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## Introduction. The Mafia and the Sociological Imagination

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# Introduction. The Mafia and the Sociological Imagination

by Marco Santoro

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What social science is properly about is the human variety, which consists of all the social worlds in which men have lived, are living, and might live [...] Within these worlds there are open-country settlements and pressure groups and boys’s gangs and Navajo oil men [...] policemen on a corner [...] criminal syndicates [...] The human variety also includes the variety of individual human beings; these too the sociological imagination must grasp and understand. In this imagination an Indian Brahmin of 1850s stands alongside a pioneer farmer of Illinois; an Eighteenth-century English gentlemen alongside an Australian aboriginal, together with a Chinese peasant of one hundred years ago, a politician in Bolivia today, a feudal knight in France [...] a Roman patrician. To write of “man” is to write of all these men and women – also of Goethe, and of the girl next door

[Mills 1959, 132-33]

It is not at all unreasonable to view the results of social research as a dependent variable that is affected by the reality of what it is meant to study, and by other various technical matters that keep the study from being ideal, and also by the social context of the work itself

[Lieberson 1992, 60]

The Mafia is big news today even in the sociological world. Books, papers, articles, conferences, seminars devoted to this topic make a growing industry.<sup>1</sup> This is big news also because there is not an established and well-known tradition of Mafia studies in sociology or the larger social sciences. Among the classics, only Max Weber showed some little acquaintance with the phenomenon (in both its Neapolitan version as “Camorra” and its Sicilian variant as “Mafia”) when dealing with the financial strategies of political groups in his magnum opus, the unfinished *Wirtschaft*

<sup>1</sup> A revealing indicator of this growing interest among sociologists is the organization of a Presidential Panel devoted to “The comparative study of mafias” at the 2011 Congress of the American Sociological Association, held in Las Vegas under the presidency of Randall Collins. It was the first time a special focus was devoted to Mafia in an ASA convention.

*und Gesellschaft* [Weber 1968, 195]. None of the other fathers of sociology showed such an awareness of the issue.<sup>2</sup>

However, this recent explosion of sociological interest hardly comes as a surprise after the huge international success of a TV serial like *The Sopranos* and of a book like Roberto Saviano's *Gomorra* [Saviano 2007]. The world seems ready to appreciate the historical, anthropological, economic, political and even cultural importance of this exotic thing called Mafia.

The term "Mafia" is indeed today one of the most used, and abused words in the world. There are mafias everywhere it seems: in Italy, the United States, Colombia, Bolivia, China, Nigeria, Jamaica, India, Russia, Turkey as well as in Bulgaria, Mexico, and Japan. You can find "mafias" in contemporary societies as well as in past societies. There is a medical mafia, an academic mafia, a Christian mafia, a Black mafia, a cocaine mafia, and even a Hippie mafia. "Mafia" is also the name of a successful party game (created in 1986 in a Psychology Laboratory in Russia). Mafia may be enjoyable, as it seems. Like the word "fascism," "mafia" has become an umbrella term for identifying things which have some resemblance even if they are located in very different regions of the world and in different spheres of life. For a long time this word was used as a synonym for "organized crime" [van Lempe 2001; Varese 2010]. More recently, "mafia" has become a fashionable word used to cover and classify things as different and varied as drug trafficking, political corruption, racketeering, the illegal production and selling of (legal or illegal) goods, and the armed protection of men and enterprises in spite of the State's claimed legitimate monopoly of force. Formal analogies among practices and real flows of people and ideas account for this conceptual stretching whose empirical counterpart is the transnational spread of "criminal" behaviour and the growing networks of illegal and secret enterprises all over the world [see Castells 2000].

<sup>2</sup> While devoting a whole essay to secret societies, arguably a perfect occasion to approach the topic, Simmel made no reference to Mafia or Camorra – focusing instead on more established historical examples like Freemasonry and the Italian Carboneria [Simmel 1950]. No references to Mafia can be found in Durkheim – notwithstanding his attention to the Italian socio-anthropological production, his own knowledge of Mediterranean societies at least on the African shore, and the few references to mafia in *L'Année sociologique* by his student Gaston Richard [e.g. Richard 1900]. Even if devoting some attention to a medieval German institution – the infamous *Femgerichte* – that has some resemblance with one of the legendary sources of the Sicilian Mafia, the sect of the *Beati Paoli* [see Renda 1991], Marx had apparently no familiarity with Italian criminal life sub specie of *camorra* and *mafia* – which Italian State officers were eager at the time to lump together with socialist revolutionaries and social bandits as elements of dangerous classes. To be sure, Mafia was an early topic of interest to (the Italian) Vilfredo Pareto, because of his interest in the concrete working of representative institutions, and his obsession for the place of "irrationalities" in social and economic life. However, this early interest of him for the Mafia never translated in more than rhapsodic, albeit enlightening, references in his writings.

In order to limit the excessive stretching of the word before the term itself becomes so fuzzy to be literally meaningless, it is worthwhile setting some boundaries. The solution I propose to use in this article is the following: the Mafia is both 1) a historical concept (the name for a certain configuration of social relationships and cultural traits to be found in Sicily and other Italian regions. This term has been created and used since the 1860s), and 2) a generic concept (a label hypothetically useful to identify and group together a few configurations which exhibit strong similarities to the Italian Mafias's social structures and cultures). As a generic concept it is to be distinguished from the still more generic, and general, concepts of "organized crime"<sup>3</sup> and "the underworld." Not all that is labelled by scholars and observers as "organized crime" or as 'the underworld' is also "Mafia" [see, e.g., Finckenauer 2005; Allum 2010]. And "the Mafia" is worth using to identify social things that may be captured by the concepts of "organized crime" or the "underworld," *but* that extend well beyond the boundaries of those concepts. For instance, while the concept of organised crime does not include a reference to religion, the concept of Mafia may, or better should include this dimension [as for example in the work of Dino, 2008; see also Ceruso 2007; Cavadi 2009; Puccio 2010]. The political dimension of its inner life and social relations is crucial for the Mafia [Santoro 1998; Santoro 2007; Santoro 2011; see also Santino 1993; Armao 2000; Sciarrone 2006], but not necessarily for organized crime.<sup>4</sup> Figure 1 shows graphically the logic underlying this set of distinctions.

<sup>3</sup> The word "organized crime" is an American invention which dates back to the 1910s, even if there is evidence of an earlier use in 1860s [compare Lampe 2001 and Varese 2010].

<sup>4</sup> Of course, also for organized crime the role of politics is important, especially with respect to how the State works and what politicians are able or willing to do. But for Mafia politics is a constitutive feature, while for organized crime it is more a regulative one [on this distinction, borrowed from John Searle, see DiMaggio 1994]. This may accounts for the fact that scholars of the Sicilian Mafia have for long been not criminologists (even if also early criminologists studied the Mafia, as I will say), but political scientists, political/social historians, and political sociologists or anthropologists (e.g. Gaetano Mosca, Gaspare Nicotri, Eric Hobsbawm, Anton Blok, Filippo Sabetti etc). Since the early eighties the field was invaded by economists and economic sociologists – with a corresponding emphasis on the entrepreneurial, and firm-like features of the Mafia(s). In part this invasion could be accounted for with the changing nature of Mafia and especially its growing interests and activities in markets and trafficking. But disciplinary moves and investments have a relative autonomy from the social world (and the research objects) that has to be considered as well. There is considerable evidence, for instance, that in the last three decades economic approaches have been rising in the social sciences, and that economic sociology has grown till becoming one of the leading specialties inside the sociological discipline. On the rise of economic sociology see Convert and Heilbron 2007.

