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The Trickle-Down of Corruption: Italy, Mafia, and the Crisis of Legality

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Introduction: The Italian Anomaly

Italy is a borderline country, teetering permanently on the brink of disaster in conditions of stable instability, battered by continuous crises that mostly originate in the political system to infiltrate the now dysfunctional economic and social environments. The unification of Italy occurred more than 150 years ago, yet the country never developed a coherent and fully-integrated sense of its own identity. On the contrary, the country is composed of contradictory – and sometimes totally incompatible – models of politics and economic development, as well as controversial life-styles. Undoubtedly, this is not a genetic shortcoming specific to Italians, but a product of a convoluted political past.

First, the present lack of identity is a consequence of the ineptitude of the elite who ruled the state-making process, selling a coherent and unitary image of themselves to the communities they pretended to include in the newborn kingdom – it is enough to remember the conflicting political attitudes of Cavour and Garibaldi (Macry 2012; Lupo 2011). The consequence was an incapacity to nourish the very idea of citizenship. This was further reinforced by a decision implemented by the unitary governments to co-opt rather than coerce the pre-existing southern Italian power elite in the Mezzogiorno and particularly in Sicily, which actually supported the survival of autonomous power centers equipped with means of coercion (Tilly, 2007). As a result, “the unification process, and the way the House of Savoy managed the first years of the new kingdom, emphasized the relevance and the power of organized crime groups, which ended up reinforced instead of defeated” (Felice 2013, 61).

Second, the Italian anomaly is a by-product of the solutions adopted by the power elite after the ruinous experiences of the two World Wars and the authoritarian fascist interlude to try to solve the original fault in the state-making process. In his opening chapter of *La crisi italiana*, Sidney Tarrow, debating the Italian crisis of the 1970s, concluded that, despite its serious, multiform, and still unfinished character, the crisis came under the control of the power elite: “the politicalization of the crisis and the fragmented response are an attempt to prevent an organic crisis of the system” (Tarrow 1979, 37). This is absolutely true: Italy is a country based on the “hegemony of the political society,” or rather a country lacking a capacity of collective mobilization, in which the political society “tends to monopolize the arena of the exchanges and places itself at the center as a mediator” between state and civil

society; political society asserts “its own hegemony as the hegemony of intermediaries” (Farneti 1994, 25 and 26). In the case of political hegemony, “the appropriation of power and work is monopolistically implemented by the political society through a series of blatant appropriations, such as the spoils system, for example; or through latent appropriations usually implemented by corruption, cronyism, and so on” (Farneti 1994, 28). From the end of World War II, it was the politicians in Italy who developed specific skills of illegality, successfully involving increasing numbers of people from the civil society. This means the political elite bears the main responsibility for the ongoing crisis, even if ultimately they share it with elements of both the economic and social elites and the broader civil society: “Civil society, far from being subjugated by an all-embracing political class, has been successfully coopted into a system of *common* interests which has turned most Italians, whether consciously or not, into accomplices of the system” – as well as with the mafia, one of its most efficient partners (Guzzini 1995, 32).

The evolution of the Italian political system led to the current crisis, a crisis that eventually proved to be foundational more than simply organic: it is a crisis of legality so radical that it is rocking the very core of Italian democracy. Every day in Italy, the news carries additional evidence of this unprecedented crisis, pointing out a widespread indifference to laws and to punishments among growing numbers of individuals. This has been observed to such a great degree that we can assume that the laws are no longer part of their everyday lives.¹ In this sense, the crisis of legality foreshadows the questioning of the very foundations of legitimacy, or the belief in the validity of the legal power. But that’s not all. In Italy, the “normal” pathologies of cronyism and corruption that are widespread in other democratic countries are transformed into something completely different because of the proliferation of mafias. The main influencing factor is that criminal organizations in Italy manage considerable resources of violence and money that are largely unknown (under this form and in such severity) in other developed countries. The current Italian crisis, therefore, is foundational not only because of the arbitrary (illegal) character of power, but also because of the proliferation of *de facto* (illegitimate) powers, the mafias.²

We must further assume that in order to explain the current crisis of legality it is necessary to retell Italian history, combining different narratives which social scientists tend to separate – in particular, as they distinguish the evolution of mafia from that of the political and economic systems or offer an idiosyncratic representation of their relationships. The first section offers a brief interpretation of the period of Italian socio-political turmoil known as the Years of Lead as the early warning symptom of what has been defined from time to time

as the Italian collapse (Crainz 2015), the beginning of the bronze age (Felice 2015, 301) or, more bluntly, the Italian disaster (Anderson 2014). The second builds on the combined effects of the assassinations of the prosecutors Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino in Palermo and the Bribesville (*Tangentopoli*) scandal in Milan – but there is no guarantee there will be any empirical correlation between the two events. The third outlines the main traits of mafia expansion at home and beyond their territories of origin. The fourth investigates the peculiarities of mafia colonization of Central and Northern Italy, and the flywheel role they assumed in trickling down corruption. Finally, the conclusion offers Italy as a paradigm of “real existing democracy” (in the same way as we had “real existing socialism” during the Cold War).

Retelling the Story of the Years of Lead

All the sources tend to correlate the Years of Lead story strictly with terrorism, be it in Italy or West Germany, but this narrative does not fit the Italian situation perfectly. Between 1970 and 1993, the mafia murdered 612 civilians and representatives of the Institutions, whereas left- and right-wing terrorism were responsible for 181 deaths, and what were called “state massacres” caused a further 129 fatalities.³ The mafia killed 70 members of law enforcement agencies (the terrorists killed 105), 17 judges (terrorists 11), and 14 politicians (terrorists one, Prime Minister Aldo Moro).⁴ It is worth noting that such an extreme level of violence has no comparison in Europe. Several other countries were affected by the problem of terrorism over that same period; however, none of them were simultaneously faced with the violence of terrorism and of organized crime.⁵ The point is that the Sicilian Cosa Nostra was killing more people than all of the other organized crime and terrorist groups combined. And if we take a closer look at the killings, what emerges is the extremely precise targeting of their victims: investigators, prosecutors, journalists, entrepreneurs, politicians – not chosen for their symbolic value, for what they *represent* (contrary to terrorism) but for who they *are*: individual enemies of the clans, antagonists or resisters in the mafia’s territorial wars.

