

10. Italy

10.1 CIVIL SOCIETY'S ROLE IN THE FIGHT AGAINST THE 'NDRANGHETA

*by Claudio La Camera**

Introduction

This paper presents the role played by Italian civil society in the prevention of and fight against the 'Ndrangheta – a Mafia organization whose roots are in Calabria (a southern region in Italy) but which nowadays has expanded its presence across the whole country and all over the world. Using a critical approach, the paper aims to describe the work conducted by civil society organizations in the field in order to give an overview of the social engagement against the Mafia, and to assess its effectiveness. Firstly, some background information on the presence of the 'Ndrangheta will be provided; secondly, the social reaction and level of awareness of the phenomenon will be discussed; subsequently, a list of civil society organizations will be presented; in conclusion, the author shares challenges and perspectives about the topic.

The presence of the 'Ndrangheta

In September 2009, in Reggio Calabria, the capital city of the Calabria region located in southwest Italy, the Special Operations Department of the Carabinieri police force (which intervenes during the investigations under the orders of the Prosecution Service) managed to film a secret meeting taking place at the sanctuary *Madonna di Polsi*, one of southern Italy's most impressive places of worship. The event was the annual meeting of the 'Ndrangheta bosses, in which they

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make decisions about the tasks and roles for all the *Locale*¹ distributed in Italy and around the world, about who should live and who must die, and about alliances and agreements. The existence of these legendary meetings had been known for about 40 years, but it had never been possible to obtain any direct evidence before.

On October 31, 2009, in Lombardy in northern Italy, another meeting was filmed by the police. The heads of the *Locale* of Lombardy gathered for a convivial meeting at a community center for the elderly, “Falcone and Borsellino,”² to elect the new representatives of the ‘Ndrangheta in Lombardy. On this occasion, the orders that had come from Calabria had to be observed. A few months later, through the police operation “*Reale*,” the existence of a network of complicity and collusion was discovered. This network linked the ‘Ndrangheta with very important institutional clubs of politicians and judges. Thanks to this investigation, the perpetrators of a number of attacks on judges and prosecutors, as well as the authors of a strong intimidating threat against the president of the Republic, Giorgio Napolitano, could be identified.

These investigations highlighted that the ‘Ndrangheta remains the most powerful criminal organization in Italy and one of the most dangerous in the world. Indeed, in the province of Reggio Calabria, there are towns where 300–400 out of 10,000 inhabitants are full members of a *Locale* of the ‘Ndrangheta – a ratio which, nowadays, would hardly be reached in a city like Palermo in Sicily.³ The criminal density index (based on the percentage of the population involved in different forms of criminal activities) has been estimated at 27 percent of the Calabrian population, compared to 12 percent in Campania, 10 percent in Sicily, and 2 percent in Puglia (a region in southeast Italy where the organized crime group Sacra Corona Unita originated).

There are many reasons why criminal density in the Calabria region is so high: family ties between ‘Ndrangheta members, which strengthen the criminal bonds; the respect for a number of traditions and rituals, which eliminate the possibility of *pentiti* (members turned state informants); the extraordinarily pervasive control over the territory and over many aspects of Calabria’s administration, society, and economy. Above all, the ‘Ndrangheta is a secret society. There are great difficulties in identifying its real structure and presence because its identity is in constant evolution. Unlike the Sicilian Mafia, there has been little attention given to the

1 | The *Locale* is an organizational unit of the ‘Ndrangheta comprising a number of families of the same geographical area.

2 | Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, magistrates of the Anti-Mafia Prosecution Service of Palermo, are symbols of the fight against Cosa Nostra. Falcone, his wife, and his police escorts were killed on May 23, 1992. Borsellino was killed on July 19, 1992. The murders were part of Cosa Nostra’s strategy to challenge the Italian state.

3 | For data on the criminal density index in the province of Reggio Calabria, see the annual report of the anti-Mafia prosecutor, Giuseppe Pignatone, for 2010–2011. Published in “Vincere la ndrangheta,” Aracne editrice, Roma 2011.

study and knowledge of the 'Ndrangheta. The first official report of the Italian Parliamentary Anti-Mafia Commission was published only in February 2008.⁴ Four months later the US Treasury Department put the 'Ndrangheta on the black list of organizations engaged in money laundering in the United States (Forgione 2009, 368).