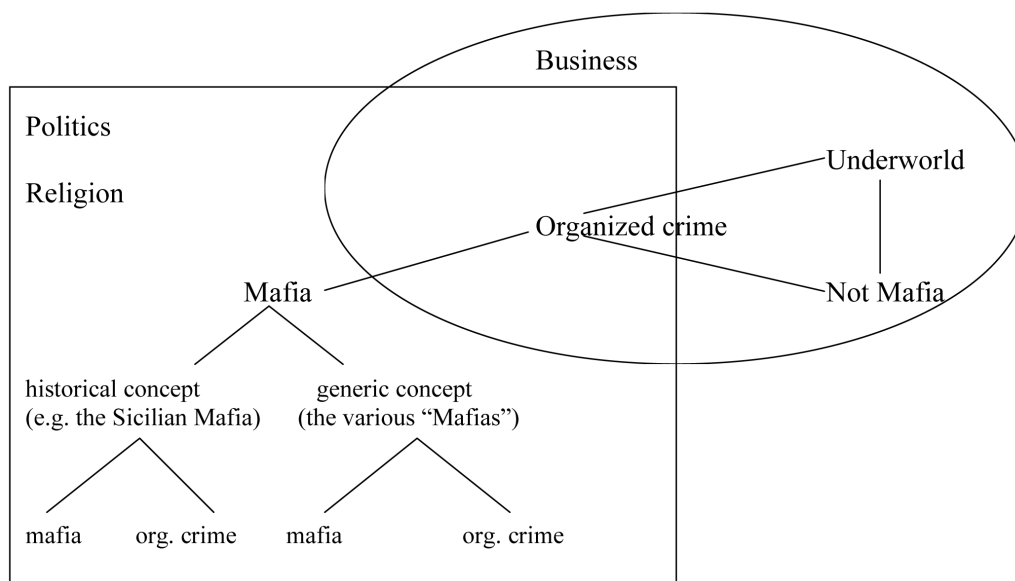


Fig. 1. Relations among concepts of Mafia, Organized crime, and Underworld.

We can enlighten the distinction between the Mafia and organized crime through an analogy with another distinction, that between the “classic professions” of law and medicine, on one side, and the more general idea of “profession” on the other ([see Hagan 1983; on the concept of profession there is a wide literature, see e.g. Santoro 1999]). The social study of the Mafia is in this sense homologue to the sociology of the medical profession or the sociology of lawyers: they both contribute to a sociology of professions, but do not exhaust it. And the sociology of professions cannot account for the specificities of the sociology of medicine or the sociology of law.

I would add that like many other conceptual distinctions in the field of the human and social sciences, the distinction between “Mafia” and “organized crime” has something of a *fractal nature* (Abbott 2000). It is always possible, after their conceptual separation, to look at each as a concept reproducing in its inner structure the original distinction at a lower level: we have therefore conceptualizations of Mafia as distinct from “organized crime” emphasizing its *sui generis* character (e.g. Hobsbawm 1959; Hess 1970; Blok 1974) or, alternatively, showing its criminal and organizational features (e.g. Paoli 2003). Figure 1 tries to capture this fractal nature as well.

But this would not be enough, I guess. “Mafia” is not only the original historical matrix of the concept of “organized crime,” nor a kind of Ur-species of a larger genus identifiable as organized crime. Both mafia and organized crime are indeed – or have become – “folk concepts,” and their meaning(s) cannot be separated by the social processes through which they are used and communicated in everyday life, in the me-

dia, and in public discourses (including the discourse of the State). This makes always difficult any analytic distinction between the two, as well as any analytic definition of both. Moreover, “Mafia” and “organized crime” tend to be used as keywords for different perspectives in the study of the “underworld” (and not only the underworld), perspectives that are differently located in the division of intellectual labour, and in the topology of disciplines. Whereas “organized crime” suggests a perspective deeply embedded in the history of criminology (especially in the USA) and focused on criminal behaviour and criminality (as defined by the rules of a State), a conceptualization of “Mafia” as “mafia” may suggest an approach more aware that behind words as “criminal” and “crime” there are social mechanisms of labelling and evaluation, and the (manifest or latent) acceptance of a socially dominant point of view (e.g. Becker 1963; Thompson 1975.) The criminological bias toward a normative and “control oriented” approach has been famously criticized among others by Ned Polsky:

The great majority of criminologists are social scientists only up to a point – the point usually being the start of the second, “control of crime,” half of the typical criminological course – and beyond that point they are really social workers in disguise or else correction officers *manqués*. For them a central task of criminology, often *the* central task, is to find more effective ways to reform lawbreakers and to keep other people from becoming lawbreakers (Polsky 1998: 135-136.)

Polsky wrote these sentences in the sixties; thirty years later things were changed but in the sense that, according to him, “that situation seems worse than ever” (Polsky 1998: 227.)

I suggest these conceptual explorations are also useful in helping put some order in the Mafia literature. The *scholarly* literature on the Mafias and especially that on the Sicilian Mafia is arguably narrower in quantitative terms than the literature on organized crime and/or the underworld. At the same time, I would say that the literature on the Italian Mafia is wider in scope and more far-reaching than the literature on organized crime. At issue when debating the Sicilian Mafia as well as the Camorra or the ‘ndrangheta (the Calabrese mafia) are topics such as the State, politics, honour, violence, business, ethics, friendship, family, property, life style, clientelism, corruption, trust, and faith, just to name a few. There is some degree of overlap among the literature on the Mafia and that on organized crime<sup>5</sup>, but there are also some

<sup>5</sup> For example, a book like *The Sicilian Mafia* by Diego Gambetta [1993] belongs concurrently to the literature on the Sicilian mafia, the literature on organized crime as well as that on the underworld. But it may also be thought as belonging to other literatures and research programs, i.e. on trust and the market, or protection as a commodity, or social development, and so on). Indeed, among the more than 900 texts which quote this book (according to the data base of Google Scholar), only a minority belongs to criminology or even Mafia studies. For an example of influential – at least in

strongly felt boundaries which have to be acknowledged. Sometimes they are boundaries set by the same authors with their disciplinary affiliation and/or their privileged perspective (e.g.: more or less “criminological,” more or less “anthropological” etc.), sometimes they are boundaries defined by the readership, and sometimes, they are boundaries built into the same text’s argument.

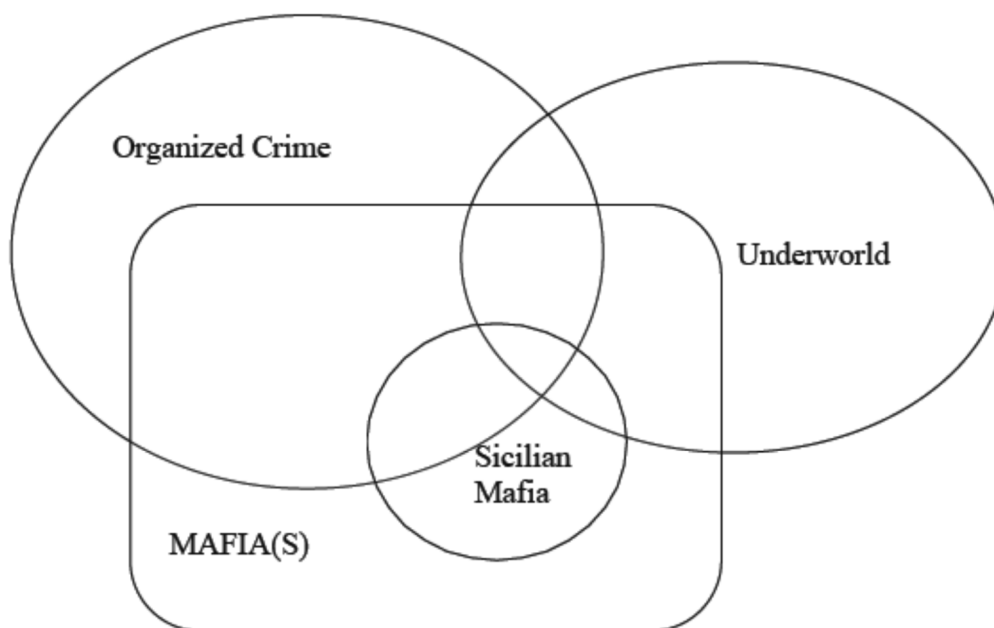


Fig. 2. Boundaries and overlaps between literatures: a stylized representation

So delimited, the Mafia is far from being a novel topic in sociology.<sup>6</sup> In Italy, a quite sociological interest in the Mafia started very early, as the first scholarly works on the subject date back to the 1870s and 1880s. The Mafia (as well as the Camorra and especially, brigandage) frequently figured in the writings of the Italian school of criminology – from Cesare Lombroso’s masterpiece *L’uomo delinquente* [Lombroso 1876] to Enrico Ferri’s criminal sociology [Ferri 1900] – whose influence was strongly

the UK – research program that refers strongly to “organized crime” but only very weakly to Mafia, see e.g. Hobbs 2001.