On May 9, 1978, while the Red Brigade was leaving the body of Aldo Moro in Via Caetani, in Rome, the apex of terrorist strategy, mafia members planted a bomb that executed Giuseppe Impastato, a political and anti-mafia activist, in Cinisi (Palermo), in an attempt to validate the lie that he was a terrorist preparing an attack. In 1979 the Cosa Nostra killed, among others, Michele Reina (Provincial Secretary of the Christian Democratic Party) and Cesare Terranova (member of the Court of Appeal in Palermo, and former member of the Parliament for the Communist Party and of the Anti-mafia Parliamentary Commission). In

1980, Piersanti Mattarella (Christian Democrat, president of the Sicilian Region) and Gaetano Costa (Chief Prosecutor in Palermo) met the same fate, as did Pio La Torre (member of the Parliament for the Communist Party and of the Antimafia Parliamentary Commission, and then Regional Secretary of the Communist Party) and Carlo Alberto Dalla Chiesa (General of the Carabinieri, founder of the anti-terrorism special corps, and Prefect in Palermo for less than four months)⁶ in 1982. This list is not intended for comparative purposes, or to produce a ranking of importance of the victims; it has been compiled simply to suggest that social scientists should revisit the story of the Italian Years of Lead.

Terrorism has been tellingly defined as an “insurgency symptomatic of a blocked situation,” the reaction to a political stalemate, to a political system unable to innovate (Bonanate 1979, 176; Manconi 2008). This is the perfect description of the Italian situation – a product of both international and domestic factors, from the role Italy played in Cold War strategies to the inability of the country’s successive governments – despite the expansion of the left, highlighted by the election of the country’s first Socialist Prime Minister (Bettino Craxi, 1983) – to regulate and govern the ongoing dramatic social and economic transformations (Ginsborg 2003, ch. 5). We should not forget that from the end of the 1960s, Italy and other European countries were facing a new and growing wave of contention between new political movements and the old party system (Tarrow, in this volume). But beyond that, the “Italian miracle” had already expired (Felice 2015, ch. 6; Battilani and Fauri 2014, ch. 4) dramatically reducing the competitiveness of Italian industries in an international setting dominated by the first global oil crisis and the simultaneous structural changes induced in the international financial markets marked by the end of the Bretton Woods System (see the chapters in this volume by Bini and Hopkin and Lynch). This resulted in the free circulation of currencies, which deprived central banks and international monetary authorities of any residual powers of control, in the privatization of credit, and in the proliferation of offshore financial centers (Gilpin 1987; Strange 1986).

In this global scenario, mafias in Italy played a role similar to the terrorist groups: they, too, used violence in attempts to unlock the political stalemate, answer the political and economic interests of private groups, and mobilize the masses against the government. Investigations revealed that at times mafia interests converged with the interests of neo-fascist groups and disloyal sectors of the state apparatus; but in this case the aim was to foster a transition to authoritarianism, manipulating the citizens’ consent through panic.⁷ It is beyond the scope of this essay to summarize the events of those decades, most of which are still to be fully unravelled, and we are still waiting for the government to publish the relevant

classified documents. However, it is at least worth remembering the archetypal narrative of the 1970s and the 1980s in the matter of the secret Masonic Lodge “Propaganda 2,” ruled by Licio Gelli; it managed to form a very effective and well-structured network of politicians, members of the armed forces and secret services, and the financial lobbies. And within this narrative, the bankers Michele Sindona and Roberto Calvi both played a role. Their stories were closely intertwined, involving the same political milieu, the same Vatican Bank, the mafia, and suicide – the first in an Italian jail, with cyanide, on March 22, 1986; the second, by hanging under the Blackfriars Bridge in London on June 17, 1982 (Silj 1994, 331ff; Crainz 2005, 491ff). Sindona, in particular, was a real precursor of an upcoming generation of financial executives, and he tested every opportunity offered by the post-Bretton Woods financial market, speculating both in Italy and the United States, locating easy hospitality for his illicit gains in various international tax havens. He proved to be an incomparable wildcatter, openly endorsing his powerful political and economic friendships, unscrupulous in menacing his opponents and using violence if he felt it necessary. He commissioned the American mafia to kill Giorgio Ambrosoli, a liquidator in charge of Sindona’s bank; Ambrosoli was gunned down in Milan on July 11, 1979 (Stajano 1991). Sindona personifies an overly common way of conceiving politics and economy in the Italian First Republic, and a symptom of an even worse disease to come.

1992, Building On the Palermo-Milan Nexus

The year 1992 marked a critical juncture in Italian history, in which two heavy and prolonged conflicts, or cleavages, converged (Rokkan 1999, 278ff). The first concerned the evolution of the mafia system, with particular regard to the Sicilian Cosa Nostra. Decades of a well-planned strategy of violence culminated in two explosions in Palermo: on May 23, Giovanni Falcone was killed with his wife Francesca Morvillo and three police officers; on July 19, Paolo Borsellino and five police officers suffered the same fate. Investigators, politicians, intellectuals, and citizens all joined in the debate on the causes of and responsibility for these events, but devoted considerably less attention to their consequences. Some of the major Cosa Nostra bosses were arrested over the following months and years, and every now and then there would be discussions on who had ultimately won the war – the mafia or the state? And yet this was not the appropriate question.⁸

Social scientists, in particular, should have been questioning the outcomes in terms of the consequences for the mafia organizations, and for the relationships between mafia and both the political system and the civil society. From this perspective, the main result of the 1992

cleavage was that the mafia groups opted for a different strategy that implied a lesser use of explicit violence and a more nuanced variety of dissuasive-corruptive-collusive-clientelistic relationships, depending on the interests involved, and the setting of these relationships.

