

IN THE NAME OF THE GODFATHER

A Study of the Role of Religious Rituality and Performativity in the Sicilian Mafia

Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

Religion may be viewed as a central component of mafia identity. Instances of this apparently paradoxical phenomenon range from the altars frequently found in the hideouts of mafiosi, to the ambiguous relationship with clergymen, and to the prominent roles performed by mafia leaders in local religious festivals. Although instances like these are evident throughout the history of *Cosa Nostra*, it is only in recent years that this phenomenon has aroused academic attention.

This research adopts an interdisciplinary approach to analyse the role of religion at the micro-social level of communicative interaction between mafia leaders and affiliates at lower levels. In particular, it draws on socio-anthropological theories of religious rituals, symbols and performance to examine how, and to what extent, the religious language and behaviour used by mafia bosses in specific interactional contexts affect mafia affiliates both at an individual and collective level of identity, and at the structural level for the organisation as a whole.

The research strategy adopted is based on interpretive ‘in-depth’ case studies. These include the analysis of the religious practices in mafia rituals of initiation; the religious references of mafia boss Michele Greco in his court hearings and written memoirs; and the religious language utilised by mafia leader Bernardo Provenzano in his *pizzini* (written messages). The data for this research are principally derived from judicial documents, police and parliamentary reports, audio-visual material, newspapers archives, as well as from relevant existing literature on the subject.

Examining the influence of religion in the way mafiosi construct their identity and establish their authority may be useful to explore how *Cosa Nostra* has managed to adapt its structure and business activities to changing circumstances over time while maintaining consistent ‘moral’ codes and practices. Furthermore, the combination of approaches used in this research and, in particular, the novel application of performance theories to organised crime, may contribute to the delineation of an interpretative model for future analyses of various criminal organisations whose sources of social legitimisation are similarly rooted in religious values and other cultural codes.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CCL	Corpus Christianorum series Latina
CdA	Corte d'Assise
CdC	Corte di Cassazione
CPI	Commissione Parlamentare d'Inchiesta sul Fenomeno della Mafia in Sicilia
DIA	Direzione Investigativa Antimafia
DNA	Direzione Nazionale Antimafia
ESV	English Standard Version
G.I.	Giudice Istruttore
GIP	Giudice per le Indagini Preliminari
GUP	Giudice per le Udienze Preliminari
NR	Notizie di Reato
PL	Patrologia Latina
RAI	Radio Televisione Italiana
R.G.	Registro Generale
R.G.G.I.	Registro Generale Giudice Istruttore
R.G.n.R.	Registro Generale notizie di Reato
R.G.P.R.	Registro Generale Procuratore della Repubblica
R.G.Sent.	Registro Generale Sentenze
R.G.U.I.	Registro Generale Ufficio Istruzione
Sent. n.	Numero di Sentenza
Sez.	Sezione del Tribunale
TdP	Tribunale di Palermo

INTRODUCTION

The concept of a religious Cosa Nostra must seem to be contradictory. However, examples of the relationship between the Sicilian mafia and religion are evident throughout the history of the organisation, and this research aims to contribute to a better understanding of the significance of religion for the Sicilian mafia. Examining the role of religion within the cultural dimension of Cosa Nostra may make a crucial contribution to explaining the ability of the mafia to adapt its structure and activities to changing times, to survive internecine wars and arrests at top echelons while maintaining consistent values and codes.

The introduction to this thesis presents a broad overview of instances of religious behaviour and practices that mafiosi at different hierarchical levels have displayed throughout the history of the organisation. This is useful not only to contextualise the analytic perspective offered in this research, but also to show the intricacy and complexity of the phenomenon of mafia religion.

Mafia, religion and the Church: a long standing relationship

*L' ultima duminica di luglio
festa di San Giseppi l'artigianu
nesci la so statua, scinni di li scaliddi e si ferma nta' lu chianu;
misu di lu barcuni lu boss e cu lu so statu maggiuri,
di li finestri abbiuanu rosi e ciuri.
Sutta, la banna cu lu parrinu fannu silenziu e aspettanu
la basata e poi l'inchinu.
Lu boss passa accussi a so figghiu
lu strettru di lu so regnu
cu lu patrarca San Giseppi*

*ca ci fa di parrinu.*¹

On the evening of 25th July 1937, the community of Riesi, in the province of Caltanissetta, carried the statue of its patron saint Saint Joseph on an annual procession through the centre of the town. The procession arrived at the Di Cristina household, where the young Francesco Di Cristina stood watching. Everything went as his father, Riesi mafia boss Giuseppe Di Cristina, with the aid of religious and political officials had planned. As was the unofficial custom, the procession came to a halt in front of the house of the mafia boss. Giuseppe then left the crowd, approached his son, and kissed him three times. Francesco bowed in turn to his father and to the statue of Saint Joseph, to the applause of the devout crowd, the music of the municipal band and the ringing of church bells, which echoed through the streets. That event symbolised the abdication of Giuseppe Di Cristina from his role as mafia boss and the solemn consecration of his son Francesco as the new head of the local mafia (Marino 2001, 273-276).

When Francesco di Cristina died in 1961, his funeral was well attended in the main church of Riesi. On that occasion, local inhabitants, civil, military and religious authorities walked in procession behind the hearse drawn by four horses to say a last farewell to the mafia boss. As mafia defector Antonino Calderone would reveal to judicial authorities in 1987:

In Riesi, there is the most important mafia family of the entire province of Caltanissetta. The old representative was Francesco Di Cristina, a man of honour who lived according

¹ This Sicilian storytelling describes the religious procession of San Giuseppe in Riesi in 1937, during which the local mafia boss Giuseppe di Cristina passed 'the sceptre of his reign' to his son Francesco. Translation: *The last Sunday of July/ the feast of Saint Joseph the Artisan/ his statue comes out, goes down the steps and stops on the street/ the boss stands waiting at his balcony with his officers/ roses and flowers at the windows/ Below the balcony the municipal band and the priest keep quiet and wait for the kiss and the bow/ In this way the boss passes the sceptre of his reign to his son with the blessing of the patriarch Saint Joseph who acts as parish priest.*

to the traditional canons of Cosa Nostra. He was generous and kind and everyone loved him. I took part to his solemn funeral.... The whole town of Riesi cried for his death.²

A holy picture was distributed among the population on the day of Di Cristina's funeral (Pantaleone 1962; Sciascia and Padovani 1979, 29). The closing lines read: 'The enemy of all injustices/ he showed with words and deeds/ that his mafia was not criminality/ but respect for the law of honour/ defence of every right/ great-heartedness/ It was love'.

This funeral card was couched in language similar to the elegy pinned to the entrance doors of the church of Villalba in July 1954 in commemoration of the death of mafia boss Calogero Vizzini. Although he was the brother of two priests, cousin of the Bishop of Noto, and nephew of the Bishop of Muro Lucano, Calogero Vizzini had built a curriculum vitae worthy of the arch-criminal he was, including thirty-nine murders, six attempted murders, and numerous other illegal activities such as thefts and extortion (Farrell 1997, 105). Nonetheless, he had been repeatedly acquitted on the grounds of insufficient evidence. A funeral picture was also distributed to commemorate his death. In reference to the accusations moved against Vizzini throughout his life, the top right corner of the picture carried the quote 'Vedi giudizio umano, come spesso erra!'³ The closing verses were almost identical to those written on Di Cristina's funeral card: 'He showed with words and deeds that his mafia was not criminality/ but stood for respect of the law/ defence of all rights/ greatness of character/ It was love' (Figure 1).⁴ Politicians, policemen, churchmen and thousands

2. Tribunale Penale di Marsiglia, Corte D'Appello di Aix-en-Provence, Gabinetto del Dr Debacq G.I., n.174/87, vol. 942/a, processo verbale di interrogatorio di prima comparazione di Antonino Calderone, udienza del 22 Giugno 1987, 813045.

3 This quote is derived and adapted from Ludovico Ariosto's *L'Orlando Furioso* (1532, 7:2): 'Ecco il giudizio uman come spesso erra' ('How often human judgement wanders wide!').

4 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Vizzini_epitaph.jpg (accessed 12 September 2012). Copyright unknown.

of black-clad peasants followed the funeral procession to show their respect (Sales 2010, 77). Calogero Vizzini ‘died in the arms of the Church and of the political party in charge exactly as his uncle, the bishop, and his brothers, the priests, had requested’ (Farrell 1997, 105).

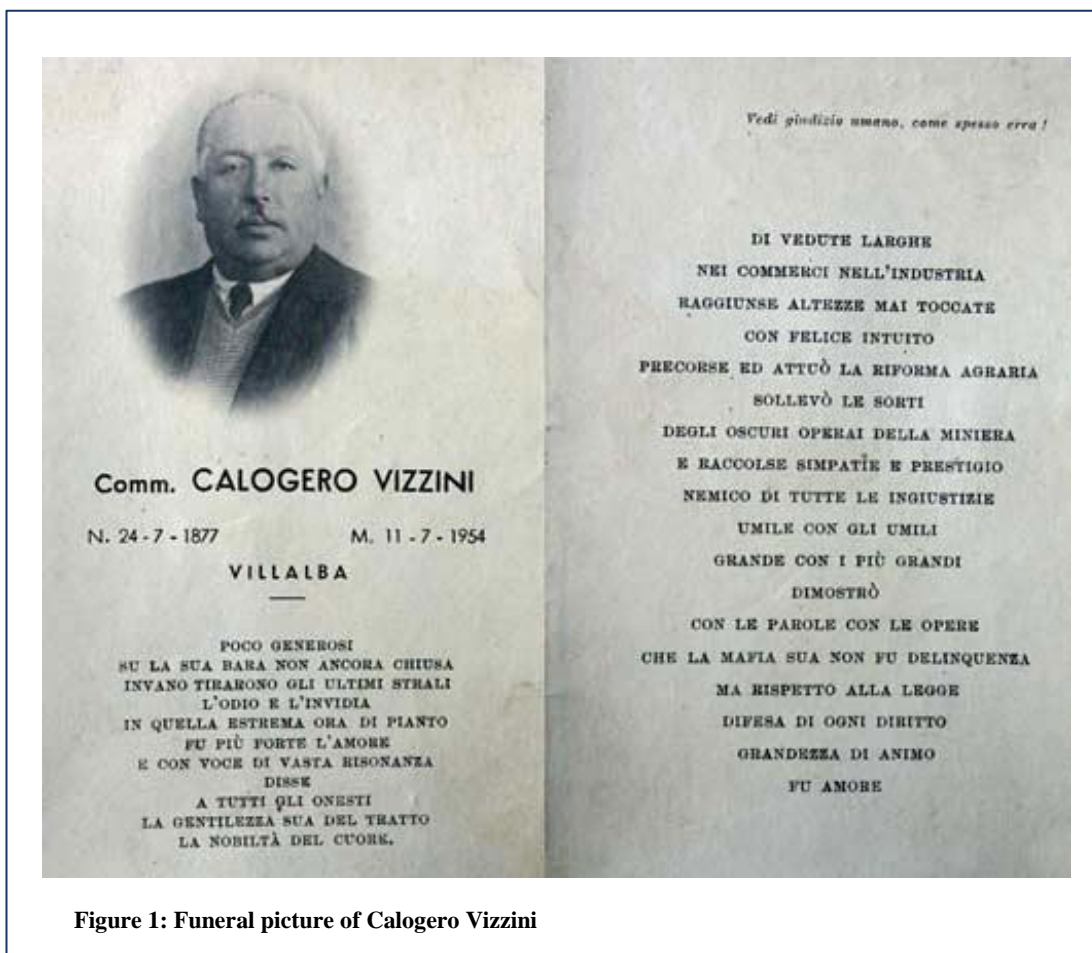


Figure 1: Funeral picture of Calogero Vizzini

The deferential attitude of the attendees demonstrates the significant public role that Vizzini had played for a broad spectrum of the population. At the same time, it shows his close connection with other powerful ‘men of honour’ in Sicily. For example, Giuseppe Genco Russo, mafia boss of Mussumeli, in the province of Caltanissetta, can be seen in the front line of the funeral procession (Figure 2).⁵

⁵ <http://www.oggi.it/focus/senzacategoria/2010/10/05/mafia-un-secolo-di-sangue-e-di-clic/?pid=3875> (accessed 12 September 2012).

Widely considered the successor of Calogero Vizzini, Genco Russo similarly represented the typical figure of mediator and social entrepreneur who had built up a position of power during his mafia career by infiltrating public agencies and forging privileged relationships with important individuals (Catanzaro 1992, 159).



Figure 2: Funeral of Calogero Vizzini; G. Genco Russo in attendance (Centre-right, wearing a black tie)

The influential role that Genco Russo played in the religious life of his town is particularly noteworthy. Not only was a church bench reserved for him during the liturgies, but he was also given the respectable role of collecting money for the church to fund the festival of *Madonna Maria Santissima dei Miracoli* (Dolci 1960, 60). In light of his honourable services and commitment as a devout member of the religious community, Genco Russo was nominated *Superiore della Confraternita del Santissimo Sacramento* of Mussomeli (Superior of the Confraternity of the Blessed

Sacrament), a prestigious title which gave him the right to lead the religious procession in front of the statue of the patron saint (Pantaleone 1966, 118).

Furthermore, Genco Russo habitually carried a book of prayers full of sacred pictures that he would kiss at the end of each prayer. This text lay on a bedside table ‘constellated with religious images’ and went with him into his cell at the Ucciardone prison (Fasullo 1996). Throughout his mafia career, Genco Russo was arrested repeatedly on different charges, including murders, extortion and theft; yet, he was regularly acquitted on grounds of insufficient evidence. This continued until 1969 when the Court of Assise of Salerno sentenced him to eight years in prison for criminal conspiracy.⁶ On that occasion, prominent Christian Democrat politicians, members of the local clergy, and mafiosi collected twenty thousand signatures in support of a petition which declared that Giuseppe Genco Russo was ‘a man of moral principles, whose life was an example of probity and rectitude’.⁷

Carrying the statue of the saint celebrated during the local religious procession, as well as playing prominent characters in religious performances, are privileges that mafiosi have always appeared to retain. This was the case of, for example, Momo Grasso, mafia boss of Misilmeri, who routinely played the role of Jesus in the annual performance of *The Passion* during Easter celebrations (Arlacchi 1983, 115; Camilleri 2007, 151).

With the growing secularisation of society over time, rising antimafia sentiment, and hardening of the Church’s stand against the mafia, one might expect

6 Commissione Parlamentare d’Inchiesta sul Fenomeno della Mafia in Sicilia, Legge 20 Dicembre 1962, n. 1720, V Legislatura, Doc. XXIII, n.2 quater, ‘relazione sull’indagine riguardante casi di singoli mafiosi’, 25.

7 Giorgio Frasca Polara, ‘Intimidazioni contro i giudici di Genco Russo. Mafia, notabili e dirigenti della DC sono scatenati’, *L’Unità*, 12 February 1964.

that the acquisition of prominent roles taken by mafia members in public religious ceremonies would decline. However, numerous examples demonstrate that the mafia habit of financing, organising and playing central roles in religious festivals has not disappeared. Leonardo Messina, a mafia member of the San Cataldo faction who turned state's evidence in 1992, described his role in the procession of *Madonna dell'Annunziata* (Our Lady of the Annunciation) to journalist Rita Mattei in 1996:

I was responsible for the religious procession of Cosa Nostra's patron saint, Our Lady of the Annunciation. I walked in the procession next to the saint. You will understand it if you want to.... These ritual occasions have a very important role for us.... The priest? Do you think the priest did not know who organised the processions of the saint?⁸

Additionally, when mafia 'soldier' Vincenzo Scarantino was arrested in 1992 on suspicion of having robbed and prepared the car bomb which killed magistrate Paolo Borsellino and his police escort in July of that year, a large section of the Palermo *borgata* (suburb) of Guadagna, where he had grown up, took to the streets to defend his innocence.⁹ According to the local inhabitants, the religiosity that Scarantino had demonstrated throughout his membership to the *Confraternita di Sant'Anna* (Brotherhood of Saint Anne) was unquestionable proof of his innocence. For example, they described how he was always among 'those strong, lucky ones who held the tons of weight of the statue on their shoulders and carried the saint in procession through the streets of the town' during the annual celebration of the patron saint (Mignosi 1993, 43).

Even the practice of bringing the statue to pay homage in front of the house of local mafia bosses as a sign of respect is still carried out today. This is demonstrated

⁸ Mafiosi refer to *Madonna dell' Annunziata*, or *dell'Annunciazione* (Our Lady of the Annunciation), as the sacred figure chosen by Cosa Nostra as its patron saint. Interview of Leonardo Messina with RAI (Radio Televisione Italiana) journalist Rita Mattei, January 1997, RAI-teca Roma, via Salaria.

⁹ The structure of Cosa Nostra will be described in detail in the next chapter. For the moment, it is sufficient to say that in the mafia hierarchy, as detailed by defector Tommaso Buscetta in 1984, a soldier is an affiliated member at the lower echelons of the organisation.

by a police report dated 17th of September 2006, the day of the religious procession of the *Santissimo Crocifisso* (Holy Crucifix) in Campobello di Mazara near Trapani.¹⁰ The report describes, step by step, the itinerary of the *fercolo* (the platform upon which the statue of the saint is brought in procession). On this occasion, the *fercolo* stopped once for fifteen minutes in front of the church of the Madonna di Fatima, and again for approximately the same length of time in front of the house of local mafia boss Francesco Luppino, a high-ranking criminal under house arrest with high security surveillance. The report details:

The procession of the Crucifix stopped, as a sign of deference, in front of the house of a subject who has been sentenced for double murder and mafia association. That day, although not being able to leave the house, Luppino left the entrance door open so that he was visible from the outside. As the Crucifix stood in front of Luppino's door, all the members of the municipal band entered the house, along with other participants in the procession, including a number of local mafiosi.¹¹

Similarly, in 2004, during the procession of Sant'Agata, as unauthorised public fireworks illuminated the sky above Catania, the *fercolo* stopped in front of the house of Giuseppe Mangion, the prominent mafia boss of Catania who had recently been released from prison. On that occasion, under-cover police officers wearing the white gown of 'penitents' took photos of mafia bosses Mangion and Benedetto Santapaola at the event. These notable mafiosi were photographed on the *feretro* next to the statue, carrying the reliquary casket of the saint on their shoulders into the cathedral and occupying the front seats during mass.¹² According to Carmelo Petralia, Deputy Public Prosecutor of *Direzione Nazionale Antimafia* (DNA), and Antonino Fanara, District Prosecutor, for six years – from 1999 until 2005 – the mafia clans led by

10 Regione Carabinieri Sicilia, Stazione di Campobello di Mazara, Relazione di servizio effettuato in occasione della manifestazione religiosa in onore del SS. Crocifisso, 17 Settembre 2006.

11 *ibid.*

12 'Le mani dei boss su Sant'Agata. Per gli inquirenti "controllavano" la festa patronale del capoluogo etneo più per potere che per profitto', *Il Corriere della Sera*, 1 February 2008.

Santapaola and Mangion ‘infiltrated the major religious event of the devout Catanese community in order to significantly increase the criminal prestige and authority of the mafia as a fundamental power centre in the city.’¹³

Developments in the fight against organised crime, which coincided with the rapidly growing phenomenon of pentitismo (mafiosi turning state’s evidence) in the early 1980s and the subsequent maxi-trial of Palermo (1986–1987), have undoubtedly contributed to limiting—albeit not eliminating—the participation and influence of mafiosi in religious ceremonies and processions. In particular, attendance at public ceremonies or Sunday mass considerably increases the risk of arrest for *latitanti* (mafia members in hiding), and hence the need to resort to other solutions to avoid unnecessary exposure. As in the proverbial Mohammed and the Mountain, mafiosi unable to attend church have literally brought the church into their secret locations. Indeed, the police have frequently found altars and religious settings in mafia hideouts.

This phenomenon is exemplified in the case of Pietro Aglieri, the boss of Vincenzo Scarantino. Aglieri, originally from the Guadagna area of Palermo, had become, by the late 1980s, the head of the powerful Santa Maria di Gesù mafia faction. Confessions of mafia defectors and judicial enquiries underline the direct and indirect role of Aglieri in the murder of a large number of high profile victims, including prosecuting magistrate Antonio Scopelliti in 1991, Christian Democrat politician Salvo Lima and antimafia magistrate Paolo Borsellino in 1992.¹⁴ When the

13 Michele Giuffrida, ‘La Piovra sulla festa di S. Agata. il business gestito dalle cosche’, *La Repubblica*, 1 February 2008.

14 Corte Suprema di Cassazione, Quinta Sezione Penale, Udienza Pubblica del 3/7/03, Sentenza n. 948/2003, R.G.13489/03 contro Riina Salvatore + 14 (Borsellino bis). See also Corte di Appello di Catania, Corte di Assise di Appello Sez. II, Udienza del 20–21/04/2006, n. 24/06 R. Sent, n. 8/03 +

police broke into his hideout in June 1997, they were surprised to find a chapel completed with altar, benches and a large wooden crucifix (Figure 3). Next to the altar, the police found a holy water stoup, a thurible, green and purple vestments, the statue of the Virgin Mary, a picture representing *The Last Supper*, a Bible, a wide variety of holy pictures and the Acts of the Second Vatican Council (Figure 4).¹⁵

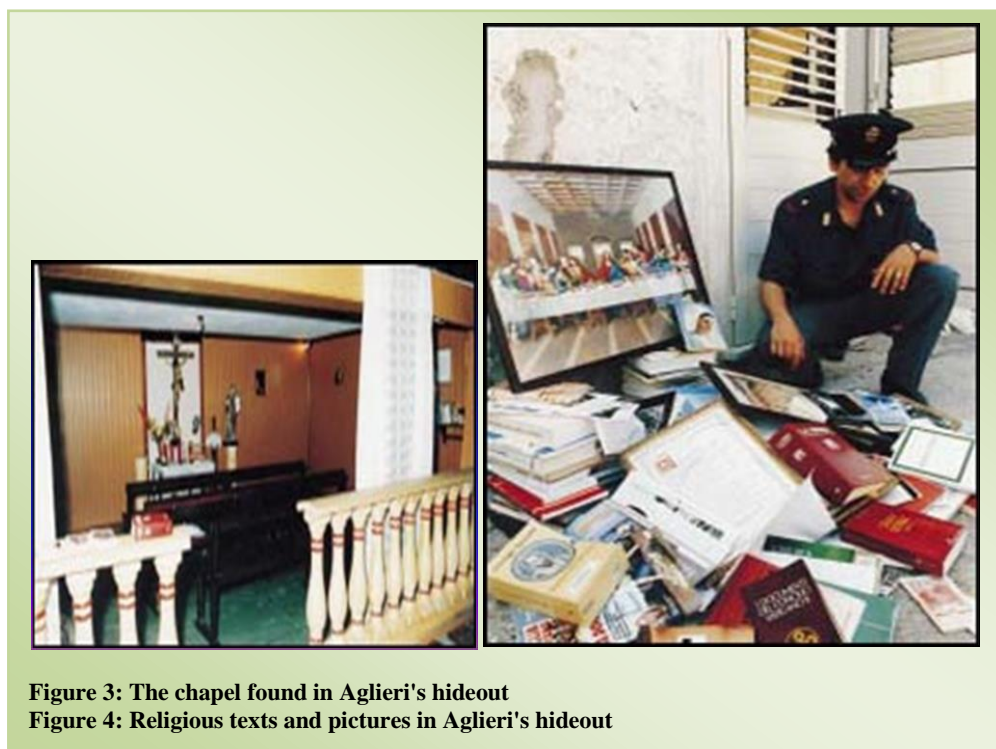


Figure 3: The chapel found in Aglieri's hideout
Figure 4: Religious texts and pictures in Aglieri's hideout

Approximately two-hundred religious and philosophical texts completed the religious setting. These included works of Edith Stein, Sören Kierkegaard and Saint Thérèse of Lisieux.¹⁶ Although this plethora of religious paraphernalia was present, no weapons were found at the scene. While in Rebibbia prison, Aglieri granted a written interview to *La Repubblica* journalist Salvo Palazzolo.¹⁷ Asked by Palazzolo

20/03 + 29/03 R.G., sentenza nel procedimento contro Agate Mariano +16.

15 Photo M. Palazzotto/@Periodici San Paolo. With permission of the publisher.

16 Enzo Mignosi, 'I latitanti con il Crocefisso: anche Santapaola aveva un altare', *Il Corriere della Sera*, 7 June 1997.

17 Personal communication, August 2012. Part of the interview has been published in 'Aglieri: Io, Dio e la Legge' on *La Repubblica*, 14 March 2004.

whether a dialogue between the mafia and people external to the organisation was possible or not, Aglieri replied quoting Saint Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 9: 19–21):

I would like to focus on the words used by Saint Paul in the first Epistle to the Corinthians. Contrary to all those who are convinced that faith needs to pass through external actions, which are quantifiable by the penal code and not by the commandments, the apostle of people said 'I have made myself a servant to all that I might win over more of them. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law.' In light of these considerations, I can say in all tranquillity that some clergymen have opted for this right way of doing good things.¹⁸

The clergymen to whom Aglieri referred included Father Mario Frittitta, a Discalced Carmelite priest who confessed to having said mass at the hideout for the mafia boss and other mafiosi on Christmas and Easter. A few years later, other priests, including Father Giacomo Ribaldo and Father Lillo Tubolino, admitted meeting with Aglieri at his hideout to offer spiritual support and celebrate liturgies (Palazzolo 2004).

Father Frittitta was arrested in 1997 on charges of 'aggravated aiding and abetting of the mafia' not only for saying mass for Aglieri, but also for presiding at the secret wedding of another mafioso on the run.¹⁹ However, the *Corte d'Appello* (CdA – Court of Appeal) and the *Corte di Cassazione* (CdC – The Cassation Court)²⁰ acquitted him on the grounds of insufficient evidence in 1999 and in 2001, respectively. Alfonso Sabella, Deputy Prosecutor of the Antimafia *Pool* led by magistrate Giancarlo Caselli from 1993 until 1999, had investigated the relationship between Father Frittitta and Cosa Nostra over many years.²¹ For instance, he

18 Wherever possible, throughout this thesis the references to the Bible will be to the English Standard Version (ESV), Good News Publishers, 2001.

19 TdP, Giudice per le Indagini Preliminari (GIP) Ciaccio Montalto, Ordinanza del 29 Ottobre 1997 nei confronti di Frittitta Mario.

20 For an overview on the Italian legal system, see John Foot, *Modern Italy*, 2003, 70–93.

21 In this context, the term 'Pool' refers to a group of magistrates who specifically investigate the

enquired into Frittitta's sermon during the funeral ceremony of Salvatore Marino, a young mafioso who died during heavy-handed police interrogation into the murder of police officer Beppe Montana in 1985 (Sabella, Resta, and Vitale 2008, 222). During the funeral mass of Salvatore Marino, Frittitta read from the Book of Wisdom (4: 7–16) in the Old Testament:

*L'uomo onesto, anche se muore giovane,
ha una sorte felice.
Chi si rende gradito a Dio, da lui è amato
e, se vive in mezzo a gente cattiva,
Dio lo prende e lo fa vivere altrove;
La sua esistenza piace al Signore
che lo toglie in fretta da un ambiente malvagio.
L'uomo onesto che muore è condanna
per i cattivi che restano in vita.²²*

Given the context in which the sermon was delivered, one can infer that the 'righteous man' in Frittitta's sermon is a reference to mafioso Salvatore Marino, while the 'unrighteous' and 'ungodly' refers to the policemen accused of killing him during the interrogation. 'I cattivi', Frittitta continued in his sermon,

*...diventeranno un cadavere spregevole:
tra i morti saranno sempre oggetto di scherno.
Perché Dio li schianterà dalle fondamenta.
Li butterà giù a capofitto
ed essi non potranno dire una parola.
Sarà un disastro per sempre:
si troveranno in mezzo ai dolori
e nessuno si ricorderà di loro.²³*

mafia phenomenon.

22 The original Italian version is left in the main text to emphasise the reference in the verses to Salvatore Marino. Translation: Wisdom of Solomon, from The Bible, King James Version (Apocrypha): *But though the righteous be prevented with death, yet shall he be in rest. He pleased God, and was beloved of him: so that living among sinners he was translated. For his soul pleased the Lord: therefore hastened he to take him away from among the wicked. Thus the righteous that is dead shall condemn the ungodly which are living.*

23 *...God shall laugh them to scorn: and they shall hereafter be a vile carcase and a reproach among the dead for evermore. For he shall rend them, and cast them down headlong, that they shall be speechless; and he shall shake them from the foundation; and they shall be utterly laid waste, and be in sorrow; and their memorial shall perish.*

Interestingly, during the liturgy, no mention was made of the police officers and authorities, such as Boris Giuliano, Lenin Mancuso and General Carlo Alberto Dalla Chiesa who had been killed at the hands of the mafia in the preceding years, or of the assassination of policemen Ninni Cassarà and Roberto Antiochia three days after the death of Salvatore Marino, suggesting a somewhat selective view of indignation and righteousness in Frittitta's sermon.

The police also found a similar altar in the hideout of Catania mafia boss Benedetto 'Nitto' Santapaola. Accused of having committed hundreds of homicides and of ordering many more, including the assassination of journalist Giuseppe Fava in 1984 and that of General Dalla Chiesa in 1982, Santapaola spent eleven years hiding in a farmhouse outside Catania until his arrest in May 1993.²⁴ In the square opposite his hideout, he commissioned the building of a small chapel with an altar, a statue of the Virgin Mary and a number of benches in a structure made of red bricks. Outside the chapel, a bell tower had been erected. A copy of the Bible lay by his bedside table. On the day of his arrest, before leaving the house and being handcuffed, Santapaola embraced this Bible and kissed it in front of the police (Mignosi 1993, 38).

When the police arrested Michele Greco in 1986, they found the mafia 'boss of bosses' seated by his bedside next to a Bible and a book of prayers. Michele Greco frequently appealed to his religious beliefs in defence of his innocence, quoting verses of the Bible both in court hearings and in written memoirs addressed to the judges (as described in Chapter Four). Cesare Vincenti, President of the *Giudici per le Indagini Preliminari* section of the Court of Palermo (GIP – Judges for

²⁴ Corte di Assise di Palermo, Sezione II, Proc. nr. 25/99 R.G., Corte di Assise nr. 07/02, Reg. ins. sent. n. 2867/96, R.mod. 21 D.D.A., sentenza contro Madonia Antonio + altri.

Preliminary Enquiries), observed that, during preliminary interrogations, Greco carried his Bible with him into the Judge's office.²⁵ Similarly, Angelo Bottaro, mafia boss from Siracusa, attended court hearings with a crucifix firmly clasped in his hands (Sales 2010, 48).

Five copies of the Bible were also found in the hideout of mafia boss Bernardo Provenzano in 2006. Provenzano had been on the run for over forty-three years when the police broke into his cottage in Montagna dei Cavalli near Corleone. They found biblical texts beside piles of holy pictures, a book of prayers, rosaries, a picture of 'The Last Supper' on the wall and the crucifix that Provenzano wore around his neck. A particular copy of the Bible appeared to have been used by the mafia boss to underline and copy passages to be conveyed via other routine instructions in written messages to his collaborators (described in Chapter Five). Moreover, the seventy-four copies of the same holy image of Jesus bearing the inscription *Gesù confido in te* ('Jesus in you I trust') indicated Provenzano's practice of sending these *santini* (holy pictures) to other mafia members.

Frequently, holy cards have been found on mafiosi at the moment of the arrest, as in the case of Giuseppe 'Piddu' Madonia, mafia boss of Caltanissetta, who carried a series of *santini* in his wallet among banknotes (Mignosi 1993, 38-39). In particular, the holy picture of Our Lady of the Annunciation is repeatedly mentioned in the descriptions of initiation rituals as detailed in the testimony of mafia defectors: the initiates smear their blood on a *santino dell'Annunziata* and burn it whilst swearing their allegiance and loyalty to Cosa Nostra. Religious symbols in the ritual of affiliation appear to have been utilised consistently throughout the history of the

²⁵ Personal communication, 10 July 2011.