<sup>6</sup> The short reconstruction which follows refers only to the literature on the Sicilian mafia (and not to Camorra and other kinds of regional organized crime historically developed in Italy, as ‘ndrangheta and, in the past, brigandage). The general picture would not change however, had I included also these more specialised literatures. For an early exemplar of social research on camorra see De Blasio 1897, with a preface by Cesare Lombroso. De Blasio was a police officer, but also a student and close collaborator of one of the pioneers of (even cultural) anthropology in Italy, Giustiniano Nicolucci. The first scholarly work on Camorra is Monnier 1862. (A professor of comparative literature in Naples, Monnier had Swiss origins.) For a recent empirical study on the Camorra, especially careful in underlying its political dimension, see Allum 2006.

felt even in the United States.<sup>7</sup> Pioneers of Italian social sciences such as Napoleone Colajanni [1885; Colajanni 1895; 1900] and Gaetano Mosca [1900; Mosca 1933] wrote about the Mafia as both a social problem and a sociological puzzle. A rich tradition of social survey, dating back to the beginning of the century, contributed to the social and political knowledge of the new State – and especially, of what was, at the time, the largest social class, the peasants. A sociological discourse on the Mafia also developed through these official and wide-ranging experiences of data collection [see for example, Lorenzoni 1910]. It might even be suggested that the Mafia was an integral part of the socio-political unconscious of early Italian sociologists: many of the most influential scholars who acted as sociologists in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries in Italy were Sicilians (or from Calabria, or from Naples) It is not by accident, that it was in Sicily in 1894 that the first Italian journal of sociology, the *Rivista di Sociologia*, was founded, that is to say, one year before the founding of the *American Journal of Sociology* [Santoro 2012]. We may speculate that the “Mafia” was in the cognitive and experiential horizons of a large portion of the men who imagined and claimed a place for sociology and the social sciences in liberal Italy.

Two short and relatively unknown passages from Mosca’s masterwork (originally published in 1896) may be enlightening here. In the first, the Mafia (or *Maffia*) is explicitly quoted as a criminal association whose members accept certain limits (as an ethics and a “certain sense of honor”) in their conduct, in this way, contributing to their survival and success

There have been, as there still are, organized groups of bandits that preach theft, murder and the destruction of property. But in such cases the perpetration of the crime is almost always colored with some specious political or religious doctrine that serves to decoy into the company some misguided person who is not wholly contemptible, whose crumb of respectability renders common turpitude more bearable to the public and introduces into the association a modicum of moral sense that is indispensable if a villainy is to succeed. Bismarck is credited with the apothegm that a man needs a little honesty to be a perfect rascal. The Sicilian *Maffia*, among other criminal associations, had its rules of ethics, and its members a certain sense of honor. The *Maffiusi* sometimes kept their word with nonmembers, and they rarely

<sup>7</sup> See also Lombroso 1898, collecting studies written in the 1860s by Lombroso while a young physician serving in the army. The Mafia and the Camorra are the topics of one of the best chapters of Lombroso’s *L’uomo delinquente* (five editions), and many of the founding texts of Mafia studies have been published in journals or book series edited by Lombroso or Ferri (e.g. the journals “Archivio di Psichiatria” or “La Scuola Positiva,” the book series in Criminal anthropology edited by Lombroso in Turin, and so on). Ferri’s students contributed to this literature as well, e.g. Scipio Sighele [1893], Alfredo Niceforo [1897, 1898], and especially Gaspare Nicotri [see Nicotri 1910, with a preface by the same Ferri.] On the Lombroso’s school and its American success, see D’Agostino 2002 and now Gibson and Rafter 2006.



betrayed each other. It is mainly to the limitations they set to their wrong doing that certain criminal associations owe their extraordinarily long lives. [Mosca 1939, 178].

Still more interesting is the following excerpt, where the Mafia is never named while its phenomenology was clearly in the mind, and the experiential knowledge, of the writing author:

Psychological and intellectual isolation on the part of the lower classes, as well as too noticeable differences in beliefs and education between the various social classes, give rise to social phenomena that are very interesting to the student of the political sciences, dangerous as they may be to the societies in which they occur. In the first place, as a consequence of their isolation within the lower classes, another ruling class, or directing minority, necessarily forms, and often this new class is antagonistic to the class that holds possession of the legal government. When this class of plebeian leaders is well organized it may seriously embarrass an Official government. In many Catholic countries the clergy is still the only authority that exerts any moral influence over the peasantry, and the peasants extend to the parish priest all the confidence that they withhold from the government official. In other countries, where the people look upon the public functionary and the nobleman if not exactly as enemies certainly as utter strangers, the more resolute and aggressive of the plebeians sometimes succeed in organizing widespread and fairly permanent associations, which levy assessments, administer a special justice of their own and have their own hierarchies of officials, their own leaders, their own recognized institutions. So *a real State within the State comes into being, a government that is clandestine but often more feared, better obeyed, and if not better loved certainly better understood, than the legal government* [Mosca 1939, 116-17, my italics].

We can easily infer from this short text that Mosca believed the “social phenomenon” of the Mafia was as “dangerous to society in which it occurs” as it was “very interesting to the student of the political sciences.” Indeed, it was as a real, true government – “clandestine” but often “better obeyed” and even “better understood” – this is how the political sociologist Mosca conceptualized the Mafia. Even if deeply felt, however, these intellectual concerns never developed into concrete research programs. More than an analysis and an explanation, scholars like Colajanni and Mosca looked for public documentation to denounce the Mafia as a social and political issue. Both Sicilians, they felt it their duty to collect evidence and offer an interpretation of a phenomenon which periodically attracted media attention. The media usually suggested that something strange and mysterious – and not only dangerous – was happening in a relatively remote part of the newly formed nation, and they worked in order to shed light to this strange phenomenon. However, the Mafia as such was never their central theoretical concern: their research focus was rather the rates of crime, the effects of poverty, colonial policies, or the rise and fall of political regimes and ruling classes. The Mafia was more a “hot” issue for

political and journalistic writing than the object of serious and deep sociological analysis.

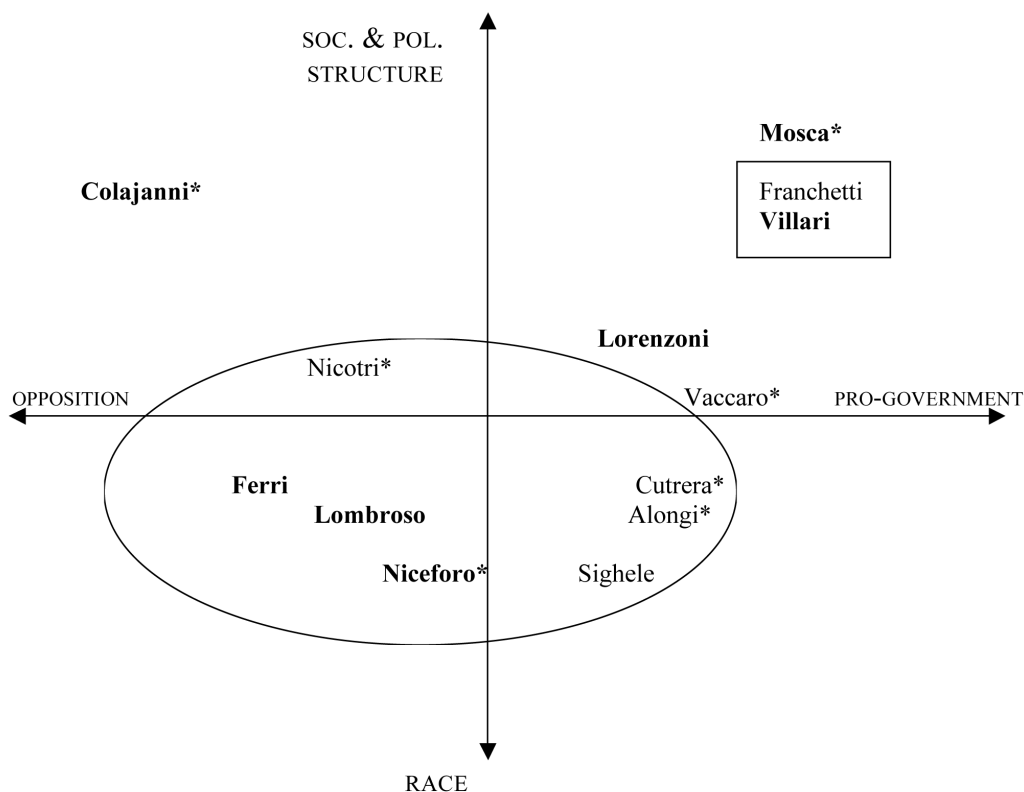
Before them, paradoxically a sociological reading of the Mafia was however attempted by scholars who were not professional social scientists – even if educated in the same positivistic *milieu* that had nurtured sociology in Italy as elsewhere.<sup>8</sup> This is the case of Leopoldo Franchetti, whose *Considerazioni sulla situazione politica e amministrativa della Sicilia* [Franchetti and Sonnino 1877, vol. I] was the outcome of a six-month exploration “in the field,” a sort of ethnographic experience and experiment which is still today regarded as a landmark contribution to Mafia studies and to the literature on the *Mezzogiorno* (the Southern regions of Italy). Franchetti was one of the most gifted intellectuals of the newly unified Italy, whose brilliant work as a student of the *Mezzogiorno*'s social problems was matched only by his research and reflections on Italian colonies and colonial policies. This connection between Mafia and colonialism was far from being occasional and contingent, and its consideration would help to account for a relatively large section of Mafia studies as really studies on “inner colonialism” [see Santoro 2010].