Social reaction and awareness

The first signs of a presence of this criminal organization in Calabria date from the second half of the 19th century (Cicone 2008; Cingari 1982) – a lengthy period during which the 'Ndrangheta came to penetrate all levels of civil society, as well as the culture and mentality of the people. Indeed, it is important to remember that the 'Ndrangheta has a century of history behind it and is structured according to a system of family transmission. Over time this resulted in the assimilation of Mafia behaviors and values, a process of enculturation that has been operative for several generations (Satriani 2012, 172). For this reason, change will only be achievable through the formulation of alternative values, which are to be passed on to future generations with the support of educational institutions, such as schools and universities.

Throughout its history, the 'Ndrangheta has continually encouraged social mis-mis and camouflage, as well as the construction of useful stereotypes. The most recurrent stereotypes are those that represent the Mafia boss as a god-fearing man and charismatic figure. The instrumental use of religious symbolism and the construction of heroic tales of the Mafia through folk music are two concrete examples.

All the Italian Mafias make instrumental use of religious symbolism. When Bernardo Provenzano, one of the most cut-throat Mafia bosses, was captured, his hideout yielded: 91 images of saints, 72 images of Jesus, two wooden crucifixes, two Bibles, one copy of the Gospels, and various other sacred images.⁵ Pietro Aglieri, the Cosa Nostra (Sicilian Mafia) boss, even had a small altar in his hideout, where twice a week a priest celebrated Mass. Italian *mafiosi* reconcile murder with the Bible. Sure of God's approval, they consider themselves good Catholics and trust that Jesus and the Virgin Mary are by their sides.

Another very frequent stereotype is the representation of the 'Ndranghetista as a hero fighting against the injustices of the state and as a protector of traditional values. This stereotype is principally spread through Mafia folk music. In fact, the production in Calabria of *Canti di malavita* (songs of a life of crime) and in Campania of *Canti neo-melodici o musica nera* (neo-melodic songs or black music) enjoys great popular success, especially among young people. These songs feed all

4 | Annual report on the 'Ndrangheta supervised by Francesco Forgione and approved by the Commission in the session of February 19, 2008. Published February 20, 2008.

5 | For an in-depth analysis of the Mafias and religion, see Sales (2010) and Cavadi (2009).

aspects of Mafia mythology: the glorification of violence, the power of money, the submission of women, and the fight against the state.

The songs of the 'Ndrangheta describe the rituals of the 'Ndrangheta: initiation, vengeance, the code of silence, blood, respect, honor. They repeat the styles and clichés of the organization's written and unwritten rules, simplifying them. The most enduring stereotype is the romantic image of the 'Ndrangheta as an association of pure and courageous knights, ready to assist anyone in need. These songs draw strength from popular music and are often exhilarating and powerful. They reinforce the sentiment of belonging and the group identity. The language is simple but rich in symbolism and in double meanings, full of religious references and a powerful sense of mystery.⁶

Despite the reactions of civil society to the violence and intimidating force of the 'Ndrangheta, there has been an absence of true knowledge of the phenomenon in all its complexity. The existing awareness stems from emergency situations, from alarming or sensationalist news in the media, and from the information provided by judicial inquiries. There is no real knowledge because schools and universities have seldom carried out serious research and educational work on the matter, and the few serious anti-Mafia associations that exist are unable to reach the masses. On top of that, scientific study on the 'Ndrangheta always lags well behind the speed of the phenomenon's evolution.⁷

In recent years, various public agencies of the Italian state have responded with stronger repressive actions that have led to important results.⁸ The true dangers of the 'Ndrangheta have been revealed for the first time, its presence in many foreign countries (Canada, Australia, United States, Argentina, Brazil, northern Europe) has been ascertained beyond doubt,⁹ and it has become clear that decisive change can only be based on a reaction by civil society.

The 'Ndrangheta, like all other Mafia-like organizations, derives its strength from the consensus of important sectors of the economy, of the political class, of state institutions, of the church, and of the population. Taking away that consensus would mean reducing the 'Ndrangheta to a common criminal organization, thus to a problem that would not require more than repressive state action.

6 | See the essay of Santoro and Sassatelli (2001, 505–514).