Sicilian mafia (described in Chapter Three). For example, they appear in the rituals of the *Stuppagghieri* ('Fuse burners') of Monreale and of other *Fratellanze* (fraternities) in nineteenth-century Sicily.²⁶ Interestingly, they recur in an almost identical format in a police report drawn up at the arrest of mafia bosses Salvatore and Sandro Lo Piccolo in 2007, when a written record of the ritual oath and a list of the mafia 'Decalogue' were found in their hideout.²⁷

Examples of religious practices are not solely observed at the upper echelons of the organisation. Numerous instances of religious behaviour are also evident in mafiosi at a lower hierarchical level. Luigi 'Gigino' La Vardera, a mafia soldier of the Brancaccio faction would habitually go to confession in church the day before an assassination; Giuseppe Marchese from the Corso dei Mille mafia faction made the sign of the cross before melting his victims in acid (Mignosi 1993, 33-35).

Less frequent, but still significant, are the examples of mafiosi who became 'pentiti' in the religious sense of the word. A notable example of this is in the case of Leonardo Vitale, mafia affiliate of the Altarello di Baida faction in Palermo. Vitale is considered to be one of the first mafiosi to turn state's evidence.²⁸ In March 1973, he decided of his own accord to inform the police of his role within Cosa Nostra and reveal the structure and workings of the organisation at a time when the existence of the mafia as a coherent hierarchical society had not yet been officially acknowledged.²⁹ As Vitale detailed in a memoir addressed to the police, he had

26 As will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three, the *Stuppagghieri* and other 'brotherhoods' are considered to be early forms of mafia associations (Gambetta 1996, 262-263; Crisantino 2000).

27 TdP, Sezione GIP, Sentenza di Rito Abbreviato n.1579/07 Reg. Not. Reato, n.800165/07 Reg. GIP, nei confronti di Adamo Andrea + 56 (Sentenza Gotha).

28 As the thesis unfolds, it will become clear that, although pentiti have existed since the beginning of the organisation, it was not until the mid-1980s that their confessions were deemed valid.

29 Procura della Repubblica di Palermo, Procedimento Penale contro Greco Michele ed altri, n. 3162/89 A – P.M., Vol. 8, (Dichiarazioni di Leonardo Vitale), 1236–1247.

repented for his past as a mafia member because he was moved by a profound religious crisis and a renewed faith in God:

Cosa Nostra opened my eyes to a world made of killings and whatever is worst in the world because it lives far from God and from the divine laws. Mafiosi are criminals of the worst kind; those who respect and protect them or, even worse, who exploit them, have forgotten God; one becomes a man of honour by observing the ten commandments of God, not by killing, stealing or threatening.... These are the evils to which I have fallen victim. I, Leonardo Vitale, reborn in the real Jesus Christ.

Vitale's mental state was called into question and, on this basis, the evidence from his defection was deemed invalid. He was killed in 1984 leaving the Capuchin church he visited every day, two months after release from a mental health institute in which he had been confined for ten years.

Salvatore Grigoli, the killer of Father Giuseppe Puglisi, was another mafioso who 'repented' and decided to turn state's evidence after a similar religious 'epiphany'. Pino Puglisi was a priest in Brancaccio, an area of Palermo with high mafia density and influence. He had openly challenged the mafia that controlled the neighbourhood by opening a centre in the San Gaetano parish to offer local underprivileged children 'an alternative to life of the street'. Puglisi fiercely rejected any offers by the mafia to finance the local celebrations and prohibited mafiosi from leading the processions. Perhaps most damning was the fact that Father Puglisi repeatedly attacked the mafia in his sermons and tried, with some success, to change his parishioners' mentality by convincing them of the importance of study and work and discouraging involvement in illicit and criminal activities.³⁰ Because of this continuous antimafia activity, Cosa Nostra assassinated him on the 15th of September 1993, on his 56th birthday. The 2001 Sentence of the Court of Assise of Palermo established the responsibility of Salvatore Grigoli and Gaspare Spatuzza as the actual

30 Official website dedicated to the figure and legacy of Padre Pino Puglisi, Arcidiocesi di Palermo, <http://www.padrepinopuglisi.diocesipa.it/> (Accessed 12/10/2011).

perpetrators of the murder, and of the Graviano brothers, mafia bosses of Brancaccio, as *mandanti* (those who ordered the killing).³¹

During court hearings, Grigoli asked to be considered ‘not simply as a normal *pentito di mafia*, but as a *pentito* in the religious sense of the word’. At the trial, in which he admitted to another forty-five murders, he confessed that his motivation for turning state’s evidence was guilt born of a religious conscience for the murder of Puglisi. In an interview to *Famiglia Cristiana* in 1999, Grigoli revealed that the last words the priest said when he saw his killers approaching him were ‘I was expecting you’:

He said that with a smile. That smile has remained in my head ever since. There was a sort of light in that smile which shocked me to the core. I cannot explain it. I had already committed many murders, but I had never felt anything like that before. I tend to forget the faces of people, even relatives, but I will never forget that smile. That night I began thinking about it incessantly, something had moved inside me. I have done many things in my life that cannot be justified but that one has been the real reason for my decision to collaborate with the judicial authorities. I could not forgive them [my bosses] for making me do that.... Ninety per cent of mafiosi say they believe in God. One of the other defendants at my trial used to say ‘In the name of God’ every time we were going to kill somebody. This annoyed me: how can God help you in killing somebody? I also heard that Giuseppe Graviano sometimes went to mass. These people read the Bible. I read it too when I was on the run. I liked reading it. I read it then and I read it now that I am a true believer. It is only when you are alone that you begin to think, because they [mafiosi] inculcate this culture into you: whatever Cosa Nostra does is right and proper.³²

As previous examples demonstrate, in the history of Cosa Nostra there have been numerous cases of proximity to, and even of involvement in, mafia activities on the part of the clergy. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the Friars of Mazzarino who were tried in the early 1960s for criminal association, extortion, manslaughter, unlawful acquisition of property and illegal possession of weapons (Frasca Polara 1989). With the support of Christian Democrat representatives and members of the

31 Corte di Assise di Appello di Palermo, Sez. I, Sentenza n. 7/2001, n. 30/2000 R.G., n. 724/94 n. Reato, nei confronti di Graviano Giuseppe + 2, 13 Febbraio 2001, 225–226.

32 Francesco Anfossi, ‘Gli sparai, lui sorrise. Parla l’assassino di Padre Puglisi’, *Famiglia Cristiana*, 12 September 1999.

Church (e.g. the Archbishop of Palermo Ernesto Ruffini) the first verdict of guilty was revised on numerous occasions. By 1969, all Capuchin friars were either acquitted on appeal or released for good behaviour.

The case of Father Agostino Coppola represents another example of proximity between mafia and clergymen. Father Coppola was a priest of the Carini parish and nephew of American boss Frank ‘tre dita’ Coppola (Frank ‘three fingers’ Coppola). He was arrested in 1976 for his proximity to the Corleonese faction headed by boss Luciano Leggio first, and Salvatore Riina later, and for taking an active part in the kidnapping business that the mafia clan had undertaken in those years.³³ Mafia defector Antonino Calderone confessed during his interrogation that Father Coppola had been introduced to him as a ‘made man of honour’ from Partinico, a title that, in mafia code, implies that the person in question has been initiated into the organisation through a formal ritual of affiliation.³⁴ The testimony of mafia defector Gaspare Mutolo also revealed that Coppola, in his capacity as a confessor to prisoners, was able to act as a vehicle of communication between mafiosi inside and outside prison. Additionally, through his investigative work for the *Giornale di Sicilia*, journalist Mario Francese discovered that Father Coppola was the priest who had celebrated the wedding between fugitive mafia ‘boss of bosses’ Salvatore Riina and Ninetta Bagarella on the 16th of April 1974.³⁵

The identity of the priest who used to celebrate the *Settimana Santa* (Holy Week) in the residence belonging to mafia boss Francesco Paolino Bontade, known

33 Corte di Assise di Appello di Palermo, Sez. II, n. 61/2002 Sent., n. 30/2002 R.G., n.1314/96 n. R., D.D.A. PA., nei confronti di Riina Salvatore + 7, 21.

34 TdP, Ufficio Istruzione Processi Penali, Processo Verbale di interrogatorio dell’imputato Antonino Calderone con il giudice istruttore Giovanni Falcone, 28 Ottobre 1987 (Coll. VI. 22–22bis), 813340.

35 Corte di Assise di Appello, Sentenza n. 61/2002 (Riina + 7), 178.

as Don Paolino Bontà, on the other hand, has never been disclosed. Bontà was among the notable mafiosi leading the funeral procession of Calogero Vizzini in 1954. During the Easter celebrations, he would arrange the assembly of religious structures on his land representing the fifteen Stations of the Cross in the *Via Crucis*, with flowers and candles completing the scene (Alongi 2006, 67).

The ambiguous relationship between members of the clergy and Cosa Nostra further accentuates the complexity of the mafia-religion phenomenon. Within the same ecclesiastical institution, the spiritual support provided to mafia members by priests like Father Frittitta or Father Coppola strikingly contrasts with the antimafia commitment of Father Puglisi, Father Luigi Ciotti and the Jesuit priests of the Pedro Arrupe Centre in Palermo, who are still involved on a daily basis in the fight against organised crime of mafia type.

Even at higher hierarchical levels, the stand taken by representatives of the Church has been inconsistent. In the 1960s, Cardinal of Palermo Ernesto Ruffini publicly declared that the ‘mafia existed only in the minds of those who wished Sicily ill’ (Schneider and Schneider 1997, 252) and only as a ‘slander spread around by communists’ to dishonour Sicily.³⁶ An altogether different position was taken by Ruffini’s successor, Archbishop of Palermo Salvatore Pappalardo. At the funeral mass of General Dalla Chiesa on the 5th of September 1982, Pappalardo gave a powerful eulogy charged with important political implications. In his sermon, he compared Palermo to Saguntum, the ancient city of the Roman Empire that fell under the siege of Hannibal’s Carthaginians while the Romans opted for non-intervention. Pappalardo solemnly declared to a church packed with citizens, the family of victims

³⁶ Letter sent in 1963 by Cardinal Ruffini to Mons. Angelo Dell’Acqua, Sostituto della Segreteria di stato Città del Vaticano (Ruffini 1989).

and the highest State authorities: ‘While they talk in Rome, Sagunto is wiped out. But this is not Sagunto, this is Palermo!’³⁷ The reference in Pappalardo’s eulogy was to what the escalating violence of the Second Mafia War was doing to the city of Palermo and to what the State was allowing to occur. However, by February 1986, on the eve of the maxi-trial of Palermo, Cardinal Pappalardo had already withdrawn his previous statement. During a press conference and under the pressure of questions over his alleged change of position, he declared: ‘Palermo has never been and will never be Sagunto! Those sorts of comparisons do not necessarily mean that the terms coincide precisely.’³⁸

In general, contemporary theologians and priests have openly condemned the decades of Church indifference towards, and even tolerance of, the mafia (Cavadi 2009, 1993; Cavadi and Scordato 1990; Stabile 1996). Using the analogy of the priest in the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:38), Father Nino Fasullo has compared the Catholic church to the priest who, when passing by a man who had been robbed and left half dead on the street, crossed to the other side of the road:

Until a few years ago, going against any evangelical principle, the ecclesiastical institutions never explicitly condemned the mafia.... In no document of the Church has the mafia ever been condemned in the name of the Gospels or have Christians been instructed that between mafia and Christianity there is absolute incompatibility, even clearer than the one – always denounced– between Christianity and Marxism. Even in 1986, on the eve of the maxi-trial, the archbishop of Palermo made it clear that, according to an Episcopal document dating back to 1944, it was not the mafia that had to be excommunicated but the individual authors of the murders. (Fasullo 1993, 161)

With the exception of isolated figures in the clergy who took a clear position against organised crime, it was only after the deaths of magistrates, politicians and police

37 The recordings of the homily can be watched in ‘Dalla Chiesa: il prefetto dei cento giorni’, RAI, *La Storia Siamo Noi*, Mafia Dossier, <http://www.lastoriasiamonoi.rai.it/puntate/generale-carlo-alberto-dalla-chiesa/652/default.aspx> (Accessed 10/10/2012).

38 Alberto Stabile, ‘Ma Palermo non è Sagunto. Pappalardo ci ha ripensato’, *La Repubblica*, 5 February 1986.

officers in the 1980s and 1990s that the Church broke its silence.³⁹ A clear stand against the mafia was finally taken after the killing of magistrates Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, with the sermon of Pope John Paul II from the Valley of the Temples in Agrigento on the 5th of May 1993, in which he openly condemned the mafia and urged mafiosi to change their ways.

Aims and structure of this thesis

These examples represent different facets of the rapport between mafia and religion, relations that are as inextricably related to each other as they are profoundly diverse, thereby making it impossible for this complex phenomenon to be analysed as one homogeneous whole or through a single disciplinary means. This is particularly the case with the common argument that the mafia *strumentalizza* (exploits) religion as a means to acquire social consensus (Ciotti 2009).⁴⁰

The prominent roles demanded by mafiosi in religious processions may suggest an exploitative use of public ceremonies on the part of mafia bosses in order to acquire legitimisation and consensus within Sicilian society. However, the altars and the religious artefacts frequently found in mafia hideouts may also indicate a distinct individual need, which does not necessarily correspond to the general aims of the organisation. Similarly, the role played by the Catholic Church both at a local and wider social level may be viewed from the perspective of the support provided to mafiosi or for its pastoral action aimed at opposing organised crime and denouncing its connivance with the Church itself. Therefore, analysing mafia religion as a

39 Saverio Lodato, review of Enzo Mignosi 'E il Signore sia coi boss. Storie di preti fedeli alla mafia e padrini timorosi di Dio', *L'Unità*, 11 October 1993.

40 Also in Fabio Armao, 'Criminalità organizzata', *Enciclopedia Treccani*, 2005.

consistent, isolated phenomenon risks overlooking the specificity of certain aspects, each of which calls into question particular dynamics worth exploring on their own. From another perspective, however, focusing on a single aspect without taking into account other constitutive facets of the phenomenon and, above all, without contextualising it within the wider socio-historical context in which Cosa Nostra has developed, risks offering an extremely superficial and narrow view of a complex and deeply rooted phenomenon.

It is interesting to note that, although religion, like the code of honour, appears to have been a constant in the ‘transcultural’ (Santino 2006) dimension of the mafia since its inception, it is only in recent times that the phenomenon has aroused academic interest.⁴¹ As will be described in detail in Chapter One, the relationship between the Sicilian mafia, the Church and religion is now being approached from several different perspectives. Despite important contributions produced by these different approaches, several largely unexplored yet crucial points of view on the phenomenon remain. For example, considerable attention has been dedicated to the ambiguous position of the Church regarding the mafia association, as well as to the development of a theological interpretation of the religiosity demonstrated by mafiosi. Instead, fewer attempts have been made to consider language and behaviour at a social level of interaction within Cosa Nostra as a specific context in which to analyse the role of religion. In particular, studies on mafia religion have tended to dedicate minimal attention to how religious symbolic and ritual practices affect the

⁴¹ Umberto Santino used the term of *transculturata mafiosa* (mafia ‘transculture’) to distinguish it from that of ‘subculture’. He defines *transculturata* as a ‘dynamic concept, open to new influences despite being strongly anchored to old values...a transversal path that collects elements of different cultures, in such a way that archaic and modern aspects can live and feed reciprocally’. (Chinnici and Santino 1989, 378)

participants involved in routine or extra-ordinary interactional processes at a level of identity, and at a social structural level for the group as a whole.

This research aims to contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon of mafia religion by analysing the functional role of religion at the micro-social level of communicative interaction within Cosa Nostra. It adopts an interdisciplinary approach to examine how, and to what extent, the religious language and behaviour used by mafia bosses in specific interactional contexts affects the mafia both at an individual and collective level of identity, and at the structural level for the organisation as a whole. In particular, this research utilises three ‘in-depth’ case studies to describe the role that religion plays in the dynamics through which the identities, roles, and authority of mafia leaders can be constructed, presented to, and perceived by the rest of the mafia community. The selected case studies include the religious practices in mafia rituals of initiation; the religious references of Michele Greco in his Court appearances, interviews and written memoirs; and the religious language used by Bernardo Provenzano in the written system of communication devised when he assumed the leadership of the organisation in the 1990s. Examining the influence of religion on the way mafiosi construct and present their roles may also help explain the ability of mafia bosses to acquire the obedience and allegiance of mafiosi at lower levels. As this thesis unfolds, it will become clear to the reader that it is precisely on the total allegiance of its affiliates that Cosa Nostra derives its major strength.

It is important to note that there is also a series of issues associated with the study of phenomena in relation to the cultural dimension of the Sicilian mafia. Until the early 1980s, the major interpretative paradigm had been that of the mafia as

neither an organisation nor a secret society, but as a ‘method’ and an ‘attitude’ of loosely connected criminal groups sharing a common ‘subculture’ (Arlacchi 1983; Blok 1974; Hess 1973; Schneider and Schneider 1976). The ‘culturalist’ paradigm of those *Sicilianisti* who in the aftermath of Italian Unification had defended the idea of the mafia as the cultural product of a particularly fierce and courageous reaction to the foreign powers considerably influenced not only the socio-anthropological debate of the 1970s, but also the apologetic dimension of political and public discourse on the mafia and on Southern Italy in general. This had important implications at a socio-economic and political level for Sicily at large, and it contributed to shaping and spreading an image of the mafia as a phenomenon with vague outlines, so deeply rooted in Sicilian culture as to make any effective action at identification and opposition impossible to implement.

The first maxi-trial of Palermo (1986–1987), which resulted in the unprecedented, simultaneous conviction of hundreds of prominent mafiosi, marked a watershed both in the history of the organisation and in its interpretative paradigms. The confessions of *pentiti*, upon which the trial was based, helped judicial authorities to establish for the first time the structural and corporate dimension of the Sicilian mafia, known by its members as *Cosa Nostra*. Upon these developments a new scholarship arose which, chiefly set against the culturalist perspective, focused primarily on the entrepreneurial and organisational dimension of the mafia (Arlacchi 1986; Catanzaro 1988; Centorrino, Sgroi, and Cacciola 1984; Centorrino 1986; Gambetta 1996). This paradigm remained constrained within its utilitarian schemes, thereby neglecting the importance of cultural values to which mafia defectors repeatedly referred in their testimonies. Indeed, the examples reported in the previous

section clearly demonstrate how these values occupy as central a role today as they did a century ago. The conviction that bridging insights of both perspectives is necessary to draw a more exhaustive—albeit still incomplete—picture of the mafia phenomenon, underpins this thesis. This research thus fits within a more recent stream of mafia studies that draws insights from both interpretative paradigms, whilst relying substantially on the model of the mafia reconstructed through judicial investigations based on defectors’ testimony. Within this framework, the mafia is interpreted as a single, hierarchically structured criminal organisation, which aims to derive internal cohesion and external legitimisation from a solid ideological ground.

It is important to stress that the focus of this research on a ‘cultural’ dimension of the mafia does not, by any means, imply the assimilation of Cosa Nostra to a pan-Sicilian cultural phenomenon. On the other hand, an analysis of mafia religion solely within the parameters of the ‘moral’ universe of Cosa Nostra would not take into account the significance that cultural values of wider external society have for mafia affiliates. Hence, rather than ‘assimilate’, it is necessary to ‘contextualise’ the relationship between mafia and religion within the socio-cultural fabric of Sicily in which Cosa Nostra appears to be deeply rooted. This is particularly important in the study of religion where, as historian John Dickie phrased it, ‘it is difficult to tell where genuine – if misguided – belief ends and cynical deceit begins’(Dickie 2004, 16).

In this regard, it is also necessary to specify that the purpose of this study is not to establish or investigate if, or to what extent, mafiosi are ‘really religious’. This would entail a different type of analysis based on single individual perspectives and appropriate investigative means. Nevertheless, in order to understand how pervasive

religious values are not only for the mafia organisation, but also for the external society as a whole, it is important to present a background perspective on the 'religious models of Sicily' which contemporary theologians have defined 'municipal religion' and 'municipal Catholicism' (Stabile 1996). The Literature Review presented in Chapter One dedicates particular attention to these theological approaches that offer an extremely valuable angle from which to examine the significance of religious values for members of Cosa Nostra.

Chapter Two describes the theoretical framework utilised for the analysis of the case studies. Having emphasised the complexity of the phenomenon, the necessity of adopting an interdisciplinary approach is self-evident. This research draws on a number of disciplines including Sociology, Anthropology, History and Performance Studies. In particular, it refers to socio-anthropological approaches to religion, rituals and performance that emphasise the role of rituality and performativity in constituting social structure and identity. These perspectives provide valuable models of analysis for the examination of the role of religion in the processes through which mafia leaders construct their authority and identity whilst crucially affecting the identity and structure of the rest of the organisation.

This chapter is divided in two sections. The first draws on sociological and anthropological approaches to religion, rituals and symbols. This theoretical framework will be adopted to interpret both mafia rites that relate to specific, definite events (e.g. the ceremony of initiation) and those related to everyday communicative processes (e.g. the written communication system devised by mafia boss Bernardo Provenzano). The second part of the chapter offers an overview on the growing discipline of Performance Studies. At the core of this field of study is the concept of

performance as ‘action’ and ‘process’, standing between ‘ritual’ and ‘theatre’. Performance, from this perspective, does not necessarily mean ‘acting’ in the theatrical sense of the term, but ‘enacting’, a concept which does not contradict the notion of actual belief. Through this interpretative model, the religious behaviour of mafia leaders can be studied from the perspective of the effects on the audience and on the actors, irrespective of whether their performative actions are a mere *mise-en-scène* or are motivated by sincere faith. Theories on the performativity of language and narrative performance allow the analysis of religious behaviour and language of mafia bosses Greco and Provenzano in terms of symbolic ritual performances. Moreover, perspectives on the role that ritual performance plays in the negotiation and representation of the ‘self’ in social interactions are useful to describe how identity can be progressively constructed, re-constructed and represented by means of religious behaviour and language, both verbal and written.

Chapter Three discusses the first case study of this research. It describes the initiation rites of Cosa Nostra and explores the role of religion within this highly symbolic ceremony. In particular, it analyses the function of cultural symbols in the construction of the power and authority of mafia bosses who conduct the ritual, and in the individual and collective identity of the candidates undergoing affiliation. In the first section, a comparison is drawn between the mafia affiliation ceremony and the ritualistic tradition of secret societies that spread across Sicily in the nineteenth-century. Such contextualisation is necessary to explore the dynamics through which Cosa Nostra has adopted myths and values belonging to a shared cultural patrimony to construct and strengthen its own evolving identity. It is also useful in exploring the

factors which influence the choice of certain religious symbols and references drawn from the Christian tradition over others.

Mafia defectors have described numerous examples of initiation rites along the history of the mafia. These will be analysed in terms of rituals of interaction, and, specifically, of highly symbolic *rites of passage*. In regard to this, not only does the testimony of *pentiti* provide useful information about the ritual proceedings; it also represents an ideal platform from which to study individual reactions to the ceremony. The data necessary for this case study are derived from judicial papers, legal documentation, as well as from existing literature on the subject.

In Chapter Four, the second case study addresses the religiosity of mafia boss Michele Greco. It specifically describes the function of religion in Greco's process of identity representation contextualising it within the wider frame of Cosa Nostra in the late twentieth century. An overview of the influential position that the Greco family held in Palermo and the wider province, as well as its role in the events leading to the Second Mafia War (1981–1983), is useful to contextualise Michele Greco's persona at the top level of the Sicilian mafia during the violent turmoil in the early 1980s. In this study, the data are obtained from judicial and legal documentation, audio-visual material, and from interviews with magistrates who investigated Greco's figure as head of the organisation. In particular, two memoirs written by Michele Greco while incarcerated provide a unique perspective from which to study his continuous appeals to religious devotion.

The third case study, described in Chapter Five, examines the religious references that mafia boss Bernardo Provenzano used in his written communication with the rest of the mafia community and with his family. It analyses the religious

language of Provenzano contextualising it within the larger socio-historical framework of Cosa Nostra and the external socio-economic and political system of connections that allowed him to rescue an organisation in an apparent state of terminal decline. The anthropological *social drama* approach represents a valuable model to interpret the role played by religion within the communicative system implemented by Provenzano when he assumed control of Cosa Nostra in the mid-1990s. The data for this analysis are derived from the records of written communication (termed the *pizzini*) that Provenzano exchanged with the rest of the wider mafia community; from relevant literature on the subject; and from judicial documents and records of confessions given by mafiosi who turned state's evidence. Interviews with magistrates and journalists who investigated Provenzano have helped in delineating his role within Cosa Nostra prior to, and after, the Second Mafia War and the bombing campaign of the early 1990s.

The general conclusions of the thesis will provide the reader with an expanded summary of the whole study, integrating and synthesising the various issues raised in the discussion. Furthermore, this section will attempt to identify the theoretical implications of this research for the overall study on the mafia, providing the scope for future research.

Methods and Sources

This study is conducted using a qualitative methodological framework. Qualitative paradigms are required for the study of a complex phenomenon like mafia religion since they are 'multi-method in focus' and involve an 'interpretive, naturalistic

approach to their subject matter' (Denzin and Lincoln 1994, 2). Sociologist Irmgard

Holloway gives a comprehensive definition of qualitative research as:

A form of social inquiry that focuses on the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences and the world in which they live. A number of different approaches exist within the wider framework of this type of research, but most of these have the same aim: to understand the social reality of individuals, groups and cultures. Researchers use qualitative approaches to explore the behaviour, perspectives and experiences of the people they study. The basis of qualitative research lies in the interpretive approach to social reality. (Holloway 1997, 2)

Moreover, since qualitative research is concerned with the analysis of behaviour from the social actors' own perspective and with situational settings, it offers valuable interpretative models to reconstruct and analyse the complex system of relations, behaviour and social representations conveyed by members of the mafia in interactional contexts.

The research strategy adopted is based on case study analysis. Case studies represent a multi-perspective, qualitative research method that is widely utilised in many disciplines within the social sciences, specifically those seeking to gain an 'in-depth' understanding of social behaviour in its natural setting. Case study research allows the exploration and understanding of complex phenomena through analyses of a defined number of instances. It is particularly useful in situations where the context is crucial for understanding the phenomenon and where the researcher has no influence on the unfolding events. Researcher Robert Yin gives a definition of case studies that perfectly applies to the subject of this research in which mafia religion is not immediately distinguishable from its surrounding cultural context:

[A] case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used. (Yin 1984, 23)

The advantage of adopting the case study approach in this research is that it facilitates the examination of the data on the relationship between mafia and religion

without isolating the phenomenon being studied from its background, and without limiting the array of interacting variables. Contextualisation is fundamental in this case in that it not only helps the researcher to examine the data in a natural setting, but also contributes to exploring the intricacy of real-life situations in all those facets which statistical surveys or experimental research methods may not be able to capture in detail.

The philosophical stance underlying this research fits within the interpretive tradition. The basic epistemological assumption of *Interpretivism* is that reality is a social construct and that knowledge of reality can only be gained through social constructions such as shared meanings and language (Walsham 1993b). To be understood, social phenomena must be explored in the social contexts in which they are interactively constructed and reproduced. Furthermore, in contrast to the assumptions of *Positivism*, the meaning that social actors give to their actions either intentionally or involuntarily is also central to the understanding of social behaviour from an interpretive perspective.⁴² In this sense, interpretive research is not concerned with the repeatability of an analysis, but with gaining a deeper insight into the phenomenon being investigated whilst, simultaneously, acknowledging the subjective role of social actors and of the researcher in the process.

Researcher Geoff Walsham maintains that ‘case studies provide the main vehicle for research in the interpretive tradition’ (1993, 14). Specifically for this research, interpretive, retrospective case studies represent a concise qualitative

42 Positivism is rooted in the objectivity of knowledge and reality. Reality and knowledge exist irrespective of human behaviour, and can be observed and described from the objective perspective of sensory experience. Phenomena need to be isolated and observations repeated for analyses to be validated. For this reason, positivism is generally—albeit by no means exclusively—associated with quantitative research methods.

method to explore, in as much detail as possible, a definite number of instances selected from historical records which are seen as ‘illuminating’ of the phenomenon being analysed.

The qualitative analysis of the data presented in each case is theoretically informed. Discussing the use of theory in interpretive ‘in-depth’ case study, Walsham suggests that it is a useful way ‘of “generalising” research findings, since the interlinked concepts in the theory can then be utilised to provide insights in contexts other than that in which they are developed’(Walsham 2003, 87). In Walsham’s view, although informed and critical use of theory is useful, a theoretical framework ‘should not be regarded as a rigid structure, but as a guide to empirical research’ (1993, 71). He suggests the adoption of multiple theories to be used as a “scaffold”, and discarded when they are no longer needed. In this sense, ‘in the interpretive tradition there are no correct and incorrect theories but there are interesting and less interesting ways to view the world’ (Walsham 1993a, 6). Therefore, theoretical literature should be used primarily as a source for inspiration and for understanding complex social phenomena:

The motivation for the use of theory in...interpretive case studies is to create an initial theoretical framework which takes account of previous knowledge, and which creates a sensible theoretical basis to inform the topics and approach of the early empirical work. (Walsham 1995, 76)

To analyse the role of religion in processes of social interactions between mafia leaders and their subordinates, the theoretical framework adopted in this research draws from socio-anthropological theories of rituals, symbols and performance. Chiefly, but not exclusively, it bridges insights of Symbolic Interactionism (Blumer 1969; Goffman 1971), Symbolic Anthropology (Turner 1967; 1982) and Performance Study theories (Schechner 1977; 2002) within the interpretive

paradigm. The theoretical framework adopted and its application in the analysis of the case studies on the relationship between mafia and religion will be discussed in detail in Chapter Two. In general, despite different methodological approaches, these perspectives focus on understanding the human experience by recognising human agency and by studying symbols and the meanings individuals attach to them in the course of social interactions. Social reality is seen as a product of negotiation between two or more individuals who interpret social actions symbolically to give meaning to their reality. The meanings of these symbols are also socially constructed by means of interaction. The implication is that there is no single ‘true’ reality, but multiple ones, which individuals create and transform in social settings. The application of these theories in research therefore cannot be validated in terms of truthfulness, but in terms of usefulness for understanding the phenomenon being studied.

One important issue regarding the use of case study research relates to the selection of cases, the validity of the findings, and to how generalisations can be derived from multiple cases. *Triangulation* is a recognised strategy to ensure the validity of case study research. It involves the use of different sources of information, and different methodological and theoretical perspectives to interpret a single data set (Denzin 2009, 301). The cases to analyse are chosen based on their potential to inform about the phenomenon or to convey specific information which may help to generalise the findings.

In light of these considerations, the choice of cases for analysis in this study has been largely determined by the potential of each specific instance to ‘illuminate’ and ‘inform’ on relevant aspects of the wider subject under investigation.

Furthermore, particular attention has been paid to potential connections among the three case studies, which might contribute to a generalization of the findings and to better understand each case in context. Indeed, as will become clearer during the course of this thesis, individual cases provide valuable insights for understanding the others. However, it is necessary to stress that the main aim of this research is not to build a generalising theory of mafia religion or to replace the bigger picture with smaller examples. Rather, working predominantly at a micro-level of analysis and focusing on specific cases, the main objective is to provide an ‘in depth’ look at the relationship between the mafia and religion, which could ultimately contribute to delineating a more complete understanding of the broader, complex phenomenon.

