaviours when committing crimes at very young ages or when they see others committing crimes. Children acquire mafia behaviours and values and justify their actions through family endorsements.

A 16-year-old boy<sup>15</sup> is speaking to his father (in prison) about the suicide of his mother. He considers: *"granddad was certainly acting jealous and aggressive...and certainly it was also the Carabinieri's [local police force] fault, but mostly it was his fault"*. But then he adds, talking to his father directly: *"first you do things and want me to hide them, then you ask me why didn't I say anything! [...] What can I say against him [the granddad] anyway? He takes care of me! And what happened just happened...she [mum] wanted to kill herself, she did it on her own. And now they [the authorities] say it's on us? They want to make it look like it's on us."* The minor, very worried, asks his father: *"Will the newspapers say that she cooperated? That she became a "pentita"? Did she go to the police?"*. And his father replies: *"Yes, they use what they want...you know the judges...there are two arsehole judges who have documents about your mother. Let it be anyway, nothing she said it's true"*. The 16-year-old boy, even when questioning whether his mother's suicide might have been caused by any behaviour in the family, still justifies the rest of the family, blames his mother, disrespects the work of the authorities - as the authorities are always portrayed as the "enemies" by all mafia fathers - and essentially worries about what his mother might have said to the police, perceiving this as a shame on the family as a whole.

Similarly, Dario<sup>16</sup>'s engagement with his father's business – the boy was observed helping his father hiding guns and other weapons – was perceived by Dario as a father-son activity, something that was part of *"time shared with his father, part of their special relationship"*. While obviously the father-son relationship is always crucial for a child's upbringing, the content of this relationship is used to teach and commit criminal behaviour.

Mafia behaviours are endemic to certain environments, at the point of becoming accepted and recognised part of the cultural setting. In other words, as the cultural codes of Calabrian mafia families are "twisted", deviant and criminal versions of non-mafia (but still Calabrian) families' values, it becomes very difficult to understand what comes first (the local culture and its own corruption) and how to differentiate one from the other. Further research on which values and behaviours within the Calabrian culture can be or have been twisted into mafia values and behaviours is necessary to avoid untrue judgements over the whole Calabrian community.

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<sup>15</sup> Operazione Onda 2, Proc. no. 3469/11 R.G.N.R + Proc. no. 1959/11 R.G. G.I.P., Tribunale di Palmi (Reggio Calabria)

<sup>16</sup> Tribunale per i minorenni di Reggio Calabria, procedimento n. 212/14 R.G. Vol. Giur. N.907

A woman (in prison) is talking to a relative during a visit<sup>17</sup>. They are both mothers; they discuss some problems in the family clan linked to complaints from affiliates who were supposed to receive payments and never did. In order to argue how sympathetic she is with these complaints one of the women says: *“You need to understand, they owed them money for Lucia’s dowry! [...] No-one even told Lucia [...] that the money was missing... she protested that she had to ask her fiancée’s family for money!”*. This woman shares the concern and the shame of not having a proper dowry for a daughter’s marriage, which is common in many traditional Calabrian families in the same area, even though the reason why the money is missing and the family is ashamed is because of issues in distributing payments for mafia-related activities. The value is the same – presenting the daughter for marriage with a good dowry, a status symbol - but the mafia culture embraces different means and meanings of this traditional value and this is how it gets transmitted to children.

#### *Outcomes and best options for the child*

The noxious environment of mafia families, which enables children’s delinquency and their education to deviance, is deemed as the most problematic factor in the rehabilitation of these children. The Tribunal in these proceedings, as it was for the Cittanova events in 1975 and the period of the mafia feuds, provides for the children separated by their families to be sent out of the region. Notwithstanding the possibility for mafia culture to spread beyond regional territories of origin (Sciarrone, 2014), and the risks that children might perceive this as a punishment or be emotionally harmed by this (Muncie and Goldson, 2012), sending children to facilities or families to the North or the Centre of Italy is supposed to cut the environmental bond with mafia culture. This measure is indeed drastic but not unusual also among adults and, as the Tribunal puts it<sup>18</sup>, moving the children away from Calabria is necessary so the minors can *“critically revisit the non-values learned in the territorial context of reference and acquire sufficient autonomy and self-esteem [...] far from logics of usurpation and social parasitism”*. Leaving Calabria is not only functional for rehabilitative purposes, but is also another way of protecting the children from repercussion and prolonged unhealthy contacts with their immediate and extended family. In Lara’s case<sup>19</sup> the Tribunal finds that *“this solution appears to be the only feasible one to avoid retaliation, to save the girl from an unavoidable destiny and at the same time to allow her to experience different cultural, emotional, psychological contexts and an alternative way of living*

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<sup>17</sup> Transcription from intercepted conversation at Carcere di Carinola (Carinola prison) 24 July 2007 in Proc. No. 2815/07/ R.G.I.P. D.D.A Reggio Calabria, pages 596-599

<sup>18</sup> Tribunale per i Minorenni di Reggio Calabria, Proc. No. 335/10 R.G. Vol. giur. No. 1589

<sup>19</sup> Tribunale per i Minorenni di Reggio Calabria, Proc. No. 335/10 R.G. Vol. giur. No. 2100

*different from the deleterious one of origin, hoping that she can free herself from parental conditioning”.*

The Tribunal also assigns children to specific education programs particularly aimed at teaching legality and civic duties. While the revocation of the *patria potestas* might be temporary and can be reconsidered in the future, education is a long-term investment for the cultural background of these children. In order to support the educational focus of its provisions, the Tribunal’s discourse is inspired by the New York Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, which entitles every child to grow into a family that educates to principles of legality and civility, human solidarity and dignity as well as protecting the child from risks associated to the lack of such social and civic values. It is necessary when the family is neglecting educational roles and actually exposes the child to delinquency and deviance “*to allow the child to enjoy different educational paths to ensure (s)he has an alternative to what would be a certain future of delinquency*”<sup>20</sup>.