Paradoxically, this evolution was reinforced by the second cleavage Italy experienced in 1992: namely, Bribesville and the subsequent end of the First Republic.⁹ In the 25 months following February 17, 1992 – the date of the first incarceration in Milan – more than 4,500 individuals were arrested, and around 25,400 more received a notice of investigation. Approximately 1,100 members of the Parliament and politicians were involved, investigated, or jailed (Diamanti 2008). We agree that “once the parties that had been in power collapsed, an enormous void was left at the center of the Italian political system” (Crainz 2015, 179), and this collapse benefitted new parties like the Northern League, and, particularly, Berlusconi’s *Forza Italia*, successful thanks to the peculiarly attractive (albeit ambiguous) charisma of its leader, Silvio Berlusconi. However, we should add two more considerations. The first is that the Italian political system also collapsed so abruptly because the old mass-based parties had already begun to lose their legitimation with the end of the Cold War. This is also the reason why “the [1992] crisis went well beyond the overturning of the political class: more overtly than in the crisis of the late 1960s, it involved a growing sentiment of *antipolitica*, a preference for direct, as opposed to representative forms of participation” (Tarrow, this volume). The fact is that the “end of ideologies,” perceived as a liberation in the Italian political debate, also left a desert devoid of ideas and of coherent political projects. This also produced successive waves of populism, emotional (and often unpredictable) electoral exits, and the proliferation of leaders who attempted to be charismatic, and enforced their political programs through armies of ghost writers and spin doctors, whose task, by definition, was not to produce “great thoughts” but “great words” – and, when necessary, were also “professionals in lying” (Arendt 1972).

The second consideration is that Bribesville also had the effect of destroying the old networks of illegal political financing and corruption; however, there was no action addressing the structural causes of these phenomena, nor was this ever a job for the judicial powers. Corruption still dramatically increased instead of dropping. The new political system was not totally dormant: “In less than two decades, three anti-corruption agencies have been established, two major transparency initiatives have been launched, two codes of conduct for public personnel have been introduced, the incompatibility regime has been reviewed twice” (Piccio, Di Mascio and Natalini 2014, 189). However, this gives the impression of reactions and counter-reactions rather than a coherent and consistent anti-corruption reform program.

The overall pattern observed with respect to the Italian governments' disposition towards anti-corruption policy reforms since the 1990s is one of incremental change: policy changes have been developed occasionally and unevenly, disguised as substantial continuity yet lacking effective implementation (ibid.)

The new political system still had the problem of recruiting its members and financing their activities, with the growing relevance of private media raising the cost of campaigning; and this occurred beyond any real judicial or social control. While prior to 1992 corruption was one of the main financial resources for political party activities and their top leaders on a national level, at this point private accumulation of wealth became the main motivation for corruption. Misappropriation of public funds was spreading in local governments, too, shifting the practice of corruption from "stealing for the party" to "stealing the party" (Crainz 2015, 184). In spite of the surge of moral shame from the media and public opinion, in the private sphere the moral cost of corruption seemed to decrease further. The diffusion of mafia subcultures forcefully preached estrangement from the state and from the law – so much so that Bribesville rapidly proved to be a "squandered opportunity" (Della Porta and Vannucci 1999).

The year 1992 is mostly (and accurately) remembered as the year of the Maastricht Treaty and progress in European unification. We should not forget, however, that for Italy it marked the beginning of a growing devaluation of the Lira, which would lose 40 percent of its value against the US Dollar and the German Mark over three years, producing a currency storm and Italy's withdrawal from the European Monetary System (Graziani 2000). To meet the targets of joining the Euro system, between 1992 and 1998 successive governments were forced to drain huge financial resources, further reducing the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and cutting investments in the principle fields of research, innovation, and education (Felice 2015). During that period, the most dynamic components of the modern Italian economy were operating as a fourth type of capitalism (based mainly on the model of the industrial districts); but they had to share the market with criminal enterprises – namely Cosa Nostra, Camorra, and 'Ndrangheta – which dramatically increased their revenues and spilled out to the other regions of the country from their home bases in southern Italy (Amatori 2011).

If we go back briefly to the Years of Lead, we can now see that, while terrorism was losing most of its allure as a reaction to a stagnant situation, the mafia by contrast proved to be an effective enabler, offering an exit route for the political and economic stalemate. Moreover, "upturning a liberalist metaphor, we could say that the [Italian] elite has not promoted a 'trickling down' process whereby wealth is distributed across the country, but has

encouraged a process in which what actually ‘trickles down’ is illegality” (Ruggiero 2012, 157). The effects of the two cleavages finally accumulate to welcome the mafias wherever political and economic collusive relationships already exist, increasing the particularistic appropriation of collective resources (Sciarrone 2014).

Criminal Clusters at Home and Abroad

First of all, corruption represents a sort of highway offered to mafia clans to facilitate their spread in Northern Italy (Dalla Chiesa 2015). Secondly, corruption takes root first and foremost in the public works sector, where cartels form frequently, and legitimate entrepreneurs, professionals, white collar criminals, and members of mafia clans are all involved (Ruggiero 2012). In recent years, when comparing a growing number of case studies, social scientists have investigated why and how mafia clans move. We have observed the proliferation of different, and sometimes contrasting, paradigms which aimed to shed light on the shifts and patterns in the mobility of organized crime groups outside of their territories of origin – for example, a wide range of push and pull factors were identified, forces which drive these groups *from* or *to* a specific setting (Morselli, Turcotte and Tenti, 2011).

Most of these contributions were built on the main assumption, first stated by Gambetta (1993), that mafias are illegal economic enterprises involved in the production, promotion, and sale of private protection (Varese 2011a, 2011b; Campana 2011; Vannucci 2015). Considerable empirical evidence suggests, however, that mafias, more than any other type of organized crime, are much more than ordinary protection enterprises. For one thing, they can count on a significant and durable amount of social capital (Sciarrone 2009). For another, their organizational forms are unusually flexible: “in real circumstances, different levels of action and organization may coexist and combine. Territorial expansion processes may involve individuals, groups or organizations; and they may mainly pursue an economic mode and follow the logic of affairs, or the organizational mode that favours the logic of membership” (Sciarrone 2014, 33).