One other significant factor in the selection of case studies has been the availability and accessibility of data necessary for the investigation. The topical nature of mafia study places obvious limitations on the amount of available data and on the way they can be analysed. The difficulty in conducting fieldwork with direct access to ritual and communicative practices prevents the researcher from using common qualitative methods of data collection, for example, participant observation, focus groups, or in-depth interviews. Legally sanctioned telephone intercepts and hidden microphones could partially overcome this obstacle (Paoli 2003, 20), but may, similarly, be subject to availability. Moreover, increasing measures adopted in the last two decades by Cosa Nostra to maximise secrecy, including the implementation of a written communication system, have rendered the information obtained through telephone and microphone recordings extremely fragmented and inconsistently reliable.

Therefore, this research chiefly relies on the analysis of existing documents such as public records (police reports, judicial documents from court hearings, audio-video material, preliminary interrogations transcripts, trial sentences and the reports of the parliamentary antimafia commission) and personal documents (memoirs; personal notes; written messages termed *pizzini*). The exploration of the religious dimension of mafia behaviour within these sources of data will primarily involve a systematic process of identification and description of the structural elements and symbolic patterns. Once these patterns are identified and described ‘in depth’ within their wider setting, they will be interpreted in light of the more appropriate theoretical propositions. For example, assuming performance and ritual as frames of reference, this study will look at the way religious elements are arranged within the overall communicative interaction to enhance the effectiveness of the ritual performance of mafia bosses. A detailed contextualisation of each instance of mafia interaction ritual within the wider context of the organisation provides a necessary framework within which to observe not only the performative language and behaviour of mafia bosses, but also the reaction of their audiences. The response of mafiosi at lower levels serves to demonstrate the effectiveness of their leaders’ ritual performance and to validate the assumptions reached in each case study.

In conducting this research, attention has also been paid to the possibility that judicial records may not necessarily bear a truthful correspondence to actual events but are selected and ordered according to their normative value (Paoli 2003). For this reason and for purposes of triangulation of data, historical reconstructions of the events has accompanied, where possible, judicial evidence of the trials in order to

provide a more exhaustive, albeit not always correspondent, version of the events described.

The testimony of mafiosi who turned state's evidence represents a unique source of information for this research. However, the fact that these accounts may be 'corrupted' by the intentions of the speakers to represent themselves in a positive light, whilst attempting to discredit their rivals, needs to be taken into consideration. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss the reliability of this type of orally sourced data. Here it suffices to say that, rather than on the authenticity of the events described, this thesis is concerned with what the accounts tell us about the speakers: how mafiosi represent themselves; the way their individual perspectives might be influenced by collective narratives; and how cultural codes may influence these narratives. For example, this is the case with the myth of 'an old mafia of honour and justice', which recurs almost unanimously in descriptions of initiation rituals by pentiti (as described in Chapter Three). In general, the confessions of defectors have provided researchers with an unprecedented insight into the internal dynamics and workings of Cosa Nostra from the personal perspective of its members. Even in regard to this research, the most direct and informative insight into mafia religion can only be gained by studying the words of the protagonists.

In order to access and consult these sources of data, research was conducted at the *Tribunale di Palermo* (TdP – Court of Palermo). In particular, data concerning mafia structure and workings as well as specific documents related to mafia rituals of initiation and to the trials of boss Michele Greco have been sourced from *Corte d'Assise* (CdA – Court of Assise), *Corte d'Assise d'Appello* (CdA – Court of Appeal) and from the *Archivio Penale* (Criminal Court Archive). Access to the

archives of the *Aula Bunker* of the Ucciardone Prison in Palermo has been granted to collect specific information on the first maxi-trial and on Michele Greco. A previously unknown memoir written by Greco while in prison was found attached to the proceedings of the 1994 trial during the course of this research and has been integrated into the data of this thesis for the first time.

Research carried out in the GIP section of the court of Palermo was principally aimed at collecting data on mafia boss Bernardo Provenzano. The *Direzione Investigativa Antimafia* of Palermo (DIA – Antimafia Investigation Department) kindly granted access to the *pizzini* archive and annotated Bible seized in Provenzano's hideout during his arrest in 2006. Other *pizzini* have been sourced from the documentation attached to specific trials in which Provenzano was indicted. Many of the letters, which will also be integrated into the case study, have not been published to date. The crucial value of the *pizzini* for mafia research lies in the unprecedented inside view it offers into the dynamics and flux of power, social relations and cultural values inside the organisation. In addition, it permits an analysis of Cosa Nostra's main protagonists from a personal standpoint and in a natural setting that cannot be obtained from mafia defector testimony. The interviews, documents, written judicial records will be presented and interpreted in the course of this study moving from a description to an analysis of the data set against their socio-historical background, with reference to the wider subject under investigation.

Other published primary and secondary sources, including relevant literature on the subject, journals and newspapers have also provided useful data. In particular, substantial information has been derived from local and regional Sicilian newspapers

including *L'Ora* and *Giornale di Sicilia*, which have been consulted at the newspaper archives of the *Istituto Gramsci Siciliano* and at the *Biblioteca Regionale Siciliana*. The RAI film archives in Rome and Palermo (RAI–Teche) have provided access to audio and video recordings of interviews of mafiosi and of court hearings during the first *maxi-processo* (maxi-trial).

One important motivation for this research is the premise that understanding the mafia from within is crucial not only to reconstruct the dynamics of Cosa Nostra over time, but also to generate a model from which predictions on future activity can be made. It is hoped that this research may contribute to this end.

CHAPTER ONE

LITERATURE REVIEW

*La plus belle des ruses du diable est de vous persuader qu'il n'existe pas!*¹
(Charles Baudelaire, Le Joueur généreux)

1.1. One, none and a hundred thousand mafias

On Palm Sunday 1964, Cardinal Archbishop of Palermo, Ernesto Ruffini, issued a pastoral letter entitled *Il Vero Volto della Sicilia* ('The True Face of Sicily'), in which he openly denounced a media conspiracy against Sicilians: 'Recently, we have witnessed a great conspiracy organised to dishonour Sicily; the three main contributing factors are the mafia, The Leopard and Danilo Dolci' (Ruffini 1964).² According to Ruffini, the mafia was 'nothing more than an insignificant minority of criminals'. When asked to define the mafia by a journalist, the Archbishop replied 'As far as I know, it is a brand of detergents' (Savatteri 2005, 207). The Archbishop's position, far from being an isolated instance, reflected the opinion of many who, even in the 1960s, denied the existence of the mafia as a secret criminal organisation. Nevertheless, the hypothesis that the mafia existed in the form of a structured, secret society had previously been formulated as early as the nineteenth century.

1 'The finest trick of the devil is to persuade you that he does not exist'.

2 Cardinal Ruffini blamed Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's *The Leopard* (1958) for its portrayal of the decadence of the nobility in Sicily during the Risorgimento. Similarly blameworthy, in Ruffini's opinion, was the social activist and sociologist Danilo Dolci, who had depicted in his *Inchiesta a Palermo* (1956) the desperate conditions of the Sicilian countryside and fishing villages, and the power of the mafia. Ruffini's epistle represented the first official public statement about the mafia issued by an ecclesiastical authority almost a century after the word 'mafia' had first been used.

Even before the word ‘mafia’ was first used, the Bourbon official Pietro Calà Ulloa, in a 1838 report written to the Minister of Justice of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, noted the existence of ‘brotherhoods’ and ‘sects’ in Sicily, which shared many similarities with the mafia *cosche* (clans or factions) of today:³

There are in many villages unions or brotherhoods, kinds of sects that are called parties, without political aim, without colours, without meetings, without any other link but the dependence on a leader, who may be here a landowner or there an archpriest. A common fund serves various needs: to get an official dismissed, to defend him, to protect a witness, to accuse an innocent person. There are so many kinds of little governments in the government....People have come to a tacit agreement with the criminals. As soon as a theft occurs, intermediaries come out to offer transactions to recover the stolen goods....Sometimes the funds are held in common with other provinces as to commit thefts and to deal in stolen animals between one province and another. (Farrell 1997, 29)

More importantly, this report clearly demonstrates how the leaders of these criminal networks belonged to the local ruling class (e.g. priests, lawyers and doctors) rather than to exclusively lower social classes (Farrell 1997, 9). Similarly, in 1890, the German Consul in Sicily, Augusto Schneegans, described the Sicilian mafia as:

a secret society that has invaded every aspect of life; it is an illegal power that executes an illegal action for the benefit of its own affiliates, using any form of legal or illegal means. Whatever its importance, the mafia is a State within the State and represents an arbitrary and illegal power capable of permeating order and legality. (Schneegans 1890, 291)

Reports written at the turn of the nineteenth century by police officers of Palermo, Antonino Cutrera and Giuseppe Alongi, were also insightful. Although these criminologists denied the existence of the mafia as a structured secret society, they nevertheless identified within the economic activities of mafia criminal groups specific aspects that would recur in analyses carried out by police a century later. Cutrera, in particular, argued against the widely held idea of the mafia as a product of backwardness and poverty, identifying in wealthy citrus estates of the *Conca d’Oro*

³ The association of the word ‘mafia’ with criminality was inspired by the 1863 successful play *I mafiusi di la Vicaria* (‘The mafiosi of the Vicaria prison’) by Giuseppe Rizzotto and Gaetano Mosca (Farrell 1997, 13).

(‘Golden Basin’) of Palermo the area in which nascent forms of mafia criminal associations had developed (Cutrera 1900, 45-46):

The mafia is stronger and denser in the Conca d’Oro where there is no *latifondo* [large estate], no misery. Everyone knows that the estates of the Conca d’Oro belong to a myriad of small and big landowners, that the soil is extremely fertile, and that farmers enjoy a certain degree of wealth. We should not forget that it is precisely in the gardens of the Conca D’Oro that the most famous criminal mafia associations have born, as the trials to the Stoppaglieri, Fratuzzi, and Fratelli Amoroso demonstrate.⁴

The 1876 *Inchiesta in Sicilia* (Inquest on Sicily) of the Tuscan senators Leopoldo Franchetti and Sidney Sonnino also illustrated important components of mafia activity which appear to have remained constant over time. In the section of the inquiry entitled ‘Political and Administrative Conditions in Sicily’, Franchetti defined the mafia as an ‘industry of violence’. He argued that the use of violence in Sicily had become the main asset in achieving personal power at a time in which the land was a major commodity (following the abolition of feudalism in 1812) and the State was unable to effectively exercise its legal and moral authority (Franchetti 1993, 13-17). Franchetti’s report, although it dismissed the idea of the mafia as an organised, secret society, contained important insights on the monopoly of violence as a means of social control and on the responsibility attributed to the ruling class, insights which are still considered valid today.

A few years later, an extensive report written by police inspector Ermanno Sangiorgi represented the first systematic portrait of the Sicilian mafia. It constituted the first official document to describe the mafia as a hierarchical criminal organisation consolidated by a secret oath of affiliation, aimed at controlling territory

4 As will be discussed in Chapter Three, the evident similarities in terms of structure and rituals with the mafia described by pentiti in the 1980s suggest that these fraternities represent an early form of mafia organisation.

(Lupo 1988).⁵ Indeed, the image of the organisation emerging from this document is remarkably similar to that which the pentiti would describe during the maxi-trial in the 1980s:

A large association of *malfattori* [miscreants], organised in sections and groups, afflicts the countryside of Palermo and its adjacent areas: every group is ruled by a boss, called *capo-rione* [local boss] and, according to the number of members and to the extension of territory... this boss is aided by a *sottocapo* [second-in-charge]. A supreme boss is at the top of this union. Affiliates choose their *capi-rione*, while *capi-rione* choose their supreme boss in a meeting that is generally held in the countryside. The objective of the association is to establish control and impose its guardians, workers, taxes, and prices of products over local landowners. (Lupo 1988, 467)⁶

In 1937, a similar analysis of the mafia appeared in the description given by Melchiorre Allegra. Allegra, a medical doctor from Castelvetro, described the association as a sort of ‘Masonic sect’ organised in *famiglie* (families) and *decine* (groups of ten men) ruled by a *capodecina* (head of a group of ten). An overarching ruling body coordinated the various *famiglie*. He also revealed that elections of bosses and symbolic initiation rituals regulated this sect where members allegedly came from any social extraction, including higher social classes.⁷

The significance of these examples lies in the fact that they demonstrate the existence of the mafia as a united, secret organisation since the late nineteenth century. They show specific components of the mafia system and of the rules that governed its internal behaviour, already in place at an early stage, that are evident in the Cosa Nostra described in modern trials. Acknowledging the existence of a unifying thread in mafia history is fundamental for several reasons. It is necessary

5 The Sangiorgi Report is a volume comprising thirty-one individual reports written between November 1898 and February 1900, and addressed to the Chief Prosecuting Magistrate of Palermo as part of a trial documentation. It describes the mafia of the late 1800s in the area of Palermo, its organisation in *cosche* coordinated by a summit of bosses and by a *capo supremo* (supreme boss). It particularly emphasises the existence of a *tenebroso sodalizio* (‘dark association’) between this organisation and the Palermitan ruling class.

6 (*Italics mine*) Also reported in *Sentenza di Rito Abbreviato n.1579/07, nei confronti di Adamo Andrea + 56* (*Sentenza Gotha*), 143–150.

7 The testimony of Melchiorre Allegra was published in *L’Ora*, 22–23 January 1962.

not only to comprehend the subtle ways in which the organisation has adapted its structure to changing historical circumstances, but also to identify the function of those components that appear to have remained unvaried through time. As the examples presented in the Introduction of this thesis imply, cultural codes—specifically religious values and practices—represent such an example of a constant in mafia history.

Despite evidence that the mafia existed in the form of an organised criminal society in the wake of Italian unification, the idea of the mafia as a loose ensemble of local factions with a proud sense of honour and chivalry inherent to the Sicilian culture was promoted at every level.

1.2. The mafia as a ‘southern question’

The origins of the Sicilian mafia have long been at the centre of public, political and academic discourses. Historian Salvatore Lupo has insisted on the necessity to focus on the development of the organisation rather than on trying to identify its precise beginnings.⁸ To comprehend this perspective, it is necessary to see the mafia as a modern phenomenon, whose origins are closely tied to the emergence of Italy as a unified State. This does not mean that the mafia did not exist in Sicily prior to 1861. Rather, it implies that it was only with the Unification of Italy that the phenomenon became a national issue with a single encompassing name linked to criminal groups pre-existing in Sicily. As Lupo recently explained:

⁸ Salvatore Lupo, ‘Com’è nata cosa nostra?’, paper presented at the workshop series *Ricordare per educare al futuro. Itinerari della memoria e percorsi formativi*, University of Palermo, February–May 2012, 16 February 2012.

It is likely that the mafia phenomenon existed well before somebody had even invented the concept of 'mafia'. If the word does not exist then the concept does not exist. For this reason, the mafia has relatively recent origins. The word mafia was not created by mafiosi, but by public opinion in a period which coincided, or which immediately followed, the Unification of Italy. The word appeared and, only then, its meaning became attached to a criminal phenomenon.⁹

Therefore, the mafia appears to have emerged as a 'question' in post-unification Italy along with the 'question' of the south. A few prior considerations on this point are necessary to contextualise the interpretative paradigms on the mafia discussed in the following sections and the perspective of analysis adopted in this research.

The political discourses on the mafia in the aftermath of the Italian Unification need to be framed within the wider political and academic debate concerning underdevelopment and poverty in the southern regions of Italy. Central to the paradigm known as *questione meridionale* ('Southern question') was the concept of the south as a backward society and, above all, as a 'problem' when compared with the relatively prosperous north of the country (Foot 2003, 150-152). A backward agrarian economy and feudal social relations supposedly characterised the *Mezzogiorno* (Italian South).

However, the southern question 'was from the start clouded by resentment and prejudice' (Duggan 2007, 265). The very idea of a 'southern question' derived more from a well-rooted belief in a profound cultural and moral divide between the north and south of Italy than from actual evidence. Northerners drew on long-standing stereotypes to point out the lack of liberal sentiment and the widespread backwardness of the South. Southerners, on the other hand, blamed their economic situation on the policies of the new State—taxation, laws, military conscription—

⁹ *ibid.*

‘reflecting resentment at what had seemed a Piedmontese “conquest” (Duggan 2007, 265-266).¹⁰

Numerous insurrections erupted across Sicily in the 1860s making the island a most urgent target of State intervention. Public officials were regularly sent to the Sicilian provinces to assess the situation and extinguish riots. Their use of heavy-handed military force was frequently justified as a necessary means to quench what they described as ‘really something out of the Middle Ages’ (Riall 2002, 5). Among these officials, Prefect Filippo Gualtiero drew a report in 1865 to be addressed to the parliament in which he highlighted the ‘exceptional criminal tendencies’ of Sicilians. He particularly reported the presence of a criminal group of conspirators, equipped with its own statute and rites, which had established its power by means of violence and intimidation. In Gualtiero’s view, this so-called *mafia* was responsible for the failure of liberal policies in Sicily and for increasing social unrest. As a result, it called for the immediate deployment of military force, increased repressive measures and the suppression of basic judicial rights (Riall 2002, 5–6). With this report, the term ‘mafia’ associated to a criminal phenomenon had officially entered the political and public debate (Farrell 1997, 17). Yet, Gualtiero linked it to widespread Sicilian criminal attitudes and activities rather than to a specific association or network of social relations.

10 As will be detailed in the course of this chapter, the paradigm of ‘southern backwardness’ would remain predominant in the intellectual tradition of *meridionalisti* (scholars of the Italian South) for over a century. Starting from the 1980s, a group of southern historians challenged the *meridionalista* view of a backward and static south, promoting instead a picture of the south as an essentially dynamic society. Arguing against the praxis of looking at the *Mezzogiorno* as a uniform entity through systematic comparison with the north, *Revisionisti* (revisionists) have maintained that the socioeconomic situation of the Southern Italian regions ‘stemmed from a set of “rational” responses to human (e.g. societal) and physical (e.g. climatic) factors’. Since these conditions evolved through time, they cannot be dismissed simply in terms of ‘relics’ of feudal society (Lumley and Morris 1997, 5). For a comprehensive overview on the revisionist movement in southern historiography, see Lumley and Morris 1997.

The reaction of the intellectual and political class in Sicily promptly arrived. In opposition to the widespread idea of mafia as an inherently Sicilian problem, prominent public figures ‘hid criminal episodes behind the supposed mentality of a Sicilian subculture named *sicilianismo*’ (Pezzino 1990, 38–39). The ‘sicilianist’ political and cultural propaganda was promoted by the island’s ruling class in the late 1800s and aimed at contrasting what it perceived as ‘an indiscriminate criminalisation of all Sicilians by Italian law enforcement and public opinion’ (Paoli 2003, 25). One less official, albeit significant, reason behind this movement was the collusion of the local upper classes with the mafia whose support was needed to consolidate its power (Dickie 2011, 101; Paoli 2003, 25).

According to *sicilianisti*, the mafia was the cultural product of a particularly fierce and courageous reaction to the foreign powers that had occupied the island for centuries. Giuseppe Pitrè, ethnographer and scholar of Sicilian customs and traditions, was undoubtedly the most influential leading exponent of this movement. In his view, a mafioso was ‘simply a courageous, brave fellow who won’t stand any nonsense from anyone’:

Mafia is the awareness of a man’s nature, an exaggerated idea of the power of the individual, the sole power of decision in each conflict and in each clash of interests; hence it is the inability to tolerate the superiority, or worse, the arrogance of others. The mafioso wants to be respected and almost invariably shows respect himself. When offended he does not turn to the judiciary and does not rely on the law. If he did so, he would be displaying weakness and offending against *omertà* [code of silence], which brands as distasteful and despicable any man who turns to an official in order to get his rights. (Pitrè 1889, 287–292)¹¹

The Marquis of Rudinì, Antonio Starrabba, took a similar position when, facing the *Giunta d’Inchiesta* (Committee of Inquiry) which visited Sicily in 1875, he declared ‘What is this maffia? I say there is a benign maffia. The benign maffia is the spirit of

11 Cited in Henner Hess (1998, 10).

bravery, an unwillingness to be subjugated but to subjugate...a willingness to show courage, to fight and so on' (Pezzino 1990, 109-116). Similarly, in 1925, member of the Parliament for Vittoria, Vittorio Emanuele Orlando, publically stated:

If by mafia we mean the exaggerated sense of honour, the intolerance of abuse and oppression... the generosity that faces the strong and is kind to the weak, faithfulness to friendship ahead of anything else, even death, if by mafia we mean these sentiments and behaviours, however excessive they may be, then, in that sense, it is a trait of Sicilian soul, and I declare myself mafioso, and I am proud to be one. (Marino 1976, 314)

This 'culturalist' interpretation would exercise an enormous influence not only on academic studies of the mafia, but also on the way mafiosi were perceived externally and perceived themselves.

1.2.1. The culturalist paradigm

The interpretation of the mafia based on a culturalist perspective constituted the grounds for the socio-anthropological debate that took place in the 1960s and 1970s (Blok 1974; Schneider and Schneider 1976; Arlacchi 1983; Hess 1973). The common thread uniting these studies was the idea of mafiosi as individuals who were related to each other by family and clientelistic relations or by precise 'subcultural' behaviour rather than by an affiliation to a structured organisation. The mafia was interpreted as a 'method' and an 'attitude' inextricably related to Sicilian culture and social structure (Hess 1973). In particular, *mafia* was synonym of *mafiosità*, an attitude characterised by 'the proud awareness of one's own personality, of independence in every respect, the ability to look after oneself and to defend one's own dignity, and an awareness of chivalrous ties with the members of one's own group' (Hess 1998, 10).

German sociologist Henner Hess expanded on a theory of the mafia as ‘a plethora of small, independent criminal groups’ that required no further rituals of affiliation. A similar stand was taken initially by sociologist Pino Arlacchi, who defined the mafia *cosche* as ‘simple but solid organisms, which do not have any formal or bureaucratic aspect’:

Contrary to what has been suggested by a majority of the literary and journalistic production on the subject, there does not exist, and there never was, a secret, hierarchical and centralized criminal organisation called the mafia, 'Ndrangheta or Honoured Society whose members are bound to one another by oaths of mutual assistance and loyalty sworn during dark ceremonies. (Arlacchi 1983, 63-64)

In Arlacchi’s view, the mafia derived from a cultural system based on a specific notion of honour, which, in the 1940s, still played an important role in regions like Calabria and Sicily:

Mafia and 'Ndrangheta, Mafioso and 'Ndranghetista are synonyms. In the eyes of local people, these words designate the category of men of honour. In the traditional mafia areas of Sicily and Calabria, honour is the unit of measure of a person’s value, of a family, of a clan. . . . Mafia behaviour is part of a cultural system centred on the concept of honour achieved through individual violence. (Arlacchi 1983, 22-23)¹²

In general, the culturalist paradigm heavily influenced the apologetic dimension of political and public discourses on the mafia. Above all, it contributed to the construction of a myth around the phenomenon, which was further reinforced by its cultural representations. In particular, the media and the US entertainment industry promoted the idea of mafiosi as mobsters in sharp suits, very often religiously devout, who commit crimes in the name of honour and of their families.¹³ Conversely, the mafia members, who have always been conscious of the way they

12 After the mafia maxi-trial and the confessions of pentiti, Arlacchi admitted a fundamental error of judgement in his earlier work and agreed that the mafia was a hierarchically structured organisation.

13 It is noteworthy that, as early as 1886, police officer Giuseppe Alongi pointed out one important aspect of mafia identity: ‘Those who have studied the *maffiosi* in the novels or on the newspapers, think they can recognise them by what they wear. . . . The real *maffioso* dresses humbly, adopts a language and behaviour that are of ‘fraternal and attentive benevolence, who patiently suffers insults and slaps and then in the evening shoots you’ (Alongi 1886, 54).

are represented, frequently made these mystifications their own. For example, when journalist Enzo Biagi asked him to explain what the mafia was, mafia boss Luciano Leggio did not hesitate in quoting Pitrè and the concept of the mafia as ‘pride of self, excellence and bravery’.¹⁴ Interestingly, during the maxi-trial of Palermo, Leggio consistently adopted an attitude and posture that strongly resembled the character of Don Vito Corleone played by Marlon Brando in *The Godfather* (1972).

One of the most enduring consequences of mafia interpretations and representations based on an essentially cultural viewpoint was that the Italian word ‘mafia’ spread around the world assuming a variety of meanings or none. ‘If everything is mafia then nothing is mafia’, historian Salvatore Lupo commented (Lupo 2004, 13). Indeed, what emerged was not the image of a united hierarchical organisation but a body with a nebulous profile that rendered the mafia too vague to be effectively identified or opposed.

It was only in the early 1980s, amid the unprecedented escalation of violence of the Second Mafia War, that prosecutors in Palermo began to investigate possible connections between mafia groups across Sicily (Dickie 2011, 104). A year later, prominent mafioso Tommaso Buscetta turned state’s evidence. Prior to his confessions, judicial authorities only had a superficial knowledge of the mafia phenomenon. Buscetta, who had lost many of his close relatives in the ongoing mafia war, provided them with extremely valuable insights into the mafia. He described the structure of a unique criminal organisation, with initiation rituals, rules and statutes, born in Western Sicily and known to its affiliates as *Cosa Nostra*.

14 Interview of Luciano Leggio with journalist Enzo Biagi, *Linea Diretta*, 20 March 1989.

1.3. Cosa Nostra: structure and workings

The word mafia is a literary creation. In reality, mafiosi refer to themselves as *uomini d'onore* [men of honour]. Each of them belongs to a *borgata* [neighbourhood] and is member of a *famiglia* [faction].¹⁵ This is the case of the city of Palermo, because in smaller centres the mafia organisation takes the name of the centre itself. The *capo* [head] of each Family is elected by the other men of honour. In turn, each capo names his *sottocapo* [second-in-charge], *consiglieri* [advisers] and *capidecina* [head of a group of ten members]. The boss of each Family is called *rappresentante*. Above the Families there is a coordinating body called *Commissione* [Commission] composed of members representing three Families with adjoining territories.... In its totality, this organisation is known as Cosa Nostra, like in the US.¹⁶

With these words, Tommaso Buscetta began his collaboration with prosecuting magistrate Giovanni Falcone in July 1984 (Figure 5). Contrary to what is generally believed, Buscetta was not the first mafioso to break the code of *omertà* in the course of the history of the Sicilian mafia, but the first one to be attentively heeded. As stated earlier, testimonies of mafia informers were used as early as the nineteenth century. However, their confessions were systematically dismissed as unreliable, or at least not reliable enough to provide judicial evidence. Buscetta provided magistrates with important insights into the organisation, its structure, rules and workings. The attention with which the magistrates of Palermo pursued his case was unprecedented, as was the perspective of analysis that Buscetta gave them; a perspective that was necessary to understand the complexity of the mafia phenomenon and its scope. 'He gave us a broad, global, wide-ranging vision of the phenomenon', Falcone explained in his interview to journalist Marcelle Padovani, and added 'He provided us with an essential interpretative key, a language and a code. For us he was like a language professor who allows you to go to Turkey without having to use hand gestures' (Falcone and Padovani 1991, 41-42).

15 A mafia Family does not necessarily correspond to the blood family of an affiliate, but refers to his mafia clan. In this thesis, the word is capitalised to distinguish it from the blood family.

16 TdP – Ufficio Istruzione Processi Penali, verbali di interrogatorio dell'imputato Tommaso Buscetta da parte del Giudice Istruttore (G.I.) Giovanni Falcone, Roma, 21 July 1984, 4–5.

mot. v. del suo attuale e congiuntamente processuale. - Nella veduta
è composta da quattro capi che vengono siglati nell'ufficio. -
A. D. n.

La parola "mafia" è una creazione pellicana, mentre i vari
mafiosi sono semplicemente chiamati "uomini d'onore";
ognuno di essi fa parte di una "borgata" (questo nella città di
Pelorus, perché nei piccoli centri l'organizzazione mafiosa
prende nome dal centro stesso) ed è membro di una
"famiglia". - In questa sono alle famiglie vi sono: "il capo",
eletto dagli uomini d'onore. - Egli, a sua volta, nomina
"il sottocapo", uno o più consiglieri (se, però, la famiglia è
vasta, anche i consiglieri sono eletti, in numero non su-
periore a tre), e i "capicorona". - Il capo delle famiglie
viene chiamato "rappresentante" nelle famiglie stesse.

Ai di sopra delle famiglie e con funzioni di coordi-
namento, esiste una struttura collegiale, chiamata
"Commissione", composta di membri, ciascuno dei quali
rappresenta tre famiglie territorialmente contigue.
Tuttavia di uno dei capi delle tre famiglie, designato
dai capi delle stesse. I membri della commissione, ai
suoi tempi, duravano nella carica per tre anni, ma
non se ne tuttora vengono rispettate queste regole. -
... nei principi -

Figure 5: Report of interrogation of Tommaso Buscetta (1984)

Buscetta gave detailed information on the structure of the organisation. For instance, he explained that the main aim of the Commission (or *Cupola*) was to supervise and coordinate the activities of each *mandamento* and Family in the province of Palermo. Established in the mid-1950s, the Provincial Commission had judicial powers: it exercised sole authority for the resolution of conflicts between members of the same faction or between different factions; it agreed on sanctions to adopt against the affiliates; had authority to order assassinations. Furthermore, an interprovincial Commission (called *Commissione Regionale* or *Regione*) was created in the 1970s to operate in the interest of the whole organisation. The *Commissione Regionale*, made up of the representatives of each province, had exclusive competence on deciding on the murder of prominent public figures (*eminent corpses*), including police, magistrates, lawyers, journalists, entrepreneurs and politicians.¹⁷ As other pentiti explained, this specific role was essential to the organisation as a whole, as it prevented affiliates from taking justice in their hands against the interests of Cosa Nostra.¹⁸

The Cosa Nostra that Buscetta described during the maxi-trial appeared to be strictly disciplined by rules and codes of conduct, which the affiliates were obliged to follow after their entrance into the organisation. In this regard, he explained that a man acquires the status of ‘man of honour’ only after a formal ritual of initiation. During this ritual, the candidate for affiliation swears his total allegiance to the mafia

17 Sentenza di Rito Abbreviato n.1579/07, nei confronti di Adamo Andrea + 56 (Sentenza Gotha), 183–185.

18 Corte di Appello di Catania, Corte di Assise di Appello Sez. II, n. 24/06 Reg. Sent., n.8/03 + 20/03 + 29/03 R.G., udienza del 20/21 Aprile 2006. Sentenza nel procedimento penale contro Agate Mariano + 16, 159–170.

and to the Family boss who is conducting the ceremony. From that moment on, the affiliate lives in a perpetual balance between the obligation to keep his association secret and to tell the absolute truth to his fellow men of honour.

Buscetta's description of the structure and workings of Cosa Nostra became known as 'Buscetta Theorem' and provided the grounds, in 1986, for the biggest criminal trial in Sicilian history with approximately five hundred mafiosi being prosecuted. The 1987 sentence of the Court of Assise and the 1992 verdict from Italy's Court of Cassation confirmed the validity of the Buscetta theorem. As a result of this verdict, not only were notable mafiosi sentenced to life imprisonment, but it became a matter of record that the mafia was a single organisation of men bound to one another by an oath of loyalty. The 1982 Rognoni-La Torre Act, which defined the mafia association as a specific type of prosecutable crime, had been key to reaching this historical verdict.¹⁹ The article *416 bis*, introduced by the law, established that:

The organisation is of the mafia type when its components use intimidation, subjection and, as a consequence, silence (*omertà*) to commit crimes, to acquire – directly or indirectly – the management or the control of businesses, concessions, authorizations, public contracts and public services, to obtain either unjust profits or advantages for themselves or others.²⁰

Following the example of Buscetta, other mafiosi turned state's evidence. In general, the image of the Sicilian mafia emerging from their testimonies has been that of a unique criminal organisation. The uniqueness of Cosa Nostra derives from its evident ability to organise itself in an all-encompassing manner, 'that combines the attributes of a shadow State, an illegal business, and a secret society' (Dickie 2004, 2). Cosa

¹⁹ The Rognoni-La Torre Act (named after the political leaders who had backed it, Christian Democrat Minister Virginio Rognoni and the Communist leader Pio La Torre) was approved in 1982, after the assassination of General Prefect Dalla Chiesa.

