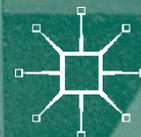


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‘NDRANGHETA

The Glocal Dimensions
of the Most Powerful
Italian Mafia

**Anna Sergi and
Anita Lavorgna**



‘Ndrangheta

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The Glocal Dimensions of the Most Powerful
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Introduction

Abstract The introduction of this book will present the scope of our analysis: the Calabrian region, and the Calabrian mafia, the ‘ndrangheta. It will offer the outline of the book, discuss the choice of the title, and explain the rationale of our choices in terms of structure of the chapters and conceptualisation of the phenomena we are going to describe and analyse. It will also explain our theoretical approach to mafia-type organised crime as behavioural model and justify it by presenting the main approaches to mafias in Italy and the peculiarities of the Calabrian ‘ndrangheta. Finally, the chapter will offer a brief presentation of the geography of the Calabrian region.

Keywords ‘Ndrangheta • Calabrian Mafia • ‘Ndranghetisation • ‘Ndranghetism • Glocalism

In recent years, the mafia from Calabria has been at the centre of judicial interventions all around Italy and beyond. Usually known as the ‘ndrangheta and, historically, also as the Honoured Society, the Calabrian mafia has been the object of media interest and scholarly work, at the point of redefining research and knowledge on (Italian) mafias more generally. Despite its only recent categorisation as a *mafia*, which, under Italian law, occurred only in 2010,¹ this mafia is as old as the Italian state and certainly as old as Sicilian Cosa Nostra, its most well-known relative. The debate on what constitutes a mafia, especially in the Italian context is still ongoing

notwithstanding the longevity of the phenomenon and its literature. The term mafia indicates the prototypical case of criminal structures transcending class divisions and the divide between the illegal and legal (Von Lampe 2008). As argued by Italian scholars, mafia groups are those types of organised crime groups supported by social prestige and accepted and/or tolerated by their own communities; they are also capable of infiltrating legal economy and politics (Sciarrone and Storti 2014; Sciarrone 2014). In particular, Sciarrone (2011) describes mafias as social forces with the power to accumulate and employ social capital; mafias are social structures realising *strategic* goals through different types of resources. These resources are the control of territory, affiliates, social relationships, and intimidation originating from the associative bond, money, and political power (Dalla Chiesa 2010). Individuals having access to such resources can be internal to the mafia group, or external in a populated “grey area” surrounding and strengthening mafia influence (Mete 2011; Ciconte 2013; Dalla Chiesa 2015). Within this framework, the ‘ndrangheta is a mafia-type organisation with roots in Calabria, a region in the extreme south of Italy, at the “toe” of the peninsula but with clear projections and activities outside its birthplace.

The purpose of this book is twofold: first, it is an updated outlook on the various components that today support the attribution to the ‘ndrangheta of the label of “most powerful Italian mafia” by authorities. This primacy is to be found in activities and roles of ‘ndrangheta clans in various criminal markets in Italy and around the world. The second purpose of this work is to dig deeper in the concept of ‘ndrangheta as a mafia-type organised crime group. This requires looking at the structure of the Calabrian clans, their organisational ties, and their movements abroad.

According to recent scholarly work the primacy of the ‘ndrangheta can be linked to various elements: the ‘ndrangheta is more reliable; it has substituted Cosa Nostra when the Sicilian mafia was at the centre of a political and media moral panic; it has a more flexible structure; and it is more present outside Calabria than other Italian mafias. Strategically, politically, financially, internationally, and culturally, the Calabrian mafia has been underestimated for a long time, while instead it was accumulating wealth and power and was settling outside of regional boundaries (Paoli 1994). This book wishes to critically unpack the claimed primacy of the ‘ndrangheta among the Italian mafias by focusing on both the structures of the clans and on the criminal activities that ensure longevity and wealth to the affiliates and their networks.

The perspective under which we develop our analysis rejects the idea of “the ‘ndrangheta” as a monolithic mafia organisation; we understand and explain the ‘ndrangheta as a fragmented phenomenon, without, however, denying the existence of centralised coordination structures among the clans. We also promote a view of the ‘ndrangheta as a *behavioural model*—a set of behaviours, which we could call *‘ndranghetism*—rather than solely a set of criminal activities and organisational features (Sergi 2016a, 2016b). These behaviours are *qualifiers of a mafia behaviour* generally intended (i.e. applicable to other groups with similar characteristics, anywhere in the world), and appreciate mafias as social phenomena combining both cultural and structural elements.