7 | On the problem of knowledge about the 'Ndrangheta, see Librandi (2012).

8 | According to the official data of the Anti-Mafia District Directorate of Reggio Calabria, in the course of the last four years, assets worth more than €2 billion have been confiscated and around 3,000 crime prevention measures (*misure cautelari*) have been taken against the Mafia. This figure is double that of the largest Italian Prosecution Service. Furthermore, 10 city administrations have been dissolved due to Mafia infiltration. These statistics may be consulted in: La Camera (2012).

9 | Official 2012 data of the Anti-Mafia District Directorate of Reggio Calabria, published in La Camera (2012).

Civil society organizations involved in the fight against the 'Ndrangheta

Since 2008 the Anti-Mafia District Directorate of Reggio Calabria has been led by investigators and magistrates of the highest level. They have achieved important results, even discovering the more secret aspects of the 'Ndrangheta. The success of the judicial inquiries has increased the spread of knowledge and has contributed to a reaction from civil society with the birth of new anti-'Ndrangheta movements.

These experiences are partly similar to those of the Italian anti-Mafia movement, with its strong evolution since the massacres in Sicily in 1992: the murders of the prosecuting judges Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, and of their bodyguards. The period of the massacres is a dividing line in the history of the anti-Mafia movement in Italy (Dino 2004; Tessitore 2003), even if only a certain number of groups remain engaged in activities that are fragmentary and discontinuous.¹⁰

These kinds of activities are typically carried out by individuals or groups that are not structured as organizations and who only spring into action after individual cases of injustice or tragedy. Such initiatives do not succeed in overcoming the logic of events and do not contribute much to creating a concrete change in mentalities. These actions of civil society, however, have activated important mechanisms of change, mostly coming from associations and structured movements that can be classified under the term "social anti-Mafia."¹¹ Associations that are most significant in terms of their activities and their social presence in the area are presented below.¹²

These associations mostly carry out their activities in the province of Reggio Calabria, considered to be the heart of the most powerful 'Ndrangheta families. This territory is characterized by a very high fragility of its productivity structures, owing to its lack of industrial development and strong economic dependence on other Italian regions. In social terms, the fragility of the region's productivity structures has resulted in one of the highest levels of unemployment in Europe (19.8%),¹³ a very high level of unofficial employment, little investment, and strong migratory movements toward the northern regions of Italy. These social

10 | For a historical analysis of the anti-Mafia movement, see Santino (2000).

11 | For an analysis of the "social anti-Mafia" from peasant movements through to the anti-globalization movement, see Santino (n.d.).

12 | A census of these organizations has recently been carried out as part of preliminary research into the anti-Mafia movement in the Province of Reggio Calabria, supported by the Social Policy Department of the Provincial Government. The research was carried out on behalf of the 'Ndrangheta Museum, Reggio Calabria, by Viviana Frisina, and its findings can be consulted in the museum's documentation center.

13 | Official data provided by the Dati ufficiale dell'Istituto nazionale di statistica, August 2012.

structures lead to a transmission of behavioral patterns and a mentality that foregrounds individualism or an overly strong focus on the family, at the expense of the common good and the rule of law.

Common features of the associations mentioned below are regular cultural activities, through which people are brought together and which help to raise awareness among individuals and groups. Their shared aim is to take consensus away from the 'Ndrangheta as a prerequisite for a true change in mentalities. The following is a brief list of these associations and a short description of their activities.

Reggio non tace¹⁴

On January 3, 2010, the movement *Reggio non tace* was born, following a very serious bomb attack against the Prosecution Service of Reggio Calabria. Its aim is to create a continuous program of initiatives. Based on a firm belief in the persuasive power of non-violence and dialogue, *Reggio non tace* actively denounces malpractices in society and organizes meetings dedicated to social justice, regularly mobilizing large numbers of people. The movement creates and supports initiatives of social solidarity and resistance in search of social justice, not limiting its scope only to actions against the 'Ndrangheta. Furthermore, *Reggio non tace* denounces instances of non-transparency in public administration, advocating democratic participation and active citizenship.