²⁰ Law n. 646, September 13, 1982, art. 416 bis.

Nostra is a business for it infiltrates legal and illegal economic activities, which guarantee large profits and allow it to establish and control the territory at capillary level. It is a secret society since its members are bound by an oath of loyalty and omertà that can only be broken with death. It acts as a 'pseudo State' in that it institutes hierarchies and ruling bodies, establishes laws, rules of conduct, and passes judgement, including death sentences. However, the definition of Cosa Nostra as 'anti-State' is incorrect and misleading, as the mafia has always had a close, dialectical relation with the Italian State.²¹ 'The mafia infiltrates the State to exploit it, carefully avoiding to oppose it....The mafia does not represent a degenerated variable of the system, but a stable component of it' (Ayala 1988).

1.4. The entrepreneurial paradigm

Following the wealth of information provided by pentiti in the 1980s, academic attention largely shifted towards a view of the mafia as having an organised, hierarchical structure with an entrepreneurial and economic dimension. Indeed, a number of scholars (Catanzaro 1988; Gambetta 1996; Varese 2001) have adopted the entrepreneurial paradigm in their analysis of the Sicilian mafia as well of other criminal organisations with a mafia-like ethos in the domain of global criminal markets.

Sociologist Diego Gambetta formulated a definition of the mafia as 'a specific economic enterprise, an industry that produces, promotes and sells private protection' (1996, 1). He drew on Leopoldo Franchetti's concept of the mafia as 'an industry of violence', seeing 'protection', however, not 'violence', as the main

²¹ Antonio Ingroia, 'La mafia non è Antistato ma tratta con lo Stato', *Antimafia Duemila*, 26 November 2011.

commodity at stake. According to Gambetta, the need for private protection emerges in a context of economic exchange in which trust and confidence are missing. In the specific context of Sicily, in particular, the impoverished economic conditions of an island that had never known the development of a real market economy produced a high demand for protection. The mafia supplied this protection to whoever needed and could pay for it, making its ability to use violence, or the simple 'reputation' for it, one of the main means to achieve the end of protection.

Although this paradigm perfectly describes the mafia business practice of extorting protection money, it appears to underestimate the role of the mafia in encouraging and creating the necessary conditions in which protection is needed (Lupo 2004, 27; Santino, Jedlowski, and Siebert 1995). In this regard, the need for protection is not merely a consequence of the lack of trust in Sicily towards the new Italian State, but rather the consequence of the threatening power and recourse to violence that the mafia wielded over certain areas of Sicily. Furthermore, numerous judicial enquiries have exposed the influence that the mafia had on the agricultural, financial and industrial sectors of the Sicilian economy.

As previously mentioned, the revisionist scholarship emerged in the 1980s has challenged the *meridionalista* view of Southern Italy as a backward, static society. Consequently, scholars have also challenged the view of the mafia as a phenomenon emerging from the backwardness of the Italian south, particularly Sicily. Based on evidence that a market economy developed on the island at the end of the nineteenth century, *revisionisti* have suggested that the mafia developed hand in hand with the growth of capitalist transformations of Sicilian agriculture (Lupo 2004; Renda 2003; Santino 2000b). Moreover, the assumption that the mafia grew out of an immobile

society underestimates the dynamic aspects of an organisation like Cosa Nostra, with a proven ability to adapt its structure, strategies and aims to the changing society it parasitizes, whilst maintaining a consistent need to control the territory.

As historian Umberto Santino stated regarding the two main mafia paradigms (the culturalist and the entrepreneurial), ‘the scientific-academic output went from an “indigestion of informality” (disorganized crime, non-corporate groups) to an overdose of the overly-structured’; from a theory based mainly on the cultural aspects that did not take into account the evidence of the actual existence of a structured organisation, to an approach limited mostly to the organisational aspect, but which underestimated the crucial role played by cultural and social factors (Santino 1994, 118). In fact, the entrepreneurial paradigm largely neglected other important aspects of the phenomenon, including politics, social relations and, above all, the cultural dimension, which has always been of paramount importance for the grip and longevity of Cosa Nostra.

Despite the important contributions it brought to studies on the mafia phenomenon, the ‘contract of protection’ was not sufficient to interpret and explain, for example, the relationship between mafia affiliates and their bosses, or the function of identity cohesion and consolidation at group and individual levels exercised by mafia force. For instance, Gambetta (1996, 47–50) explained the religious devotion of mafiosi in terms of *pubblicità* (advertising). He argued that this form of advertising is the common practice of local mafia bosses in dealing with the organisation and financing of religious processions linked to the devotion of a specific saint of their choice:

Folklore aside...this peculiar form of sponsorship – the sponsor is the mafioso, the Saint his innocent beneficiary – relies, like all publicity, on contemporary beliefs, and exploits both the general attributes of sanctity and those specific to each individual saint. In this

case, it signals to the world at large that [a mafioso] ‘protection firm’ is so powerful as to offer its earthly protection even to a protector par excellence. Thus, the language of Catholicism may serve to enhance the reputation of the mafia firm. But advertising must adjust itself to the people’s values. (Gambetta 1996, 48)

Religious ceremonies have always represented a useful source of social legitimisation for Cosa Nostra in the eyes of the community at large. However, by analysing this phenomenon merely in terms of advertising and conscious exploitation, Gambetta’s perspective does not take into account other significant aspects that characterise the relationship between the mafia and religion. For example, the concept of advertising is not sufficient to explain the nature of individual forms of religiosity that are often reported by mafiosi in their confessions, nor the ambiguous relationship with clergymen frequently indulgent towards the organisation, nor the religious references that have characterised the interactions between mafia members in the whole history of the organisation.

The ‘cultural values’ of Cosa Nostra, specifically those related to codes of honour, family and, above all, religion appear to have been sourced from a cultural patrimony shared with wider external society. Nevertheless, rather than suggesting a correspondence between mafia and Sicilian culture, this should raise questions on how and why values are drawn from the external cultural background, and the meanings mafiosi attach to them. In particular, it should raise questions on the role that these codes played, and continue to play, within the internal dynamics of Cosa Nostra. The importance not to underestimate the weight of cultural codes for the Sicilian mafia was clear to magistrate Giovanni Falcone²² when he maintained that:

[Today] the application of these codes is certainly more unscrupulous, but assuming that they no longer work makes of the mafia a purely criminal organisation whose only goal

22 Prosecuting magistrate Giovanni Falcone (18 May 1939–23 May 1992), whose fight against the mafia culminated in the famous Maxi-Trial of Palermo (1986–1989), was killed by the mafia in May 1992.

is the pursuit of profit. This is an enormous mistake of perspective, which leads us to plan even repressive strategies incorrectly.²³

1.5. Literature on mafia religion

The intricate association between the Sicilian mafia and religion has been approached from several different perspectives. These range from a descriptive chronicling of events linking mafia activities, religious practices and the Church's attitude towards the phenomenon (Sales 2010; Ceruso 2007; Mignosi 1993), to specialised theological studies (Cavadi 2009, 1982, 2012; Fasullo 1996, 1993; Naro 1994a, 1994b; Stabile 1992, 1996). Some recent studies have begun to approach the topic from a socio-anthropological and psychological standpoint in an attempt to describe the relationship between *Cosa Nostra* and religion, and the Church (Dino 2003, 2008; Principato and Dino 1997; Giordano 1999).

As mentioned in the Introduction of this thesis, the study of mafia religion requires contextualisation within the larger socio-historical and religious framework of Sicily. However, in order to avoid misleading generalisations which might degenerate into yet another culturalistic stereotype, the approach adopted in this study calls into question the practice of referring to Sicilian religion or culture *tout court* as one homogenous and unitary cultural category, and the attempt to find correspondence between so-called *Sicilianism* and mafia *transculture*. Exploring the ties between mafia religion and religion as it developed in Sicily is beyond the scope of this thesis. Nonetheless, an overview of the theologians' positions about the socio-historical characteristics of 'Sicilian religiosity' will provide an extremely useful

23 Giovanna Fiume, 'La mafia tra società e cultura. Intervista a Giovanni Falcone', in *Meridiana*, 1989, n.5.

perspective for further exploration on the functional role of religion in the context of social interaction within Cosa Nostra.

1.5.1. Cattolicesimo municipale and parrocchie comunie

Theological studies on the relationship between mafia and religion have mainly dealt with doctrinal aspects and with the position of the Church towards the criminal organisation. As Father Nino Fasullo wrote:

One of the most significant factors of the mafia phenomenon is religion. Mafiosi are religious. Atheist or anticlerical mafiosi are unheard of. Instead, we can easily say that mafiosi have always cooperated with the Church... and achieved a real relationship with religion. For a mafioso God does not represent a problem. A mafioso has God on his side, as God represents the prerequisite of his own identity, the ground of his conscience, of his social and military power.... For a phenomenon like the mafia, which lacks of any intellectual justification, religion can be considered as the only necessary ideological apparatus. (Fasullo 1996, 39)

The indulgence demonstrated on the part of the clergy towards the formal and exterior aspects of mafia religion (e.g. the involvement in religious processions and ceremonies) and, at the same time, towards the explicit appeal to faith voiced by mafiosi, reinforced antisocial attitudes and behaviour which limited the development of a process of evangelisation (Dino 2008, 38). If, from one perspective, the Church showed for over a century and a half a certain level of acquiescence towards the religiosity displayed by Cosa Nostra, from another the mafiosi have seldom found an inherent incompatibility between religious faith and the illegal and criminal practices that affiliation to Cosa Nostra involves.

In regard to the phenomenon of mafia religion within the historical perspective of the Catholic Church Fr. Cosimo Scordato wrote:

On the one hand, the clergy and the faithful did not seem to notice the contradiction between the mafia and ecclesiastical affiliation, partially because the mafia did not go against worship or religious traditions; on the other hand, there is no evidence that the higher ecclesiastical hierarchy has ever accepted the stereotype of a benign mafia. The future dissociation of the Catholic world from the mafia will not derive from a well

thought-out consideration of the impossibility of reconciling mafia and religion, but rather from political considerations. (Scordato 1997, 68)

A number of scholars have analysed the reasons behind this apparently vicious circle that has led not only part of the clergy, but also mafia affiliates to ignore the contradiction between mafia activity and religious practices and beliefs. Augusto Cavadi, for example, has identified in the process of ‘enculturation’ of the Bible one of the intervening variables at the root of this phenomenon. Cavadi observed that the translation of the Jewish Bible into the Greek and Roman versions transformed a religious message that was essentially provincial in its original format—one of the many sects born out of the Hebraic tradition—into ‘an organic, coherent cultural system, which almost rendered the original message unrecognisable’. Abandoning its Semitic context, the Bible went from what Cavadi defines ‘il gioco-linguaggio della preghiera celebrativa’ (the effect-language of celebratory prayer) to the ‘gioco-linguaggio della speculazione ontologica e della costruzione giuridica’ (effect-language of ontological speculation and juridical constructions) that were typical of the Hellenic philosophy and of the Latin tradition, respectively. ‘This translation is a masterpiece of Roman Catholicism: this is the version of Christianity that mafiosi have known since childhood and that, in turn, have re-elaborated adapting it to their aims’ (Cavadi 2009, 107-109). Within this perspective, God is perceived as the guarantor of cosmic and social order, who can only be approached through the intercession of saints and the clergy. The passage from ‘the God of Jesus Christ to the God of Mediterranean Catholicism’, Cavadi observed, ‘is also the passage from a universal Father who aims at the liberation of every human being to the “tutelary deity” of a defined religious community’. Within the logic of this ‘tribal theology’, which tends to be exclusive towards those who are external to one’s religious

community, the individual relationship with God is less important than the local religious tradition. Similarly, the ethical and civic commitments become less important than liturgical rituals and private forms of devotion.

The work of Fr. Francesco Michele Stabile is particularly interesting in this regard in that it offers a helpful perspective in explaining why, in Sicily, despite nearly ubiquitous Christian preaching, a network of interests of *solidarietà limitate* ('limited solidarities') remained dominant for so long and created the ground for both clientelism and for the mafia to prosper (Stabile 1992, 289-301).²⁴ His studies have focused on the relationship between mafia and religion within the diachronic context of 'Sicilian religiosity'—here meant as the result of a specific historical process in a particular socio-cultural and territorial context. Stabile identified a religious model which, deeply rooted in the foundations of Sicilian Catholicism, has been able to influence the civil sphere of life, thus becoming an integral part of it:

The historical category within which this phenomenon can be framed is that of municipal religion or Catholicism. By municipal Catholicism, I mean not only a civil religion, which obliges Christianity to become a support of the socialisation of political power, but also a religious experience and organisation that remains enclosed in the local and particular dimension of the municipality. (Stabile 1996, 15–16)

Stabile points out how piety and devotion, rather than the ecclesiastical institutions, were 'the unifying elements' of Sicilian religious life until the mid-nineteenth century. Within this context, the Church retained the role of mediator and means of salvation through the sacramental apparatus, but 'the most deeply felt form of mediation was the one deriving from the images of Christ, of the Virgin Mary, of the saints' (Stabile 1986, 79). Indeed, the *devout model* was based on the invocation to, and hope for, a miraculous intervention as a free concession of the patron saint

²⁴ Francesco Michele Stabile is priest and professor of History of the Church at Palermo's Faculty of Theology. He has dealt for many years with the relationship between the mafia phenomenon and the ecclesiastical world.

irrespective of one's participation and faith, and depending essentially on the devotion and loyalty shown to one's protector (Dino 2008, 39). A religious model, therefore, that only recognised forms of *solidarietà limitate* (limited solidarity), a 'mix of the civil and the religious that did not have only religious but also economic, family, administrative and political interests, and a clergy which had always remained within its local dimension' (Stabile 1996).

In this regard, Msgr. Cataldo Naro, Archbishop of Monreale, described the effects of the traditional *clero indigeno* (indigenous clergy) and *parrocchie comunie* (local parishes) on the difficulty experienced by the Church in taking a firm position against criminal organisations from the beginning. Naro explained that the model of *parrocchia-comunia* prevailed in Sicily before the unification of Italy and lasted until the first Plenary Council in 1920. This expression refers to the fact that the pastoral dimension of each village was given over not to one or more rectors, but to a group of priests composing the so-called *comunia*, and who, all together, had responsibility for each single church in the area:

This is the reason why Catholicism in Sicily had an important municipal characterisation. The clergy was deeply rooted in the local environment and linked to it through family connections. It was therefore rather difficult for this clergy—in a society that deeply felt the value of family—to develop a critical attitude towards violent behaviour like that of the mafia in which relatives or friends were involved, or, on the other hand, by which relatives or friends could be threatened. (Naro 1994, 57)

The *municipal religion* developed in step with the *devout model*. The religious and civil identity of the local community became intertwined closely with the development of municipal religious institutions, with the 'success' of the local saints and with the diffusion of collective ceremonies. As Stabile explained:

The processes of modernisation and secularisation, which followed the unification of Italy, did not increase the gap between civil and religious society. It rather widened the separation between the religious creed and its choreographic, ceremonial apparatus, between the moral commitment and religious ceremonial. It became increasingly more difficult to assert a Catholic identity and consciousness capable of going beyond the

devotional and the choreographic dimension of the ritual, collective ceremonies. As a result, what emerged was an individual, choreographic religion without, so to speak, church, without community. (Stabile 1992, 289–290)

In other words, the process of secularization in Sicily has strengthened the most superficial, choreographic and exterior part of Catholicism. Author Leonardo Sciascia identified the components of the Sicilian ‘devout’ model of religiosity in beliefs, sense of belonging, symbolic religious practices and rituals (1979). Sciascia added, ‘After almost a century, we can see how this material devotion survives in Sicily and in many other areas of Southern Italy even today’ (1979). Reflecting Émile Durkheim’s position on the sociology of religion, Sciascia identifies in the religious ceremonies the ‘projection and personification of material and carnal needs in myths’. Religious rituals and ceremonies become the main occasion for the municipal group to reaffirm its norms and consolidate its structure and relationships; they eventually become a representation of the social order where family and blood ties prevail, thus preventing the development of a civil collective conscience (Dino 2008, 38). Within these religious rituals, mafiosi are able to present themselves as repository of traditional values—honour, family, religion, social order—and to legitimise their power by showing that its influence can reach even the most important religious events at local level (Stabile 1996, 31).²⁵

1.5.2. Mafia and religion: a sociological perspective

Sociologist Alessandra Dino has approached the study of mafia religion from a socio-ethnographic standpoint (1997; 2003; 2008). Her analyses have focused on identifying the elements that have allowed men and women in the mafia to

²⁵ Quoted in Dino 2008, 13.

simultaneously adopt faith values and mafia 'morals', and the reasons behind the acquiescence of the Church towards the phenomenon (Dino 2003, 161-174). Acknowledging the deep changes that occurred within the criminal organisation in the mid-1980s, Dino analyses the confessions of men and women in the mafia who turned state's evidence, also benefitting from a series of interview with exponents of the clergy who have been involved in the antimafia sector. *La mafia devota* (2008), in particular, represents the first comprehensive study of the relationship between the Sicilian mafia, religion and the Church to date.

The author explores the role played by organised crime, in Sicily and elsewhere, in public religious ceremonies where well-known mafiosi occupy prominent roles (2008, 12–43). By participating in these events, the mafia shows its support for the traditional social order and its embodiment of community values. At the same time, it demonstrates the evidence of a tacit agreement with clerical authorities that allows mafiosi to take part or even play prominent roles in religious processions. One important consequence of this, Dino observes, is that on numerous occasions the celebration of saints subtly becomes the celebration of the boss financing the event and marching behind the statues of saints:

Exploiting the evangelical message and the prophetic role of the Church for its own purposes, the mafia organisation has created a useful representation of an anthropomorphised God; [a God] without transcendence, who remains constrained within the utilitarian scheme of the mafia group. In the name of this God, the illicit becomes licit, oppression becomes justice, and intimidation becomes respect.... If all this is true, then it should not be surprising if occasions of religious processions and the organisation of feasts in honour of patron saints become the occasion for the cult of the personality of mafiosi, following a mechanism of mirroring that projects the religious devotion upon the persona of the 'man of respect', of the mafia boss. (Dino 2008, 35)

In general, from Dino's perspective, mafia religion emerges as an extremely complex phenomenon, a powerful instrument at both individual and collective levels of the organisation: it is able to give cohesiveness to the whole mafia structure, and to

maintain a balance for its affiliates at personal level (Dino 2008, 234). From a wider perspective of analysis, there appears to be an individualistic theology in the mafia 'moral' dimension that operates a continuous redefinition of its own values by choosing the ones that are functional to its own needs and adapting them to its lifestyle. Within this panorama, the recourse to religion and to the church, the participation of mafiosi in public religious ceremonies, the manipulative use, directly or indirectly, of relationships with clergymen represent fundamental ingredients of the cohesiveness of the group and of the creation of social consensus. Above all, it represents an essential support at individual level in preventing the rise of internal conflicts.

One of the consequences of this process, the author argues, is that 'Cosa Nostra becomes the place in which to mediate the relationship with religion and God, as the mafia boss considers himself, and is considered, a divine administrator' (2008, 73). The mafia proclaims itself 'as interpreter of divine authority', while mafia bosses perceive themselves 'as undisputed mediators of the law of God' (2008, 76). The role played by members of the clergy in this regard is noteworthy. Not only does it provide indirect confirmation of illicit mafia behaviour, but also 'reinforces the conviction, frequently emphasised by pentiti, that a mafioso exercises justice in the name of God' (Principato and Dino 1997, 128). Although this thesis takes a somewhat different stance from Dino's view on the mafia and mafiosi as 'interpreters of divine authority', the concept of 'divine' justice in relation to 'mafia' justice has, indeed, significant implications on mafia identity. This point will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

In her studies, Dino dedicates particular attention to common religious practices for the mafia, which are essential for the cohesiveness of the group and the creation of social consensus. These include the participation of mafia members in public religious ceremonies and the manipulative use that mafiosi make, directly or indirectly, of the relationship with clergymen. In particular, weddings, funerals and christenings appear to be fundamental sacraments for Cosa Nostra that allow it to legitimise its authority whilst maintaining structural cohesion by means of marital and other kin strategies. This last point relates to another important component of mafia religion that Dino identified in the role of women related to mafiosi by family ties.

Until recently, the research and studies on the Sicilian mafia had only indirectly dealt with women in the mafia. Generally, women were considered to be marginal figures with no access to roles of authority or power with the organisational structure of the group. In general, women's exclusion from the organisation has always contrasted with a system of male power (Siebert 1999). Recent studies (Principato and Dino 1993; Ingrasci 2008) have challenged this theory, highlighting the fundamental role played by women in transmitting mafia values at family level and guaranteeing cohesion within Cosa Nostra as a whole. As the family remains the basic, fundamental institution in the structure of the mafia, women are responsible for the transmission of values to the children, for their education and socialisation, but also for the maintenance of allegiances among mafia families through marital strategies (Dino 2008; 1993). In particular, religious values are a fundamental cultural code the women are in charge of. Women in this respect have the strategic

role of portraying a respectable and reassuring image of the organisation (Principato and Dino, 2003).

Conclusion

The overview on the interpretative paradigms of the mafia and of mafia religion presented in this chapter provides a necessary context to this thesis as a whole. The first part of this chapter has described the major streams of mafia interpretations framing them within the socio-historical background of nineteenth-century Sicily. For example, it has highlighted the consequences that culturalistic approaches have had on the representation of the mafia both inside and outside the organisation. Such contextualisation is fundamental for the analysis conducted later in this research, where the roles of mafia leaders will be addressed. As will be emphasised in the case studies, many of the characteristics of mafiosi emerging from their culturalistic representations recur consistently in the ‘identities’ and ‘roles’ that mafia bosses construct and project in ritual interactions. Furthermore, the considerations on the developments of Cosa Nostra provide the historical background to analyse the roles of Michele Greco and Bernardo Provenzano in different phases of mafia history, and to comprehend the nature of specific myths, which recur during the mafia rituals of initiation.

The second part of the chapter has focused on previous studies on mafia religion. It is remarkable that this phenomenon has only recently had academic attention, and mainly from a theological and sociological standpoint. One common interpretation underlying these different studies is that mafia religion works as a value system capable of providing the organisation with legitimisation for illegal

behaviour and a sense of belonging and identity through adherence to a set of rules and practices derived from the Catholic tradition. Furthermore, religion appears as an essential support for mafiosi at an individual level in preventing the rise of internal conflicts. In this regard, both sociological and theological studies have underlined how the lack of a firm antimafia position on the part of the Church and the connection between clergy and mafia representatives have contributed—directly or indirectly—to confirm the legitimacy of religious practices for Cosa Nostra. Consequently, mafiosi have routinely sought pastoral support as an immediate vehicle to redeem potential feelings of guilt and expiate sins, bypassing the role of juridical institutions. Theological studies offer an interesting viewpoint on religious models in Sicily. Concepts of *municipal Catholicism* and *parrocchie comunie* are indeed extremely useful to contextualise the religiosity of mafiosi within the wider religious dimension of Sicily.

The focus of academic approaches to mafia religion has been concerned primarily with the relationship between the Church and the mafia. Instead, fewer attempts have been made to consider language and behaviour at the micro-social level of interaction as a specific context in which to analyse religious references. In particular, the role of religion in relation to how the authority and identity of mafia leaders are constructed by means of communicative interactions remains largely unexplored. The purpose of the analysis offered in this thesis is to attempt to fill this gap, drawing on the important insights provided by these previous studies on the mafia and on theories of ritual, performance and performativity. This research, therefore, offers a novel approach to studying the relationship between Cosa Nostra and religion, and aims to contribute not only to a deeper understating of the mafia

and its religiosity, but also to the study of religious rituals and performance in general.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

PART I - RELIGION, RITUAL, SYMBOLS

To these rituals we must return: or we must evolve them to suit our needs.

(D. H. Lawrence)

Introduction

Mafia religion is a broad and complex phenomenon, which precludes the use of single disciplinary means. The focus of this research on the religious dimension of mafia behaviour in communicative interactions requires an analytical model that allows interpreting the religious behaviour of mafia leaders without the need to enter into their private sphere of personal belief. Specifically, it is necessary to use an approach that examines the effects of the ‘religiosity’ of mafia leaders, rather than the actual nature of their belief. Social and ritual interactions and the identity of their participants will be the prime focus of this theoretical approach.

Drawing chiefly on socio-anthropological perspectives, the theoretical framework adopted in this research is positioned between religion, ritual and performance studies. As this chapter unfolds, it will become clear that the three concepts are semantically extensive, yet overlap on different levels. This analytic perspective is extremely valuable. Not only does it facilitate the interpretation of social interactions within Cosa Nostra in dramaturgical terms of ritual performances, but it also provides an analytical model to study the effect of these interactions on the identity of social actors (mafia leaders), the audience (mafiosi at lower levels) and the structure of Cosa Nostra as a single community.

The chapter is divided into two parts. The first part deals with socio-anthropological approaches to religion, rituals and symbols. These perspectives essentially examine how religion relates to society. In particular, they describe religious rituals and symbols in terms of ‘processes’ and ‘actions’ that have a manifest effect on the structure of social groups in both traditional and modern societies. As will be discussed in the course of this chapter, the idea of ‘action’ and ‘change’ extends the meaning of ritual into that of performance.

The second part of the chapter deals with the definition and application of ‘performance’ as adopted and developed in different academic disciplines. Performance constitutes an analytical model for examining social interactions in terms of rituals and symbolic exchanges, and for exploring how identity can be effectively created and negotiated in the course of these interactions.

2.1. Religion and rituals: a socio-anthropological perspective

Religion has long been the object of analysis in classical sociology. From Karl Marx to Emile Durkheim, and to Niklas Luhmann, the role of religion in society, and in the study of modernisation specifically, has been a consistent topic of analysis. In particular, Èmile Durkheim’s sociological theories of religion have exerted enormous influence on twentieth-century thought.¹

Durkheim developed a social theory of religion breaking with the trend of individualism and evolutionary thought that had dominated the 19th century.

¹ The ongoing influence of Durkheim’s sociology of religion as a paradigm of social and political theory can be seen in contemporary treatments of politics and religion, exemplified by the notion of ‘post-secular society’. For example, philosopher Charles Taylor constantly refers to Durkheim as a source of inspiration in his analyses on nationalism, multiculturalism and pluralism, and as a paradigm for understanding the public role of religion (Turner 2010, 20).

Focusing on the relationship between religion and society, he maintained that the collective character of society generates religious and moral values and that, in turn, religious values provide the cohesive bonds that maintain stability in social groups. 'Religion is something eminently social', Durkheim argued in his *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse: Le système totémique en Australie* (Durkheim 2001 [1912], 11).² Through its rites, it acts as a source of solidarity and identification and provides stability, cohesion and occasions for people to gather and reaffirm their social norms. Religion thus transcends 'the idea of gods' (Durkheim 2001, 35). It is 'a unified set of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things...that unite its adherents in a single moral community' (Durkheim 2001, 46). The etymology itself of the term 'religion' (from the Latin *religare*, meaning 'to bind') contains this idea of community. Because religion is fundamentally collective, it is experienced as compulsory in the life of the individual. In this sense, it is what Durkheim called 'a social fact': a phenomenon existing irrespective of the individual, and exercising moral force over society (Turner 2010, 23).

Durkheim was primarily concerned with identifying the enduring source of solidarity and cohesion in industrial societies. To explore this broad and varied phenomenon, he examined it in its simplest form in traditional communities. Specifically, his work focused on the *Arunta*, an aboriginal people from central Australia. It was observed that, on specific occasions, the Arunta clans would gather to carry out a ceremony, at the centre of which was the clan emblem, its totem. In Durkheim's view, this totem was a 'sacred' object for the extended clan; it was set apart and different from all the 'profane' things (Durkheim 2001, 96). Totemism was

² Translated in English with the title *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*.

essential to the survival of the Arunta identity since it provided regular occasions for clan-wide gatherings while, at the same time, it reminded members of the existence of their clan as a unit. Therefore, the sacred religious value given to the totem and the clan's existence depended on each other. This led Durkheim to conclude that the totem – or whatever else can be perceived as 'sacred' – which consistently features in 'elementary forms of religious life', is nothing more than society itself symbolically represented.

Extending these observations to modern societies, Durkheim argued that religious phenomena emerge in any social group when a distinction is made between the sphere of the *sacred* (what is perceived to be transcendental and extraordinary) and the *profane* (the dimension of everyday, ordinary practices). From this perspective, the object of the ceremony is never inherently sacred, but it acquires its status only through ritual activities. Since this object represents the group, its values and norms, the worship of the sacred becomes in reality the worship of the social group itself. This has important implications on the stability and structure of society.

Theoretically, Durkheim identified the sharing of common sentiments—a *conscience collective* ('a collective conscience')—at the base of social life (Durkheim 2001, 168). By defining religious beliefs and practices as the source of such sentiments, he argued that religion is a precondition for the existence and survival of social groups. The fate of the group and the fate of individual members are intrinsically bound together: the members depend on the group to survive, and the group's survival depends on its members recognising their membership to the group. Religion enables this process to occur. Religious symbols represent the group, and the worship of these symbols by the group reproduces its existence.

For Durkheim, no community can exist without feeling the need to maintain and reaffirm its collective life, historical narrative, shared emotions and dominant ideas at periodical intervals (Turner 2010, 22). It is precisely during rituals that men who feel ‘united in part by blood ties but even more by a community of interests and traditions’ gather and become conscious of their moral unity (Durkheim 2001, 287). Ritual gatherings create ‘collective effervescence’, emotions and social energy, which further strengthen social bonds between ritual participants (2001, 164). Therefore, rituals are powerful processes that have a real effect on people: they not only enhance the relationship between the group and god, but also reinforce the bonds between individuals and the social group to which they belong.

Drawing on Durkheim’s sociological theory of religion, other scholars recognised and explored the relationship between religion and group solidarity (Radcliffe-Brown 1952; Douglas 1966; Turner 1969; Rappaport 1999;). Although their positions differ substantially from one another in regard to how rituals create solidarity, there is a nearly unanimous consensus on the collective dimension of ritual as the main mechanism through which this cohesion can be achieved. For example, structural functionalist Alfred Radcliffe-Brown elaborated on Durkheim’s ideas of religion as an ‘inherently social fact’ to focus on the links between religion and social structure.³ He emphasised the value of studying religion ‘in action’ by looking at its effects on society (1952, 177), and argued that collective rituals enable the affirmation and consolidation of shared values and, therefore, are essential for maintaining stability and harmony at a communal level. Anthropologist Roy Rappaport addressed the effects of ritual on group solidarity as a result of its

³ In social sciences, the expression ‘social structure’ generally refers to the hierarchical arrangement of positions or social statuses that keep a community balanced.

communicative potential. Interpreting ‘ritual as a mode of communication’ (1999, 50–52), he saw rituals as performative practices that can give insights into the intentions and statuses of the participants involved. Bruce Lincoln’s anthropological studies also focused on the performative aspect of ritual. Lincoln defined ritual as ‘a coherent set of symbolic actions that has a real transformative effect on individuals and social groups’, and that has the potential to ‘transform people, replacing old roles, statuses, and identities with new ones’ (1981, 6). These preliminary examples demonstrate how the notion of ‘action’, ‘process’ and ‘performance’ progressively became associated with the interpretations of ritual as a vehicle for social solidarity.