This *behavioural model* encapsulates the ability to manipulate social networks and relationships, more or less linked to family dynamics and certainly entrenched in social structures—in this case, Calabrian ones; it is related to the manipulation of traditions, rituals, and social practices of communication and leadership among Calabrian individuals. This manipulation is secured through shared values and conducts, which do not necessarily amount to criminal conducts (such as family support, marriage among families to cement ties, and ways to behave in the community). The exploitation of shared values and social bonds—through the use of usurpation, arrogance, intimidation, violence, and subjugation—differentiates a *‘ndranghetista* (affiliate of an ‘ndrangheta clan) from the rest of the population. This phenomenon, which is cultural and social, can only prosper thanks to structural factors in society. Both structural weaknesses (such as a weak political class) and structural opportunities (such as the possibility to invest in new business ventures) allow *individuals subscribing and adopting the mafia behaviours* to prosper and further organise in more or less regulated groups with coordination functions as needed.

The successful intersection between cultural and structural elements forms what we name “mafia” also in accordance with the Italian Criminal Code. Article 416-*bis*, in fact, postulates the elements of the “mafia method” defined as the condition of subjugation, intimidation, and *omertà* that originate from the associative bonds existing among affiliates. Furthermore, the conceptualisation of “mafia” at the basis of article 416-*bis* is grounded in the sociological characteristics of the phenomenon: control of territory, interdependence among affiliates, potential use of violence, and organic relationships with politics (Dalla Chiesa 2010: 36). We argue, therefore, that rather than discussing the ‘ndrangheta only as a criminal organisation—running the risk to eliminate subtle but necessary

internal differences among the various manifestations of the phenomenon—it makes more sense to look at what the clans share in terms of their ability to exploit social values, relationships, and opportunities for the benefits of criminal activities. This exploitation occurs through a socially recognised *set of behaviours*, effective for a successful interaction with local communities, which are needed to disguise illegal activities, secure protection from prosecution, as well as to ensure social inclusion. This *behavioural model* becomes criminally relevant because prodromal to or even facilitating the use of violence, usurpation, and intimidation.

In brief this book considers the ‘ndrangheta as a mafia-type *behaviour*, alongside its being a mafia-type *organisation*. On one side, judicial results have recently ascertained a unification of ‘ndrangheta clans, under more or less hierarchical coordination structures in the southern part of Calabria, the hinterland of the capital city, Reggio Calabria. On the other side, the characteristics of this mafia and its links to the particular territory of Calabria contradict the idea of a full-blown total confederation in the whole region. Calabria is a highly fragmented region, culturally, geographically, and demographically. Some of these conditions date back to the unification of Italy and before, and are very visible to a keen eye visiting the area. Not only the distances, the roads, and the natural landscapes change significantly from one area of Calabria to the other, but also political settings, civil society’s traits, and industrialisation processes are quite different across the region. Some of the most eminent historians in the area have often talked about many (plural) *Calabrie* (Cingari 1982; Sergi 1993).

Bearing in mind the plurality paradigm for an analysis of the Calabrian territory, we prefer to approach the ‘ndrangheta as a *plural* and multifaceted phenomenon under the same collective name. Rather than the expansion of the ‘ndrangheta as organisation growing in power, we observe a *‘ndranghetisation* process across Calabria and beyond regional boundaries (Sergi 2016a). This process occurs also with the increasing use of the single word “‘ndrangheta” applied as a brand name to indicate the mafia-type behaviour—*‘ndranghetism*—of criminals and groups with a Calabrian connection. By *‘ndranghetisation* we essentially indicate the process of imitation and osmosis among the clans in Calabria and outside the regional boundaries that allow us to identify similar *‘ndranghetist* behaviours even when there are no signs of formal coordination structures in place among the clans across different territories. Certainly, the clans across the region share similar behaviours and, in the years, have increased their power and

reach in various criminal markets, sign that the brand name works and their reputation is reinforced.

In practical terms, following this perspective means being careful about the language used throughout the book. For example, we tend not to use the singular name ‘ndrangheta, but rather we refer to *‘ndrangheta clans* or *‘ndrine*. Whenever we do use the singular word, we usually refer to general mafia’s presence and/or mafia’s behaviours.

There have also been numerous debates and discussions on the name(s) of the ‘ndrangheta in the first place. It is clear that the origins of the word are Greek (*andranghateia* means “society of men of honour”, and *andrangathō* means “to engage in military actions”)—which is more than plausible in the Calabrian territories that used to be part of the *Magna Graecia*. The use of the word ‘ndrangheta to indicate a criminal phenomenon is also quite dated. As reported by linguistic scholars (Trumper et al. 2014) in the 1920s and 1930s, various documents from local police mention the terms *dranghita*, *entrangheta*, and similar others to indicate bullying and subjugation from certain individuals across the region. However, one thing is the use of the term and the other is the attribution of meaning and the evolution of a concept around that term. The latter needs to be found in Calabrian history rather than in linguistics.