At this point, we aim to enrich this perspective, with some points that should better explain the ongoing foundational crisis of Italian legality:

1. In their territories of origin, mafias develop as organizations consisting of different clans; they are more or less hierarchically structured to balance their need for authority (almost always protected by secrecy) without having to give up on a network, and can adapt easily to different needs. Mafias pursue profits through monopolistic positions in illicit markets and

make instrumental use of legitimate markets, primarily for covert activities and money laundering. Finally, mafias achieve their position of control by using violence as a specific, though not exclusive, means for acquiring political power (Armao 2000).

2. The clan is the main unit of analysis and is defined as a group that aims to unite and safeguard the interests and security of its members, based on a subjective notion of identity and belonging, more than the objective reality of kinship identified as the existence of family or blood connections.¹⁰ The limits of a clan are defined by its own claims of identity, which must be confirmed within the social context through a process of affirmation and verification of its own legitimacy, and, in the final analysis, by the clan's capacity to command the obedience of its own members. Territory is the main factor in clan coalescence, and it depends in no small part on shared living conditions and subcultures (Armao 2015).

3. Clans combine the idea of local dominion with the globalizing logic of colonization of new domains beyond the borders of their home territories. This development model translates into a process characterized by alternating phases of entrenchment and expansion: the clan takes shape in a specific territorial context, but once its power has been consolidated, it looks to establish new settlements; preferably it will expand initially into adjacent regions, and then into different countries or even other continents. Both of these phases may be further subdivided into two additional stages: a) entrenchment (territorial conquest through violence and/or consensus); and b) expansion (projection of power through commercial colonization and/or settlement colonization).

4. Clans increasingly tend to structure themselves like clusters of integrated and geographically proximate companies, interconnected by a variety of externalities, and classifiable according to two variables: a) degree of clustering and b) life cycle. On the basis of the degree of clustering, it is possible to distinguish between *pure agglomerations*, *social networks* and *political complexes*, depending primarily on the existence or not of prerequisites for admission and the pretense of exclusive membership, as well as the prevailing attitude of trust or opportunism among the members. On the basis of the life cycle, we can distinguish between four phases: a) *latency*, or the presence in a specific territory of favorable conditions, such as a large reservoir for the recruitment of new members, and political and economic players eager to take advantage of the opportunities created by the clan; b) *development*, or the moment in which a clan legitimizes its claim to power (if necessary by dissuading, or effectively using violence against competitors); c) *institutionalization*, or the consolidation of both the financial resources and the relationships with other political and economic players; and d) *transformation*, or the capability to comply

with evolving market demands and governing strategies. In everyday life, investigations may discover cases that combine elements from different ideal types, as well as clans in transition with regard to their degree of clustering or life cycle. It is essential to add, however, that no single one of these types is necessarily better or more powerful and reliable than the others. The highly institutionalized political complex, for example, is not necessarily the most cost-effective. The winning strategy in this game is one which, case-by-case, reveals itself to be most compatible with input received from the surrounding environment, in an endless game of action and reaction, and reciprocal influence. This also means, finally, that clans may enforce different types of cluster models at home and in the areas of new settlement, depending on the different political, economic and even cultural environment, specific to that territory (Armao 2014). Figure 1 is a tentative representation of the distribution of clans, based on the degree of clustering and life cycle.