The actual manifestations of a mafia education are, however, not always predictable. Crucial, again, is the role of mothers; the authorities seem very reluctant to cut the mother-son/daughter bond completely and even when deciding to send away the child, they attempt to keep the mother in the picture. Furthermore, not all children absorb the black pedagogy of mafia culture in the same way. The Tribunal recognises how mafia pedagogy and culture are indeed like any other pedagogy and culture when it comes to learning.

When deciding the appropriate protection measures, therefore, the intention of the Tribunal is twofold. On one side there is the need to ensure the physical and psychological wellbeing of the child: the Tribunal allocates psychological and health support to every child and also, in order to minimise the trauma, the authorities attempt to save at least the relationship with the mother. On the other side there is the need to restore social and civic skills through an appropriate education to legality and social values. This, apparently, cannot be done in Calabria and certainly cannot be done immersed in Calabrian culture. It could be argued that because of the shared behaviours and values between the Calabrian culture and the Calabrian mafia the space for action to cut away the deviant behaviours and values is too thin. For example, mafia culture promotes social acceptance and prestige in the community, rather than isolation, and it encourages accumulation of wealth and power in the logic of usurpation of others through the power coming from the acquired social status in the community. This is a value of Calabrian society in itself, a society historically based on social stratification affirmed by prestige and deference (Silverman, 1966). The mafia version of this value allows for wealth, power and prestige to be accumulated through illegal means and

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<sup>20</sup> Tribunale per i minorenni di Reggio Calabria, procedimento n. 212/14 R.G. Vol. Giur. N.1941

deviant behaviours. Mafia behaviours manifest through the *hubris* of individuals and their families and more specifically men and fathers still at the vertex of mafia families. In the work of the Tribunal with children of mafia families in Calabria *'ndranghetist* behaviours of this sort are portrayed to be systematic, deeply rooted, consolidated and recognisable in local culture at the point that they can be assumed and *presumed* (pre-judged) by the authorities who know the context and work in the territory.

## **Conclusion**

This paper explored the local and cultural dimensions of the *'ndrangheta* in Calabria by looking at the ways the youth courts narrate mafia behaviours as learned and transmitted values to younger generations within mafia families. Given the attention given today to the Calabrian mafia, a local study into its dynamics seemed all the more necessary.

The proceedings analysed in this paper, on one side, demonstrate the intention of the authorities to both punish and prevent mafia behaviours by intervening on the education and the protection of the youth of the *'ndrangheta*. On the other side, these proceedings offer a unique opportunity to re-evaluate how the authorities on these territories portray mafia behaviours as endemic to the local environment, at the point of justifying the separation of children not only from their family but from the region altogether. The qualitative data in the proceedings offer a unique insight into the lives of Calabrian mafia families at the micro level. By looking at the way the transmission of mafia culture is assessed and condemned by authorities in Reggio Calabria, we can see that the authorities look at the *'ndrangheta* as a socially transmitted deviant (sub)culture. The transmission of the *'ndranghetist* culture and its values is not indifferent to the gender of parents as well as the gender of children; further research needs to focus on women's roles as mothers and educators of future male members as well as gender differences in the mafia families.

As previously noticed, the interventions in this paper clash with voluminous literature that suggests how the removal of a child from home – however 'inadequate' that home is deemed to be – is normally experienced by children as punishment rather than protection and a courtesy to their wellbeing. Just as significantly, such uses of power by the courts frequently produce iatrogenic outcomes both in terms of child welfare (causing emotional distress) and juvenile/youth criminality. Indeed, a more sophisticated analysis of the 'power' of the courts (and the one granted to children), the meaning of 'punishment', 'protection' and 'prevention' in child welfare in Calabria and in general for similar cases is required, beyond this paper, to fully evaluate the effects of these provisions on children in the long term. For the purposes of this work, child protection is based on a much more generalised assessment of the systematic presence of mafia values in the environment. Even though the cases are individually assessed by the Tribunal, the issues at stake are never limited to just one case, they form the basis

for a collective (pre)judgement by the court. Mafia behaviours are assessed throughout the knowledge of the territory and the osmotic links among the single family, the territory, and the social context in which the cultivation and the transmission of mafia behaviours takes place. Beyond the arguments on the negative effects of preventative measures in child welfare are the arguments about the distinct nature of mafia behaviours as all-pervading deviant subculture and as object of black pedagogy.

In conclusion, this paper rekindles a discourse on the 'ndrangheta as (also) cultural phenomenon deeply linked to Calabria beyond its nature of global organised crime group engaged in cocaine trafficking and cross-border criminal activities. 'Ndrangheta families are Calabrian families – made of individuals born and bred in Calabria. As such they share Calabrian cultural codes in their everyday life, at the point of being able to manipulate them. As previously said, Calabrian cultural codes are not intrinsically 'ndranghetist, but the 'ndranghetist cultural codes are also Calabrian. Adopting a cultural outlook to mafia behaviours means accepting that individuals who engage in, and subscribe to, mafia criminal activities do so by twisting and transmitting the shared social meanings and practices they know and belong to culturally. These meanings, practices and cultural codes are neutral anthropological categories. Their *exploitation* and the transmission of twisted cultural codes to younger generations are what mafia is in Calabria. The behaviours of mafia clans that we can see in this collection of stories of men, women and children is not detached from the 'ndrangheta clans' large scale global criminal activities that are of interest of scholars and law enforcement around the world today. The strength of mafia culture in Calabria and the way it is transmitted are, indeed, the strongest possible springboard for the clans' prosperity, the networks' influence and their criminal reach around the world.

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