Starting from these conceptualisations and clarifications of our position, this book presents the ‘ndrangheta, as both mafia-type organisation and a mafia-type behavioural model, deeply linked to Calabria and its fragmentation, and highly present outside the local birthplace. Hence, the *glocal* adjective we chose for the title (Hobbs 1998).

We have organised the book in two parts. The first part, Part I, will describe the evolution of the ‘ndrangheta as a social phenomenon in Calabria and the movement of the clans in the rest of Italy and abroad. It will look at the birth of the ‘ndrangheta as social drive of Calabria and particularly at the way the clans gained and still retain an important role within Calabrian economy. Also, this part will specifically consider the migration of the clans and their activities abroad, within paradigms of colonisation and delocalisation, settlement and outsourcing of activities, by critically linking migration of Calabrian individuals and families to the exportation of criminal savoir faire to the rest of Italy and beyond. Part II will look more specifically at the criminal activities of the clans, with a specific focus on the roles of the Calabrian *‘ndrine* in the transnational dimension of the drug trade and money laundering, and with further focus on their investments and interferences with waste disposal, the green economy, the food industry,

and even online gambling. The choice of the two parts is in alignment with Block's famous understanding of New York's criminal organisations as power and enterprise syndicates (Block 1980). Using Block's (1980: 129) conceptualisation, we can describe the 'ndrangheta both as power syndicate—retaining control over the territory—and as enterprise syndicate, as the clans are successful in pursuing a number of illegal activities, both locally and nationally or internationally (Asmundo 2011; Paoli 2003; Ruggiero 1996; Sergi 2015). We argue that the 'ndrangheta is a poly-crime mafia and that the clans originate their strength and increase their criminal reach thanks to well-balanced investments into both power and enterprise capacities (Busso and Storti 2011); they are both sociopolitical actors and successful criminal entrepreneurs (Sciarrone 2011).

Our analysis is based on the judicial work of offices of the District Antimafia Directorates (DDA). As qualitative social scientists, we do not wish to simply take the words of law enforcement as indisputable truth; indeed, when actually looking at the judicial documents of the various operations—including interceptions and witnesses' declarations—the picture is complex and in need of interpretation. In order to understand the evolution and the growth of the 'ndrangheta, it is necessary to remember that it is also thanks to the *static* elements of the region—as we will see, its geographical fragmentation, its political weaknesses, and its economic underdevelopment—that the clans have developed into the *dynamic* forces that they are today. Finally, the book's twofold focus, on structures and activities, reflects our underlying conceptualisation of the 'ndrangheta as a set of behaviours (*'ndranghetism*) spreading thanks to a *'ndranghetisation* process as previously defined.

Before leaving the readers to the rest of the book, it is necessary to present a map of the Calabrian region, which should serve as a reference for the geographical mentions made throughout the book (Fig. 1.1).

In this map, the dividing lines highlight the main areas of interest for our analysis. South, opposite of Sicily, is Reggio Calabria, capital of the region and very contested area for the birth, the evolution, and the coordination of many 'ndrangheta clans. Above the city of Reggio is the Aspromonte mountain, a protected natural area near San Luca, which, in the years, has assumed crucial importance geographically and symbolically for the clans: the Aspromonte divides the clans in the east of the city of Reggio Calabria from those in the west of the city. Generally speaking, any reference to the 'ndrangheta as a monolithic criminal organisation *de facto* refers to the organisation of those clans in the area around Reggio Calabria, in the map.



Fig. 1.1 Map of Calabria. Source of map: d-maps.com

In the middle of the region, around the city of Vibo Valentia, is the area of the port of Gioia Tauro, crucial for the drug trade, as we will see. Clans from the areas of Catanzaro, Crotona, and Cosenza are usually referred to as more chaotic and less organised than those of Reggio Calabria, but their expansion beyond the regional boundaries often confirms their reach into criminal markets as well as their changing organisational structure.

NOTE

1. With the word “ndrangheta” added to the offence of mafia membership in article 416-*bis* of the Italian Criminal Code (law decree converted with changes from Law No. 50, 31 March 2010, in *Gazzetta Ufficiale* 03.04.2010, No.78).

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PART I

Structures and Governance

Calabria and the ‘Ndrangheta

Abstract As qualified minority of Calabrian society, the ‘ndrangheta is today a mafia-type criminal system, supported by social prestige and embedded in society. As any other mafia, the clans of the ‘ndrangheta have growth in parallel to the evolution of their region. This chapter will look at the historical evolution of the clans and their relationships with the rest of the Calabrian society. The ‘ndrangheta clans share characteristics of other mafia-type organised crime groups whose power is enforced through violence and through the exploitation of cultural codes and social relationships in Calabria.