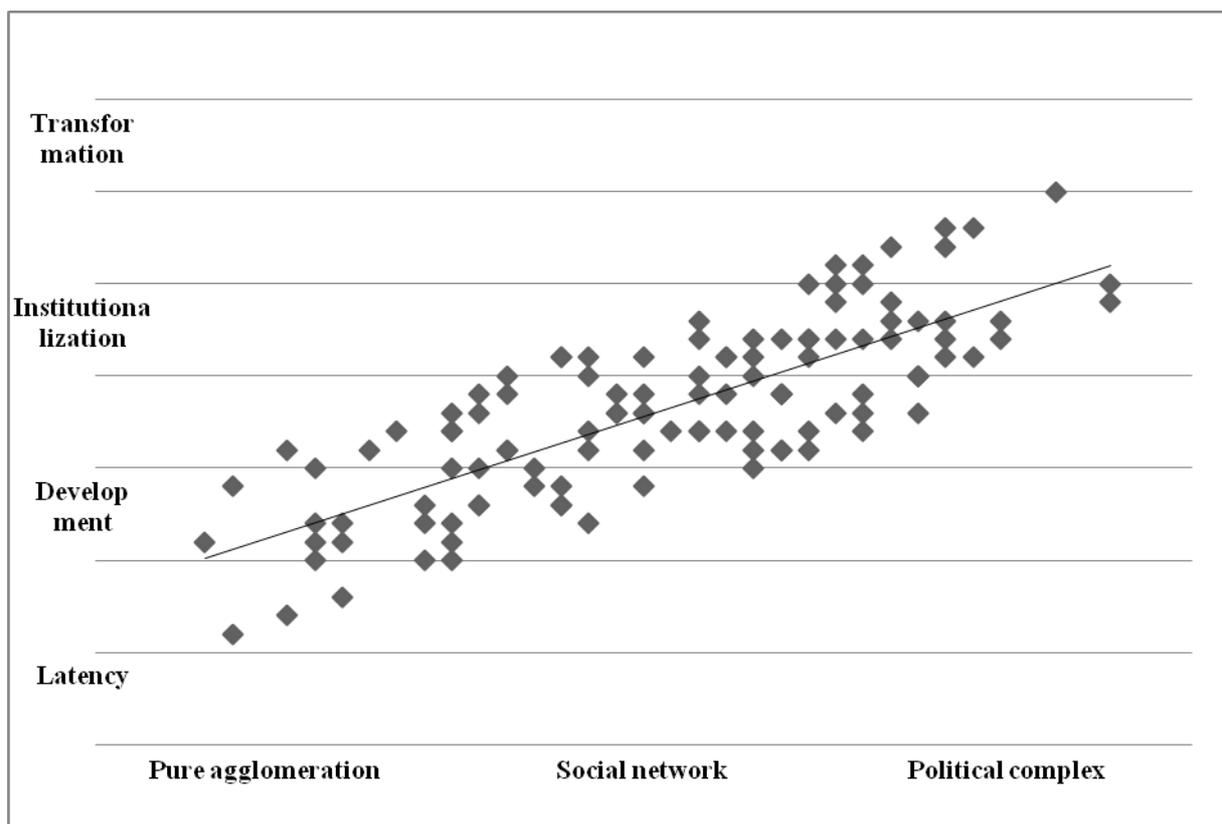


Fig. 1: Distribution of clans based on the degree of clustering and life cycle

The power of the clans, the reason they can be so effective in transplanting beyond their territories of origin, is based exactly on their capability to interact with the social environment. This networking activity, ranging from intimidation to flattery, tends to

generate a grey area of relationships whose borders are difficult to trace, yet they exist with actors who are not all equal. We propose to identify these actors on the basis of the options – exit, voice, and loyalty – that the clans make available to them: respectively, the possibility of shifting from that clan to other groups in the arena, of stating one’s own opinion (or dissatisfaction) in order to change the practices of the clan, of proclaiming one’s loyalty as a way of demonstrating compliance to the will of the boss, and as a means of increasing one’s influence over the leadership (Hirschman 1970).¹¹ We may therefore distinguish four different types of subjects:

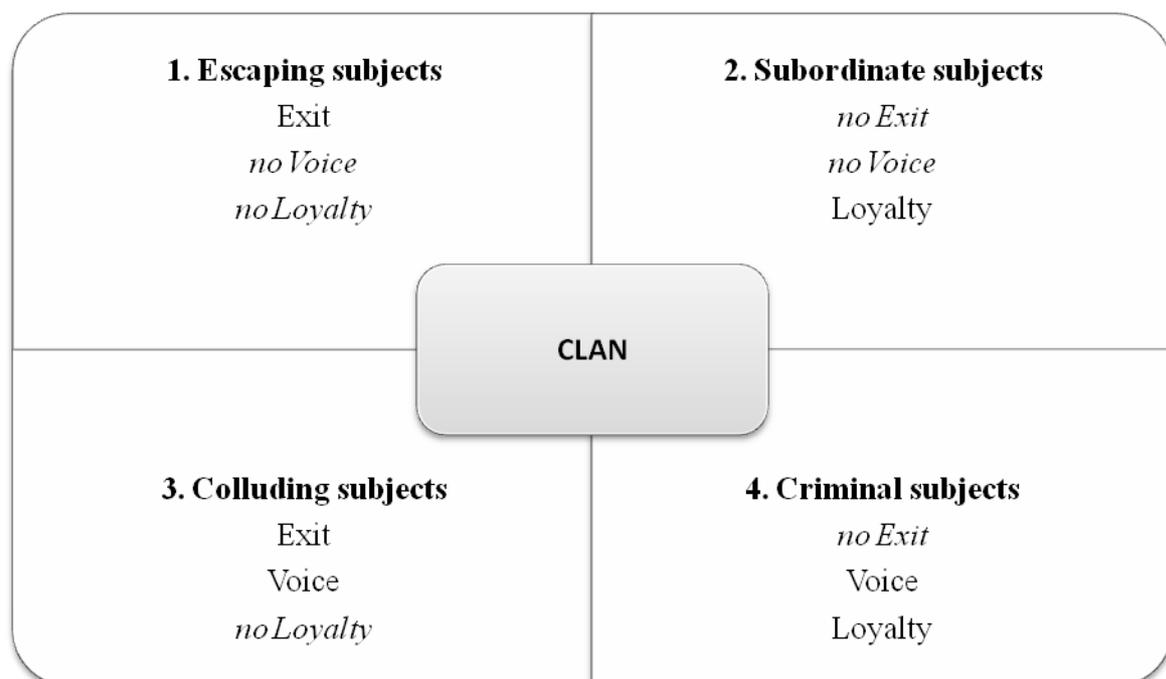


Fig. 2: The quadrant of clan relationships

1. *Escaping subjects*: individuals who do not possess any relevant benefit for the clan and who, therefore, are not even asked to join. The appearance of a clan on their territory, however, will not prompt them to resist or seek an alternative authority, such as the state – in fact, these are both risky undertakings that might provoke the revenge of the mafiosi. Their acquiescence relegates them to a condition that they pretend not to see and not to know. For these individuals, the exit strategy, which means abandoning the territory, is always an available option, but they will have no chance of requesting favours from the clans, nor will they have the opportunity to reinforce their voice by proclaiming a loyalty which is not even asked of them.

2. *Subordinate subjects*: individuals who hold offices or possess skills and resources relevant

to the clan's requirements. The clan subjects these people to its full coercive power, and does not allow them to escape the subjugation nor soften the effects by allowing them to use their own voice. Paradoxically, these subjects have no choice but to profess their loyalty to a culture and values they do not necessarily share, in the hope of obtaining the clan's protection.

3. *Colluding subjects*: individuals who create mutually convenient relationships with the clan aimed at satisfying common interests. For both actors, these relationships assume a fully utilitarian nature thanks to the fact that the colluded individual knows that he or she possesses resources which are essential to the clan; while the clans know that they can compel the colluded individual into maintaining or even increasing those resources over time. The bargaining power of colluding subjects allows them to overtly demonstrate any potential dissatisfaction with the clan, as well as preserve the exit option, if only as a coercive measure. Loyalty, on the other hand, has little relevance in a relationship pragmatically devoted to achieving the maximum conceivable benefit for both parties involved.