2.2. Ritual as Performance

Scholars from a number of disciplines – most notably anthropology, sociology and folklore studies – have long been interested in rituals for the insights they can offer into social realities.⁴ Being symbolic social actions, whose performance requires the organised cooperation of individuals directed by a leader, rituals can be studied both for their meaning and for their effects on participants. As anthropologist Fiona Bowie argues, rituals are, above all, ‘dramatic’; they can be interpreted as ‘performances’ involving both audience and actors (Bowie 2006, 138). The main difference between ritual performance and theatre performance is that ritual does not simply repeat a script, but represents a mode of action that exercises a certain influence upon the participants. In the definition of anthropologist Bobby Alexander, ritual can be interpreted as:

⁴ In particular, sociologists like Durkheim, Arnold Van Gennep and Max Weber, and anthropologists such as Franz Boas, Bronislaw Malinowski and Radcliff-Brown, laid the groundwork for future studies of religion and rituals in relation to society.

... a mode of action taken by real and familiar people to affect the lives of other real and familiar people. Participants in ritual may be 'acting', but they are not necessarily just 'pretending', they are 'enacting', which contradicts neither the notion of belief nor the practice of theatrical acting. (Alexander 1997, 154)

The concept of 'enactment' is particularly valuable for the analysis of religion in studying the interactions between mafia affiliates, where it is extremely difficult to draw a line between 'authentic belief' and 'exploitative deceit'. Another central feature of ritual as performance, which scholars have identified in their studies, is its transformative potential:

Ritual defined in the most general and basic terms is a performance, planned or improvised, that effects a transition from everyday life to an alternative context within which the everyday is transformed. Traditional religious rituals open up ordinary life to ultimate reality or some transcendent being or force in order to tap its transformative power. As we will come to see, ritual, including religious ritual, is grounded in the everyday, human world. (Alexander 1997, 139)

The ability of ritual performances to actualise a transformation, as well as their grounding in the everyday dimension, finds its clearest expression in theories of performance developed by Richard Schechner (Schechner and Appel 1990; Schechner 2002) and Victor Turner (Turner 1982, 1969). Schechner, for example, sees rituals as 'action', meaning that, rather than expressing ideas, rituals actually embody these ideas (2002, 50). He identified in ritual behaviour several important characteristics:

1. Ritual is a stylised or stereotyped, repetitive, sequence of actions.
2. Ritual relates to religious beliefs and practices and is, in some respects, deemed to be sacred. In regard to this characteristic, frequently what is considered to be sacred goes beyond the religious sphere to extend into what is usually perceived to be secular life (e.g. graduation ceremonies and presidential elections).
3. Rituals have a temporal and spatial connotation as, on some occasions, they appear to be set at specific times and in specific locations. Bridging together the

collective theories of performance and rituals by scholars like Turner, Schechner and, above all, Émile Durkheim, contemporary sociologist Jeffrey Alexander defined rituals as:

episodes of repeated and simplified cultural communication in which the direct partners to a social interaction, and those observing it, share a mutual belief in the descriptive and prescriptive validity of the communications' symbolic contents and accept the authenticity of one another's intentions. (Alexander, Giesen, and Mast 2006, 29)

Alexander suggested that it is precisely because of this shared understanding of intention and content, and in the intrinsic validity of the interaction, that rituals have a profound effect on the participants. Their effectiveness 'energises' the individuals involved and binds them together while, at the same time, intensifying the connection of the participants and the symbolic objects with the observing audience, 'the relevant community at large' (Alexander, Giesen, and Mast 2006, 20-30).

The potential of a ritual performance to strengthen the social bonds between individuals – and between individuals and the symbolic content of ritual itself – may also have important implications for the authority and power of the leaders conducting it. Alexander argued that the authority of leaders is more exposed to challenges in complex social organisations than in traditional societies. In order to preserve their social power and the ability to exercise control, elites or leaders of social groups need to 'develop effective forms of expressive communication' and transform their 'interest conflicts' into widely available performances that project persuasive symbolic forms. In order to do so, they portray themselves as:

protagonists in simplified narratives, projecting their positions, arguments, and actions as exemplifications of sacred religious and secular texts. In turn, they 'cast' their opponents as narrative antagonists, as insincere and artificial actors who were only role playing to advance their interests. (Alexander, Giesen, and Mast 2006, 51–52)

Therefore, in Alexander's view, the goal of rituals as performances, whether on stage or in society, remains the same as the ambition of sacred ritual:

They stand or fall on their ability to produce psychological identification and cultural extension. The aim is to create, via skilful and affecting performance, the emotional connection of audience with actor and text and thereby to create the conditions for projecting cultural meaning from performance to audience. (Alexander, Giesen, and Mast 2006, 54–55)

In summary of the positions presented so far, three broad functions of ritual have been identified: ritual is *communal* in that it generates or increases solidarity among the participants involved; ritual is essentially *traditional*, that is, ‘understood as carrying on ways of acting established in the past’; ritual is ‘rooted in beliefs’ in sacred things (Bell 1997, 94). Furthermore, ritual can be considered as a performance, a concept that implies the notion of transformation and change. For example, a ritual performance enables leaders to project their roles in ways that create psychological and cultural identification with their audience in order to establish or maintain authority. As the next section will illustrate, rites of initiation represent a clear example of a ritual action embodying all these features.

2.3. Rituals of initiation

The concept of ritual as symbolic performance was also central to the study that anthropologist Jean La Fontaine conducted on rituals of initiation:

Initiation rituals have much in common with plays. They are artificial experiences, created by the people concerned and performed in a manner, time and place which the participants choose.... Like theatrical performances, rituals make use of deceptions and special effects to create impressions. The full meaning of a ritual, like that of a play, relies on a set of shared conventions and assumptions that may be quite difficult for an outsider, first to elicit, and then to understand. Some of these refer to the symbols, which condense many layers of meaning, drawn both from tradition and from daily life. (La Fontaine 1985, 181–182)

La Fontaine’s work on initiation rituals focused specifically on rituals of admission into secret societies such as the Chinese Triads. Classifying secret societies on the basis of their reliance on secret knowledge and on covert and subversive activities, La Fontaine saw initiation as the process that defines boundaries between members

of a group and non-affiliates. In addition, it is the process through which knowledge and power are transmitted from leaders of a society to the person undergoing initiation (La Fontaine 1985, 15–16). As a result of this ceremony, the initiate acquires a new collective identity in return for complete allegiance to the society. This process entails a series of highly symbolic actions that are necessary to reify individuals' identity upon the values of the social group into which they are initiated whilst, at the same time, increasingly distancing them from external society. These actions include the revelation of 'secret knowledge' and 'recognition signs'.

Secret knowledge generally refers to the traditions and mythical origins of the group, 'its history and early heroes'. The appeal to a mythical origin, which is only disclosed during rituals of affiliation, 'serves to justify a claim to power through ancient knowledge' (La Fontaine 1985, 41). Above all, it serves to create a bond between the initiate and his seniors while simultaneously consolidating the ones between the other participants:

Shared secrets create a bond. This bond is the basis of the solidarity of members of a secret society, underlying their expressed loyalty to one another.... The ritual itself and the experience of initiation are the most important parts of what is shared. The dramatic form of the rites heightens the significance of the experience, creates a lasting impression. But the impression is also regularly reinforced by participation in subsequent rituals. (La Fontaine 1985, 186)

La Fontaine argues that the bond is further strengthened using codes of recognition, which are likewise revealed only during the initiation ritual. These codes are perceived as essential secrets for the organisation, in that they mark off members from outsiders. 'The very existence of codes and secrets is thus crucial for the society to define its own existence' (La Fontaine 1985, 39–40). Although secret associations define themselves by stressing their difference with external society, their ritual of initiation can only be interpreted in terms of the wider social and cultural context.

The oath is also an important element of initiation rituals into societies where secret information is revealed, since the individual must be committed to preserve that secrecy. The breaking of this oath usually involves powerful sanctions, including death. Oaths are necessary to commit the initiates at a psychological level and bind them to the other members, and their effectiveness depends on the degree of formalization of the language employed. In this regard, La Fontaine stressed that the wording of the oath is never ordinary language aimed at conveying information, but formal language that has 'symbolic force'. The expressions uttered by the elders or the leaders who officiate the initiation ceremony represent their authority; 'authority that is derived from the ancestors for whom, and as whom, they use this ritual language'. Moreover, contrary to what is generally believed, the oath is not the point at which the initiate spontaneously admits himself into the group; it 'is a point which tests the candidate's acceptance of its authority over him'. By repeating the words of the instructor, the initiate demonstrates obedience. 'It is the personal acceptance of authority and a personal commitment to the group' (La Fontaine 1985, 77–78).

These last considerations refer to another important function of rituals of initiation, that is, the maintenance of hierarchical order and authority within a secret society. La Fontaine argued that these rites involve ideas of hierarchical order, for they involve a range of individuals whose relationship is defined between the roles they occupy, not in personal terms. From one perspective, rituals of initiation both emphasise and contrast the equality among initiates with the higher rank of the officiants; from another, they serve to reveal gradations of status to which individuals may aspire. By affirming and reaffirming the divisions and hierarchies that are fundamental to a system of authority, these rituals have significant implications in

terms of legitimacy and power. The legitimacy conferred on those officiating the ritual is that of ‘traditional knowledge: the information, understanding and experience needed to ensure a correct performance’. Their power, instead, may derive from their roles as the leaders of a powerful group. Therefore, according to La Fontaine, authority is ‘the recognised right to command, legitimised by an appeal to moral principles, and that gives access to economic and political power’ (1985, 14–17). It is by means of rituals that the effectiveness of leaders’ knowledge is demonstrated and their authority legitimised.

Rituals of initiation that involve a process of redefinition of identity and change for both the individual and the group can be classified within the broader category of *rites of passage*. Approaches to these forms of ritual will be important when considering the role of mafia initiation rituals on the identity of the candidates for affiliation into Cosa Nostra and on the mafia leaders conducting the ceremony.

2.3.1. Rites of passage

Belgian ethnographer Arnold van Gennep used the expression *rites de passage* (2004 [1909]) to describe rituals that ‘accompany every change of place, state, social position and age’. In general, rites of passage can be interpreted as highly symbolic ritual processes that represent the idea of death and resurrection. They imply the presence of ritual elders (or social actors) who, in performing the ritual, lead the initiate to be reborn with a new identity. In van Gennep’s scheme, all rites of passage have a three-fold structure: the rite of *separation*, the rite of *transition*, and the rite of *incorporation* (Gennep 2004, 11). Using the concept of *liminality*, van Gennep also

referred to them as *preliminal*, *liminal* and *postliminal* rites, respectively (2004, 21).⁵

Each stage has its own characteristic type of ritual activity and set of cultural symbols, which are necessary to mark every phase and imprint the values of the group on the initiate's identity:

Separation (preliminal): the first phase comprises all the ritualistic behaviour that signifies 'the symbolic or physical detachment of the individual or group from an earlier fixed point in the social structure' (Turner 1969, 80).

Transition (liminal): is the period between two states, during which one has left his or her previously occupied position in the social structure, but has not yet entered the next. As will be described in the next sections, the anthropologist Victor Turner developed this concept further and maintained that individuals experiencing *liminality* are *betwixt* and *between* two states:

Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions. (Turner 1969, 95)

This middle stage implies a symbolic or actual passing through the 'threshold' that marks the boundary between two phases. For this reason, it is common for individuals undergoing initiation to be challenged with physical, emotional or psychological tests. This phase concludes with the revelation of secret knowledge by the ritual elders, that is, the teaching of sacred and secret stories regarding the group into which one is being initiated.

Incorporation (post-liminal): is the third and final phase. Having completed the rite and assumed a 'new' identity, the initiate is integrated into society, but in a

⁵ From the Latin *limen*, meaning 'threshold'.

transformative state: she or he has a new status, with a higher prestige and more power.

A prerequisite to these rites is the fact that they need to respect the pre-established sequence of actions, that the participants know their exact roles, and that everything must be done under the authority of the ritual elders. Rites of passage such as initiations are transformation performances, in that liminal rituals affect both ‘those who are being transformed and those who oversee the transformation’ (Schechner 2002, 63–64). The initiate assumes a new identity whilst acknowledging the authority and identity of the senior members conducting the ceremony. Reflexively, senior members acquire higher prestige and authority not only over the initiates, but also over the rest of the group attending the ceremony. By following the same format and referring to a knowledge that is only disclosed in rituals, rites of passage can be considered as ‘processual dramas’ that ‘mark the passage of time, as well as continuity with past traditions and generations’ (Bowie 2006, 151).

2.4. Religious symbols and rituals: Victor Turner

In the previous sections, various functions of rituals have been highlighted: rituals can express emotions, control and guide actions, change and maintain the social structure, mark specific changes in one’s life, and restore harmony (Bowie 2006, 138). Symbolic anthropologist Victor Turner is undoubtedly one of the leading theorists of ritual. Turner departed from the functional-structuralist tradition that interpreted rituals as static sequences of repeated, symbolic behaviour, and focused essentially on their role in the maintenance of group solidarity. Hypothesising a concept of ritual as a ‘process’, he interpreted rituals and religious thought as

representations and dramatisations of social relationships or, in a word, as performances:

I like to think of ritual essentially as performance, enactment, not primarily as rules or rubrics. The rules 'frame' the ritual process. But the ritual process transcends its frame.... The term performance is, of course, derived from Old English *parfournir*, literally 'to furnish completely or thoroughly'. To perform is thus to bring something about, to consummate something, or 'to carry out' a play, order, project. But, in the 'carrying out', I hold, something new may be generated. The performance transforms itself. (Turner 1982, 79)

By extending the notion of ritual to performance, as mentioned earlier, the author implied that ritual is capable of creative change.

Turner explored the roles of rituals in the social dynamics in non-western communities first, and in industrial societies later in his career, arguing that both simple and complex societies have distinct symbolic systems and ritual practices to make sense of their lives.⁶ By looking at examples of rituals in modern societies, he maintained that, although they may be largely seen as secular practices, they still retain some religious component, which is necessary to stabilise and maintain the internal relations of the group (Turner 1975) .

In Turner's view, ritual is 'a prescribed formal behaviour for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in invisible beings or powers regarded as the first and final causes of all effects' (Turner 1982, 79). Drawing on Durkheim's theory, Turner argued that the religious component in ritual is essential. Whenever ritual is inspired by an overtly religious belief in an existential dimension, it acquires a 'sacred' status. Indeed, for the participants involved in ritual activities, religious beliefs have a quantity of 'surplus value' over and above other

⁶ Turner's most influential studies focused on rituals and symbols of the *Ndembu*, an African tribe in Zambia. *Schism and Continuity in an African Society* (1957) was the first report of Turner's fieldwork with the *Ndembu* tribe. In *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (1974), Turner later explored ritual contexts in twelfth-century England, the Mexican Revolution of Independence in 1810, and pilgrimage processes in modern Europe.

secular forms of knowledge. In this way, symbols, rituals and religion are closely related: ritual is fundamentally religious, and religion implies both ritual practices and a systematic corpus of belief.

Turner dedicated particular attention to the function of symbols, the smallest units of ritual (1967, 19). He viewed symbols as essentially symbols 'in action', employed in rituals as 'a set of evocative devices for rousing, channelling, and domesticating powerful emotions' (Turner 1969, 42–43). Symbols are fundamental components of ritual dynamics in that they are not only reflections of cognitive classifications, but also powerful agents of change, which tie members of a community to their social norms, resolve conflicts and crisis, and allow changes in the status of the social actors (Turner 1975, 55).

Viewing the function of symbols within the context of the ritual process, Turner proposed a three-level classification: the *exegetical* consists in the explanation of its meaning given by the performers; the *operational* refers to the relationship between the symbol and the way it is used in a ritual context; the *positional* explains the symbols' relationship within the whole ritual complex to reveal their hidden senses (Turner 1967, 50). There are also *dominant* symbols in rituals, which embody cultural values and norms of external society. They 'are the relatively fixed points in both social and cultural structures, and constitute points of juncture between these two structures' (Turner 1967, 30–32). Since dominant symbols have considerable autonomy with regard to the aims of the ritual in which they are used, they can be analysed irrespective of their position within the ritual proceedings. Nevertheless, when utilised in rituals, they play a fundamental role in

reinforcing both the validity of cultural values for the group as well as group relations.

Turner explained that symbols are able to condense meaning or, for one symbol, to be ‘multivocal’ (to have multiple meanings). Their referents may vary, albeit ‘normative values of moral facts’ are constant referents. These include religious and family values, political ideals, obedience to leaders, and the rules of social organisation — ‘in short, what most makes for order, continuity, and harmony in society’. During ritual actions, dominant symbols bring the ethical norms and values of the social group ‘into close contact with strong emotional stimuli’ (Turner 1975, 55). In the midst of what Durkheim had previously defined as ritual ‘effervescence’, the normative referents are charged with emotional significance. As a result of manipulating crucial cultural symbols, the social actor confers sacred value on concepts of a general order, affecting the participants at an emotional and psychological level. At the same time, the participants, by means of symbolic behaviour and language, ratify their belief in existential matters, which provide ‘unity and continuity’ to the morality of the social order and the emotional needs of the individuals (Turner 1967, 29).

These observations on the active qualities of symbols are crucial for the analysis of symbols in mafia rituals of initiation in the next chapter and to examine the effects of religious symbolic language utilised by mafia bosses in more ordinary interactional contexts described in Chapter Four and five.

2.4.1. Social Drama and Communitas

Turner’s approach to ritual as a process, rather than a static sequence of repeated actions, allowed him to explore the role of rituals in crises and conflicts emerging in

both simple and complex societies. Drawing on van Gennep's theory of rites of passage, he developed his theory of ritual processes as part of an on-going *social drama*, a social process that arises in conflict situations (Turner 1975, 37). The assumption that every community has a social structure 'in action' is at the basis of this approach. As previously mentioned, social structure refers to the hierarchical arrangement of statuses and ranks, and consists of the whole system of social relations that keeps a community balanced. These relationships are represented in the structure of a ritual: the selection of participants, the allocation of their roles in the performance, and the identity of those directing it are all modelled on the structure of wider society. Ritual occasions, including secular events, 'mobilise this structure in action; in some cases rituals are even the only times when this happens' (La Fontaine 1985, 11). In Turner's scheme, when the rise of internal conflicts disrupts this system, a 'social drama' is likely to occur.

Social drama refers to arguments, rites of passage, conflicts and to all the changes that are implicitly dramatic because participants' actions take on a 'performed-for-an-audience aspect' (Schechner 1977, 120-123). It presents itself as a breach of social norms or an infraction of a rule, which a member of the community causes – involuntarily or deliberately – to challenge the established authority. In either case, the action will interfere directly with the system of relationships that maintain balance in the social structure. Once this breach occurs, a conflict within the community originates and can only be resolved by means of public ritual actions. Turner identifies four main phases in social dramas (Turner 1982):

1. *Breach* of norm-governed social relations: a person or subgroup breaks a rule. This leads to a breach that is destined to widen into the phase of crisis.

2.*Crisis*: in this stage, conflicts between individuals, sections and factions follow the original breach, revealing hidden clashes of character, interest and ambition. This represents a serious threat to the group's unity and its very continuity, unless rapidly resolved by redressive public action, consensually undertaken by the group's leaders or elders.

3.*Redressive action*: it consists of a series of ritual actions aimed at addressing the causes of the breach and the following crisis. Redressive actions range from personal advice and informal mediation to formal legal actions and, if certain kinds of crisis require it, to the performance of public ritual.

4.*Reintegration or Schism*: depending on the efficacy of the redressive action, the final phase of the social drama will consist either in the re-establishment of the *status quo* before the crisis erupted and restoration of normality, or in the official recognition of irremediable schism. A few considerations on the redressive stage are necessary, since it provides a valuable model to interpret the actions of mafia boss Bernardo Provenzano in the crisis experienced by Cosa Nostra during the 1980s.

Turner developed van Gennep's concept of limen in rites of passage. He used the notion of liminality to describe the redressive action as a highly liminal phase between the state of crisis and re-integration. During this stage, old parameters are questioned while new ones take shape (Turner 1967, 93-95). In fact, during liminality, a social actor has the possibility to 'meta-comment' upon the critical situation and offer alternatives to the pre-existing structure in the form of an 'anti-structure', where the social positions and constraints are levelled out and new

communitarian values are shared.⁷ In order to do so, the performer will resort to a series of strategies that are characteristic of the ritual process as a redressive action: the communication of sacred symbols through the use of images, words and instructions that represent the unity and continuity of the social group; deconstruction and recombination of familiar cultural codes that provoke the audience to reflect on basic social values and on society in general; simplification of the social structure where the authority of the performer is the only remaining structural characteristic left (Turner 1967, 101–103). Ritual participants, emotionally and cognitively influenced by the crucial values that the symbols represent, now share a spirit of unity and comradeship, which Turner defined as *communitas*:

Communitas breaks in through the interstices of structure, in liminality; at the edges of structure, in marginality; and from beneath structure, in inferiority. It is almost everywhere held to be sacred or "holy," possibly because it transgresses or dissolves the norms that govern structured and institutionalized relationships and is accompanied by experiences of unprecedented potency. (Turner 1969, 128-129)

Communitas can be defined in contrast to social structure. If social structure refers to the hierarchical arrangement of roles and statuses within a social group, *communitas* refers instead to feelings of egalitarianism and comradeship, frequently associated to conditions of marginality and inferiority (Turner 1975, 231–252; 1969, 132–133). It is important to note that, for Turner, *communitas* represents only a temporary phase. Both primitive and modern societies function on constant dialectic processes between *communitas* and structure:

What is certain is that no society can function adequately without this dialectic.... For, like the neophytes in the African circumcision lodge, or the Benedictine monks, or the members of a millenarian movement, those living in community seem to require, sooner or later, an absolute authority, whether this be a religious commandment, a divinely inspired leader, or a dictator. (Turner 1969, 129)⁸

⁷ Metacommentary is 'a story that a group tells itself about itself' (Turner 1982a), a self-reflection on events that the group has experienced.

⁸ Turner identifies three types of *communitas*: *spontaneous communitas* are free from all structural constraints and are characterized by a transient feeling of togetherness; *normative communitas* are

Although in liminal stages the structural differences tend to be levelled out, the authority of the leaders over other members of the community is not only maintained, but is also reinforced:

The authority of the elders is not based on legal sanctions; it is in a sense the personification of the self-evident authority of tradition. The authority of the elders is absolute, because it represents the absolute, the axiomatic values of society in which are expressed the common good and the common interest. (Turner 1967, 100)

Ritual participants (the neophytes in the case of rituals of initiation) submit to the authority of the ritual elders in so far as the elders are responsible for the whole community.

It is clear that both the concept of *social drama* and *ritual process* utilise a terminology and set of meanings standing ‘between theatre and anthropology’. These meanings can be condensed in the single term of ‘performance’. One fundamental characteristic of performance emerging from these observations is its actualising power and transformative potential. Nevertheless, the concept of performance, here seen applied to rituals, has an extensive semantic width that often ‘escapes’ definition. The second part of this chapter focuses on performance as model of analysis and object of study, dedicating particular attention to those applications of performance which will later be utilised in case studies analysed in the following chapters.

organised into a social system; *ideological communitas* refer to utopian models of societies based on existential communitas (Turner 1969, 132).

PART TWO - PERFORMANCE, IDENTITY, CHANGE

*There will be time, there will be time.
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet.*

(T.S. Eliot)

2.5. Performance: a contested definition

In the last five decades, scholars from a number of academic disciplines have adopted performance as a model of analysis for social processes and events, thus extending its meaning far beyond those genres more generally considered as ‘entertainment’ (Madison and Hamera 2006, xii-xiii). This has made performance an expanded conceptual category that designates a broad range of practices within the visual arts, the theatrical genres and other forms of cultural activity. Moreover, the analysis of performance has been extended into the field of self-representation in everyday life interactions.

As discussed in the previous sections, the constitutive elements of performance include a performer (or social actor), an audience, the means necessary for communication to take place and, more generally, ‘the presentation of rehearsed or pre-established sequences of words or actions’ (Bial 2004, 57). Despite its numerous connotations, central to each definition of performance is the idea of ‘action’.¹ In particular, performance studies theorist Richard Schechner stressed the importance of understanding performance as an encompassing ‘continuum’ of human actions, which are rehearsed, replayed, or consciously constructed for an audience (2002, 2). These range from ritual to play, and to the enactment of professional,

¹ Derived from the Old French *parfourmir*, etymologically to perform means ‘to accomplish an action’, or ‘to carry out thoroughly’.

status, and gender roles in everyday conversational interactions. Defining performance as a ritual or theatre depends on whether its context and function are aimed at entertaining (*entertainment*) or at effecting changes (*efficacy*) (Schechner 2002, 71). The discipline of Performance Studies has expanded upon this definition making performance an intrinsic element of the customs, rituals and practices of cultures in both traditional and modern societies (Striff 2003, 1-3).

The array of themes that performance studies covers gives an insight into the broad scope of the field. Mary Strine, Beverly Long, and Mary Hopkins pointed out in an essay entitled *Research in interpretation and performance studies: trends, issues, priorities* (1990), that performance is an ‘essentially contested concept’. They derived the idea of ‘contestedness’ from W. B. Gallie’s *Philosophy and the Historical Understanding* (1964, 187-188), in which the author suggested that the disagreement about the essence of certain concepts, such as art and democracy, is an integral part of the concepts themselves. Similarly, Strine, Long, and Hopkins argued that performance has grown out of a situation of ‘sophisticated disagreement’ between individuals who do not try to defend their positions at all costs, but ‘rather through continuing dialogue to attain a sharper articulation of all positions and therefore a fuller understanding of the conceptual richness of performance’ (1990, 183). Consequently, thinking about performance study as a ‘contested’ idea, means that every attempt to define performance is bound up in disagreement, and that this disagreement is a fundamental constituent of the notion of performance itself. Moreover, because so much of the development of the field has emerged as a direct result of these disagreements, it is impossible to separate a consideration of

performance studies from the genesis of the discipline, which became widely recognised internationally in the 1990s.

2.6. Performance Studies: a field with multiple roots

Performance studies originally emerged as a confluence of ideas from a number of academic disciplines, chiefly anthropology, sociology, linguistics, theatre and folklore studies. Scholars within these fields adopted performance as a model to examine cultural practices and social interactions. Despite the multidisciplinary origins and nature of the field, each academic discipline has made its own imprint on the study of performance. While linguists look at the pragmatic ability of language to achieve things in terms of performance, anthropologists frequently use performance to explore social organisations and their cultural values (Fine and Speer 1992, xi). Nevertheless, these different perspectives have laid the ground for a progressively increasing interest in the study of cultural forms by means of performance (McKenzie 2001, 33). Embedded as it is in its social context, performance can reveal useful insights into the internal dynamics of social groups contextualising them within their wider cultural framework.

A systematic cultural performance theory began to emerge in the mid-1950s. The work of anthropologist Milton Singer is generally associated with the origins of the field. In attempting to derive a unit of analysis to interpret the myriad of religious and linguistic differences characterising India's regional diversities during his fieldwork in the mid-1950s, Singer found in rituals, ceremonies and prayers 'the elementary constituents of the culture and the ultimate units of observation' (Singer 1972, 71). He called these 'cultural performances'. Such 'encapsulations of culture',

Singer observed, possess ‘a limited time span, or at least a beginning and an end, an organised program of activity, a set of performers, an audience, and a place and occasion of performance’. Within this frame of activity, they display the core values of a social group. Therefore, for Singer, cultural performances can be interpreted as casting ‘much light on the ways in which cultural themes and values are communicated as well as processes of social and cultural change’ (Singer 1959; 1972, 77).

It was, however, only during the 1960s and 1970s that collaboration between theatre studies and anthropology would develop influential theories of cultural performance. Anthropologists and ethnographers provided theatre studies with a model of analysis to explore the way in which ‘people and society embody symbolic structures in living behaviour’. In turn, through concepts like ‘acting’, ‘social actors’, ‘dramatisation of social interactions’, theatre provided anthropologists with useful frameworks within which to analyse ceremonies, social interactions and rituals in dramaturgical terms (McKenzie 2001, 36). Erving Goffman’s *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*, Kenneth Burke’s theory of ‘dramatism’, Dell Hymes’s ethnography of speaking, and especially the theories of anthropologists Clifford Geertz and Victor Turner represent some of the key works that arose out of this interdisciplinary synergy.

Symbolic anthropologist Clifford Geertz contributed to the ‘performative turn’ in anthropology by elaborating a theoretical framework that gave prime attention to the role of symbols in constructing public meaning.² In *The*

² This expression refers to the interpretative shift occurred in the second half of the twentieth century in the disciplines of humanities and social sciences that adopted performance as model of analysis for human behaviour.

Interpretation of Cultures (1973), Geertz outlined culture as ‘a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life’ (Geertz 1973, 89). Furthermore, seeing rituals as ‘multisemiotic modes of cultural expression’, Geertz, along with Victor Turner, theorised that performance was a process of transformation for the group as well as the individual.

A general distinction between cultural and social performance emerged from these studies. Cultural performance is generally associated with marked events of heightened awareness (e.g. religious ceremonies, rites of initiation, plays) which are separate from normal life, and where ‘self-conscious and symbolic acts are “presented” and communicated within a circumscribed space’ (Madison and Hamera 2006, xvii). Instead, in social performances, actions and intentions are not specifically marked from routine behaviour. Social performances deal with ordinary daily interactions and the consequences that these encounters have on the individuals and on the social structure as a whole. Although individuals in social performances may not be aware that their enactment is culturally determined, their interactions can inform about particular symbolic practices within a culture (Madison and Hamera 2006, xvii).³ This practice of reading even common everyday interactions in terms of theatrical performances was already in use by the 1940s. For example, rhetorician and philosopher Kenneth Burke developed a ‘dramatist’ approach based on the idea

3 Both notions are useful to describe the case studies presented in this thesis. The concept of cultural performance applies to mafia rituals of initiation, while the notion of social performance will be adopted to analyse the religious behaviour of mafia bosses Greco and Provenzano.

of language as ‘action’ and on the ‘awareness of ourselves as actors speaking in specific situations with specific purposes’ (Bell 2008).⁴

In the early 1970s, linguistic anthropology and folklore also adopted performance as model and subject of analysis. The shift from *structure* to *process* that characterised the ‘performative turn’ in anthropology corresponded to a shift in linguistics that moved the object of study from texts to texts-in-context. Influenced by Roman Jakobson’s model of communication this new emphasis on performance directed attention away from the study of the ‘formal structures and symbolic content of texts to the emergence of verbal art in the social interaction between performers and audiences’ (Bauman and Briggs 1990, 59).⁵ The theory of *performativity* is without doubt the most influential result of the ‘performative turn’ in linguistics.

2.7. Performativity

Linguistic philosopher John Langshaw Austin argued in his *How To Do Things With Words* (1962) that language can be interpreted as social action, and introduced the concept of *performative* as a way of ‘doing things with words.’⁶ For Austin, *performativity* is the ability to accomplish something by means of saying it. The action that is performed when a performative utterance is pronounced belongs to what he named a *speech act*. *Performatives* differ from *constatives* in that they do not

4 Kenneth Burke introduced the concept of ‘dramas of living’ and utilised dramaturgical terminology to describe the five key concepts of social life: *act*, *scene* (the situation or background of the act), *agent* (person who performs the act), *agency* (means used), and *purpose* (the objectives).

5 Jakobson’s model of communication distinguished six elements that are necessary for communication to happen: (1) context, (2) addresser (sender), (3) addressee (receiver), (4) contact, (5) common code and (6) message (Jakobson 1960).