Keywords Calabria • Southern Italy • Underdevelopment • Mafia Evolution • Mafia–Politics Nexus

INTRODUCTION

Summarising the origins and the growth of the ‘ndrangheta clans in Calabria, also known as *‘ndrine*, is very complex. Firstly, we cannot separate the birth and development of the mafia phenomenon from the historical evolution of Calabria. Secondly, the identification of sociological factors, which, in Calabria, have contributed to the contemporary situation of the clans, is, in retrospective, not an easy task. While, on the one hand, the Calabrian region is an example of underdevelopment in Italy,

on the other hand, the clans have prospered also thanks to the changes of Calabrian society, both financial and political. What we call ‘ndrangheta, the Calabrian mafia, exhibits the traits of any mafia-type organisation and some structural peculiarities linked to the territory (Sciarrone 2009). This chapter will select some events in Calabrian history, to identify how and why the evolution of the mafia clans is symbiotically linked to Calabrian society. For the ‘ndrangheta clans everything starts where it ends, in Calabria. An investigation of the complex and composite identity of the clans in their birthplace is essential to fully see the various faces of this mafia today, also outside Calabria.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE EVOLUTION OF THE ‘NDRANGHETA IN CALABRIA

Corrado Alvaro, an Italian writer born in San Luca, in the Aspromonte mountain, wrote in an article in the national newspaper *Il Corriere della Sera* on the 17 September 1955 (Cingari 1982: 367):

The Fibbia, the ‘ndrina, the ‘ndranghita, the Honoured Society, basically the mafia, I have known since I can remember. In my meetings in Calabria, I have always been interested in noticing those attitudes, those behaviours, those particular hairstyles or clothes that might characterise a member of the Honoured Society. Far from assuming brutal appearances, they acted like distinguished *parvenu*. Strong through violence, they had social status. Despised in the past, they became feared. When a society has very few or no occasions to change its *status quo*, to be feared is a way to emerge. This is not a simple policing issue; it is not even useful to blame the whole province. The norm for a serious action could be found through an exam of how the governing class has acted in the past 50 years. This is not all, but it is a starting point.

Even though these affirmations date back to 1955, they still are quite relevant today. Indeed, the evolution of the clans and their affiliates, their behaviours within and outside Calabria and specifically certain areas of Calabria, is tightly linked to the destiny endured by the region as a whole, in its political, financial, and social settings.

The origins of what today we call ‘ndrangheta are legendary and linked to the myth of three Spanish knights—Osso, Mastrosso, and Carcagnosso—who funded the Honoured Society in the fifteenth century, together with the other Italian mafias, on the model of the “Honoured Society of the Garduna in Toledo” (Ciconte 2011; Sergi 1991; Casaburi

2010). The birth of the Calabrian mafia is usually placed before or during the unification of Italy in 1861. It is not only a Calabrian discourse that links the phenomenon of mafia with the dissolution of the feudal system but also the introduction of capitalism in the rural areas of the south of Italy. Calabrian anthropologist Lombardi Satriani has been among the firsts to discuss the link between capitalism, underdevelopment, and mafias. More specifically, Lombardi Satriani maintains that the “peculiar socio-historical concretisation, which we call mafia” is a product of a “dependent capitalism” that the Italian State has fostered in the south of Italy, and especially in Calabria since the unification of Italy. This is paired with the absence of other private forms of entrepreneurship and with the presence of a subculture based on certain family and social values (Pitaro 1996: 50).

Until 1960s, historians and journalists (Cingari 1982; Malafarina 1981a) describe clans, especially in the Aspromonte mountain near Reggio Calabria, as a mix of bandits and aggregations of “men of honour”. The Chief of Police Marzano was sent by the Ministry of Interior to eradicate the mafia from the territory in the mid-1950s (Malafarina 1981b), showing that the problem was already known, even though not fully understood. Since the 1960s, however, there have been a number of events that have profoundly affected the Calabrian region and also its mafia clans. If we had to choose among the relevant factors that in the history of Calabria have been significant for the evolution of the ‘ndrangheta clans we need to highlight the following:

- The extensive migration from the region, especially in the aftermath of the Second World War;
- The political turmoil surrounding the birth of the regional entity;
- The failures of industrialisation in the region.

As for the first point, the next two chapters of this book will specifically deal with the relationships between ‘ndrangheta clans and Calabrian migration. In general, the ability of the clans to exploit the links with Calabrian migrants settled outside the region has been facilitated and strengthened by the very tight family bonds forming Calabrian society, as also described later in this chapter.