In the same year in which Franchetti was preparing his trip to Sicily with his friend Sidney Sonnino – an expert in agrarian and peasant economic issues destined to a brilliant political career – one of the leading intellectuals of the new Italy, the historian and pedagogue Pasquale Villari, published a series of letters about the most important social problems the new unified State had to tackle (and partly had produced) in the South of Italy, namely the Camorra, the Mafia, and brigandage [Villari 1875]. The name of Villari – unknown to foreign social scientists, but a strong presence in the history of Italian culture – is to be highlighted here, as it was through this Neapolitan scholar, at the time Professor of history at Pisa University, that positivism – especially in its English, Millsian version – entered Italian intellectual and even political life.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> To be sure, we owe the first serious analysis of the “Mafia” not to a social scientist but to an aristocratic rural entrepreneur, expert of agronomic issues and politically engaged in the Risorgimento movement: the baron Niccolò Turrisi-Colonna. In a series of articles published in a Palermitan newspaper (then collected in volume), Turrisi-Colonna described the practices and organization of a sect which was controlling economic and political life in the countryside near Palermo [Turrisi-Colonna 1864]. He did not use the word “Mafia,” but the sect he refers to is clearly what would have been named that way in a few years. Ironically, the same man who firstly wrote about, and against, the Mafia would become one of its defender, acting as guarantor and protector of one of the leading Mafiosi in the end of Nineteenth century, a man who served as a volunteer in the army company Turrisi-Colonna commanded when a Risorgimento activist: we find here a typical Mafia situation, in which the boundaries between criminals and well-to do men, law-breakers and victims, protectors and protégées are constitutionally blurred.

<sup>9</sup> Franchetti and Villari belonged – together with the young Pareto – to the same Florentine

In this context, we should recall the contributions to the sociological analysis of the Mafia made by professional State officers, especially by police functionaries [see Alongi 1886; Alongi 1900; Cutrera 1900]. This provides not only a clue to the success of positivism as an epistemic culture in those early post-unification years, but also a telling testimony to how a rich sociological imagination can be cultivated among non specialists thanks to immediate contact with their object of study.



LEGENDA:  
 bold = academic men  
 circle = Lombroso's school (of criminal anthropology, or of positive criminology)  
 rectangle = Florence-based liberalism (includes also Pareto)  
 \* = Sicilians

Fig. 3. The field of Mafia studies in Italy, 1870-1910

In those early studies, a tension between two main perspectives emerged, a tension which is still noticeable in the literature even if translated in other terms: it is the tension between a sociological explanation (in terms of *structural* economic inequal-

intellectual *milieux* of liberal conservatives with high cultural capital, firmly engaged in the political debate generated by the recent unification, and strong admirers of English institutions, their intellectual traditions included [Urbinati 1990]. In other words, the rise of the Mafia to the awareness of the Italian cultural elite was closely linked to the penetration of liberal positivism among selected intellectual circles. This is a genealogy still affecting current scholarship on the Mafia, at least in Italy.

ities and distribution of private properties) and an anthropological interpretation grounded on the assumption of long lasting structures – commonly conceptualized as “racial” formations, albeit they could easily be understood in more “cultural” terms<sup>10</sup>. Indeed, the conflation between the two perspectives was not rare in the writings of those early scholars. This notwithstanding, the tension was deeply rooted in the literature, where scholars insisting on biological determinants and physical clues of criminal conducts (e.g. Lombroso) were at odds with those sensitive to the effects of institutions, history and social structures (e.g. Colajanni, Mosca). Behind and beyond this tension, however, there was a common positivistic episteme – a veritable faith for all of them (see Fig. 3.)

Positivism was not alone in creating a common language. All the scholars who contributed to the production of a social science discourse on the Mafia in liberal Italy were also politically engaged or directly involved in political life, sometimes in the same government (see Santoro 2012): this was the case of Villari, a deputy since 1870 who served as a minister of public education in the 1890s; of Franchetti who, while a leading exponent of the colonial movement, acted as both a deputy (since 1882) and a senator (since 1909) being a policy consultant about rural problems for the government; of Colajanni, a leading member of the Republican and Democratic party, a deputy for the opposition since 1890, and a leader of the *Fasci* of Sicilian workers in 1891-93 (one of the first popular mass mobilizations in Italy, ferociously suppressed by the government)<sup>11</sup>; of Mosca, not only a deputy for the conservative liberals since 1908 but also, in the years following the conquest of Lybia (1911), a *sottosegretario di stato* to the Colonies; of Michele Angelo Vaccaro, who worked as personal secretary for the powerful prime minister Francesco Crispi and *capo di gabinetto* for other ministers, while writing his early sociological books and articles including a few on Sicilian problems and the Mafia (1899); of Ferri, one of the more influential and vociferous radical and then socialist deputies in liberal Italy (since 1886); of Gaspare Nicotri, author of books and articles on the Mafia in the history of social revolutions in Sicily (e.g. Nicotri 1910), who was a socialist lawyer; of the same Lombroso, himself a socialist engaged in local politics. In other cases, there was a direct involvement in the Italian state’s bureaucratic structure: this is the case of Alongi and Cutrera (as well as the Neapolitan DeBlasio, author of one of the first scholarly work on Camorra) who were police functionaries of State, but also of the aforementioned Vaccaro, who served as a judge. In other words, all the main creators

<sup>10</sup> Lombroso’s idea of race was far from being consistent, and typically conflated anatomic and biological features with more historically grounded cultural elements. In his writings, « races » were conceived sometimes as fixed entities and sometimes as adaptive collective structures.

<sup>11</sup> On Colajanni see now Frétigné 20002. On Mosca, see Albertoni 1987.

of a scientific discourse on the Mafia were also located in the political field, and a few in the same bureaucratic (i.e. state) field. Their interpretations of Mafia is thus to be read also moving from their political as well as professional location (Fig. 3.)

Indeed, the only influential writer on Mafia who was not immediately involved in Italian political life (he was appointed senator in its seventies, for scientific merits) was Giuseppe Pitré, the Palermitan physician who greatly contributed to the rise of an Italian tradition of ethnological and folklore studies. It was Pitré who famously argued against the identification of Mafia as a criminal social organization, insisting on its being a diffuse cultural attitude instead (Pitré 1889). Obviously, this is not to say that Pitré was less politically involved in the object than other scholars: as a proud Sicilian and a close observer of popular milieux, he was deeply engaged in the defence of Sicilian identity and the promotion of its better values. Mafia as a criminal organization was a real problem in this project, and it is not surprising that he acted in order to minimize its existence. Meanwhile he attempted to define Mafia's identity in a way that made it possible to justify its workings in so far as a deeply rooted and potentially benign cultural ethos.

Whereas all these contributions on the Mafia still are classical references, sources of information and ideas, even for contemporary scholars [e.g. Hess 1970; Blok 1974; dalla Chiesa 2010; Santoro 2011], they did not generate a program of studies and a tradition of research devoted to the Mafia (or to Mafias, in the plural).