4. *Criminal subjects*: individuals who totally comply with the clan, even though they are not effective members. These individuals represent a fifth column in civil society, and their main task is to increase the level of consent. Loyalty remains the basis for their action; voice is ancillary to it and used only when needed to defend the clan's interests – which helps explain why most of the time criminal subjects cannot even conceive, let alone implement, an exit strategy from their chosen affiliation.

Empirical research should strive to classify the various subjects living in a given clan-ruled territory according to the four quadrant categories, and test the clan's ability to appropriately (and rationally) perform the following three options: a) provide an exit for those who either do not matter, or matter too much, and not to those for whom the clan has the greatest need; b) give voice to the true believers and those who have resources, and not to those who have no other choice than to submit; c) forgo loyalty in peer relationships and appeal to it to fuel the voices of the supporters and ensure the silence of those who are afraid. On the other hand, this grid could become an instrument by which the degree of responsibility of the subjects interacting with the clan is measured. However, we must bear in mind the fact that escaping and colluding subjects have more freedom of choice than subordinated and criminal subjects. Lest this fourfold typology appear too abstract or academic, it is worth noting that it reflects the way some Italian legal authorities have come to understand the situation. In a recent trial, an entrepreneur from Brianza was sentenced to 12 years in prison, convicted of colluding with 'Ndrangheta, rather than being a victim (subordinate subject). The court, in fact, stated

that “the difference with the victimized entrepreneur is that he suffers the violence of the group, without gaining any benefit; the colluded entrepreneur, on the other hand, makes the decision to live with the imposition he suffers, exploiting it to get closer to the criminal organization and receive personal advantage” (Rossi 2015, 47). Further evidence of the value of these categories comes from studying the geographic expansion of the mafia since the early 1990s.

The Colonization of Central and Northern Italy

We saw in the second section that the two cleavages of 1992 finally merged to allow mafias to earn a role as main enablers in both political and economic environments. In other words, clans can take advantage of the consequences the crisis of the old party system had on corruption: “if corruption of the first Bribeville was frequently organized by way of the *hidden structure* of political parties, managed by party treasurers and business politicians, the corruption that results from recent investigations adjusts itself to the reduced managing capability of a corrupted political machine” (Della Porta, Sberna and Vannucci 2015, 216, italics added). If corruption is nurtured by the very existence of hidden spaces – spaces concealed from the control of law enforcement agencies – then mafia clans can count on the further competitive advantage of being used to secrecy, which is essential to protect its affiliates and guarantee the group against the risks of enemy infiltration. This specific attitude makes them particularly attractive for what we defined as the colluding subjects – political or economic actors eager to win votes and profits in blatant disregard of legal norms and to hide their malpractices.

Among the different Italian mafia brands, in recent decades 'Ndrangheta has proved to be the most effective in colonizing new territories in Central and Northern Italy, where its hold clearly prevails. This is the result of many factors: historical events, different patterns of organization and diffusion, the geography of migration. The seemingly reduced role of the Sicilian mafia, for example, could be ascribed to the events of 1992, and specifically to the consequences the events had on Cosa Nostra. And yet we should not forget Sindona and Calvi, and the evidence that Cosa Nostra had been playing a financial role in Milan since the 1960s. This could support the hypothesis that the Sicilian mafia is still heavily devoted to financial strategies, such as money laundering and recycling of illicit profits that are much more difficult to investigate and result in prosecution. The Neapolitan Camorra, on the other hand, may pay a heavy price for the crushing infighting among its clans, indicating an inability to guarantee stability through a clear and legitimate hierarchy. In spite of the

propensity of its members to follow an entrepreneurial strategy, the Camorra clans actively operate in the Lazio, Emilia Romagna, Tuscany, Lombardy and Veneto regions (Sciarrone 2014; CROSS 2015c). In both of these cases, relative to the Cosa Nostra and Camorra, we can assume that they are moving along the axis shown in Figure 1, at the intersection between pure agglomeration and social network, on one side, and between development and institutionalization, on the other.

Assuming that all these organizations do not hesitate to threaten people or use violence to gain power, 'Ndrangheta seems to better embody the characteristics that provide the winning options under present circumstances: a fully-fledged awareness of the settlement territory; a well-structured and hierarchical organization, governed by drawing on the symbols and the subcultures needed to reinforce its internal cohesion; the will to exploit ethnic bonds at village level, moving to territories where the clan members can easily recreate kin relationships and emphasize the risk of moral shame to prevent treachery (Ciconte 1992, 2010). Finally, in the Northwest 'Ndrangheta adopted a strategy to colonize small municipalities, especially in the suburbs of Milan or Turin; it was well aware that in such districts it is easier to appeal to ethnic bonds, and to win the control of elections by selling votes to colluding candidates, and elude the investigations of law enforcement agencies and the media (Dalla Chiesa 2015).¹² This means that 'Ndrangheta is capable, when needed, of reproducing the intensity of a political complex in small enclaves even at a local level, far from their home territories.

A simple list of the results of the investigations, collected periodically in institutional reports, is quite impressive. Mafias in Northern Italy are involved in all of the traditional illicit activities: narco-trafficking, extortion, loan-sharking, counterfeiting, gambling, prostitution, and so on (CROSS 2015c). Moving to the legal economy, in recent years, the mafias were involved in sectors ranging from construction and public contracts to public and private healthcare systems, from large-scale retail trade to tourism and commerce in the following regions: Emilia Romagna, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Lazio, Liguria, Lombardy, Piedmont, Tuscany, Trentino-Alto Adige, Val d'Aosta, Veneto (CROSS 2015b; Sciarrone 2014). Six city councils were dissolved, charged with infiltration by the mafia: Bardonecchia, Leini, Rivarolo Canavese (Turin, Piedmont); Sedriano (Milan, Lombardy); Bordighera (revoked in 2013), and Ventimiglia (Imperia, Liguria).