As for the second point, the events surrounding the establishment of the Calabrian region as a state entity in 1970 had created different types of political tensions in the region, which culminated between July 1970 and

February 1971 in the so-called Moti di Reggio, riots in Reggio Calabria. The riots eventually ended, after the involvement of the army, when it was decided for the city of Catanzaro to be the executive capital city and Reggio Calabria to be the administrative one: this fragmentation of political power still characterises the region. Behind the riots in Reggio were very deep social problems linked to the area around the city (D'Agostini 1972), such as the profound divide between demographic dimensions and fragility of production activities, the frustration for the general situation and the lack of identity of the city of Reggio due to its vicinity to Sicily, and the perceived distance from other areas of Calabria (Cingari 1982; Ciconte 1992). In those years, all the difficulties of a city that kept enlarging but was struggling to grow in terms of services and opportunities made social exclusion even more a characteristic of the extreme south of the region.

This is obviously linked to the third point, the failure of a process of industrialisation, always promised and never realised. There are a few too many examples of failed projects in Calabria between the 1960s and the 1980s. Probably the most well known is the “Pacchetto Colombo”, a series of investment plans which were meant to boost the economy of the region (Coscarelli 1992). Among these plans were the expansion of the motorway A3 started in 1964 between the neighbouring regions Campania and Basilicata, connecting Salerno (in the Campania region) and Reggio Calabria, and the construction of the port of Gioia Tauro. The port was only finished at the beginning of the 1990s, while the Salerno–Reggio motorway in 2016 is still awaiting completion, becoming one of the most shameful delays in Italian economy (Sergi and South 2016). Other plans—mainly linked to chemical, iron, and steel industrial centres—failed miserably too; today their ruins look like an industrial graveyard of desolation across the region.

Calabria has always swung between potential for development and underdevelopment. Since the Second World War, it has represented “*the negative paradigm of the inhomogeneous development of the country*” (Sergi 2013: 136). On one side the potential for development, when accompanied by injections of public funds, has been hijacked by a network of well-connected families, tied by blood and by favour exchanges. On the other side, underdevelopment and the stagnation of economy—due to difficult political choices in the tremendously fractured realities of the region—fed into the preservation of a mafia-type social structure, which praises usurpation and violence for social and economic promotion.

CAPITAL ACCUMULATION BETWEEN VIOLENCE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Some of the considerations made in the previous paragraphs already give us an idea of the extremely complex scenario in which the mafia prospered in Calabria. Certainly, when entering the classic debate in organised crime studies between culturalism and structuralism, Calabria represents a challenging case for both perspectives. It fits both. On one side, the 'ndrangheta is entrenched in its culture. It is undoubtedly Calabrian. This does not mean that it is *only* Calabrian, but the way members of the 'ndrangheta behave among each others, the value of the family bonds, the importance of social prestige in small villages of Calabria, the words they are caught using in the interceptions, the rural geography, and the scars of a very complex past are also culturally relevant indicators of Calabrian society (Teti 2015). However, if the cultural elements might have supported the preservation, they do not explain neither the birth nor the evolution of the 'ndrangheta as a criminal behaviour. These are rooted in the structural weaknesses of Calabrian economy and politics (Paoli 2003). As maintained by Granovetter (1973: 1377) when looking at ties in social networks, “*the personal experience of individuals is closely bound up with larger-scale aspects of social structure*”; it would be impossible to understand how the clans work at the micro level without looking at the macro level they are embedded in.

Within the socio-economic scenario briefly described above, we need to investigate the way mafia power grew. How did the 'ndrangheta—as a mafia organisation and subsequently as *a behavioural model* and *brand*—evolve in a territory like the Calabrian region at the dawn of the 1900? The answer lies in the accumulation of money and in an increasing ability to govern the territory of certain families and individuals later organised in small criminal structures. The financial wealth of the clans came from both legal and illegal sources in the form of a preliminary capital accumulation (Dalla Chiesa 2010). First, men affiliated to 'ndrangheta clans operated a strategic infiltration and participation in the entrepreneurial soul of the region since the 1970s; second, impressive amount of money was stored during the kidnapping season throughout the 1980s.

As seen above, the injection of public funds in Calabria since the 1970s has been an occasion for the clans to infiltrate the economy while building on their public profiles. Antimafia investigations have proved mafia infiltration in public funds and projects as important as the port of Gioia

Tauro and the A3 Salerno–Reggio Calabria motorway (Mete 2011a). Specifically, but not only, Operation Porto¹ and Operation Arca² have demonstrated how the clans had created a consortium to buy out contractors and subcontractors in the building of the port and the motorway. We read in Operation Arca³ about a proper *system*:

The agreement among the clans and between the clans and the contractors (usually a company outside Calabria) had already been established before the work started by planning operational directives. Each clan had control of the portion of motorway in its own territory, supervised by the stronger clans in Reggio city.

Operation Arca also described how the clans controlled their “portions” in a number of ways: first, through fictitious ownership of assets and use of frontmen to guarantee access to payments, to manage subcontracts by twisting prices and discourage competition, to inflate costs to mask extortion rackets (an “environmental tax”, around 3 %), and to hire workers. Second, the clans used intimidation and violence to dissuade any competitor left or resisting.