In part as a consequence of the relative silence of sociological analysis during the interwar period,<sup>12</sup> the Mafia only could become an established and legitimate topic of investigation in the second half of the Twentieth century – which happened after Eric Hobsbawm's study [Hobsbawm 1959] on social banditism as a primitive form of resistance to capitalism and after Danilo Dolci's dramatic investigations into Sicilian poverty and ways of life (a concern which made him a world leading exponent of pacifism and a forerunner, I would add, of public sociology) [Dolci 1955; Dolci 1956; Dolci 1960]. But above all, it was only after the expansion of the social sciences into a true transnational academic industry that Mafia studies appeared. It was in the 1960s and early 1970s that Mafia studies developed as a research program thanks to

<sup>12</sup> Contrary to a widely held opinion, sociology did not disappear in Italy during the fascism. Indeed, sociology entered the academic world, and gained academic legitimization, exactly during the fascist regime. But it is true that Italian sociology at the time was mainly focused on demographic issues and colonized people, or on abstract theoretical speculations (e.g. Corrado Gini's *neo-organicismo*), and there was no room for localized and detailed investigations of social and cultural practices [see Santoro 2012]. Still more important, Fascism claimed to have defeated the mafia already in the second half of the 1920s, and this nullified any chance of social research on the issue. In 1933, Gaetano Mosca could write his entry on "Mafia" for the *Enciclopedia of the Social Sciences*, always using the past tense: mafia was no more existing in Italy thanks to Mussolini.

the convergent and mutual reinforcing work of a few foreign scholars in the social sciences and a few Italian militant intellectuals (usually firmly located on the left as the aforementioned Dolci, Michele Pantaleone [1962], Leonardo Sciascia [1970]). The mixture of two kinds of sensitivity and competence was not without some risks (in terms, for example, of avalutativity), but proved itself effective and progressive, in Lakatos's sense. It is in this period that a few landmark studies were planned and then written: Anton Blok's *The Mafia of a Sicilian Village* [Blok 1974], Henner Hess's *Mafia* [Hess 1970], and Jane and Peter Schneider's *Culture and Political Economy in Western Sicily* [Schneider and Schneider 1976] – to whom we should add Filippo Sabetti's *Political Authority in a Sicilian Village* [Sabetti 1984] and the first important Italian contribution to a sociology of the Mafia, Pino Arlacchi's *La mafia imprenditrice* [Arlacchi 1983]. In this same lapse of time a new independent Institute of social research was founded in Palermo, specialising in the study of the Mafia: *the Centro Siciliano di Documentazione "Peppino Impastato,"* named after a leftwing militant killed by the Mafia in a town near Palermo, directed by Umberto Santino, a left-wing militant with a background in law who moved very early towards empirical social research and sociological writing.

In the early 1980s, something like a "received view" coalesced around a few scholars whose work was grounded on fieldwork in Sicilian villages.<sup>13</sup> Then in the 1980s, three new actors entered the arena of Mafia studies: the historian, the judge and the *pentito*, i.e. the Mafioso who repents and collaborates with judges in the production of the evidence – judiciary evidence but also, for that matter, sociological evidence).<sup>14</sup> It is not by chance that two of the most important autobiographies of *pentiti* have been edited by a sociologist, the aforementioned Pino Arlacchi [1992;

<sup>13</sup> To the titles already quoted, we should add *Milocca. A Sicilian Village*, by Ch. Gower Chapman, researched in the 1920s but published only in 1971. The book is a product of the Chicago tradition of ethnographic research, in its ethnological variety. The mafia has however a very limited role in this "report from a Sicilian village," a role consistent with the fascist rhetoric of a defeat of mafia thanks to the strong fascist policies of contrast. What almost all these ethnographic researches share – beyond their differences in approach and results – is the choice of a place for doing fieldwork which for many reasons could be considered exemplar or representative of Sicilian social life only with many warnings. Milocca is not only a small village – much smaller the average Sicilian town – like Sambuca or Contessa Entellina (villages respectively studied by Jane and Peter Schneider, and Anton Blok) – but also a village whose history is for many verses a very special one – like Sambuca, an exceptionally leftist town, and Contessa, originally an Albanian colony.

<sup>14</sup> Among the most influential judges, whose writing have contributed to the analysis of mafia, are the late Giovanni Falcone, Pietro Grasso, Roberto Scarpinato, Pietro Ingroia, and Michele Prestipino. But the list could be much longer. For an early influential contribution by a judge, see Lo Schiavo 1962. The convergence between social science criteria of relevance and judicial ones is however far from being easy to evaluate. A criminological literature exists to discuss the role of *pentiti* as knowledge provider, e.g. Firestone 1997. For a brilliant anthropological reading of this character and the web of relationships he is involved in, see Moss 2001.

Arlacchi 1994]. A sociological presence just when journalism was starting to contribute regularly to Mafia studies with both an independent voice and in cooperation with judges and even *pentiti*.<sup>15</sup>

A division of labour emerged. If judges and journalists provided evidence, social scientists proposed the concepts and models necessary to make sense of this evidence, and formulated questions worth asking. If there is a place where sociological imagination has been established as an intellectual standard, it is in Mafia studies. The negative side of this hegemony, however, is the weakening of the professional standards in the production and evaluation of sociological research and sociological analysis: when everything looks like sociology, it becomes difficult to identify sociology as a specific disciplinary endeavour.

What happened in a few years was the establishment of a corpus of texts, of a canon, and may be of a whole paradigm – or better a family of paradigms in mutual relationships and confrontations. The disciplines involved in this multi-paradigmatic experience are mainly four: sociology, anthropology, political science, and history [for the latter see at least Pezzino 1990; Lupo 1996; Dickie 2004; for an early example see Romano 1965]. Inter- and trans-disciplinary exchanges are common practice here. More than disciplines, they are intellectual formations and traditions acting as magnets and organizational devices: Marxism, critical theory, neo-Weberism, word-economy theory, public/rational choice, political economy, figurational analysis (à la Elias), feminism, phenomenology, network theory, social capital theory, neoinstitutional theory, etc. [e.g. Blok 1974; dalla Chiesa 1976; Schneider and Schneider 1976; Sabetti 1984; Siebert 1996; Sciarrone 1998; Morselli 2009; Catanzaro and Santoro 2007; Lo 2010]. Not all these traditions are represented in Mafia studies: there is not a functionalist theory of the Mafia (inspired by Luhmann for instance), nor a comprehensive ethnomethodological analysis of mafia practices. Bourdieu is still a marginal presence in mafia analysis, his potentialities in this field notwithstanding [Santoro 2007; Santoro 2011], and the same could be said for Goffman [apart from Dino 2002]. Symbolic interactionism, Simmel and Durkheim are decisively under-utilized resources in Mafia studies – contrary to what one could think about the nature and use of symbols and secrecy in mafia organizations.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> The number of autobiographies by *pentiti*, edited or re-written by journalists, is relatively small, but large enough to make possible to speak of a veritable new editorial genre. See for instance Lodato 1999 and Bellavia 2008. For an earlier precious contribution to Mafia studies by a journalist and writer, see Fava 1967.

<sup>16</sup> The reluctance of American sociologists, included those more sensitive to deviance and marginality, to address Mafia and mafia-like organizations still in the 1950s when Mafia entered the national public sphere through Congress hearings, has been accounted for in the following terms by

In the last twenty years, something like a compact “school” coalesced around rational action/choice theory. Borrowing tools mainly from economics (e.g. game theory, transaction costs analysis, economic neo-institutionalism), the rational reconstruction of the Mafia analysed it less as a form of capitalism [Schneider and Schneider 1976; Arlacchi 1983] than as an economic way to solve problems of collective action and social organization. It capitalized on a selective appropriation of Leopoldo Franchetti’s classical reading of the Mafia as an “industry of crime”. Its main source was however a tradition of economic analysis of (organized) crime whose roots are to be found in Frederic Lane’s historical studies of Venice’s violent expansion in the Middle Ages, Thomas Schelling’s pioneering analysis of organized crime, and Peter Reuter’s early works on American “illegal enterprises” [Lane 1979; Schelling 1971, Reuter 1983, 1985; see also Anderson 1979; Fiorentini and Peltzman 1995].<sup>17</sup> Firstly elaborated by Filippo Sabetti [1984] as an extension of Elinor and Vincent Ostrom’s public choice analysis of political institutions and collective action, then newly refined and promoted by Diego Gambetta (see Appendix for a focus on their respective theories and differences), the economic theory of the Mafia is possibly today the individual most identifiable and apparently successful paradigm in the study of Mafias, tested in countries as varied as Russia [Varese 1994; Varese 2001], China [Chu 1999], Japan [Hill 2003], as well as in Sicily’s legal and economic history [Bandiera 2003]. It is however harshly criticized from other perspectives as excessively abstract and above all, arbitrarily selective [see Santino 1995; Santino 2006; Paoli 2003; Allum and Sands 2004; Santoro 2007]. What the economic paradigm offers is analytical strength