We could give several examples of investigations, and quote numerous trial sentences to support these data.¹³ However, the case studies that best fit the hypothesis that the current foundational crisis of legality is simply the product of new corruption and mafia interests are

those related to major infrastructure projects. The first case in point is the scandal related to MoSE (Modulo Sperimentale Elettromeccanico) – an integrated system consisting of rows of mobile gates designed to protect Venice from flooding. Two different waves of investigations, in 2013 and 2014, revealed a network of systemic corruption, dating back to 1984 (even surviving Bribesville): a maze of private enterprises formed a consortium and corrupted the monitoring authorities, lobbying at both the local and national levels, illicitly financing political parties and urging the media to foster public acquiescence to a technologically and economically controversial project. The MoSE epitomizes a new model for the “privatization of public decisions,” conceived to bypass any form of control with the justification to enforce liberalization and deregulation (for example, assigning contracts without competition). As usual, this opens the way to infiltration by mafia firms through subcontracts (allegedly, in this case, related to Sicilian Cosa Nostra); but also it results in a dramatic draining of public funds: corruption produced at least 25 million euros of black funds, and inflated the project costs from 1.8 billion euros forecast in 2002 to 5.2 billion financed in 2014 (Della Porta, Sberna and Vannucci 2015, 218-222; Barbieri and Giavazzi 2014).

The second example is EXPO 2015, in Milan. It may appear superfluous to once again mention the involvement in the investigations of all the main actors responsible for organizing the event: the top managers in the public companies, the private corporations that won the tenders, and the politicians at a local and national level. What is worth noting, in this case, is that this particular scandal forced the government to create a new authority – the ANAC (*Autorità Nazionale Anticorruzione*, National anti-corruption authority) – which introduced new and more severe procedures and controls (ANAC 2015). As a result of these controls, by December 3, 2014 the authorities had barred 46 companies which had already won contracts or subcontracts related to EXPO 2015, thanks to their relationships with mafias: 11 were registered in Southern Italian regions, 35 in Northern regions and, among all of them, 32 were infiltrated by 'Ndrangheta. Most of these companies, specializing in road infrastructure, had won orders of less than 150,000 euros, the limit below which no control was necessary under the old procedures (DNA 2015, 310-311).

The third and last case in point was named “Mafia Capitale” by the prosecutors, and the trial has been underway since the end of 2015. The operation led to the arrest of 36 people, while another 101 have been investigated – among them, a former Mayor of the city of Rome, Gianni Alemanno, and politicians from different parties in charge both in the City Council and in the Region. They were charged with extortion, usury, corruption, money

laundering, and many other crimes. Eventually, on November 1, 2015, the Mayor-in-charge, Ignazio Marino, was forced to resign, and a special government commissioner took over his post. Mafia Capitale prefigures a new paradigm in the category of an institutionalized criminal political complex. “Middle Earth,” to use the metaphor adopted by the main boss, Massimo Carminati, connects the criminal milieu with the political and economic systems. First of all, from the point of view of the range of activities involved, the group was capable of managing illicit markets, in the meantime gaining a monopoly in the municipality’s public contracts for migrant and refugee shelters and Roma camps (which also means infiltrating and compromising the non-profit sector). Secondly, the scheme encompassed a wide swath of the criminal environment, ranging from former members of neofascist terrorist group (Carminati, had been an activist of Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari – Revolutionary Armed Nuclei – or NAR) to the Banda della Magliana, an infamous criminal group operating in Rome and Lazio since the end of the 1970s (Flamini 2012) to the Casamonica Roma clan, to members of traditional mafia brands (Camorra, Cosa Nostra, and ’Ndrangheta). Finally, and most importantly, for the first time in Italy prosecutors were charging people who were not connected to the traditional mafia universe with the crime of mafia association (an accusation that has yet to be confirmed in the ongoing trial). Until recently, Rome’s criminal environment had been characterized by a high level of fluidity, even though it had already produced a certain number of charismatic criminal leaders. The situation evolved and produced this specific model of a mafia group, with strong powers of intimidation, a broad-reaching yet shared control of the territory, and easy intimacy with politicians, officials, professionals, and entrepreneurs (Savatteri and Grignetti 2015).

Conclusion: Italy as a “Real Democracy”

In the twentieth century, “Real Socialism” was a successful political concept created by the leaders of USSR to distinguish their practice of government from abstract socialist ideas – we could say now, after the events of 1989, that they wished to be set free from the theories and no longer to have to account for their failures, starting with the constant presence of economic shortages (Lebowitz 2012). Italy could be proposed as a Real Democracy, because it increasingly drifts away from any theoretical definition of democracy, apart from the formal respect of the institutional rules of the game. This results in a growing and peculiar shortage regarding the redistribution of resources, from rights to incomes. Italy and Russia share eighth place in the classification of the world’s most industrialized countries (based on GDP); however, Italy is ranked 48th in the World Happiness Report (2017) published by the

United Nations; it is ranked 62th in terms of Freedom of the Press and described as “partly free” in the Freedom House classification (2017); it is ranked 60th in the Transparency International classification (2016) that measures the perception of the degree of the country’s corruption.¹⁴ Finally, “between 2008 and 2013 national income fell by 9 per cent, per capita incomes by 11 per cent, and industrial production by 25 per cent; and unemployment doubled” (Ciccarone and Saltari 2015, 228). It seems plausible, then, to propose Italy as a paradigm. As a Real Democracy, it epitomizes, at best, a “third way” – between democracy and authoritarianism, North and South, development and underdevelopment.