A very similar scenario is the one described in the interceptions for Operation Porto. Mr Bianchi, a man close to the federation of clans in Gioia Tauro, says to Mr Walter Lugli, entrepreneur in a company working in the port, in Milan on 16 September 1996⁴:

We are by your side, for any problem you have down there we can be by your side in any way, any problem you might have or you are going to have, with any possible means. Naturally, and I think it’s only fair, you know with all that hectares of land, the gardens cut off, the cultivations of oranges and mandarins destroyed, I think it’s only fair that we get something too. Our request is... it’s not about hiring someone or similar things, it’s about creating, later maybe, something... some activity nearby, through you, and our request now is a contribution for what you do there.

The mafia *behaviour* is evident and it is about controlling the territory, both financially and through military/violent control of the territory (“with any possible means”). Mr Bianchi continues by explaining its seemingly legal request:

We are there, we live there, we own the past, the present, the future. Our request is that for every container of yours there is something for us, we

consider that logic, fair. It's an exchange, it's reciprocal, correct, so... our request is a dollar and a half for every container you disembark, it's nothing.⁵

Through semi-legal activities, 'ndrangheta families secured impressive amounts of money, usually invested in more profitable activities such as cigarette smuggling or drugs later on. Another source of their wealth has been the numerous kidnappings. The first kidnappings in Calabria date back to the 1950s, and it is in 1973 that Paul Getty III was abducted in Rome by 'ndrangheta affiliates in the first case of this kind that reached national media (Sergi 1991). The “kidnapping season”—the serial use of abduction for ransom—is one of the nastiest pages of regional history, and it is also the period that gave the 'ndrangheta visibility in Italy and among the other unaware and honest citizens of Calabria, who often spoke out to support the families of those kidnapped. The kidnapping season refers to a period that goes from mid-1970s to the beginning of the 1990s and counted for more than 200 kidnappings all across Italy, especially in Lombardia and in Calabria, by groups more or less linked to 'ndrangheta clans in the Aspromonte where the abducted people were also kept (Casaburi 2010; Ciconte 2011). The numbers are not specific because at that time other criminal organisations in Italy were also engaging in the same practice and there is uncertainty in the attribution of some kidnappings (Sergi 1991). Estimates of that period count proceeds between 250 and 400 billion Italian liras (about 270–430 million euros today) (Fontana and Serarcangeli 1991; Ciconte 2011). According to the Antimafia Parliamentary Commission, this money was invested in cigarette smuggling during the 1970s and 1980s and in drugs in the 1980s and 1990s in a Marxist logic of capital accumulation; also, part of the money was laundered abroad, especially in Germany and Australia (Forgione 2008; Macrì and Ciconte 2009).

Scholars have talked about a transition between an *old mafia*, very local, archaic, and brutally involved in the kidnappings, and a *new* one, the *entrepreneurial* mafia, capitalising through drugs and infiltration in the legal economy (Arlacchi 1986). While obviously being a social construction, this transition between an old face and the modern one has been anything but smooth. Between the 1970s and the 1990s, in fact, escalations of violence have stained villages and cities of Calabria with bloodshed of mafia feuds. The feuds are the visible face of the fight for military supremacy of mafia clans on their territories. In the area around Reggio Calabria for example, between 1974 and 1977, a feud caused over 200

victims across various clans; between 1985 and 1991 another feud caused over 700 victims (Ciconte 2011). They broadly related to the control over both territories and illicit markets and to disagreement in the strategy and the management of the clans.

All feuds profoundly changed alliances in every area of Calabria. The mafia war in the 1970s caused a generational change in the clans near Reggio. The new generation, while still fighting for the control of cigarette smuggling and drugs routes, also understood the need (and fetched the possibility) to interact with higher powers in the region, namely masonic lodges and political class, as we will see later in this chapter. Upon ceasing the hostilities of another mafia war in the 1980s, the clans reached the so-called *pax mafiosa* also thanks to the intervention of clans of Sicilian Cosa Nostra (Ciconte 2011; Casaburi 2010). By 1991, the structure and organisation of the Calabrian clans appeared drastically changed with new alliances and the recognition of coordination structures especially in the area of Reggio Calabria, the one with the highest density of families. This has been explained in Operation Olimpia,⁶ which has been the first and one of the most important investigations in the structure of the clans at the beginning of the 1990s. It was the dawn of the 1990s and the ‘ndrangheta had started showing its contemporary traits, where both faces of the clans—the old and the new, the power-hungry and the entrepreneurial souls—co-exist in constantly developing forms, with the city of Reggio Calabria at the centre of Antimafia focus.