the Chicago-trained sociologist Howard S. Becker: “Well, the Mafia didn’t become a big American concern until after [the 1950s]. And even then a lot of people felt that the idea of an American Mafia was something of a media construction more than a ‘going concern.’ Or a media construction built with the collaboration of parts of the government (FBI, mostly). And, also, Mafia was crime and that subject belonged, in the division of scientific labor of the day, to criminology. I remember having a disagreement with Donald Cressey, an important criminologist/sociologist, about the Mafia. I said there was no such thing, if by Mafia one meant a nation-wide conspiratorial organization, etc. He said I was wrong, he knew there was because he had heard certain tape recordings made by the FBI. I said that when those were made public so you could check out to see if they were trustworthy maybe I would believe him, and he said that wasn’t possible. So I said then I couldn’t believe it” (personal communication). For a published witness of this perspective see Albin 1971. For Cressey’s work on the Mafia (i.e. US-based La Cosa Nostra), see at least Cressey 1969. For early instances of Chicagoan sociological analysis of organized crime (more than the Mafia) in the US see the classic Thrasher 1927 and Landesco 1929/1968. Even if based in Harvard (but with strong links with the Chicago’s ethnographic tradition) and focused on Boston, Whyte’s *Street Corner Society* (1943) is possibly the classic reference for Mafia studies in American sociology, at least for its attention to (mainly) Sicilian codes of conduct and gangs’ organization. See also Smith 1975 for an influential account of American studies on the (US) Mafia.

<sup>17</sup> For an early and pioneering reference in the field of criminology see however Sellin 1963. On Mafia as business, albeit from an anthropological perspective, see Ianni 1972.



and simplicity – two intellectual qualities Mafia studies have long missed – and above all, a clear engagement with established social theory, albeit a very specific strand of social theory (RAT theory).<sup>18</sup> It is not however the only possible articulation of Mafia studies with theoretical work – as recent studies by scholars attuned to other intellectual traditions have clearly shown [e.g. Sciarrone 1998; Volkov 2002; Santino 2006; Paoli 2003; Santoro 2007; Catanzaro and Santoro 2009; Dino 2002; Dino 2010; Collins 2010].

### **About The Symposium**

This Symposium is aimed at collecting and comparing the voices of some leading scholars of the Mafia coming from the social sciences – scholars whose research has contributed to the development of Mafia studies as a veritable specialty in the social sciences over the last forty years: the German sociologist Henner Hess, the American anthropologists Jane and Peter Schneider, the Canadian political scientist Filippo Sabetti, the Italian (but UK-based) sociologist Diego Gambetta, and the Sicilian social researcher and writer Umberto Santino (for their position in the field of Mafia studies see *Appendix*). I invited these authors to write a personal account of their research experience as Mafia scholars, insisting on four topics: how and why did they chose the Mafia as an object of investigation; which contribution to their sociological gaze and imagination this research provided and what the Mafia as a sociological object may contribute to the sociological imagination in general; what impact has their work had on Mafia studies and scholarship at large. Last but not least, what impact according to them their previous life experiences and values had on them choosing how to study the Mafia.

More generally, the aim of the Symposium is to stimulate leading authors in the field in an exercise of reflexivity, starting from their own research experience on this apparently odd and bizarre object of research. The assumption is that the Mafia has some peculiarities as an object of social research that makes it a useful test for assessing current practices of the social sciences, and the trans-historical validity of their original categories and special tools. I would add that one of the major working hypothesis here – not fully explained to the authors invited to contribute, but operating behind the project of the Symposium – was that the Mafia belongs to a social world in which the typical categories forged in the last century by social scientists in their effort to make sense of modern (Western) societies do not hold.

<sup>18</sup> On RAT see among others Elster 1989 and Goldthorpe 2000. For a well-known critique see Green and Shapiro 1996, and for a now almost classical alternative Bourdieu 1980.

In other words, the Mafia is one of those social realities that ask for a rethinking of the social sciences, and that push towards the development of alternative discourses [e.g. Burawoy 2005a; Alatas 2006; Connell 2007]. Two main arguments stand behind the hypothesis: 1) the early development of mafia-type organizations and practices in regions of the world whose histories have been relatively independent from Western institutions and histories (e.g. China, Japan); 2) the location of Sicily, as the country where the now universal but originally indigenous label “Mafia” came from, at the Southern borders of the Western world.<sup>19</sup>

Indeed, none of the authors really developed this aspect in her/his reflexive account. Nobody made a plea for alternative discourses or for a “Southernization” of the social sciences in order to cope with mafia puzzles. I would read this as evidence not of a faulty hypothesis but of the persisting attempt to make sense of our social world capitalizing on the ideas and perspectives set forth by the founding fathers of Western social sciences as well as Western interpretations of those disciplines – sociology included. It is a direction that I am not excluding nor attacking – but it is a direction whose ethnocentrism and epistemological myopia I would like to underline.

As I said, Mafia studies began as a positivistic inquiry into the social conditions of political liberalism in the *Mezzogiorno* region. And we could say that this political-intellectual genealogy is still exerting its influence more than a century later. The fate of *La Sicilia nel 1876* (*Sicily in 1876*) written by Franchetti and Sonnino is enlightening. These two scholars, lawyers by education, traveled through Sicily for months to gather information and above all to directly observe social life on the island, interviewing inhabitants and collecting documents. Their two-volume book – especially the first one, authored by Franchetti – set some of the standards for the analysis and understanding of social and economic life in Sicily and more widely, in the South of Italy. Better, it set the tenets for a major *representation* of Southern society and culture, which would influence many subsequent scholars and texts until today [see Moe 1998].

It is true that Mafia studies entered the world of professionalized social scientists very early but this move did not produce a radical change in the way Mafias were represented by those early observers whose political agenda was far from hidden. Indeed, we can say that the way the Mafia is represented in Mafia studies is still in many ways a reflection of its original representation, that is *from the point of view*

<sup>19</sup> Recall Sicily has been conquered and dominated for a century by Muslims in the Middle Ages: a legacy still strong in contemporary Sicilian cultural life, from gastronomy to linguistics to music. The same word “mafia” has almost surely Arabian roots. For the most recent study on the word “mafia” see Natella 2002. For the Muslim domination – a recurrent topic in early sociological and anthropological works on the Mafia (including Lombroso’s and Colajanni’s) - the reference text is Amari 1854.

of the national Liberal State, as fabricated by the early writers of the Mafia. These intellectuals were deeply engaged in the project of building a new state – and a new state/society relationship – according to standards established by other European countries, such as Great Britain, France or Germany where the model of the “Rule of Law” (*Rechtsstaat, Stato di diritto*) was forged. This model exerted a strong influence on Italian jurists, including Sicilian ones (such as Vittorio Emanuele Orlando, leader of the so-called Italian school of public law).<sup>20</sup> It is this model of the State – an abstract and formal model based on a historical and mainly localized instance/view of a political organization – that informed the vision of the Mafia as something “other”: the other of civility, of public life, of normality, of modernity [see Santoro 2007, 2011 on this point].

What contemporary sociologists could do, in order to remain faithful to their own sociological gaze, is to understand this vision as a necessarily partial representation (in the double sense of not impartial and limited, finished, selective) of a much larger and more complex reality, whose boundaries and meanings are far from being given and universally accepted. Indeed, sociologists should recall that they are actors as well as observers and analysts, and that our current understanding of the Mafia is dependent upon their intellectual tradition. In many ways, the Mafia as we know it is the representational effect of sociological imagination, deeply rooted in Italian positivist social sciences, and not independent from a political project of state and nation-building. Contemporary students of the Mafia should be aware of these roots, and account for this representation of their object as the outcome also of organizational activities [Becker 2007; Leahey 2008; see also Lieberman 1992], of budgets, professional codes, audience’s demands, scholarly standards, conventions, scholarly understanding of audience’s demands, scholarly concerns of audience’s uses of knowledge, as well as scholarly value orientations and cognitive biases.