Since 1992, in particular, Italy has evolved as a consociational mafia-owned democracy, based on cooperative attitudes and behavioural patterns observed between the leaders of the various groups involved – mafiosi, politicians, and entrepreneurs (Lijphart 1977).¹⁵ Italy, in fact, has exhibited this consociational approach since the aftermath of World War II and the building of the Republic, though in a peculiar mode. In this early phase, “clientelism managed domestic consent in a segmented society and buffered the effects of the necessary opening to the European and wider international system” (Guzzini 1995, 31). Later, in the 1970s and 1980s, the escalation of a patronage-based system of distribution produced the figure of “the ‘business politician’, who link[ed] private business and traditional political mediation with a trustworthy and personal network of persons willing to act illegally” (Guzzini 1995, 35). Finally, following the end of the First Republic, the mafias took the lead in the patronage system of corruption, thanks to their clan structure, advancing a peculiar interpretation of neoliberal politics: the Italian way to politics *and* market. In actual fact, the clan can attribute structure and permanence to the networks of clientelism, even after the business politician has faded. With growing success, the clan claims to replace the state in the essential functions relative to the redistribution of resources and the protection of rights, thereby definitively subtracting these reserves and systems from any possibility of control or supervision by public opinion. The worst part is that the clan is also in a position to impose its will and defend its interests against anyone who expresses even minimal opposition, simply by deploying the coercive means at its disposal.

Any attempt to overturn this trend would imply the end of the hegemony of the political society, and the formation of a real Second Republic, based on the capacity of collective mobilization. However, this also implies a huge investment in education, to build and consolidate the awareness of what democratic citizenship really means.

Notes

¹ “The legality of a judicial system lies in the population’s *de facto* acceptance of the laws applied to their everyday lives [...]. Indifference on the part of the subject to the judicial system law, therefore, highlights the real crisis in the legality of the judicial systems: Indifference to law and to punishment – punishment conceived as an accidental event and not as something that can be avoided by adapting one’s behavior to comply with the rules” (Farneti 1994, 47).

² A power is legitimate only when it is juridically founded; a power is legal when applied according to the legislation: “the opposite of legitimate power is *de facto* power; the opposite of legal power is arbitrary power” (Bobbio 1979, 580).

³ These data are inferred by the lists of names compiled by some of the anti-mafia associations and the Italian Association for the Victims of Terrorism, as official government statistics are still not available. The state massacres are as follows: Piazza Fontana, Milan, 1969; Freccia del Sud train derailment, Gioia Tauro, 1970; Peteano, 1972; Police headquarters (Questura), Milan, 1973; Italicus train, San Benedetto Val di Sangro (BO), 1974; Piazza della Loggia, Brescia, 1974; Railway station, Bologna, 1980; Rapido 904, San Benedetto Val di Sambro (BO), 1984.

⁴ Terrorists killed also a former Mayor of Florence, and two members of Regional Council.

⁵ The quantitative comparison also leaves no doubt about how anomalous the Italian situation really was. The Rote Armee Fraktion killed 34 people in Germany over a period of 22 years; Eta in Spain killed 822 people over a period of 40 years; the “Troubles” or the 30-year conflict in Northern Ireland involving the IRA and Protestant paramilitaries caused more than 3000 victims among the various factions involved. The number of fatalities does not differ greatly from the total number of deaths at the hands of the mafia in Italy over the same period, particularly if we include the victims of in-fighting among the clans.

⁶ This fact cannot be underestimated, in my opinion. The Mafia seems accustomed to delayed vengeance – as was the case for Giovanni Falcone, killed in 1992, when he was no longer a prosecutor in Palermo – but not to preventive strikes. Dalla Chiesa, who had been a protagonist in the fight against terrorism, was not even given time to qualify himself as an enemy of Cosa Nostra. When he changed his role, it appeared that he also abruptly lost the credentials and the status that state institutions had granted him throughout the war on terrorism: the powers and resources assigned to him were not even remotely comparable. Dalla Chiesa was delegitimized, abandoned by the same institutions, offering mafia an irresistible chance to gain political credits through his killing.

⁷ The Mafia was involved, for example, in two of the events listed before: Freccia del Sud train derailment, Gioia Tauro, 1970; and Rapido 904, San Benedetto Val di Sambro (BO), 1984.

⁸ In fact, this point was not questionable at all: Falcone and Borsellino had been killed, and this unquestionably represents an irrefutable defeat for Italian democracy.

⁹ It is worth noting that even if no one opposed the idea that 1992 was a turning point in Italian history, greater discussion has been given to the assumption that this change gave rise to a new Republic: “The 1994-96 legislature did not mark the beginning of a ‘Second Republic’, a term coined by journalists that is constitutionally inaccurate. [...] What it did introduce [...] is a second political party system” (Ceccanti 2015, 205).

¹⁰ “A clan is an informal organization comprising a network of individuals linked by kin and fictive kin identities. [...] Clan ties are neither exotic and primordial, nor inherently negative or undemocratic: they are networks based on the rational calculations of individuals [...]; more important than the objective reality of kinship is the subjective sense of identity and the use of the norms of kinship – such as in-group reciprocity and loyalty – to bind the group and protect its members” (Collins 2006, 17).

¹¹ For a previous, and analogous attempt at a classification of the relationships between mafia and entrepreneurs, see Sciarrone (2009).

¹² Elaborating the data of the Agenzia Nazionale dei Beni Sequestrati e Confiscati alla Criminalità Organizzata, (CROSS 2015a) made a list of 96 municipalities with less than 5,000 inhabitants; and of 68 municipalities with between 5,000 and 10,000 inhabitants, in six different Northern regions, where

law enforcement agencies seized properties linked to 'Ndrangheta members.

¹³ It is worth remembering at least two of the biggest investigative operations of the last years: in the first one (2010), named *Crimine Infinito* (Endless Crime) in Lombardy, 161 people were arrested; in the second (2012), named Minotauro, in Piedmont, 148 people were jailed and 9 “locali” (institutionalized 'Ndrangheta clans) were discovered in the metropolitan suburbs of Turin (CROSS 2015a; DNA 2015).

¹⁴ These results are far from positive. In these classifications, France is positioned 25th, 33rd and 26th respectively; Germany 26th, 18th and 12th respectively; United Kingdom 22nd, 36th and 14th respectively. Russia, Italy's direct competitor in terms of wealth, was ranked 68th, 176th and 136th respectively.

¹⁵ I agree that “the Italian system never corresponded to the ideal-type of consociational democracy [...]. Nonetheless, theories of consociationalism offer a good starting point to understand developments in Italy” (Guzzini 1995, 30).

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