⁶ Austin first introduced this notion in lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955, which were posthumously edited and published in *How to Do Things with Words* (1962).

simply describe what they ‘say’, but they perform an action by means of saying it. In this sense, they escape true or false definition.⁷

Drawing on the theory of performativity, scholars from disciplinary areas as diverse as ethnography of speaking, pragmatics, discourse analysis, and more recently, gender studies have embraced the general idea of interpreting language as action. For example, gender theorist and philosopher Judith Butler has employed the linguistic concept of *performativity* in her studies on identity categories. ‘Performatives’, Butler argues, ‘are forms of authoritative speech’. They are statements that, when pronounced, ‘also perform a certain action and exercise a binding power’:

Implicated in a network of authorization and punishment, performatives tend to include legal sentences, baptism, inaugurations, declarations of ownership, statements which not only perform an action, but confer a binding power on the action performed. If the power of discourse to produce that which it names is linked with the question of performativity, then the performative is one domain in which power acts as discourse. (Butler 1993, 17)

However, Butler suggests that it is only when referring to the social laws or accepted norms, which are cited or repeated (and thus ‘performed’), that a performative becomes effective. As she phrases it, ‘there is no power as such, constructed as a subject, that acts, but only...a reiterated acting that is power in its persistence’ (Butler 1993, 17). For example, a judge who mediates a situation consistently *cites* the law he applies. It is by means of reiterated references to social conventions and norms that the speech act of the judge derives its binding power and authority. Therefore, binding power and authority do not belong *a priori* to the *persona* of the

⁷ For example, Austin explained how the classic constative ‘snow is white’ is descriptively true or false, whilst performative statements such as ‘I now pronounce you husband and wife’, which accomplish the action of marrying, are either ‘felicitous or infelicitous’ (successful or unsuccessful) rather than being true or false (Austin 1962, 3–6). Their ‘felicity’ depends on a series of conditions: there must be an actor (speaker), an audience (listener), and the speech act must adhere to pre-established patterns.

judge nor to his will, but ‘to the citational legacy by which a contemporary “act” emerges in the context of a chain of binding conventions’ (Butler 1993, 18). This perspective will be explored in describing, for example, the enduring qualities of recurring formulae in mafia rituals of initiation and the effects that their ‘citation’ has on mafia leaders pronouncing them.

2.7.1. Verbal Art as Performance

Folklorist and linguistic anthropologist Richard Bauman drew from theories of performativity and pragmatics of language to develop a concept of ‘verbal art as performance’, based upon an understanding of performance as a mode of speaking. This theory provides a model to analyse the religious language used by the mafia bosses discussed in this thesis. Bauman defined performance as:

a unifying thread tying together the marked, segregated aesthetic genres and other spheres of verbal behaviour into a general unified conception of verbal art as a way of speaking. Verbal art may comprehend both myth narration and the speech expected of certain members of society whenever they open their mouths, and it is performance that brings them together in culture-specific and variable ways, ways that are to be discovered ethnographically within each culture and community. (1984, 5)

Fundamentally, Bauman understood performance as a mode of communication. In his view, the essence of performance resides in the actor’s assumption of responsibility to the audience and on the display that the actor makes of his/her communicative skills (1984, 11).

A characteristic intrinsic to performance as a communicative interaction is that it contains a series of messages that, explicitly or implicitly, carry instructions on how to interpret the other messages being communicated. These include figurative language, parallelisms, special codes, special formulae and so forth (Bauman 1984, 16). Being grounded in their cultural context, these linguistic features constitute an

effective vehicle for the speaker to appeal to tradition whilst displaying communicative competence.

Frame, reflexivity and *emergence* are also intrinsic qualities of performance that specify text-context relations. Firstly, performance is *framed*, highlighted and separated from the surrounding discourse, whilst remaining keyed into conventions specific to the broader cultural setting. Secondly, performance is *reflexive* because the social actors are both ‘spectators’ to their own experience and, at the same time, performers of this experience in front of an audience. Thirdly, performance is *emergent* in that it has distinctive potential for modifying and creating social structure. This last concept requires particular clarification, as it will regularly recur in the case studies of this thesis. *Emergence* refers to the ability of social actors to enhance their performance in order to gain control and authority over their audience and, ‘to interpret both traditions and social settings, actively transforming both in the course of their performances’ (Briggs 1988, 7). In other words, it is argued that social structure ‘emerges’ in performance and can be transformed through the same performative act. As Bauman phrased it,

There is...a distinctive potential in performance by its very nature which has implications for the creation of social structure in performance. It is part of the essence of performance that it offers to the participants a special enhancement of the experience, bringing with it a heightened intensity of communicative interaction which binds the audience to the performer in a way that is specific to performance as a mode of communication. (1984, 43)

The ‘emergent’ quality of performance depends on the actors’ competence and the social display they make of it, on the enhancement of the act, and on the goals of the participants. The goals of the participants include those that are inherent to performance – the display of competence, the focusing of attention on oneself as

performer, the enhancement of experience – as well as other aims which ‘will be highly culture and situation–specific’(Bauman and Babcock 1984, 38).

The more social actors are able to ‘bind’ the audience to themselves, the more prestige and authority they will gain over it: prestige for effectively displaying their competence; authority and control for holding the flow of the interaction in their hands. When performers assert control in this way, they have the potential to transform relations, statuses and roles that make up the social structure of the community to which they belong (Bauman 1984, 43–44). Emergence is a particularly important concept for the analysis carried out in this research. As will be demonstrated in Chapter Five, it provides the basis to interpret the way mafia leaders acquire control and authority over their audience in specific ritual occasions or in ordinary interactions.

2.8. Performing identity

So far, this section of the chapter has dealt with the notion of performance as a form of ritual interaction in which social actors have the potential to exercise an influence on their audience and, eventually, to modify social structure. It is now important to turn to the analysis of how identity can be constructed and projected in the course of these interactions. Such an approach is necessary to interpret the dynamics through which mafia leaders construct and project their roles and identities in interactional contexts, and to explore how cultural values work within this process.

In recent years, a number of scholars have adapted the concept of performativity of language to studies on identity. For example, gender theorist Judith Butler, as well as developing the theory of performativity in relation to concepts of

power and authority discussed earlier, merged studies of performance with performativity of identity and gender. Specifically, she employed the linguistic concept of *performativity* to understand how identity categories are not inherent or biologically determined but how they are socially constructed.⁸ This view implies that identity categories can be constructed through performative acts. A few considerations on this point help framing the theory of performance and representation of the *self* presented in the last paragraphs of this chapter. This will help clarify the notion of identity as it is utilised in this study on mafia religion. For Butler, performing ‘identity’ means enacting a role that has already been played out repeatedly over time. By means of repetition and re-enactment, this role becomes socially legitimised:

The act that one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene...much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again... As the anthropologist Victor Turner suggests in his studies of ritual social drama, social action requires a performance which is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation. (Butler 2004, 160)

Butler argued that, if identity categories are socially and performatively constituted, then they are also ‘capable of being constituted differently’ (2004, 155). She specifically identified the possibility of transforming identity categories in the multiple combinations of repeated actions and acts of everyday life, that is, through performance itself.

Butler’s theory of identity categories being culturally and socially constructed reflects the position of a wider sociological perspective that understands not only

8 For example, in *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution* Butler describes gender not as a pre-established condition, but as ‘an identity tenuously constituted in time... through a stylized repetition of acts’, that is, a social role that one performs over time (2004, 154).

identity, but also reality in general, as a product of social relations.⁹ Individuals in society enact different roles in daily interactions with others. It is the repeated enactment of the same role over time (*habitualization*) that embeds meaning in the texture of society (Berger and Luckmann 1991). Reality is thus viewed as being constructed through interactional processes that involve language, gestures, and any other form of symbolic exchange. Similarly, self-image and social identity can be developed and negotiated by means of interactions. Like reality, one's 'identity too is socially embedded and worked out in people's everyday social lives' (Lawler 2012, 8).

Sociologist Steph Lawler explained that the notion of identity hinges on a combination of both 'sameness' and 'difference'.¹⁰ Indeed, identity implies the sharing of common characteristics (for example, identity of 'women', 'men', 'British' and so forth) while, simultaneously, also indicating an aspect of uniqueness, which differentiates a person or a group from another (Lawler 2008, 2). This means that one does not have a single identity but multiple identities, and that these identities derive from processes of association to, and differentiation from, one category of people or another. The fact that individuals have multiple identities also implies that there must be multiple means through which these identities can be performatively created, maintained or transformed. These include the use of personal narratives (e.g. story-telling, memoirs) and the representation of the *self* in social interactions. The relevance of these considerations will be seen in examining the ways in which identities can be understood as created through narratives.

9 For a complete discussion on Social Constructionism see Berger and Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality. A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, 1991 [1966].

10 Etymologically, identity derives from the Latin *idem*, meaning 'the same'.

2.8.1. Performing identity in personal narratives

Examples of personal narratives include, but are not limited to, short stories, novels, storytelling, interviews and memoirs. In general, narratives are accounts that contain at least a character, action and a plot, and involve a communicative interaction between a teller (or writer) and an audience (Lawler 2012, 11). The plot is the principal part of a narrative since it merges different events into a single, meaningful whole. Through a shared cultural understanding, both the narrator and the audience participate in the process of linking these events within the overall narrative structure, which ‘is only completed in the interaction between teller and audience’ (Lawler 2012, 16). Indeed, the audience will engage in active interpretation by assuming some meaning for the episodes narrated.

Lawler argues that it is precisely for this reason that personal narratives cannot stand alone but must refer to, and draw on, wider cultural narratives. These may include general conceptions, myths, values or any other cultural symbol that is immediately and officially recognised as culture-specific. ‘These symbols work in the narrative because they are understood culturally as signifying more than themselves’ (Lawler 2012, 12). Simultaneously, narrators can draw from their social milieu to produce and perform their own stories. In this sense, personal narrative performance is perceived as being ‘radically contextualized’ (Langellier and Peterson 2006, 152). Text and context are both embodied in the personal stories narrated and in the interactional constraints of the performative event. Therefore, personal narratives represent an ideal ground in which to examine the effects of cultural values and norms on the narrator and, above all, to study how identity can be performatively constructed in narrating one’s own story. As Lawler pointed out,

events and cultural symbols constituting the plot ‘must be narrated so that they have some point in explaining how the narrator came to be the person she or he is’:

The self...appears as the inevitable outcome and actualization of the episodes which constitute a life. The self is understood as unfolding through episodes which both express and constitute that self. The very constitution of an identity is configured over time and through narrative. (Lawler 2012, 16–17)

In narrating a story, social actors assemble various memories, episodes and events into a plot. The stories narrated, however, do not simply represent a description of facts, but reflect the ‘complicated procedures’ that a narrator employs to make sense of the world and of his or her life (Lawler 2012, 17). Depending on whether the purpose of their personal narrative is to remember, persuade or argue, the narrators (or speakers) will reiterate specific communicative strategies—the choice of significant sentences, the emphasis on particular details, reported speeches, appeals to tradition and metalinguistic features— to represent themselves in a way that corresponds to their intentions (Bauman 1986). Therefore, in personal narratives, past and present are constantly interpreted and reinterpreted. The social situation of the narrator in the present informs how the past is narrated and interpreted. In turn, the past can be reconstructed in a certain way that affects the identity of the narrator in the present:

[F]rom narrative perspective, the relationship between identity and autobiography is not that autobiography (the telling of a life) *reflects* a pre-given identity: rather, identities are *produced* through the autobiographical work in which all of us engage every day.... The narratives we produce in this context are stories of how we come to be the way we are. But it is *through* the narratives themselves that we produce our identities in this way. (Lawler 2012, 13)

Identity, even in this context, does not appear as a coherent, inner category, but as a multiplicity of selves among which individuals can choose when telling about their lives. Identity is thus inherently ‘social’, and personal narrative provides a useful means to explore identity in relation to society. In relation to the topic of this thesis,

this approach will be used to interpret the religious identity of mafia boss Michele Greco through an analysis of his court hearings, memoirs and interviews.

2.8.2. Performance of the self in social interactions

Sociologist Erving Goffman drew on Symbolic Interactionism theories and on the sociology of Émile Durkheim to elaborate a notion of performance of the self in everyday interactions as a means of constructing identity.¹¹ He is now widely considered as one of the most prominent social scientists of the twentieth century.

In *The Performance of Self in Everyday Life* (1971 [1959]) Goffman employed a ‘dramaturgical approach’ based on theatrical performance to analyse language and behaviour in everyday interactions. Looking at face-to-face interactions in theatrical terms, his study focused on the ways identity can be negotiated through performative representation of the self. Goffman defined interaction—or face-to-face interaction— ‘as all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants’ (Goffman 1971, 26). In particular, he viewed interaction in terms of a performance aimed at providing others with certain ‘impressions’ which are consistent with the desired goals of the social actor. These impressions can be divided into impressions that an individual *gives* and the impressions one *gives off*. To *give* impressions refers to communication in a general sense, when the verbal symbols that one chooses are used exclusively for conveying specific information attached to the symbols. To *give off* impressions

¹¹ The earlier mentioned Clifford Geertz is one of the leading exponents of Symbolic Interactionism. This theory is essentially based on the idea of humans as pragmatic actors who actively construct their social world by systematically modifying and adjusting their behaviour to the actions of other actors with whom they come into contact. It is by reading these actions and their actors in terms of symbolic entities that one is able to interpret them and behave accordingly.

involves instead ‘a wide range of action that others can treat as symptomatic of the actor, the expectation being that the action was performed for reasons other than the information conveyed in this way’ (Goffman 1971, 14). Starting from the assumption that, when an individual appears before others he or she has a number of reasons for trying to control the impressions that others receive from such a situation, Goffman’s analysis focused on the multiplicity of techniques people employ to manage these social performances and to *give off* the kind of impressions they desire others to have of them.

He defined ‘impression management’ and ‘presentation of the self’ as the efforts that people make to control the impressions others have of them, while the whole process is characterised as ‘dramaturgy’. These are theatrical terms that indicate a number of specific components of interaction as performance of the self. *Role*, for example, is a term used to describe all those expectations that a person feels others have of him or her when occupying a certain social position. *Routine* or *part* refers instead to the ‘pre-established pattern of action which is unfolded during a performance and which may be presented or played through on other occasions’ (Goffman 1971, 27).

2.8.2.1 Front, appearance and manner

The process of establishing social identity becomes strictly related to the concept of ‘front’. Having stated that performance refers to all the activity of an individual which has some influence on the observers with whom he interacts, Goffman described *front* as ‘that part of the individual’s performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe

the performance' (1971, 32). *Front* is divided into different components, namely, *setting*, *personal front*, and *appearance*.

1. The *setting* includes the scenic parts of the expressive equipment: furniture, décor, physical layout, location and other background elements constituting the scenery.

2. The *personal front* includes other aspects of the expressive equipment, the items that one 'most intimately identifies with the performer himself', in other words, that are perceived to be very natural. Examples of personal front range from insignia of office rank to age, posture, speech patterns, facial expressions, and to bodily gestures (1971, 34). Depending on their function, the *stimuli*—the communicative aspects that make up the personal front—can be divided into 'appearance' and 'manner'. *Appearance* refers to the aspects informing about the social status of the performer. *Manner* refers to those stimuli that inform about the type of interaction roles performers expect to play in oncoming situations (Goffman 1971, 34–35). For example, an apologetic manner may give the impression that the performer expects others to take the lead of the interaction, while an aggressive manner might suggest the opposite intention. Sometimes there are discrepancies between appearance and reality. This is the case, for example, of performers trying to conceal activities that are 'unclean, semi-illegal and cruel'. As Goffman pointed out, 'we tend to conceal from our audience all evidence of 'dirty work', whether we do this task in private or 'allocate it to a servant, to the impersonal market, to a legitimate specialist, or to an illegitimate one' (1971, 53).

The *front* acts then as a vehicle of standardisation, allowing others to understand the individual on the basis of projected character traits. The actor will

present a compelling front filling the duties of his social role and communicating the activities and characteristics of this role to other people in a consistent manner. For his or her activity to become significant to others, a performer will ‘dramatise’ it with signs highlighting and emphasising those aspects that they wish to convey most (1971, 40). This relates to another essential point of the performance of the *self* in social interactions. A performance needs to fit into the understanding and expectations of the society in which it is presented; in Goffman’s words, it has to be ‘socialised’. In order to do so, the actor will *idealise* it as much as possible. *Idealisation* represents another mechanism that people commonly employ for the socialisation of their performances. Idealising one’s performance means ‘to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society’ within the performative act (Goffman 1971, 44–45). Viewed from this perspective, performance presents the same characteristics that Durkheim identified in ‘ritual’ as a means to consolidate and reaffirm the values of a society:

To the degree that a performance highlights the common official values of the society in which occurs, we may look upon it, in the manner of Durkheim or Radcliffe-Brown, as a ceremony – as an expressive rejuvenation and reaffirmation of the moral values of the community. (Goffman 1971, 45)

For the purposes of *idealisation*, some performers systematically conceal ‘dirty work’ or actions that do not correspond to the social values of the community. On the other hand, they will enhance and exaggerate their actions to make them ‘special’ and worthy of preferential attention. In this way, a performance adheres to expectations and values that society deems desirable and honourable. The audience itself will ‘often cooperate by acting in a respectful fashion, in owed regard for the sacred integrity imputed to the performer’ (Goffman 1971, 75).

2.8.2.2 Face, Line and Rules of Conduct

In a series of essays collected in *Interaction Rituals: Essays on Face-to-face Behaviour* (2005 [1967]), Goffman outlined approaches to micro-social dynamics of interactions and their resulting effects on the identities of individuals. Starting from the assumption that all forms of interaction are kinds of performances, Goffman viewed these performances as socially formalised symbolic rituals. He defined 'face-to-face interaction' as 'that class of events which occurs during co-presence and by virtue of co-presence' and that involves the use of glances, positioning, gestures, and verbal statements (Goffman 2005, 1). *Line* and *face* are two important concepts of his theory. *Line* represents the pattern of verbal and non-verbal conduct expressing how a person understands the situation established in the interaction, and the person's evaluation of other people interacting. *Face* is the positive social value of self that a person claims in an encounter and that is 'delineated in terms of approved social attributes' (2005, 5). In other words, *face* is a form of performance in which individuals present an image of their 'self' using appearance, language, and actions that they believe will give the impression that they are competent social interactants.

It is during social encounters that each person will project his or her *face*, trying to establish and maintain it in relation with the *face* of the others. To *maintain face* means to project a face that is consistent with one's own behaviour and actions. Individuals may be said to *have*, or *be in*, or *maintain face* when the line they effectively take presents an image of them that is internally consistent and is supported by judgments and evidence conveyed by other participants. A person will thus try to protect the *face* adopted in interactions by behaving and speaking consistently. However, once established, face is not guaranteed, as one risks 'losing

face' if his/her verbal or non-verbal language is not consistent with the image socially projected (Goffman 2005, 5-8). *Face* can also be lost if evidence conveyed by other participants is incongruous with the image one has presented. This is the case, for example, of all those circumstances that in Italian are expressed with the enunciation 'fare cattiva figura'. Literally meaning 'to cut a poor figure of oneself', this expressions refers precisely to those situations in which the face that one has assumed is lost during interactions for any reason. Interestingly, in Sicilian dialect this translates into the common way of saying *perdiri a facci*, meaning exactly 'to lose one's face'.

When individuals 'lose *face*', they will try to 'save it' sustaining an impression for others that *face* has not been lost. They will ensure that a particular 'expressive order' is sustained; an order that regulates the flow of events so that anything that appears to be expressed by them will be consistent with the person's *face*:

When a person manifests these compunctions primarily from duty to himself, one speaks in our society of *pride*; when he does so because of duty to wider social units... one speaks of *honour*. When those compunctions have to do with postural things, with expressive events derived from the way the person handles his body, his emotions, and the things with which he has physical contact, one speaks of *dignity* [emphasis added]. (Goffman 2005, 9-10)

It is relevant to note that, as will be discussed in Chapter Four, honour, pride and dignity, are values to which mafia boss Michele Greco regularly referred when defending himself from the accusations of mafia defectors. However, they also recur consistently in the testimony of the same mafia defectors who accused Greco and who appealed to these values to justify their decisions in leaving the organisation (as discussed in the next chapter).

Face-work also concerns the rules of conduct to observe in social interactions. Rules of conduct like *deference* and *demeanour*, for example, play an important role on how individuals act in, and respond to, specific situations. Deference is a 'component of activity which functions as a symbolic means by which appreciation is regularly conveyed' through rituals. Goffman described it as a 'mark of devotion' that represents the ways in which an actor 'celebrates and confirms his relation to a recipient'. Examples of this ceremonial activity include little 'salutations, compliments, and apologies which recur in social contacts, and may be referred to as "status rituals" or "interpersonal rituals"' (Goffman 2005, 56–57).

Where deference is the code of conduct with others, *demeanour* refers instead to an individual's behaviour, to the code of conduct of oneself. *Demeanour* creates a self-image, but for others. It encompasses all forms of an individual's personal expression including diction, competence, poise and emotional self-control:

By demeanor I shall refer to that element of the individual's ceremonial behavior typically conveyed through deportment, dress, and bearing, which serves to express to those in his immediate presence that he is a person of certain desirable or undesirable qualities. In our society, the "well" or "properly" demeaned individual displays such attributes as: discretion and sincerity; modesty in claims regarding self...command of speech and physical movements; self-control over his emotions, his appetites, and his desires; poise under pressure; and so forth. (Goffman 2005, 77)

The actions and reactions of many individuals playing a specific role, and the feedback to their *demeanour* through the deference expressed by others bind actors and recipients together.

In this regard, Goffman refers to Durkheim's concept of 'sacred' related to rituals to analyse how, through the observance of rules of conduct, the identity of individuals is shaped in ritual interactions. For this reason, the self is to be considered not as an innate category, but as 'part of a ceremonial thing, a sacred object which must be treated with proper ritual care and in turn must be presented in

a proper light to others' (Goffman 2005, 91). In order to establish this *self*, the individual will act with an appropriate demeanour, will display deference to stronger parties and will be treated with deference in social interactions. Deference and demeanour practices, therefore, must be institutionalised so that the individual will be able to project a viable, sacred *self* on a regular basis:

The implication is that in one sense this secular world is not so irreligious as we think. Many gods have been done away with, but the individual himself might stubbornly remain as a deity of considerable importance.... Perhaps the individual is so viable a god because he can actually understand the ceremonial significance of the way he is treated, and quite on his own can respond dramatically to what is proffered him. In contacts between such deities there is no need for middlemen; each of these gods is able to serve as his own priest. (Goffman 1971)

As it will be emphasised in the case studies analysis of the following chapters the idea of sacred self is an integral part of the identity of mafia leaders.

Conclusions

This chapter has laid out the theoretical framework of this research. Divided in two parts, it has focused on socio-anthropological notions of religion, rituals and performance. The perspectives outlined have indicated how these three concepts are inherently related to one another and, at the same time, deeply rooted in their cultural framework of reference.

Sociology allows an interpretation of religion in terms of its function and its effects on society. From the perspectives adopted in this study, the relationship between religion and society is complementary: by means of ritual practices, society attributes sacred and religious value to specific symbols; at the same time, since these symbols represent society itself, its values and norms, religion provides social groups with regular occasions to reaffirm their identity and collective life. Religion, or, more specifically, religious rituals and symbols, are thus perceived as the main

mechanism through which communities achieve solidarity and cohesion. This functionalist perspective has been further developed by scholars who added to the interpretation of religious rituals and symbols a more 'dynamic' and 'active' dimension. Anthropologists such as Victor Turner saw symbolic rituals as a vehicle for change and transformation in a group. This assumption is predicated on the idea of ritual as performance. Numerous academic disciplines have successfully adopted performance as model of analysis for social processes. Central to the notion of performance is the idea of 'action' and 'process'. Indeed, either referring to specific rituals like rituals of initiation or to rituals of everyday social interactions, performance has the potential to effect a change in terms of social dynamics, relations and identity of the participants. Cultural values like religion play a fundamental role within these ritual practices. For example, while in marked ritual performances (e.g. initiation rituals) religious symbols are necessary to create emotions and imprint the values of the community upon the identity of the initiate, in daily social interactions, religious values may serve to idealise one's performance and make one's identity consistent with officially recognised cultural norms.

The extension of the notion of ritual to performance has extended the range of social behaviours that can be read in terms of 'ritual'. This is particularly useful in regard to the topic of this research where the religious behaviours analysed range from ritual activities in initiation ceremonies to religious language in communicative everyday interactions. Furthermore, it allows an analysis of mafia religious ritual practices from a 'processual' perspective through which to identify and explore those patterns which remain constant or change through time. A more 'static' notion of ritual viewed exclusively in light of its ability to maintain solidarity would not be

sufficient to analyse, for example, the role of religion in communicative processes (such as Provenzano's *pizzini* or Michele Greco's memoirs) within particular critical circumstances.

This chapter has also focused on the notion of identity as a category that can be constructed, transformed or maintained by means of performance in personal narratives and everyday interactions. Identity is seen in this context as the result of a continuous process of comparison which involves assimilation to, and differentiation from, others. In representing their *selves*, individuals will base their images upon those characteristics derived from external cultural which serve to carry messages and facilitate understanding, and affirm one's position of authority or subordination depending on the circumstances. Cultural symbols are thus essential to these processes of identity construction.

Theories on the role which religious symbols, rituals and performance play at the level of identity of an individual and at a structural level for the group as whole offer valuable interpretative models to explore the role of religion in mafia social interactions and its effects on the formation of individual and group identities.

CHAPTER THREE

CASE STUDY: MAFIA RITUALS OF INITIATION

*Entering the mafia is like converting to a religion.
One never stops being a priest.
Nor a mafioso.*
(Giovanni Falcone)

Introduction

This chapter discusses the first case study of this research. It focuses on the initiation rituals of the mafia to explore the role of religion within this highly symbolic ceremony. In particular, it analyses the effects of religious symbols and values on the candidates for affiliation and on the figure of the mafia leader conducting the ceremony. Previous studies have dealt with these rituals from a socio-anthropological standpoint (Paoli 2003; Gambetta 1996) and looked at the religious dimension of the ceremony (Dino 1997; 2008). However, only marginal attention has been dedicated to the role of religion within the ceremonial proceedings in relation to the identity and authority of the officiants, and in relation to the social structure of the organisation in general.

The first part of this chapter contextualises the origins of Cosa Nostra within the socio-historical framework of nineteenth-century Sicily. An overview on the socio-economic and political changes of this period is necessary to comprehend the dynamics through which the mafia has borrowed myths and values belonging to a shared cultural patrimony to construct its identity. It also helps understanding the role of rituals in perpetuating this identity over time. Evidence indicates that liberal secret

societies, such as Freemasonry and *Carboneria*, provided early mafia associations with inspiration for their rituals and structure. A comparison between the mafia affiliation ceremony and the ritualistic tradition of nineteenth-century secret societies across Sicily is therefore necessary to observe similarities in terms of ritual structure and symbols, and to identify possible reasons why the choice of certain religious symbols and references from the Christian tradition recur as a theme.

The second part of this chapter concerns the analysis of mafia initiation rituals from the socio-anthropological perspectives presented in the previous chapter. Mafia members have described numerous examples of rites during the history of the Sicilian mafia. These will be analysed in terms of rituals of interaction and, specifically, of highly symbolic rites of passage with their characteristic tripartite structure.

3.1. Socio-political turmoil in nineteenth-century Sicily

The origins of the mafia initiation ritual directly relate to the origins of the organisation itself and, in light of the considerations on the mafia interpretative paradigms expressed in Chapter One, they are similarly rooted in the turbulent socio-historical process that led to the Unification of Italy.

The *Risorgimento* was characterised by profound political and economic changes, which gave rise to widespread discontent, frequent insurrections and a network of conspiratorial movements. During this period, a number of liberal secret societies spread across Italy. For the most part, they originated from Freemasonry, introduced to Tuscany from Britain in the 1730s (Duggan 2007, 57). The most important secret society in the south of Italy was the *Carboneria* ('Charcoal

burners'), which advocated liberal and patriotic ideas in favour of Italian independence (Duggan 2007, 60). Although its origins are uncertain, it is believed that the Carboneria evolved from Freemasonry and spread across the peninsula in the early nineteenth century (Rath 1964, 355).¹ Giuseppe Mazzini's political propaganda, along with Nicola Fabrizi's *Legione Italica*, also met with some success in Sicily, introducing the island to the nationalist conspiracy network (Crisantino 2000, 23-24).²

A hypothesis that has gained credit among contemporary historians asserts that these patriotic societies contributed to the spread of a 'secret associationism' culture from which early forms of mafia organisation developed (Lupo 2004, 41-42; Pezzino 1990, 1992; Dickie 2011, 85; Santino 2000a). Moreover, as time passed, secret revolutionary groups progressively lost their political and cultural identity, and became enmeshed with local 'secret sects' and 'brotherhoods' that were scattered across the island (Lupo 2009, 48). Indeed, several judicial and police documents confirm that stable sects and groupings of *malfattori* (miscreants) existed in Sicily by the mid-1800s. However, the scarcity of available documentation makes it difficult to establish with any degree of certainty if, and to what extent, these *brotherhoods* represented a prototype of the modern mafia. It is equally problematic to establish if the mafia consisted of a conglomeration of different groups rather than a single body in these early years. If one takes into consideration that the entire period extending from the Restoration to the first decade after the Unification of Italy was

1 John Rath argued that the Carbonari were a 'popular Freemasonry created by liberal anti-Napoleonic Masons to serve as a vehicle to arouse the uneducated masses in southern Italy against the French'.

2 Originally a member of Carboneria, Mazzini later devised a new secret society called *Giovine Italia* (Young Italy) to promote Italian unification. With the motto of 'God and the people', this movement aimed at a widespread popular uprising that would lead to the Unification of Italy.

characterised by ‘the rampant diffusion of ordinary and political violence’, it becomes extremely difficult to neatly distinguish the difference between revolutionary movements, mobilisation designed to seize control of the management of local power, and mere criminal activities (Lupo 2009, 48).

Particularly between 1860 and 1876, post-unification Sicily witnessed an escalation of violence, political conspiracy, murders and widespread discontent that derived from the heightening economic and political crisis. Within this turbulent context, revolutionary republican movements joined forces with local criminal societies, while landowners and clergymen fought for the return of the Bourbon Kingdom or for the autonomy of Sicily. Banditry also increased in reaction to State policies (e.g. the introduction of compulsory military service) and the deteriorating economic situation (Catanzaro 1992, 4). By adopting military force to repress these insurrections, the Italian authorities not only failed in their intent, but made matters worse, widening the pre-existing gap between the population and the nascent State. One of the immediate consequences of the social upheaval associated with these political and economic changes was that it provided the necessary conditions for established criminal associations to develop further. In the next section, a few considerations on this point will help contextualise the case study of this chapter and provide a background from which to interpret specific mafia behaviours and practices in the course of the whole thesis.

3.1.1. The origins of the mafia phenomenon

As discussed in Chapter One, the approximate origins of the mafia can be identified in the transition between the Bourbon Kingdom and the Italian State. The turbulent process leading to the Unification of Italy paved the way for a phenomenon that

Leopoldo Franchetti defined as ‘democratisation of violence’ (Fijnaut and Paoli 2004, 58). The transition from a feudal to a modern society, which followed the abolition of feudal privileges and rights in 1812, resulted in the emergence of private property and in the possibility to trade land. These, however, were accompanied by a steadily increase in disputes and conflicts resulting from the lack of well-defined private property rights and their necessary enforcement by the authorities. In this context, Franchetti argued, violence became ‘democratised’: it was no longer monopolised by feudal barons, but became the tool of choice for a group of *facinorosi della classe media*, middle class trouble-makers who made an ‘industry’ out of their monopoly on violence (Lupo and Savatteri 2010, 52).