POLITICS, MASONIC ALLIANCES, AND CONCURRENT GOVERNANCE

Control of the territory does not only mean violence, truces, and alliances; it also means political interests and power over the *res publica*. In 1994, in their request for preventative measures to the judge for preliminary investigations during Operation Olimpia,⁷ the District Antimafia Directorates (DDA) of Reggio Calabria wrote that in the past decades there had been:

[...] a radical mutation in the “culture” and in the politics of the ‘ndrangheta. Such mutation goes from an attitude of antagonism, or at least detachment, from civil society, to an attitude of integration, in order to search for new forms of legitimation, not limited to criminal powers, but extended to politics, economics and the institutions.

The relationships between mafia and politics and mafia and masonic lodges are in Calabria much more fluid than just corruption pacts and/or infiltration in public or private affairs. Antimafia prosecutors in Reggio Calabria do not hesitate to say that “*the ‘ndrangheta is politics*” and that “*it is all about masonry*”,⁸ as the clans live together with—they often *are*—elite powers in the region. Again, when we look at the socio-economic history of the region, this does not surprise (Cavaliere 2004). It does not surprise in general to find alliances with politics, as this is typical behaviour of every mafia: political proximity, social power, and influence are the distinguishing factor of mafia groups. Indeed, as noticed by Catanzaro (1992: 43), mafias’ main network systems are sustained by three types of relations: kinship, patronage, and friendship. These factors are the ingredients for a successful control of the territory through social consensus.

This is perfectly visible, for example, also in the use of religion as reinforcement of the social presence and consensus of the clans, typical, again, of every mafia group (Sales 2010; Dino 2008). Moreover, to support the legitimacy of the clans to appear in religious parades and to participate in the spiritual life of their villages, ‘ndrangheta men can count on a whole set of religious references in the various rituals of affiliation (Ciconte 2015) and in the symbols of the ‘ndrangheta codes (Trumper et al. 2014) meant to promote the mafia’s collective “narcissism” (Di Forti 1982).

The spectrum of illegality is further complicated by the perspective that sees mafia and politicians having relationships for mutual benefits (Çaylı 2010), which eventually might become a form of “*concurrent governance*” (Sergi 2015: 43) between the two, with manipulation of elections, exchanges of favours for votes, and shared interests. In case of dissent, the clans have not hesitated to display their antagonism to the political class. The murder of Francesco Fortugno, Vice-President of the Regional Council of Calabria, on 16 October 2005, which happened in Locri (East coast in the province of Reggio Calabria) in full day light and in public during election day, was a clear affirmation of power and *hubris* by the clans (Forgione 2008).

Since the 1970s, if not before—while mafia clans were investing in legal economy, surviving feuds, and pursuing more ambitious illegal activities such as cigarette smuggling and drug trade—the relationship with political and social elites was part of the transformation process. In continuity with the previous decades, especially since the aftermath of the Second World War, Calabrian political classes in the 1970s were at the mercy of personal interests of a closed elite (Cingari 1982). Operation Olimpia has

also analysed the relationships with politics and masonic lodges since the 1970s. Specifically, in one of the sentences of the appeal trial of Olimpia⁹ the judges say:

Our witness [...] knew of a “commission” due to administer all the illicit interests of the city of Reggio Calabria; this commission had been created after the *pax mafiosa*, in 1992–1993, by mafia members, politicians, masons, and entrepreneurs.

The links between mafia and politics in Calabria have been cemented through the links with masonic lodges, historically intersecting with certain political elites (Cordova 2014). These connections meant contact with those social classes usually members of masonic lodges: professionals, entrepreneurs, members of law enforcement, and also politicians. Obviously these contacts have proved useful to cover up and facilitate new investments in the legal economy as well as for protection from the criminal justice system to the point that the clans became “invisible” for the authorities (Forgione 2008: 32).

Antimafia operations of the 1990s have clarified that only a certain type of ‘ndrangheta members could access the exclusive and reserved masonic lodges: a new managerial and elite rank in the ‘ndrangheta, the *Santa*, granted only to few bosses, became the *trait-d’union* between mafia, masonry, and obviously politics (Sergi 1991; Ciconte 2013; Guarino 2004). Even today, as confirmed by a number of operations, such as All Inside II¹⁰ and Crimine,¹¹ the *Santa* represents the highest ranking of affiliation. The various codes of rituals contain formulas for the attribution of the *Santa*, together with other rankings (Ciconte 2015; Nicaso and Gratteri 2012). In Operation All Inside II, letters and interceptions of ‘ndrangheta members reveal the way the ranking (known as “the flower”, *il fiore*, or “the gift”, *la dote*) of the *Santa* is conferred to those who deserve it, in secret, by those who already have it: “*I am happy for the ‘flower’ that you received; you know very few have it here in Platì and only who has it can know about it.*”¹² In Operation Bellu Lavuru,¹³ the reference to two groups of people, one *visible* and one *invisible*, confirms the existence of a circle of ‘ndrangheta affiliates close to the masonic lodges and to politics. In Operation Crimine,¹⁴ which is the investigation that proved the existence of a unitary structure for the clans in the area of Reggio Calabria, the Antimafia prosecutors present a picture of the city of Reggio Calabria in the first decade of 2000s with very concerning degrees of infiltration