Libera. Associazioni, nomi e numeri contro le mafie¹⁵

Libera is a coalition of groups established in 1995 that links more than 1,500 organizations, grassroots groups, schools, etc., throughout Italy. These are all committed to building local political-cultural collaborations that will promote a culture of legality. *Libera* is present in Calabria in the management of seized assets (e.g., agricultural land confiscated from the 'Ndrangheta) and in offering support to citizens who take legal action against extortion and other forms of intimidation by the 'Ndrangheta. The great inspiration of the founders of *Libera* was to bring together many different actors, each with their own ideologies and political leanings, but all sharing the aim of defeating the Mafias. Among the various Calabrian groups and cooperatives that are members of *Libera*, the cooperative "Valle del Marro" is particularly important (organic farming on confiscated land). Another important factor is *Libera's* commitment to holding workshops, seminars, and meetings in schools, parishes, and other places in an effort to revive or inspire anti-Mafia commitments everywhere.

14 | "Reggio doesn't shut up"; see www.reggionontace.it

15 | "Free. Associations, names, and numbers against the Mafias"; see www.liberareggio.it

Associazione daSud¹⁶

daSud works on communication, culture, research, memory, and identity through practical projects that create alliances between citizens, artists, intellectuals, organizations of different kinds, and good policymakers. The main objective of the association is to raise awareness of the phenomenon through journalism-based forms of investigation coupled with creative-artistic forms of expression. daSud aims to enhance the understanding of the phenomenon by reconstructing the anti-Mafia history written by “anonymous”: ordinary citizens, trade unionists, workers who through their work have opposed the presence of the 'Ndrangheta (Chirico 2010). This is nothing less than a bid to make the anti-Mafia movement a popular movement, a widespread battle that is open to participation by all. It is a method that helps to reach everyone in society and that transforms knowledge into an instrument of real change in society. These kinds of activities are inspired by the examples of Peppino Impastato, a well-known journalist, politician, and activist who was murdered by the Mafia in Sicily in May 1978, and Danilo Dolci, an equally well-known sociologist, poet, educator, and advocate of non-violence.¹⁷

Anti-racketeering associations

These associations offer assistance to individuals who have taken legal action as a result of crimes such as extortion and usury. The associations help to solve the many problems that arise in almost all cases where businesses decide to report extortion activities by the 'Ndrangheta. Recently, a “network for ethical consumption” has been created, with the support of the Italian Ministry of the Interior and with funding from the European Community. This network consists of both traders and consumers, and it provides direct participation possibilities for consumers in the fight against racketeering. The network also aims to establish an ethical market, mounting a challenge to Mafia-run businesses. In Calabria there are nine associations of this kind that are officially registered with the Ministry of the Interior (in Sicily there are 51). Many other cultural associations take action in individual cases of racketeering and usury.

Stop ndrangheta.it¹⁸

This organization and website was created with the objective of recovering the historical roots of Calabria and the south, thereby contributing to the creation of a new southern identity. It is a network of creative young people who, through different forms of expression, show the south's best side. It was founded on the

16 | “From the South Association”; see <http://www.dasud.it>

17 | For more information on Danilo Dolci, see his large bibliography; specifically Capinini (1956).

18 | See <http://www.stopndrangheta.it>

initiative of the Associazione daSud. The editorial team is made up of activists and young professionals from the world of communication and the social sciences who have experience in the anti-Mafia movement and, more generally, in the field of civil rights and social issues. It has strong expertise in journalism, working within structured networks, and maintaining close relationships with those parts of Calabrian civil society that are committed to anti-Mafia work and social rights.¹⁹

Associazione Riferimenti²⁰

This organization was founded in 1995, among others by family members of victims of the 'Ndrangheta and magistrates such as judge Antonino Caponnetto, head of the first anti-Mafia pool comprising the murdered judges Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino. The name "References" refers to the stories of its founders, victims of the Mafia, as well as first-hand witnesses of civil commitments and reactions. Since the death of judge Caponnetto, the association has divided its work into two distinct areas of activity: coordination of anti-Mafia work, and work for civil society. The association's work is mostly carried out through activities in schools and universities throughout Italy.

Il Museo della 'Ndrangheta²¹

The project of the 'Ndrangheta Museum was created through a cultural agreement linking the most important public institutions in Calabria (the regional government of Calabria, the province of Reggio Calabria, and the City Council of Reggio Calabria) and two important universities (the University of Calabria and the Sapienza University of Rome). It is a hybrid structure with the aim of getting public bodies to assume responsibility for continuous programs with the support of schools and universities.