As previously mentioned, Franchetti’s observations were tainted by his conviction that the mafia did not have an organised structure and, moreover, that it corresponded entirely to a social class—the middle class, which Franchetti also assumed was mainly composed of capitalists. Nevertheless, the idea of ‘monopoly of violence’ as a means of social control has remained a key concept in contemporary mafia studies. For example, revisionist studies on the mafia – and on the Italian south in general – have replaced the notion of the mafia as a general term for ‘violent entrepreneurs’ with the theory of mafiosi as ‘entrepreneurs of violence who sell the commodity of trust not as agents for a particular class or stratum, but as autonomous “businessmen” acting “rationally” in their own interests’(Lumley and Morris 1997, 13). From this perspective, ‘violence’ and ‘trust’ are major commodities in the absence of legitimate sources of public authority.

Indeed, one important element in the development of the mafia phenomenon was the inability of the state to implement an effective system of justice and law

enforcement, which is a necessary condition for any new modern state to acquire legitimacy and consensus (Weber, Gerth, and Mills 1991, 78).³ This atmosphere, characterised by a scarcity of public security and widespread theft of private property, produced a growing demand for public order and protection. In such a context, the ability to use or threaten violence had become the main, albeit not the only, instrument used to provide protection and achieve social control. Therefore, the mafia managed to develop a business based precisely on what the ruling class had failed to provide: protection and enforcement of property rights. It is not an unimportant feature of this relationship that mafiosi sold protection from the potential threat that the mafia itself posed to society. It is also important not to underestimate the extensive network of relations with key sectors of society, which guaranteed the smooth running of this system. Indeed, the Italian state, from its inception, ‘not only failed to protect its citizens from crime and criminals, but also co-habited with the mafia in a system of business extortion which controlled large parts of Sicilian territory’ (Foot 2003, 61). The process through which the mafia established itself as a protection business by using violence and key connections had important implications for the identity of mafiosi and for the organisation at large. For a long period of time, mafiosi were not perceived—and did not perceive themselves—as ordinary criminals, but as men with the ability to privately enforce that law and order the state was failing to impose.

3 As Max Weber wrote: “‘Every state is founded on force’”, said Trotsky at Brest-Litovsk. That is indeed right. If no social institutions existed which knew the use of violence, then the concept of “state” would be eliminated, and a condition would emerge that could be designated as “anarchy”, in the specific sense of this word. Of course, force is certainly not the normal or the only means of the state –nobody says that– but force is a means specific to the state.... [A] state is a human community that (successfully) claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory’. Originally a speech at Munich University, it was published in 1919 as *Politics as a Vocation (Politik als Beruf)*.

By the mid-1870s, a network of organised *cosche* looked after the rich citrus plantations of the *Conca d'Oro* of Palermo (Pezzino 1990, 15). Fraternal organisations like these had been present in the coastal area as well as in the sulphur mining regions of the Sicilian hinterland for at least two decades.⁴ As noted earlier, it cannot be established with absolute certainty the extent to which these societies were at the origins of the phenomenon that in those years was beginning to be defined as *mafia*. Nevertheless, their structure, the existence of a coordinating body and the territorial division of the areas they controlled were remarkably similar to that of the mafia described by pentiti in the 1980s. Above all, it is in their rituals of initiation that a line of continuity can be identified between these local brotherhoods, nineteenth-century liberal secret societies, and the Cosa Nostra as we know it today.

3.2. Carboneria and Freemasonry rituals of initiation

There is strong evidence to suggest that revolutionary secret societies, specifically Freemasonry and Carboneria, provided the early mafia-like organisations with inspiration for their structure and rituals. For example, several reports by the Bourbon police of Palermo demonstrate that some exchange of rituals occurred in prison between convicted members of mafia groups, Carbonari and Freemasons (Paoli 2003, 103; Dickie 2011, 85). All of these societies shared rites of affiliation based on the concept of secrecy, on the importance of honour, benevolence, uprightness and reason.⁵ One notable difference is represented by the Masonic oath,

⁴ This is further evidence of the revisionists' argument that the mafia grew in economically wealthy areas of Sicily that offered possibilities of larger profits and facilitated control of local territory.

⁵ For an exhaustive description of Freemasonry and Carboneria rituals of initiation see Dito 1905.

which has a longer and more elaborate formula than the vows sworn in the other societies:

If I have the misfortune and the shame of breaching my oath, I consent to be myself sacrificed: may my eyes be deprived of light with a red hot iron bar; may my body be execrated by the Sons of the Widow.... I swear to obey without hesitation the orders of the Sovereign.... Under no circumstance will I neglect to help the weak and the innocent. (Gambetta 1996, 150)

The presence of symbols imported from the Catholic tradition is another important element, which distinguishes the *Carbonari* rituals from the Masonic rites. Apart from some sparse references to the Old Testament, the technical tools and skills of the craft of masonry are the main inspiration for the Masonic symbolic system.⁶ The utilisation of architectural symbolism of the medieval stonemason to represent moral conceptions has always legitimised the existence of the Masonic society in terms of traditions that the Catholic Church still perceives as being opposed to Christianity.⁷

This is in contrast with the Carboneria where ‘the language and rituals... drew heavily on Catholic liturgy and symbolism, and this, too, must have been a reason for its appeal, emotionally, and probably intellectually as well’ (Duggan 2007, 59). Indeed, although the Carboneria ‘was heavily Masonic in both structure and style’ (2007, 58), it appeared to be less elitist and more open to middle and lower social classes (Lupo 2009, 48). In what historian John Rath described as ‘a colourful, emotion-evoking ceremony, intended to appeal to the extremely religious and superstitious peasantry of Southern Italy’ (1964), the candidates for affiliation into the Carboneria were informed that, just as Jesus found heaven after earthly suffering,

⁶ At the end of the ritual of initiation the Master says ‘There will be light’, in reference to the sentence attributed to God at the creation of the world. However, Freemasons do not recognise the dogma of the Holy Trinity, nor the Catholic Church. They are required to believe in a Supreme Being to whom they refer as the ‘Great Architect of the Universe’.

⁷ ‘Riflessioni ad un anno dalla dichiarazione della Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede. Inconciliabilità tra fede cristiana e massoneria’, *L’Osservatore Romano*, 23 Febbraio 1985.

they too could eventually receive the privileges they yearned for if enough sacrifices were made. In imitation of their ‘Grand Master’ (Jesus Christ), they were crowned with thorns, and a reed was placed in their hands. ‘A dramatic representation exhibited part of the agonies of the Saviour, whilst it was solemnly announced that the great requisites were to preserve their faith, and mutually assist each other’ (Bertoldi 1821). The candidate then had to take the part of Jesus in an elaborate re-enactment of his trial before Pontius Pilate, and at the climax of the crucifixion swear loyalty to the Carboneria (Duggan 2007, 59-60).

Through the ritual performance of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as a metaphor for the fight of men against tyranny and despotism, the Carboneria symbolically represented its identity as a revolutionary secret society advocating patriotic and liberal ideas. While it is not to the Christian Jesus Christ that the ceremony alludes but to the Masonic version of ‘Grand Master of the Universe’, Christian principles and terms recur throughout the *Carbonari* ceremony: Holy Trinity, Holy Gospels, Crucifixion, Heaven, original sin. St Theobald, for example, is invoked in the ceremony as the protector of the Carboneria (Figure 6).⁸

During the ceremony, a book, a dagger and a crucifix were placed on a table. These symbols recur in the sacred oath that an initiate swears in presence of the Master of Ceremonies and of the other ‘Good Cousins’ (as the Carbonari referred to each other):

I swear and promise on my honour, on the fundamental rules of this order, on this dagger which symbolises revenge against traitors, on the Great Master of the Universe who is God, to scrupulously keep the secrets of the sacred Carboneria, not to write, engrave or draw anything without the permission of a Vendita Regolare [‘Regular Sell’ was the name of the Carbonari lodge]. I swear to help my cousins, not to undermine the honour of their families. I swear to work incessantly for the regular propagation of the

8 ‘Rituale della Carboneria Italiana Apprendente Carbonaro’, copyright unknown, published online http://www.carboneria.it/rituale_carbonaro.htm (accessed 26 March 2011).

order. Should I perjure myself, I will be happy to see this dagger cut my body into pieces, then see it burn and my ashes scattered in the wind; my name be execrated by all good cousins around the world and so help me God. (Bertoldi 1821)



Figure 6: Poster representing the symbols of the Carboneria.

As will be described in the section that follows, religious symbolism, concepts of honour and revenge, death in the case of betrayal, as well as ritual elements like blood, the gun and fire would later recur in the mafia initiation rituals described by pentiti in the 1980s. They would also appear in the rituals of those secret brotherhoods and sects, considered to be early forms of mafia organisations, with which the Freemasonry and *Carboneria* have been linked.

3.3. Brotherhoods and sects: the mafia ritual revealed

The inquiry that Palermo Police Chief Ermanno Sangiorgi conducted in the mid-1870s into the mafia *cosca* of Uditore revealed the mafia initiation ritual for the first time (Dickie 2004, 34; 2011, 102). The Uditore *cosca*, led by mafia boss Antonino

Giammona, represented itself as a religious charity called ‘Tertiaries of Saint Francis of Assisi’, assisted by Father Rosario – the chaplain of Palermo’s Vicaria Prison. Behind this religious façade, the organisation ran protection rackets among the commercial lemon groves, with the complicity of police and judicial authorities (Dickie 2004, 30). In his report, Inspector Sangiorgi explained how candidates for initiation were led to a secluded place in the presence of a group of bosses. Following a pattern of action similar to the Masonic and *Carbonari* rituals, the candidate for affiliation offered his finger to be punctured with a dagger, and then dripped blood over the sacred picture of a saint. The holy image was then burnt while the initiate swore an oath of loyalty to the society (Lupo 2004, 70; Dickie 2011, 102).

As discussed earlier, historical documents do not provide sufficient evidence to demonstrate whether, before the 1870s, the mafia existed in the form of a single organisation or of disparate ‘brotherhoods’ loosely connected to one another. Nevertheless, the similarities between Cosa Nostra and earlier criminal sects in terms of structure, principles and aims hint at the possibility that, from the 1870s onwards, mafiosi may have consolidated a network of already established, territorially based ‘mutual aid societies’. Various named—*Fratuzzi*, *Stuppagliari*, *Malfattori*, *Pugnalatori* and so forth—they can be viewed as ‘incipient *cosche* that enforced members’ silence vis-à-vis the law while helping them avoid, escape, or endure imprisonment’ (Schneider and Schneider 2003, 23). Furthermore, the rituals of initiation used by these secret societies were approximately the same, and strikingly similar to how they would appear in the descriptions of mafia defectors over a century later. As mentioned in Chapter One, the document written by the Bourbon official Pietro Calà Ulloa had noted the existence of criminal ‘brotherhoods’ and

‘sects’ spread across Sicily as early as 1838. Another organisation known as *Sacra Unione* (Sacred Union), first mentioned in 1839, controlled several areas of inland Sicily. Headed by a priest, the Sacred Union ran a cattle-rustling business under the protection of local politicians (Fiume 1984, 98-99; Paoli 2003).

Although these ‘mutual aid societies’ had different names, they had a very similar structure. They were organised hierarchically in groups and sub-groups with bosses at every level. Connections and ‘reciprocal good services’ were established between them (Cutrera 1900, 127). In 1864, politician Baron Niccolò Turrisi Colonna described in his study, entitled *Pubblica Sicurezza in Sicilia nel 1864*, a ‘sect of thieves’ which had been operating across the island for almost twenty years. Members of this ‘evil sect’ were ‘the brightest’ plantation guards and smugglers from the Palermo hinterland, had special rituals and signals to recognise one other, political protection at many levels, and a code of loyalty and secrecy known as *umilta*’ (humility) (Lupo 2009, 43-44). It was also at approximately this period of time that the word ‘mafia’ became attached to this widespread criminal phenomenon.

Another fraternal organisation from Monreale known as *Stuppagghieri* or *Stoppagghieri* (‘Fuse burners’) was at the centre of a trial held from August 14, 1877 at the Palermo Assise Court.⁹ This sect was organised into discrete sections corresponding to different zones of the town, represented by individual bosses, and overseen by a ruling body. The members were called *compari* (brothers) and, before being initiated, they had to undergo a period of close observation. During the trial, the ritual of initiation imbued with sacredness and involving the smearing of blood over a sacred picture was described:

9 In Sicilian prison jargon the expression ‘avi stuppa’ refers to a man who does not confess or speak to police.

Le forme d'inizio e di battesimo sono gravi e solenni. L'iniziato si inoltra nella sala e si ferma in piedi innanzi a una tavola sovra cui trovasi spiegata l'effigie di un santo qualsiasi purchè sia un santo. Offre ai due compari la sua mano destra e i due compari punzecchiando per mezzo di un ago il polpastrello del pollice destro ne fanno stillare tanto sangue quanto basti a bagnarne l'effigie del santo. Sopra codesta effigie insanguinata, l'iniziato presta il suo giuramento e quando il giuramento è prestato in mezzo a segrete parole degli anziani, lo iniziato va tenuto a bruciare alla candela accesa di rito la santa effigie insanguinata, e l'iniziato ha così preso il suo battesimo ed è salutato compare. (*Giornale di Sicilia*, 21 August 1877)¹⁰

The fact that Giuseppe Palmeri, founder of the *Stuppagghieri* sect, was member of Mazzini's revolutionary secret society is further evidence of the connections between secret brotherhoods and liberal political movements (Pezzino 1990, 153–154). It is also possible to identify in the *Stuppagghieri* ritual a similar symbolism to that present in the Uditore cosca: the idea of initiation as a baptism, fire and blood as symbols of annihilation of previous allegiances and death in case of betrayal, and the burning of a holy picture of a saint. This sect also had a statute of obligations for its members, which, as will be described later in this thesis, bears a striking resemblance to the statute found in the hideout of mafia boss Lo Piccolo in 2007. The rules and obligations listed included:

1. Help one other and avenge with blood the offences perpetrated at the expense of members;
2. Try in every possible way to defend and free the associate unlucky enough to end up in the hands of justice;
3. Share among the associates, according to the will of the bosses, gain from extortions, blackmail and thefts, leaving a part for associates in need;
4. Be faithful to one's oath of loyalty and keep the secret in order to avoid death which would otherwise occur within twenty-four hours. (Cutrera 1900, 119)

The sect of *Stuppagghieri* was almost identical in structure and rites to other associations like the *Fratuzzi* of Bagheria, *Oblonica* of Girgenti, *Scattialora* of

10 This testimony is presented in the original Italian to display the specific terminology used by the author of the article in reporting the ritual during the trial in 1877. English translation: *The forms of initiation and baptism are grave and solemn. The person to be initiated enters the room and stands by a table upon which there is the image of a saint; it is not relevant which saint it is as long as it is a saint. Two compari ('brothers') prick the tip of his right thumb with a needle, drawing enough blood to smear the picture of the saint. The initiate swears his oath on this bloodstained holy picture and burns it in the candle flames. This is how he becomes baptised and is greeted as compare.* Also cited in Cutrera 1900, 118–120.

Sciacca, *Scaglione* of Castrogiovanni, *Fontana nuova* of Misilmeri, *Fratellanza* of Favara, and *Zubbio* of Villabate (Crisantino 2000; Cutrera 1900, 121). All these associations were similarly subdivided into various groups corresponding to different local areas and consisting up of ten members reporting to a boss or *capodecina*.¹¹ They all shared analogous signs of recognition. For *Stuppagghieri* and *Fratuzzi*, for example, the sign would consist of a short dialogue:

–*Ahi, ca mi doli lu scagghiuni!*
–*Avi assai ca vi doli lu scagghiuni?*
–*Da festa ra' Nunziata.*
–*Cu c'era?*
–*Tiziu, Caio, Sempronio chi mi hannu ricevutu da fratuzzu.*¹²

The first account of the oath's wording dates back to 1884 and refers to the ritual of the fraternal organisation of *Fratellanza* of Girgenti (today's Agrigento). The 'solemn' ceremony of the oath was held in the presence of three members, one of whom, having tied a thread around the new member's index finger, pierced it and let a few drops of blood fall onto a sacred image, which was then burned and its ashes scattered to the wind:

The wording of the oath appears to be the following: 'I swear on my honour to be faithful to the Fratellanza just as the Fratellanza is faithful to me, and as this saint and these drops of my blood burn, so I will shed all my blood for the Fratellanza, and as this ash and this blood cannot return to their [original] state, so I cannot leave the Fratellanza. (Lestingi 1884; Cutrera 1900, 125)

Since all the accounts of initiation rites are oral,¹³ they have been susceptible to minor local variations. The ritual of initiation of socialist leader Bernardino Verro

11 As police officer Antonino Cutrera described, these organisations were divided into groups of ten members each with a boss for each group called 'capodecina' or 'decimo primo' (Cutrera 1900). Yet, as mentioned in Chapter One, Cutrera was convinced that these criminal associations were not linked to one other nor constituted part of a confederation having one common objective. He was convinced that they derived from the mafia which fought against the royal army in Palermo in 1866 and, after defeat, was dismembered into local groups, each with its own ideals and aims.

12 The original version in Sicilian dialect is left in the text. Translation: A: My tooth hurts [indicating one of his upper canines] B: When did yours hurt? A: Since the feast of Our Lady of the Annunciation. B: And who was there? A: Some men who welcomed me as their little brother (Cutrera 1900, 123).

into the sect of *Fratuzzi* of Corleone in the 1880s, exhibits a variation in the ceremonial objects. When Verro arrived, he found a group of men sitting around a table upon which lay small guns and a skull drawn on a piece of white paper. After being warned about the risks and duties, Verro swore the oath, repeating after the leader of the sect and the President of the meeting. As a sign of deference, a pin was used to prick Verro's right finger rather than using the usual dagger to pierce the lower lip. His blood was smeared over the image on a piece of paper, which was immediately burnt, while the President of the ceremony and the rest of members exchanged a fraternal kiss with Verro (Gambetta 1996, 263).¹⁴ As in the Stuppaghieri ritual, the *Fratuzzi* revealed the secret password and the sign of recognition, consisting in the touching of one's upper teeth to indicate a toothache. In 1917, judges of the Tribunale Regio of Palermo, officially declared the existence of 'a real association of criminals, called *fratuzzi*, made up of mafiosi who committed crimes against people and property'.¹⁵

On 23 January 1962, the journalist Mauro de Mauro published a dossier in the Sicilian newspaper *L'Ora* in which he reported the initiation ritual in 1916 of the previously mentioned Melchiorre Allegra. The confessions that Allegra made to the police in 1937 shed light on the mafia phenomenon, its structure and its rules in a period in which most people believed the mafia did not even exist. He accurately described how one day three 'friendly men of respect' approached him. After praising him for the 'seriousness of his outlook' the three men explained that they

13 Prior to the statute found in Lo Piccolo's hideout in 2007, only one document dating back to 1884 had been found, which was probably written to describe the ceremony 'for the benefit of the insiders' (Arlacchi 1993, 146).

14 See also 'La punciuta di Bernardino Verro', *Giornale di Sicilia*, 1 August 2004.

15 *ibid.* Chief Police of Carabinieri Reali Saverio Guarino also added: 'Not only in Corleone, but in different villages of Sicily the mafia presents itself as a real organisation'.

belonged to a very important association, which included people of all ranks of society, not excluding the highest; the members of this association were called *uomini d'onore* ('men of honour'). Their society, they explained, was known to outsiders as 'mafia' but was understood by most people only in a very vague way because only members could really be sure of its existence.¹⁶

The men of honour explained to Allegra what the rules of the organisation were and that the infringement of any of these rules was punishable by death. Members were not allowed, for example, to steal. Only in specific circumstances, and only if the bosses authorised it, was murder allowed. These men described that the society was organised into 'Families', consisting of small groups of members from neighbouring towns. A *capofamiglia* was responsible for each Family. Large Families were split up into groups of ten, each headed by a *sottocapo*. Although bosses maintained contacts between them at an interprovincial level, in general Families from different provinces enjoyed a certain independence from one another.

The oath Allegra described demonstrates varieties of the ritual in that it was the middle finger to be pierced rather than the index finger, and because he swore the oath holding the ashes of the picture already burnt:

A needle pierced the tip of my middle finger, and my blood was smeared over a small holy picture of a saint. This sacred image was burnt. I had to repeat the oath while holding the ashes in my hand: "I swear to be loyal to my brothers, never to betray them, to help them under any circumstances, and, should I fail to do so, may I burn and my ashes be scattered like the ashes of this holy image".

The examples of rituals hitherto described demonstrate that criminal associations existing in nineteenth-century Sicily took inspiration from secret societies not only in terms of their organisational structure, but also for their ritual practices and symbols.

16 Mauro de Mauro, 'Verbale delle dichiarazioni di Melchiorre Allegra', *L'Ora*, 22–23 January 1962.

As mentioned in the previous section, historians have indicated the Carbonari's openness to lower social classes as the main difference with Masonic sects (Rath 1964, 355–356). Scholars have also identified the use of Christian liturgy and symbolism as one reason for the 'intellectual and emotional appeal' of the Carbonari for a broad spectrum of society particularly in the south of Italy (Duggan 2007, 59).

Viewed from this perspective, the use of religious symbols in the ritual practices of early mafia groups may have answered a similar need to appeal to all levels of society by referring to a shared cultural patrimony. Indeed, through reference to a religious dimension in rituals, both the Carbonari and local mafia associations legitimised their existence in the name of an authority that is recognised and held official and incontrovertible both inside and outside their organisations. This contributed to shaping the perception of mafiosi not only as guarantors of order and protection – characteristics which derived from the historical circumstances described in the first section – but also as 'dispensers of a justice' which was legitimised by higher ideals; a representation that the mafia has carefully perpetuated over time through its rituals of initiation.

3.4. The ritual of initiation into Cosa Nostra

The mafia ritual of initiation was not officially recognised as the entrance point into a united, hierarchical organisation called Cosa Nostra until the mid-1980s.

The initiation that Buscetta described to Giovanni Falcone was remarkably similar to the ones that other 'men of honour' had detailed almost a century earlier. He explained that the novice was taken to a secluded location, in the presence of

three or more other men of honour of the Porta Nuova Family. The oldest would inform him that the goal of *Questa Cosa* ('This Thing', namely Cosa Nostra) was to protect the weak and eradicate abuses. After the family boss had read the fundamental rules of the society, the candidate's finger was pierced and the blood dropped over the sacred image of a saint:

The image is placed in the hand of the novice and set on fire. At this point, the novice, who must endure the burning by passing the sacred picture from one hand to another until it burns out completely, swears his loyalty to the principles of Cosa Nostra. He repeats in a solemn way: 'may my flesh be burned like this sacred picture if I betray the oath'.... After the oath is taken, and only at that point, the man of honour is introduced to the boss of the Family. Before that, he is not supposed to know who the boss is, nor is he supposed to know of the existence of Cosa Nostra as such.¹⁷

The initiation of mafia defector Leonardo Messina, described as the moment he had long been waiting for, is also similar to the one delineated by Buscetta:

I choose Vincenzo Burcheri as my godfather.... He was standing there, along with the whole Provincial Commission. He pricked my finger with a needle to let my blood drop over the holy picture of Our Lady of the Annunciation. He stained it with my blood. He set it on fire while I was passing it from one hand to another. Then they told me what words to repeat: 'As paper I burn you, as Saint I adore you. As this paper burns so my flesh must burn if one day I betray Cosa Nostra.'¹⁸

The 'Decalogue' of rules, a rulebook thought to have been drawn up as a 'guide to being a good mafioso', is also revealed during the ritual of initiation. Mafiosi are prohibited from going to bars and looking at friends' wives, while they are obliged to treat their own wives with respect. Other activities apparently beyond the reach of mafiosi are being friends with police and appropriating money if it belongs to other mafia members or to other Families.¹⁹ Mafia pentito Salvatore Contorno, who

17 TdP, Ordinanza-Sentenza n. 3162/89, n. 1165/89 R.G.U.I., emessa nel procedimento penale contro Michele Greco + 18 per gli omicidi Riina, Mattarella, La Torre, Di Salvo (Omicidi Politici), 1198–1199.

18 Tribunale di Caltanissetta, processo n.5/93 R.G. a carico di Cammarata Pino + altri., trascrizione dell'udienza del collaboratore Messina Leonardo in data 10/03/94, 13–15.

19 TdP, Processo Verbale di Interrogatorio di Antonino Calderone con il G.I. Giovanni Falcone, 7 Gennaio 1988, 813718–813719.

confirmed Buscetta's confession during the maxi-trial, referred to these rules as *I Dieci Comandamenti* ('The Ten Commandments') of Cosa Nostra:

I was taken by Mimmo Teresi, (God rest his soul!) into the presence of Stefano Bontade (God rest his soul!) and of other men of honour. The oath was like the Ten Commandments, do not look at the wives of other men of honour, always tell the truth and if one betrays this Cosa Nostra his body will burn like the sacred picture they put into my hands after they pricked my finger. This is how I became man of honour.²⁰

Buscetta's confessions, along with those of other pentiti who belonged to the losing side of the Second Mafia War, provide consistent versions of the story about the 'mythical origins and noble scope of Cosa Nostra'. In particular, their testimony revealed the myth of 'an old mafia of honour and respect, born to protect the weak from the injustices perpetrated by the powerful,' which stood in stark contrast to a new mafia dedicated to drug trafficking and money making.

Mafia defectors frequently blame this alleged 'collapse' of the mafia's original ideology as a justification for having abandoned the organisation. For example, Buscetta explained that:

When I entered Cosa Nostra I had, and still have, the same spirit. But from the 1970s onwards, this organisation Cosa Nostra, if we can still call it with this name, has subverted its original ideals which might not seem very pure to people living within the law, but so beautiful for us who lived in this association. These new people in charge have begun doing things that do not coincide with the principles of Cosa Nostra, using violence, which does not belong to Cosa Nostra's principles.²¹

Neither the mafia nor its rituals can be understood except in the light of its tradition, mythical though it is. Analysing this myth is necessary to understand the consideration with which every mafioso takes his own *persona* as man of honour as well as mafia society as a whole. Most importantly, it shows how mafia religion, and

20 This section of the court hearing of Salvatore Contorno during the maxi-trial of Palermo is available online <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-U5UvtWqW2c> (Accessed 23 June 2012).

21 Court hearing of Tommaso Buscetta, maxi-trial, 26 January 1986, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aуз7IЈagCds&feature=relmfu> (Accessed 07 September 2012).

the concept of ‘divine justice’ in particular, strictly relates to this powerful mythical identity.

3.4.1. I giustizieri: the myth of the Beati Paoli

It is common for secret societies to place their origins in a mythical past related to the cultural traditions of the society to which they belong. The history of every group, as perpetuated inside it, serves to justify a claim to power through ancient knowledge (La Fontaine 1985, 41). The *Carbonari*, for example, claimed descent from the *colliers* (charcoal burners) of Germany. According to this legend, the necessity of mutual assistance had induced the *colliers*, who inhabited the vast forests of Germany, to unite themselves against robbers and enemies (Bertoldi 1821, 1-2; Dito 1905). Similarly, Freemasons claim direct descent from the historical Knights Templar through its fourteenth-century members who took refuge in Scotland, or other countries where suppression of the Knights Templar was not enforced.

Cosa Nostra traces its origins to the mythical, ancient times of the *Beati Paoli* (‘Blessed Pauls’), a secret society thought to have existed in medieval Sicily. No historical evidence, however, confirms the existence of this sect (Renda 1988). The 1790 *Opuscoli Palermitani* (‘Pamphlets on Palermo’) of the Marquis of Villabianca, author of the famous *Diari Palermitani* written at the end of the eighteenth century, provide the main source of information about its alleged existence. The Marquis of Villabianca drew exclusively from the oral tradition to write about the ‘Beati Paoli, o sia scellerati uomini’, specifying how, by the end of 1700s, ‘di questa setta ‘se n’era perduta la semenza’ (the seed of this sect had been lost) (Natoli 2010,). However, it

was through the historical novel *I Beati Paoli* written by Luigi Natoli (nome de plume, William Galt) and published in several episodes in the *Giornale di Sicilia* (1909–1910) that the deeds of the Beati Paoli acquired the fame and the popularity they still enjoy today. In Natoli's novel, the Beati Paoli were born to fight against the injustices of the nobility that, by virtue of their feudal privileges, exercised *mero et mixto imperio*, administering civil and criminal justice in its territories. In reaction to these abuses of power, a group of noble *vendicatori* (avengers) took justice in their own hands by uniting in a secret society. 'As a real court of justice, this sect was born to defend the weak and the oppressed, acting in the shadows and with maximum secrecy' (Natoli 2010, XXX). The Beati Paoli themselves identified their mythical origins in a medieval secret sect called *Vendicosi* ('Avengers').

Natoli based his novel upon popular tradition and legends, setting the scene in early eighteenth-century Palermo. Like Alexander Dumas's *The Three Musketeers* or Eugenio Sue's *Mysteries of Paris*, the Beati Paoli represented the 'fight of good against evil experienced by a community of oppressed, and avenged by the superhuman hero' (Natoli 2010, XXII). This hero is a sort of Robin Hood who has no trust in the authorities and takes justice into his own hands. The Beati Paoli hid in caves and hideaways under the city of Palermo where they held their meetings and decided on sentences.²²As for the religious reference in its name, it is believed that it may have been inspired either by Paul the Apostle or Saint Francis de Paul.

Strong religious references also characterise the initiation ritual of the Beati Paoli as detailed in Natoli's novel. The author explained that the initiate was taken

22 Legend has it that they held secret meetings in the fourth-century A.D. Christian catacombs that can be found in the Palermo area of Il Capo. Interestingly, a similar immense underground hideout was discovered in the property of mafia boss Michele Greco in 1986. According to some defectors, it was the place where members of the mafia Commission used to meet.

blindfolded into a dark cave. At one end of the room, there was a statue of Christ illuminated by two candles on top of a stone altar. A book lay open at the foot of the cross. The hooded men who were waiting for the initiate took off his blindfold and explained that the society was aimed 'at a work of justice and vengeance'. The boss of the Beati Paoli then told the person to be initiated:

You are about to enter a place in which no profane person has ever entered before. This will commit you to a life beyond imagination. Are you sure you can keep your promises? If you are not, say so now. You will be taken out the same way you came in and you will be free; we trust your silence. But if you are sure, be aware that you cannot go back and that in every moment and every place there will always be, invisible and infallible, the avenging arm of our justice. (Natoli 2010, 462–463)

To this, the initiate responded: 'I trust you and you trust me. You own my life and I place myself wholly at your service'. Then the men cut a cross with a knife on his arm letting some blood drop. With a pen dipped in his blood the initiate draw a cross on a page of the sacred book containing the Gospels and the Epistles of St. Paul. In the name of the sacred gospels, of the Apostle Paul and of his blood, the initiate was asked to keep the secret and to devote his body and soul to the venerable society of the Beati Paoli: 'I swear that this cross written with my own blood symbolises my death if I break the oath'.

As can be seen, the Beati Paoli ritual of initiation bears a strong resemblance to that of Cosa Nostra. The wording of the oath, the blood and fire are symbolic components of the mafia ceremony too. In particular, the references to Saint Paul as a symbol of the secret society, the cross, the religious image of God to symbolise the sacred witness of the ceremony suggest that Cosa Nostra may have found inspiration in the Beati Paoli for its own ritual scheme. At the end of the ritual, the initiate enters the Beati Paoli becoming one of the 'fratelli' (Natoli 2010, 131). Tommaso Buscetta, for example, used to refer to fellow mafia members as 'confratelli'. The mafia

affiliate is also greeted as *compare*, which has the general meaning of ‘brother’. The influence exercised by the Beati Paoli on the mafia, however, goes beyond the similarities found in the initiation ritual and symbols, and plays a key role in the identity and self-image of its members and in that of Cosa Nostra.