The personal accounts provided by the contributors to the Symposium offer interesting material for this kind of “sociology of social research” in the field of Mafia

<sup>20</sup> It is one of the puzzle mafia scholars should address that Sicily is at the same time the country of the mafia and the place where an Italian school of constitutional law appeared, i.e. the intellectual circle working around the legal architecture of an Italian State. A major representative of this school is one of the early students of Orlando, the Sicilian Santi Romano who in 1917 published a book on the plurality of legal orders in which it was acknowledged (as Mosca did a few years earlier) the legitimate existence of “those secret societies which live in the shadow of the State,” acting like States: an influential legal theory which should be read sociologically not only as a potential, and indeed actual, justification of the mafia guaranteed by the same Italian legal thought [see Gambetta 1993] but firstly as the possible, and concrete, intellectual outcome of a living experience in the lands where mafia has emerged. In this light, the knowledge of mafia would become a necessary condition for the sociological account of one of the most consequential legal doctrines in Italian contemporary life. For a recent evaluation see Fontanelli 2011.

studies. In this context, a comparison with alternative discourses in the social sciences, with “Southern theory” for example, could help students who study the Mafia phenomenon to distance themselves from deeply held conceptions about what society is and how collective life should be organized. A good case in point is the distinction between “public” and “private”, a cornerstone in many studies of the Mafia which is accepted at face value according to criteria consistent with the abstract model of the (liberal, Western) state, and rarely discussed in terms of its epistemological grounds as the political effect of continuous boundary-work by historical actors (something feminist theory has much insisted on, e.g. Gal 2002.) A fetishism of the (European, liberal, modern) state as the unique, or most evolved, and complete political institution seems to inform any sociological discussion of the Mafia, making it almost impossible to think at the Mafia as another form of political organization, an instance of political life built around principles which are not those of the western state. Being at the border between North and South of the globe, and an island with a long history of colonial domination (e.g. Mack Smith 1968), Sicily could be the place for this kind of political experimentation. I will not pursue this line of thought here, I just want to highlight to the reader its feasibility and (sociological) plausibility in the case of a borderline hybrid social phenomenon such as the Mafia.

In order to conclude this short introduction, let me use an example drawn from the same mafia literature. For many years, social scientists have struggled against the popular representation of the Mafia as an organized large structure, as a complex organization with established norms and rituals, and a structure of official positions. Scholars such as Hess, Blok, the Schneiders, and their Italian followers for example, Arlacchi, insist that this was a media construction, a useful way of attracting mass audiences and helping prosecutors in their trials, but not a reliable empirical description of what the Mafia is and how it works.<sup>21</sup> The documentary evidence of old trials and the many existing police reports supporting this view were not enough to persuade social scientists about what they were not able to observe with their eyes, and to demonstrate with their own data. Then, with the arrival of the *pentiti*, and *State witnesses* in the 1980s, this sociological wisdom suddenly collapsed. All the evidence collected by the former-mafiosi told the same story: there was a large secret society, well organized, with rules, norms, rituals, codes, hierarchies and a clear division of labour. There was also an organizational history which accounted for many apparently puzzling episodes of violence.

<sup>21</sup> This was in part an effect of the American debate: see e.g. Albini 1971 and Ianni 1972, both insisting on Mafia as a kinship network of obligations and not as a formal organization. What those authors missed was that a social organization could be both (i.e. a structure of personal obligations and a formalized organization.)

The Sicilian Mafia emerged, thanks to the *pentiti* descriptions and their insiders' accounts, as a formal structure, as a true and established organization, not the contingent and temporary effect of social networking and relational practices. In a short period of time, what was acknowledged as a fact and as a definitive accomplishment of social research on the Mafia proved false. Why scholars have been so hostile to the idea that Mafiosi were organized actors and that the Mafia was a real organization (albeit not a monolithic one) is still to be ascertained in its fullness – at least, from a “sociology of knowledge” point of view.<sup>22</sup> Probably, better knowledge of popular culture – and some acquaintance with British cultural studies and studies of working class cultures [e.g. Thompson 1963; Thompson 1975] – would have helped them to accept at least the concrete possibility of a formalized associational life even among illiterate peasants, semi-literate artisans and workers. Still, a less suspicious attitude towards institutionalized data collection could have alerted them to sources that their historians colleagues were available to take seriously. Social agents, even poor and

<sup>22</sup> I would like to quote this recent reflection by Jane and Peter Schneider, as it shows how epistemological and personal motives may conflate in this process: “Similar to Blok, in our earlier writings we did not use the definite article ‘the Mafia,’ treating the phenomenon as if it were a seamless extension of its surroundings [...] In retrospect, there were two additional reasons for this 1960s and 1970s understanding of Sicilian organized crime as ill defined. One was the growing scholarly output of the new field of ‘Mediterranean Studies’ that, beyond the trope of ‘honor and shame’ [...] emphasized social relations structured through informal, non-corporate groups: networks of kinship, friendship, and patron-client relations. Woven out of loosely articulated personal ties, these webs of relations gave rise to short-lived coalitions or ‘action sets’ through which people got things done[...] Partaking of ‘Mediterranean’ social life, Sicily was readily characterized in this way, making it easy to dismiss the concept of ‘the’ Mafia as, to quote Charles Tilly’s introduction to Blok’s *The Mafia of a Sicilian Village*, ‘a simplifying fiction, invented by publicists and by Fascist officials charged with eliminating Southern Italian lawlessness’ (Tilly has since changed his mind, as have we). At the same time, what we experienced of the local Mafia cosca in Sambuca [the Sicilian village where they conducted their fieldwork] reinforced our misguided ideas about blurred boundaries and absent structure. A few months into our initial fieldwork in 1965, we got to know a mafioso and his family. This man, a meat butcher by trade, invited us to several events involving other Mafia figures – the series of celebratory banquets that Peter attended in 1966, held to seal a peace between meat dealers and wholesalers from several neighboring towns; collective sheepshearings followed by extravagant feasts; and Sunday afternoon gatherings at his home. It was striking to us that although these occasions took place in country locations beyond the purview of most of Sambuca’s residents, they were far from guarded or exclusive [...] According to the *pentiti* depositions, mafiosi resemble spiders for the energy they invest in weaving relationships intended to yield resources down the line. Although no immediate quid pro quo motivates particular gestures of hospitality, generous quantities of food, drink and entertainment are regularly offered through weddings and baptisms, banquets and feasts, hunting parties and Sunday dinners. The consequence is to enmesh all manner of potentially supportive outsiders in an arena of affect, obligating them, with a minimum of fear or intimidation, to respond to requests for reciprocity at some undefined future point. Our mistake, then, was to read such informality and apparent openness as the ‘real’ face of Mafia organization, rather than the far-flung net that keeps the real face going” [Schneider and Schneider 2006, 71-72]. On the creation of lasting moral (if not truly political) obligations through the offering of gifts as a constitutive feature of Mafia practice and organization see Santoro 2011.

illiterate ones, are more competent than many sociologists and anthropologists are keen to recognize.

The small lesson I draw from this episode in the history of social research is the following: as the Mafia asks to be acknowledged as an organized complex of (organized) activities, so sociology (as any other discipline, including anthropology, political science, and history) has to be understood as the outcome of some organized collective action, as the effect of the working of some organizational arrangements – departments, chairs, fellowships, chains and circles of collaborations, journals, book series, book reviews, quotation patterns, standard operations, research assessment procedures and so on. Sociology (as anthropology, etc.) exists as a social organization, and its practitioners are socially (historically, geographically, intellectually, epistemologically) positioned, in the social structure and in the academic field, sometimes even in other fields (the political one, for instance [Bourdieu 2001]). This comprehensive organization is not without having its effects on the intellectual products – the reports on, or representations of social reality – that emerged from its operations. Representations of the Mafia advanced by social scientists owe their content and form to the organization of those sciences – including their internal differentiation – and the conflicts as well the misunderstandings which typically occur among different circles and schools is something we still have to assess. It is therefore a sociology of the sociology of the Mafia that I am seeking: a reflexive sociology of the Mafia as a variously represented and reported “going concern” of social life [Hughes 1984].

Only through a reflexive vigilance on its own codes and forms, on its own working mechanisms, can the sociological analysis of the Mafia hope to take control of its understandable biases and prejudices (including what which Bourdieu once called the “thought of the State”)<sup>23</sup> and approximate that disenchanted “objectivity” which is the ideal grounding norm, and the horizon, of a social science as *science*. This symposium hopes to be a first step in this direction.

<sup>23</sup> As Bourdieu [1998, 35] writes: “To endeavor to think the State is to take the risk of taking over (or being taken over by) a thought of the State.” We can paraphrase him by saying that “to think the mafia is to take the risk of taking over (or being taken over by) a thought of the State.” Rarely Mafia scholars are also specialists in the study of the State, and it is common in mafia studies to implicitly compare the reality of the mafia with the model of “the State” – as if the model were the reality. For a corrective to this naive conception of the State see Clastres 1974, Migdal 1988 and Scott 1998. I have tried to explore and develop the implications of a radically *not State-centric vision* of the (Sicilian) Mafia in Santoro 2007 and Santoro 2011, moving (also) from the concept of the gift as elementary form of political relationship.