The museum's overall goals are: (a) to increase rational knowledge of the phenomenon of the 'Ndrangheta through educational programs that have the strength to counter the educational strategies of Mafia- and non-Mafia families; and (b) to historicize tragic events and turn them into questions so that knowledge can become personal conscience.

The museum is also a physical place in the city of Reggio Calabria – a villa that formerly belonged to an 'Ndrangheta boss. Inside this state-confiscated villa, a museum has been designed with the aim of delegitimizing and demystifying the legendary figures of Mafia bosses and Mafia symbols in their various incarnations (religious, cultural, social). For the 'Ndrangheta Museum, creating programs for cultural change means trying to meet a society that, in part, is unaware of the problem, or only knows certain aspects of it, and is, in any case, not prepared to take

19 | See www.stopndrangheta.it

20 | "References Association"; see www.riferimenti.org

21 | The 'Ndrangheta Museum; see www.museodellandrangheta.eu

responsibility for it. The museum does not so much promote an anti-'Ndrangheta model, but rather tries to promote a model of participatory democracy.

Conclusions

Despite the valuable activities carried out by these associations, it is important to remember that nowadays it is difficult to mobilize people around themes of social and civil rights. People fear the widespread presence of the 'Ndrangheta and they are disillusioned by the repeated failures of anti-Mafia repression by state agencies and by the political decisions underpinning these. In past years, in Italy, we have seen many legislative initiatives and decisions that have undermined the power of repressive actions against criminal organizations. Examples include the removal of a number of crimes from the law codes, unfavorable changes to court proceedings,²² reduced possibilities for supervised phone and communication intercepts (telephone tapping), and limits to the law governing the protection of ex-mafiosi prosecution witnesses.

On top of that, a number of Mafia crimes cannot be properly prosecuted because there is a lack of adequate legal provisions. One case in point is the convoluted legislation on the seizure, confiscation, and re-use of Mafia assets for social purposes. This legislation was the result of an important successful battle by civil society,²³ but its ultimate inefficiency gives the impression that the Mafia organizations have won.

Clearly, weak state agencies (even more so when they are directly complicit) send a symbolic message that contributes to a feeling of fear and resignation in

22 | One of the most important laws in this sense was law 194/2009, the so-called *Milleproroghe* (Thousand extensions), which reopened access to the "fiscal shield" (Italian tax amnesty) to facilitate the repatriation or regularization of financial and property activities illegally performed abroad before December 31, 2008.

23 | A bloody Mafia war raged in Sicily between the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1980s. On April 30, 1982, Pio La Torre, parliamentary deputy and regional secretary of the Italian Communist Party, was killed in an attack in Palermo. On September 3 of the same year, Carlo Alberto Dalla Chiesa, the prefect of Palermo, was killed. The state reacted with the introduction of two laws which changed the fight against the Mafia definitively: the law of October 12, 1982, n. 726, "Urgent measures for the co-ordination of the fight against Mafia crime," instituted by the High Commission for the coordination of the fight against Mafia crime; and law n. 646/82, which introduced article 416-bis into the *Codice Penale* (Italian Criminal Code). With article 416-bis, the organization of a Mafia-type association was defined for the first time as a punishable crime. The Rognoni-La Torre law, furthermore, introduced measures of property crime prevention intended to combat the illicit accumulation of property. Following this, thanks to the commitment of the anti-Mafia association "Libera," more than a million signatures were collected, which permitted the passing of law 109/96, establishing the possibility of allocating confiscated Mafia assets to social purposes.

many people, and thus reinforces the conviction that it is useless to work against the Mafias. Southern Italy, like most modern states, is experiencing a great crisis of the concept of the rule of law, understood as a shared heritage of ethical values and a trust in the overall functioning of an accountable state.

It is absolutely necessary to oppose the presence of pervasive Mafia organizations with the combined critical strength of all layers of civil society. For state repression of the Mafia to be effective, it has to be accompanied by individual acts of consciousness. It will then be possible to create a broader change in mentalities with long-term perspectives. This is the role that a large part of the anti-Mafia movement has played, with a certain success.

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