in the legal sectors and in politics. Operation Reale¹⁵ confirmed the presence of the clans in Reggio Calabria operating even within the university in the city of Reggio through political ties. In 2012, after months of work to establish the extent of mafia infiltration in the public administration of Reggio Calabria, an Investigative Commission (Commissione di Accesso 2012: 4) concluded:

During the months of work this Commission has found that, in many aspects of the administrative life of the Council of Reggio Calabria, there are grave irregularities, inefficiencies and incongruences, gross negligence, actions and misbehaviours, which certainly have made the Council more easily permeable to the interests of the local mafia clans.

This brought to the dissolution¹⁶ of the city council of Reggio Calabria in accordance with law decree 164/1991 (Mete 2013): Reggio Calabria’s council was seen to be run in concurrent governance by politicians and mafia clans mutually benefitting from each other and linked by elite ties. There have been other ten city councils in Calabria dissolved for mafia infiltration in 2012, but certainly the events of Reggio Calabria have raised major concerns (Sergi 2015). The city of Reggio seems to be at the centre of every speculation of shadiness in Calabria, at the centre of the escalation of power of the clans, at the centre of dangerous relationships among mafia, politics, masonry, secret services, and finance (Prestifilippo 1998). Journalists, scholars, and magistrates in the past couple of decades have incessantly written and warned about the mafia–politics–masonry nexus in Calabria, painting a depressing picture of a region and in particular of a city, Reggio Calabria, ruled by “*a set of opportunities and ties that bond the various actors and form networks of collusion, not necessarily starting from mafia interests*” (Mete 2011b: 336).

‘NDRANGHETA AND ‘NDRANGHETE TODAY

Those who are familiar with the social and economic history of Calabria know the paradigm of *le Calabrie* (plural), which encapsulates the idea of a divided region, geographically fractured, polycentric, and whose provinces often experience different speeds of development and different outcomes in evolution (Violante 1994; Sergi 1993; Cingari 1982). Indeed, the socio-economic history of the region confirms this fractured reality. As anticipated in the introduction to this book, in the various *Calabrie*

we find different *‘ndranghete* (plural); the mafia phenomenon in Calabria is plural. It is necessary to differentiate the characteristics of the *‘ndrangheta* behaviour in the different parts of the region. This differentiation is often overlooked and creates confusion when attempting to study the *‘ndrangheta* outside its regional boundaries. By looking at the different *‘ndranghete* on the territory today, we can fully see the complexity of the phenomenon, its peculiarities, and its constant swinging between tradition and modernity. To facilitate the analysis we can divide the territorial analysis of the *‘ndrangheta* as follows:

- The province and the city of Reggio Calabria, especially the area of the Aspromonte region (the south of Calabria);
- The area of Vibo Valentia, Lamezia Terme, and Catanzaro (the centre of Calabria);
- The area of Crotona and Cosenza (the north and north-East of Calabria).

The province of Reggio Calabria, more than the others, represents the continuity between the mafia from the mountains (the Aspromonte) of the 1940s and the 1950s and the mafia of the cities, linked to politics and finance. It is not useful to differentiate between new and old mafia, as in Calabria the clans have evolved without interruptions and are still evolving every day. It can however be said, as argued by an Antimafia prosecutor in Reggio, that the clans in the area of Reggio Calabria *“have a very old heart and a very modern soul”*.¹⁷ Prosecutors have tried for two decades to prove that the *‘ndrangheta* in Reggio has a vertex structure and they have finally succeeded in Operation Crimine.¹⁸ While it has always been clear that the clans operated in alliance with each other, in consortia, and in federations of families, Operation Crimine judicially proved for the first time in 2012 that the *‘ndrangheta* in Reggio Calabria is united and that it is made of three *mandamenti* (subsections): the “Tirrenian” (the West coast of the province of Reggio), the “Ionic” (the East coast of the province of Reggio), and the “Centre” (the city of Reggio), with other middle units in between, all under the guidance of a collegial structure called *Crimine* or *Provincia*. This structure is not new and in the years has changed many names, including the *Santa*, or *il Padrino* (the Godfather).¹⁹ This is essentially a structure of coordination of the various clans in the province of Reggio and their (individual or collective) projections in the north of Italy and abroad. Operation Crimine has showed