## **Appendix. Italian Mafia Studies, 1970-2011: A Conceptual Map**

Mafia studies comprise something like a field, in Bourdieusian terms. There are signs (not always consistent, to be sure) that today the dominant approach in the field of Mafia studies (a field that only in part overlaps with the much larger field of organized crime research, as noticed) is occupied by exponents and followers of the so called economic theory of the mafia – with Diego Gambetta’s book of 1993 working as a manifesto or charter. This does not mean this theory is the dominant or hegemonic one (there are signs it is not): it only means that you have to refer to this theory in order to position yourself and possibly advance in the field. Where exactly other approaches/authors are located is not easy to say, also because there is a lack of a shared way of organizing the theoretical environment. To make some order, I propose in this appendix a simple classification of approaches, each with some examples – including, of course, the authors in this Symposium.

We can distinguish between perspectives which are economic in orientation (e.g. insisting on both material and rational dimension of human conduct and life), and perspectives which put greater emphasis on non-material and non-rational aspects – be they symbols or status positions or identities – or even power management and regulation. The first class includes apparently different approaches as rational action theory and political economy, i.e. individualistic and holistic approaches.

But the most important distinction is about the identification of the mafia phenomenon: is the Mafia something which pertains to economics or to some other sphere/life order, such as politics or social solidarity (e.g. communal life)? Is the mafia an economic phenomenon or a political one? Is it business or government?

To be sure, *Mafia seems exactly “the” institutional order which makes such conceptual distinctions problematic*: the differentiation between spheres of life which comprises so many parts of modern society’s identity and structure looks less clear when seen through the prism of Mafia and Mafia-like phenomena. I would rather say that what makes Mafia sociologically interesting is exactly its resistance at being easily captured by the established categories of the social sciences – categories generated by the meeting of a certain gaze with a certain historical, and geographical, experience. Letizia Paoli’s reference to the notion of “multi-functional brotherhoods” [Paoli 2003] tries to capture this lack of differentiation, of course. However, as scholars are eager to make sense of the Mafia translating its puzzling phenomenology into our common categories (which include the distinction between economics and politics, as well as between public and private), it is still possible and plausible to use these institutional distinctions as tools for distinguishing theories of the Mafia. Gambetta’s economic theory of the Mafia as “an industry of private protection” is the

most explicit among current theories on this aspect. But it is relatively easy to classify also other theories according to the same conceptual structure. So, it is apparent that Filippo Sabetti sees the Mafia as belonging to the realm of government & politics more than to economics, and it is possible to say the same for scholars as different as Umberto Santino and Henner Hess – the latter with his identification of Mafias as para-State organizations (see this Symposium.)

		<i>Perspective</i>	
		Economic*	Non economic
<i>Mafia Identity</i>	Economic (e.g. mafia as a business, an industry, a form of capitalism)	Gambetta  Schneiders  Varese	Arlacchi
	Not economic (e.g. mafia as government, as political mediation, as mutual help society, etc.)	Sabetti	Paoli Santino  Blok  Hess

Fig. A1. Italian Mafia studies, 1970-2011: a conceptual map (I).

\* includes Political Economy.

*Legend:* position in the cells is representative also of distances from other perspectives (e.g. Varese is less distant than Gambetta from an identification of the Mafia as “not economic entity”).

Things are more complex, however, because authors can change their privileged perspective in time: this is the case of the Schneiders, for example/instance, who moved from a neo-Marxist political-economy approach to an interpretation of Mafia much more sensitive to both “culture and politics” in their last book [see Tarrow 2006]. Something similar could be said for Varese, who moved toward the acceptance of a more blurred distinction between mafia as business and mafia as government [compare Varese 2011 and Varese 2011]. However, I guess the conceptual map offered in figure 1 still roughly works.



This conceptual map would be incomplete however if not supplemented by a second one, built on the now traditional distinction between action, structure (e.g. social structure) and culture (e.g. cultural structure). Figure 2 shows how current authors and theories can be mapped onto this set of distinctions, whose analytical space partly overlaps with the perspective/identity map. For the “action” side, the main difference is between scholars who adopt a rational choice perspective and scholars who follow a less constraining theory of action. Rational choice theory in the study of organized crime has been pioneered by Peter Reuter in the 1980s, and already applied to the study of the Mafia by Sabetti [1984]. Gambetta [1993] made it a cornerstone of his economic theory of the Mafia “as industry of private protection.” For an application of the same theory (RAT) to an important historical case which exhibits some resemblance to the Mafia – an application apparently independent from Gambetta’s and with somewhat different results – see Leeson [2009]. The idea of “social structure” is not a uniform one: for some (e.g. Gambetta) it roughly means the structure of property rights, for others (e.g. Blok) it is the structure of social relations. For others it is mainly the class structure (e.g. Santino). “Culture” is conceived in terms of norms and values by Hess, who wrote in the 1960s, but not by Paoli – who makes use of a “revised” concept of culture as symbols and cognitive schemas. This is the same concept of culture we can find in the economic theory of the Mafia even if it is almost never named as such (culture is for Gambetta norms and values; skills and cognition do not refer to culture in the economic theory of the mafia, even if they are “culture” in the most recent cultural theory which capitalizes on Bourdieu, Geertz, Mary Douglas and so on: see e.g. Smith 2001). But in the economic theory, mafia culture has a regulative status whereas in Paoli [as in Santoro 2007] it plays a constitutive role [on this distinction see DiMaggio 1994].

		STRUCTURE	
		Social structure	Cultural structure
ACTION (RAT theory)	YES	Gambetta Sabetti Varese	
	NO	Schneiders Arlacchi Catanzaro Santino Blok	Hess Paoli

Fig. A2. Italian Mafia Studies, 1970-2011: a conceptual map (II)

Last but not least, it is useful to try to locate and make sense of sociological (or anthropological, or political science) works/studies on the Mafia according to the types or genres of sociology (extending to other disciplines the classifications used for sociology). I have in mind here, in particular, the four-fold distinction between professional sociology, policy sociology, critical sociology, and public sociology [Burawoy 2005b]. Let me say that these distinctions are frequently collapsed or blurred in the literature on the Mafia, mainly because of the strong presence of a critical and a public attitude even among followers of “professional” sociology (this is why I have decided not to include a diagram for this classification). In a sense, we could say that a critical stance is implicit in every piece of sociological work on the Mafia. This criticism is addressed usually toward the Mafia itself, and secondarily toward the social structure and/or the political system which make the Mafia possible. Moreover, it is a common ambition of Mafia scholars to write for, and to be read by, an audience that is larger than their peers or students: this makes room for frequent incursions in the territories of public sociology with their typical features

(readability, communication devices useful for reaching large audience, etc). This is, let me say, what makes a book like *Gomorra* less an instance of a public sociology of Mafia (but recall Saviano, even if professionally a writer, has a educational background as a philosopher and anthropologist) than a successful performance in creative writing grounded on public documents readings and backed by direct (and sometimes participant) observation. The ambition to offer policy advises or recipes is very common among scholars on Mafia as organized crime – who often act or have acted (or hope to act) as advisors of governments or other public organizations (including ONGs), and are often asked to provide for this advise and recipes.

An important point: it is often difficult to locate a given text in one or another class (or genre) because of the gap between explicit or manifest aims and/or self-representation and hidden or latent ones. It is not rare that texts or approaches presenting themselves as pure exercises in social analysis conceal (and commonly presume) a political or at least normative stance towards a certain state of the world. It is not rare that this stance is communicated through the adoption of a linguistic register that sometimes exemplifies what has been termed – not without a normative bias – as “expressive sociology” [Boudon 2002]. In previous work I have argued that this would be the case with the economic theory of the Mafia, which presents itself as the most analytical and detached, if not scientific, representation of the Mafia and mafia-like things [Santoro 2007]. I believe that the essays included in this Symposium show better than any close reading of the originals the many moral as well as political assumptions grounding and guiding even the best studies in analytical terms. This is very apparent with Hess, the Schneiders and Santino, but can be inferred also easily by a symptomatic reading of the papers by Sabetti and Gambetta. With Weber, we would say that this “relation to values” is a necessary requisite and ingredient of any social study. With the same Weber, however, we could ask if scholars working on Mafia make all efforts to put aside or keep under control those same values when doing empirical research, theorizing about their data, and writing.

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## **Introduction. The Mafia and the Sociological Imagination**

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