When Luigi Natoli first published *I Beati Paoli* in several episodes in *Giornale di Sicilia* (1909–1910) it was an immediate success, to the point that the novel would later be reprinted as one volume in numerous editions and formats. In Sicily, particularly in the area of Palermo, Natoli’s *I Beati Paoli* became ‘syllabus and sacred text, kept at the bedside of the *pater familias* who, in the long winter nights, would read with emotion the different chapters to his close family gathered in religious silence’ (Natoli 2010, XXVI). For instance, Tommaso Buscetta told how his father used to read him about the deeds of the Beati Paoli, a story which he claimed would profoundly influence him (Biagi 1987, 91). Even today, the Beati Paoli represent part of the collective cultural patrimony of Sicily. Arriving at Palermo airport, for example, tourists will find Natoli’s novel presented side by side with tourist guides on Sicily on the main entrance shelf of the Flaccovio bookshop. Moreover, it is common to see the deeds of the Beati Paoli represented in the famous *Opera dei Pupi* (Opera of the Puppets) of Palermo, or upon the colourful *Carretti Siciliani* (Sicilian horse-drawn carts) and the characteristic three-wheeled vehicles (Figure 7).²³

The Beati Paoli novel is still alive in today’s mafia transculture. In many instances, the testimony of mafia defectors provides clear evidence of the fact that this novel is well read within the organisation. In the preface to *Storia illustrata di*

23 Images photographed by the author of this thesis, Palermo, 15 July 2012.

Cosa Nostra, former Antimafia Chief Prosecutor Pietro Grasso confirmed this point asserting that already ‘in the 1960s there was no mafia boss or *picciotto* (mafia soldier) who had not read Natoli’s classics *I Beati Paoli* and *Coriolano della Floresta*’. It is difficult to establish to what extent Grasso’s assumption corresponds to reality. However, Buscetta once revealed that in the Ucciardone Prison of Palermo there was an inmate who knew the two novels by heart and would stage them in the prison infirmary for his fellow detainees, including powerful mafia bosses. According to Buscetta, at the request of these bosses, the inmate had to postpone his release to be able to finish the representation of the *Beati Paoli* for his ‘illustrious’ audience.



Other examples can be found in courtroom confrontations between mafiosi. For example, mafia boss Totò Riina and defector Gaspare Mutolo faced each other in Court in 1993 throwing the characters of Natoli’s novel at one another. Riina accused

Mutolo of being like ‘Matteo Lo Vecchio’, a character of the Beati Paoli who was murdered for betraying the society.²⁴ Mutolo, in turn, accused the Corleonesi under Riina of having broken the codes and principles of the mafia to which he referred during the confrontation as ‘Beati Paoli’, rather than Cosa Nostra. To the President of the Court who ironically commented on the defendants’ knowledge of the Sicilian Popular Literature, Riina replied saying ‘that is the sort of literature that one either reads or reads’, meaning that it is imperative for a Sicilian to know it.

One possible explanation as to why the mafia traces its origins to this mythical sect can be identified in its historical developments described in the first sections of this chapter. One of the immediate consequences of the climate of violence and of the inadequacy of State’s policies in post-unification Sicily was that it provided the necessary conditions in which ‘the moral legitimisation of the mafiosi mindset’ developed. The character of the mafioso, developing as a sort of spontaneous reaction against the injustices of established order, surrounded himself with the ‘romantic aura’ of a popular hero, something which would characterise his actions and behaviour in an ambivalent way until the 1950s (Catanzaro 1992, 4). It is also worth remembering the role that the *sicilianist* paradigm played in creating and spreading this image. Interpreting the mafia as the cultural product of a particularly fierce and courageous reaction to foreign powers, this culturalistic interpretation made the defence of ‘mafia spirit’ the early mafia’s most evident and enduring legacy in Sicilian ideology.

24 TdP, CdA, Sez. I, n. 8/91 R.G.C.A., n. 9/95 Reg. Sent., sentenza nei confronti di Greco Michele +12, 85–86. The courtroom confrontation between Riina and Mutolo is available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Ullgd0pfqo> (accessed 14 March 2012).

The myth of mafiosi as *uomini d'onore* ('men of honour') and *uomini di rispetto* ('men of respect') who proudly defended the weak against injustices would be upheld both inside and outside the organisation. It was through rituals of initiation, in particular, that mafia members would carefully safeguard this myth and faithfully pass it on from one generation to another. Buscetta's description of his own initiation provides evidence of this:

They told me that it [Cosa Nostra] was born to defend the weak from the injustices of the powerful, to sustain values as friendship and respect for one's word, the word of honour. Cosa Nostra dictated the law on the island because we Sicilians always felt neglected and abandoned by foreign governments and by the government in Rome. It did so even when its name was not Cosa Nostra. I was told in fact that it was once known as Carboneria, then Beati Paoli and later became Cosa Nostra. (Arlacchi 1994, 15-16)

As this example demonstrates, that of the Beati Paoli was not the only myth to which the mafia would trace its roots. The Carbonari, described by historian Giuseppe Ricciardi (Ricciardi 1846) as a 'trustworthy and charitable secret society in times which were everything but trustworthy and charitable', also appear in pentiti's descriptions about the origins of Cosa Nostra. Both associations, indeed, are held in high regard in Sicilian society and thus provide the mafia with a fertile mythological background.

A similar 'romantic' tone to that used by Buscetta in describing his personal impressions of the mafia appears in the confession of mafia defector Salvatore Cucuzza. Cucuzza was informed during his initiation that Cosa Nostra had deep roots in the Beati Paoli, from whom it inherited its values and aims:

They referred to the Beati Paoli and to the need to administer justice. Justice not in the sense in which people generally intend it, but justice according to Cosa Nostra: the need to respect others and women, not to commit kidnapping in Sicily, help people in the local area should they have needed it, keep an eye on thieves and local criminals and intervene if necessary. (Dino 2008, 63-64)

Similarly, Leonardo Vitale confessed that he was tricked into joining the mafia by claims that the society was born to fight thieves and help the weak, in the tradition of *I Beati Paoli* and *Coriolano della Floresta* (Gambetta 1996, 131). On the occasion of his initiation, representatives of the Altarello di Baida Family told him that Cosa Nostra derived from the Beati Paoli and its aim remained to defend the weak and fight injustices:

They pricked my middle finger with a bitter orange thorn and set fire to a sacred holy picture asking me to repeat the sacred oath of the Beati Paoli. After that, I kissed all the men of honour attending the ceremony on the lips, without the tongue however, and I officially entered into the Altarello Family.²⁵

As will be discussed in the next section, this idea of justice legitimised by a mythical identity had important implications on the religious ‘moral’ dimension of the organisation.

3.4.2. The myth of Cosa Nostra: between social and divine justice

The myth of the Beati Paoli, like the Carboneria, embodies the typical sets of attitudes and behaviour, upon which the mafia has managed, with some success, to build its own image. The idea of mutual assistance and secrecy, and the myth of the mysterious avengers who, in the name of God, take justice into their own hands to defend the weak against abuses, perfectly suits the identity of a society which established itself as an industry of protection and order with a willingness to use violence. By claiming origins in a mythical past in which private justice and violence were legitimised by higher ideals, Cosa Nostra has represented itself as ‘dispenser of social justice’. As mafia defector Antonino Calderone recalls:

²⁵ Procura della Repubblica di Palermo, procedimento penale contro Michele Greco + 18, n.3162/89 A-P.M., n. 1165/89 R.G.U.I., Vol. 8, 1238–1239.

When I was young, I was proud of belonging to Cosa Nostra. The importance we felt, the consideration and respect that others gave us, all these things derived from the fact that we, the mafiosi, had the right to take care of the problems of others, of society. We were asked to do so. We were the authority chosen to maintain order in both the public and the private sphere. (Arlacchi 1994, 16)

The concept of personal and private justice, which does not recognise State jurisdiction, appears to be important to Cosa Nostra for several reasons. From one perspective, it helps to legitimise its activities and aims in the eyes of its members and, partly, in those of external society. From another, it seems to blur the boundaries between the ‘private justice’ that Cosa Nostra claims to exercise and the only other form of justice mafiosi say they recognise, ‘divine justice’. This does not imply a direct correspondence between ‘mafia and divine justice’, nor suggests that ‘mafiosi believe they are invested in something of a divine mission’ as a number of scholars have argued (Dino 2008, 70–71). Rather, in light of the considerations about the persisting mythology developed both inside and outside the mafia, one can deduce that religion, at least in those aspects that relate to mafia rituals of initiation, essentially works as a ‘myth’. Like the myth of the Beati Paoli, it serves mafia affiliates to justify their own actions and practices in the name of ‘higher’ values. In other words, religion provides the mafia with a source of legitimisation. In order for this myth to exert its power at a social level, religious values and their correspondent symbols need to be recognised and held as indisputable and authoritative by everyone, irrespective of one’s individual observance of, or faith in, the creed from which they are derived.

To explain this aspect in terms of mere exploitation of religious values and symbols by the mafia risks underestimating the role that religion plays not only for the mafia organisation, but also for external society as a whole. The Sicilian ‘devout’ model of religiosity, as described in the first chapter, offers one possible explanation

for the reason why mafia members acknowledge the ‘weight’ of religious values and symbols without the necessary moral commitment. The role that the Catholic Church has played in this regard is also an important factor to consider. The indulgence demonstrated by part of the clergy towards the formal and exterior aspects of mafia religion and towards the explicit appeal to faith voiced by mafiosi has contributed to reinforcing the idea, commonly held by mafia members, that religious practices and illegal and criminal activities are not necessarily incompatible (Fasullo 1993; Naro 1994a; Scordato 1997). Therefore, the ambiguous response of the Church to the mafia phenomenon exercised indirect influence on the process through which mafia members have defined their identity as *giustizieri*, dispensers of ‘natural justice’: not a justice that responds to a sort of ‘divine mission’, then, but a justice which, in mafia ideology, is simply not incompatible with divine justice.²⁶

This assumption is supported by the numerous confessions of mafia defectors who have frequently stressed their intentions to repent before God rather than before the State. Asked whether he saw a contradiction between being religious and committing crimes, mafia defector Leonardo Messina replied:

They taught me that the mafia was born to administer justice. Therefore, there was no contradiction for me. Moreover, do you know that I now feel a traitor before God?

26 Nevertheless, it is necessary to note how members of the clergy who have long been involved in the Antimafia sector have stressed on numerous occasions the need for the Church to take a firm position against the mafia phenomenon and to acknowledge state judicial authority when it comes to matters of ‘repentance’ or the judgment of crimes. As Fr. Nino Fasullo, director of *Segno*, has argued: ‘It is now commonly believed that a member of the mafia just like anyone else can repent before God, but not before other men.... The underlying idea being that, since repentance before God can only be administered by the Church, then the State, society, judges, and police must take a step back and let priests deal with it. As if you could only repent in front of God and not in front of men.... When repentance is reduced to a mere question of conscience, devoid of all social and ecclesiastical meaning, not only does it deny the sacramental nature of the Church, but it also becomes a useless, religious, moral, and social trick’. Cited in Dino 2001, available online at <http://www.narcomafie.it/2001/07/10/il-pentimento-tra-stato-e-chiesa/> (Accessed 02 January 2013).

When I was an assassin, I went to church with a clear conscience. Now that I am *pentito*, I cannot pray in tranquillity.²⁷

Similarly, mafia defector Gioacchino Pennino claimed that the boss of the mafia Family to which he belonged ‘used to take decisions based on the need to defend territory against injustices and on the conviction that he was the administrator of justice’:

My uncle used to go and pray on the tombs of those the mafia had had to kill.... According to mafiosi’s concept of justice, they had to administer justice against the State which was considered to be an enemy, and completely inefficient. (Dino 2008, 72)

Giuseppe Marchese from the Corso dei Mille mafia Family gave a similar answer during an interview:

Mafiosi are always religious.... They pray and then go to kill. A contrast? There is and there is not. Depends on how you look at things. You see, to be a mafioso is like having a job: you believe in what you are doing and, at the same time, you also believe other things. If you go to commit a murder you do not see it as something wrong because they have made you believe that [the person to be killed] is a piece of shit, is somebody who needs to be eliminated, erased from the face of the Earth.... Cosa Nostra is like this, it is a wrong thing. (Dino 2008, 110-111)

One important consequence observed by sociologist Alessandra Dino is that, by dispensing justice in the name of higher values, mafiosi create a mechanism which grants them immunity from guilt for their crimes. ‘Religion helps free men and women from all moral dilemma and feelings of guilt for the moral code’ (Allum and Siebert 2003, 146; Dino 2008, 71). If one kills for a right cause, such as defending another mafia member or avenging an offence to a society that acts in defence of ideals like social justice and honour, then killing does not represent a problem.

For example, according to one state witness:

If the State was to go to war against another State, let say Yugoslavia or Germany, and an Italian soldier killed thirty or forty enemies, would you consider him a criminal or a war hero? Now, you see, I was like the soldier of a State, my State was Cosa Nostra, and killing meant carrying out orders from above. Those I was killing were my enemies, and I was doing my duty. I used to hate it when something went wrong, when I could not do my job. That is when I felt guilty. I was only interested in the opinion of my

²⁷ Interview with Rita Mattei, January 1997, Rai-teca, Rome. Also in Scarpinato 1998.

people, the people of Cosa Nostra, I was not interested in anyone else's opinion, just as an Italian soldier would not be interested in what the Yugoslavs or the Germans may think of him. (Scarpinato 1998, 48)

The assumption that mafia leaders take decisions in the name of a justice legitimised by higher values has important implications for the rest of the mafia community. On the one hand, mafiosi at lower echelons will obey the orders they receive without questioning the righteousness of their actions; on another, the execution of orders that have been given from above triggers a mechanism of 'de-responsabilisation' from the crime committed. As mafia defector Santino di Matteo revealed in an interview:

Unfortunately, I could have not done otherwise. I was in that situation. There was a fight within Cosa Nostra. There was a mafia war. Having to choose between my life and theirs, I chose theirs. There was no choice: my life or theirs. If I had refused to kill, I would have died. And, besides, let's be honest, I do not have anybody's death on my conscience. I have never decided to kill anybody. I have always been ordered. I simply had to obey, as I did not have a choice. (Puglisi and Tumbarello 2009)

In light of these considerations, it is now necessary to analyse the exact dynamics of the initiation ceremony through which mafia values are 'inscribed' on the new 'identity' that an individual acquires when entering Cosa Nostra and the resulting effects that the ceremony has on the identity and roles of mafia leaders. This will contribute to explaining the evident ability of mafia bosses to obtain obedience and respect from new affiliates.

3.5. 'La Combinazione': a symbolic ritual performance

The initiation ritual of Cosa Nostra, called *combinazione* (from *combinare*, lit. 'to make') or *punciuta* (lit. 'pricking'), is the process that 'makes' a man into a 'man of honour'. Through the lens of socio-anthropological theories of ritual and symbols discussed in the previous chapter, the mafia initiation ceremony can be seen as an example of cultural performance and as a marked event of heightened awareness

where 'self-conscious and symbolic acts are presented and communicated within a circumscribed space' (Madison and Hamera 2006, xvii). In particular, it is interpreted in this study as a symbolic ritual performance that displays the core values of its social group and enables transformation within its social structure.

Social structure has previously been defined as the hierarchical arrangement of roles and statuses that social actors can let 'emerge' through ritual performance to transform or consolidate it. Within this context, the Sicilian mafia is a community with a social structure 'in action'. The hierarchically structured social relationships of Cosa Nostra emerge during the rite of initiation, where the allocation of roles in the performance, and the identity of those conducting it, is modelled on the structure of the society itself. The candidate undergoing initiation plays a passive and inferior role, which reflects the position within the mafia hierarchy he will occupy after entering the organisation. The whole mafia Family attends the ceremonial event, although it is usually the eldest member, or the Family boss, who explains the rules, reveals the secret knowledge and myths about the organisation, and conducts the entire ceremony. The new affiliate, because of the ritual, loses his previous status to assume a new reified, collective identity. Simultaneously, by showing and revealing the identity, roles and statuses of mafia members attending the initiation, mafia leaders partially mobilise the social structure of the organisation in order to accommodate new members whilst consolidating its inner order and the hierarchy of roles.

The initiation rite of Cosa Nostra presents another fundamental characteristic of ritual performance, namely *reflexivity* (Bauman and Briggs 1990, 73). The ceremony of *la punciuta* is reflexive in that it regularly shows its members their

origins, ideals and structural roles. Reflexivity, for example, refers to moments in rituals in which mafiosi become conscious of, and can reflect upon, the myths of their organisation and its aims. By presenting their collective representations, and reflecting on who and what they claim to be as a group and as individuals, mafia members are not only able to meta-comment upon established narratives, but also to generate new ones. Through reference to myths belonging to Sicilian cultural patrimony and manipulation of symbols derived from the Catholic creed, mafiosi construct the identity of Cosa Nostra upon an ideological foundation that is already familiar to, and held sacred by, the candidates undergoing affiliation.

3.5.1. Sacred symbolism and religious ritual

Drawing from sociological and anthropological theories of religion described earlier, rituals are interpreted within this analysis as the primary mechanism through which the mafia achieves solidarity, cohesion and social order as well as transformation at an individual and collective level of identity.

Viewed from a Durkheimian perspective, one can infer how the ritual of initiation offers mafia members regular occasions to gather and collectively celebrate the existence of the organisation, its values and its scope. Using symbolic language that refers to the mafia 'moral' dimension, the initiation rite becomes an important source of *collective conscience* (Durkheim 2001, 168). It establishes among the mafia members a sort of religious communion that ultimately generates enduring emotions, obligations of conduct, and mutual solidarity. Mafia defector Antonino Calderone, for example, remembered his initiation as a particularly intense ceremony and claimed that it left a profound imprint on him at a deeply emotional level:

That night everything seemed beautiful, out of ordinary. I was entering into a new world, full of exceptional people ready to risk their lives to help other men of honour, to vindicate them. It was powerful beyond imagination. (Arlacchi 1994, 57)

For the participants involved in the mafia initiation, religious beliefs have a kind of ‘surplus value’ above other secular ideas. The manipulation of religious symbols serves several purposes. First, it adds sacredness to, and enhances, the ritual ceremony. Second, it reinforces the collective identity of the mafia upon cultural values (e.g. religion and honour) which are widely recognised as authoritative and indisputable. Without this sense of identity, there would be no solidarity, no allegiance to one another, and there would be no sense in which Cosa Nostra could perceive itself as an integrated society. Third, the use of religious symbols like the holy picture of the *Madonna dell’Annunciazione* – chosen by Cosa Nostra as its patron saint – reminds members of their affiliation, thereby increasing the stability of their society. Therefore, the survival of the mafia as a group and the affiliates’ recognition of their membership depend on one another. The combination of symbols and collective action integrates the mafia community by inculcating in its members a recognition of those values and symbols upon which Cosa Nostra has solidly structured its ‘moral’ dimension.

3.5.2. The symbolic value of ‘la combinazione’

Symbols of the mafia affiliation ceremony do not simply mark the stages of initiation, they are also imbued with a set of meanings derived from external social contexts, both secular and sacred. Yet, they are more than mere projections of the society to which the mafia belongs. The symbols used in mafia rituals have the distinguishing traits of what Victor Turner defined ‘symbols in action’ (1969, 42–

43). They serve as ‘a set of evocative devices for rousing, channelling, and domesticating powerful emotions’ that deeply affect the candidates for affiliation.

The picture of the *Madonna dell’Annunciazione*, for example, can be interpreted as a bipolar symbol having reference to the sensory experience of holding the burning card, and, at the same time, to the supposed moral dimension of Cosa Nostra. It also presents the three properties of meaning that Turner identified in his studies on symbols: the *exegetical* meaning—that of being the patron saint of the mafia—is revealed in the sacred oath (‘As saint I adore you...’); the *operational* meaning corresponds to the way the holy picture is stained with blood and then burnt; and the *positional* meaning derives from the way the card is used in connection with other symbols—fire and blood—within the whole ritual complex (Merlino 2012b).

The fire with which the holy picture is burnt is a ‘multivocal’ symbol that condenses a number of powerful meanings derived from the Christian tradition. Fire is symbol of *purification* and destruction of the mafia affiliates’ previous identities, and of the creation of a *tabula rasa* upon which to inscribe the new codes and values of the organisation. In this regard, numerous references to fire as purification can be found in the Bible.²⁸ Fire was used in religious ceremonies to sacrifice victims to immolate (e.g. the perennial fire Exodus 29:18) and as means to purify people, places and sacred objects (Leviticus 13:52). Reference to fire as symbol of destruction in the Bible can be found in the example of Sodom and Gomorra (Genesis 19:24) and in the Book of Isaiah (10:17): ‘The light of Israel will become a fire, and his Holy One a flame. And it will burn and devour his thorns and briers in one day.’

²⁸The English word ‘purify’ is related to the main Greek word used in the New Testament for fire. As such, it denotes one of the main metaphors of the use of fire, namely as a tool of purification.

Within the mafia initiation rite, fire also symbolises the ultimate ‘punishment’ in case of betrayal. The ‘flesh’ of the *man of honour* ‘will burn’ should he betray the organisation as the holy picture burns during the initiation oath. In Christianity, the final destination of all the enemies of God is the ‘lake of fire’ (Revelation 19:20; 20:10). The first chronological reference to hell in the Bible (Matthew 25:41) details the description by Jesus of how betrayal will be met with eternal fire: ‘Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels’. The symbol of fire to represent punishment is also evident in the Gospel of John (15:5–6):

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

The blood spilled on the sacred image represents an apparent example of what Turner defined as a ‘dominant ritual symbol’: it condenses in one single referent the meanings of sacrifice, rebirth and death; unifies different *significata* like a natural kinship with other mafia members and the final punishment in the case of betrayal; it polarises the meaning between the sensory—the pain, the smell, the visual effect caused by the cut—and the mafia normative system, which has ultimate control on the life and death of its affiliates.

Ultimately, symbols like blood and fire become the expression of values of death and rebirth: death of the initiate as a common man and rebirth as a man of honour. For this reason, initiation corresponds to a religious baptism for the new affiliates: fire is a symbol of rebirth in the catholic ritual and of death for a mafia initiate; the godfather is a figure recurring in both ceremonies as the person charged with accompanying the novice and as guarantor of his morality; the Saint represents

the sacred witness in baptism and in the mafia ritual; the candidate undergoing initiation swears his commitment to renounce his previous life, equal to the renunciation of Satan for a person joining a Christian community (Principato and Dino 2003, 118–119).

The religious symbolism with which the ritual is imbued accompanies the member for affiliation through the ‘threshold’ that separates two manifestly different worlds. Above all, it contributes to providing the initiate with a stronger, collective identity, a new social status accompanied by social consideration and respect. The testimony given by mafiosi who turned state’s evidence and described their ritual of initiation provide a clear example of how pervasive the experience of entering Cosa Nostra is. Mafia defector Antonino Calderone recalled the moment of his initiation as something particularly ‘precise and special’ (Arlacchi 1994, 58). He chose ‘uncle’ Peppino as his godfather for being the man who had ‘cultivated’ and followed him until initiation. His godfather asked him which hand he used to shoot and took a needle to pinch his trigger finger and let some blood drop over a holy card:

I looked at it. It was Our Lady of the Annunciation, the patron saint of Cosa Nostra, whose celebration falls on March 25th. Uncle Peppino lit a match and began burning the sacred image asking me to hold it in my hands and keep it until it had completely burnt. I clasped my hands to hold the card, I was very excited and I was sweating, and I looked at the image turning into ashes. In the meantime, he asked me to repeat the oath after him, that If I ever betrayed the commandments of Cosa Nostra, I would burn like the image of the Lady of Annunciation. (Arlacchi 1994, 59).

3.6. ‘La Punciuta’: a rite of passage into a secret society

The ceremony of initiation of the mafia is a ritual, and more specifically, it is a *rite de passage*, to use the expression introduced by ethnographer Arnold van Gennep in 1909. The mafia initiation ritual clearly reflects the characteristics of the rites of passage.

1. Separation: this phase begins when an individual enters into contact with the mafia member who is responsible for monitoring him closely to determine whether he has the potential for becoming a mafioso. Until he becomes a ‘man of honour’, he is carefully monitored and supervised. For example, mafia defector Leonardo Messina revealed that:

It is not that one wakes up one day and says: ‘Oh, today I belong to Cosa Nostra’. Instead, they follow you since your childhood, they raise and nurture you, they teach you how to shoot and kill. Then there are also men in whose destiny is written that they will be bosses. The first step is that of being ‘avvicinati’ [approached] after a period that may last from one to twenty years depending on the person, until somebody comes to you one day and tells you that your time has come to enter the organisation. When they call you, you already know where you are going because you have already served these men. And, besides, there is always a person to lead you. (Bolzoni 2008, 19–20)

Similarly, Antonino Calderone explained how one becomes man of honour after a long period of scrutiny by the elders. During this period, the qualities of the candidate as a ‘man of action’ are tested. He has to prove his ability to commit himself totally to the organisation and to carry out the duties that affiliation imposes. The main prerequisite is, without doubt, the ability to shoot and kill.²⁹ For example, Leonardo Vitale, the man of honour who turned state’s evidence in 1973 following a mystical crisis, revealed that he had entered the mafia at the behest of his uncle, mafia boss Giovan Battista Vitale, when he was only nineteen. Prior to his affiliation, he had been asked by his uncle to shoot a horse and to subsequently kill a rival mafioso as a trial to test his skills under close observation. Having successfully passed his trial, Vitale underwent initiation.³⁰ This by no means implies that all mafiosi are blood-related, as anybody with the right ‘credentials’ to join the organisation can be initiated into Cosa Nostra. Calderone pointed out in this regard

29 TdP, processo verbale di interrogatorio di Antonino Calderone con il G.I. Giovanni Falcone, 7 Gennaio 1988, 813718.

30 Procedimento Penale contro Michele Greco ed altri, 3168/89 –P.M., 1238.

that only those candidates who did not belong to ‘blood families of attested mafia tradition’ had to undergo pre-initiation trials and the long scrutiny from senior members. Likewise, Buscetta stressed that professionals, businessmen and all the other figures who represent ‘the clean face of the organisation’, do not need to face these tests.³¹

The fact that individuals cannot put themselves forward for initiation but are chosen by the mafia elders reinforces the bonds between members of different generations at different hierarchical levels while, at the same time, reinforcing the authority of the bosses and their prestige. ‘The outer circle of young men willing to do anything surrounds the mafiosi’, Calderone explains, ‘depends on them, but also constitutes an essential part of the mafiosi’s public recognition’ (Siebert 1996, 16). ‘A man of honour seeks power and takes it, and he is proud of it. But a great deal of his power is given by others’ (Arlacchi 1994, 149). For this reason, certain mafia members appear to be endowed with a charisma that resonates inside and outside the organisation. For example, mafia defector Maurizio Avola described his profound admiration for Catania mafia boss Nitto Santapaola, even before joining Cosa Nostra:

It was a sudden flash. I was impressed by his story. In my eyes, he was like a Robin Hood who stole from the rich to give back to the poor. Suddenly I realised what I really wanted to become in life. I wanted to become Santapaola’s soldier. I would have sacrificed my life for him. I kept hearing his name Santapaola, Santapaola, Santapaola. Something I cannot explain pushed me towards his family.... I was proud of two things about being Catanian: of the patron saint Sant' Agata and of having Nitto Santapaola as a godfather. Everybody was deferential and respectful towards him. (Gugliotta and Pensavalli 2008, 25)

The image of boss Santapaola emerging from Avola’s description appears to be modelled upon the myth of ‘moral’ *giustizieri* embodied by the Beati Paoli. A similar

31 *ibid.*, 1198.

perception appears in Gaspare Mutolo's testimony. Mutolo described the effect that men of honour had on his imagination before he joined Cosa Nostra:

In my imagination, those men characterised by their wisdom and by being the persons to whom people turned when in need of help fascinated me. When I became a member, it was for me a new life, with new rules. For me only Cosa Nostra existed. There were precise rules and what they said was right and true, because it was based on the idea of mutual respect and assistance. I was fascinated by that world. (CPM 1993)

2. Transition: The stage of *transition* begins during the 'trial' period, in which a candidate for affiliation must undergo before the official ceremony. During this stage, senior members continuously remind the chosen candidate that, until he goes through the official ritual, he remains a 'nobody' or *a nuddu miscatu cu' nenti* ('nothing mixed with nil') (Dickie 2004, 12), an expression which, in Turner's scheme, translates into being 'betwixt and between' (1969, 95). Liminal initiates in the mafia have left their previous state but have not yet acquired a new one. Anthropological theories on ritual have shown how, in *liminality*, individuals are often confronted with physical and psychological tests symbolising the actual passing through a 'threshold' that marks the boundary between those two states. In this anti-structural, liminal stage, initiates generally occupy a *marginal* and *inferior* position (Turner 1969, 128). Correspondingly, in mafia initiation the candidates are separated or isolated before undergoing the actual ritual. As Calderone described to magistrate Giovanni Falcone in 1988:

When the time is right, the candidates are taken to a secluded place in the presence of the Family representative and other members of the same faction. In Catania, the custom for the men of honour was to stand on one side of the room, with the candidates for affiliation standing on the opposite side. In other areas of Sicily the custom was to lock the candidates for hours in a dark room before taking them out one by one.³²

In van Gennep's scheme, the transition stage concludes with the revelation of secret knowledge – the teaching of sacred and secret stories – by the ritual elders. The

32 TdP, interrogatorio di Antonino Calderone, 7 Gennaio 1988, 813718.

revelation of shared secrets and knowledge during this powerful ritual experience fundamentally serves to create a solid social bond, which constitutes the basis for the solidarity and for the secrecy of the society. For example, Antonino Calderone remembers that he was brought along with other seven young men to a secret place where other mafiosi were waiting for them. They were immediately told that they were about to enter an organisation whose name was not the mafia as everyone believed, but *Cosa Nostra*. In this phase, the 'secret knowledge' was disclosed as the mafia leader told novices that the origins of Cosa Nostra lay in the *Sicilian Vespers* and in the *Beati Paoli*. After explaining the rules, the family boss pronounced the solemn statement, which is virtually identical to that described for the Beati Paoli:

Now you know what Cosa Nostra is about. So, do you want to enter or do you want to leave? You are still in time if you want to leave. Nothing will happen to you even if you saw us. But if you decide to enter, bear in mind one thing: with blood you enter and with blood you will leave Cosa Nostra. You cannot leave; there is no resignation from Cosa Nostra. You will see in a moment how you enter with blood. And if you leave, you'll leave with blood because you'll be killed. You cannot leave, you can't betray Cosa Nostra, because it comes before everything else. Before your father and before your mother. Before your wife and before your children. (Arlacchi 1994, 54–59)

Each novice was asked to choose a godfather who would make a small cut on the index finger of the right hand so that some blood drops fall on the image of *Madonna dell' Annunciazione*. Then he would pass the burning holy picture from hand to hand, while swearing the sacred oath of faithfulness to the organisation: 'I burn you as paper; I adore you as a saint; as this paper burns, so my flesh must burn if I betray Cosa Nostra.'

3. Reaggregation: This phase is sealed with a formal salute from the mafiosi who have attended the ceremony and who kiss the new member to welcome him into his new life. At this stage, the affiliate has lost his previous identity to acquire a permanent collective one. From now on, he will not be himself anymore. From being *cosa sua* ('his thing'), he becomes *cosa nostra*, 'our thing.' According to a number of

descriptions, *compare* is how a new mafia member is hailed at the end of the ceremony. Becoming *compare* has reference to baptism as well as to other sacraments in the Christian tradition and symbolises the indissoluble connection between two people who are not blood related.³³ As Giuseppe Pitrè noted:

With the blessing of the Patron Saint St. John the Baptist, *comparaggio* in Sicily is the most important and felt spiritual relation between two people; it is often more important than one's blood family. A compare is entrusted with maximum trust and reciprocal loyalty. As the Sicilian proverb says: 'cumpari semu, cumpari restamu. Veni la morti e nni spartemu'. (Pitrè 1962, 255)

The active participation in the oath-taking of other members is essentially a demonstration of the effects of the initiation: it creates a loyal group and exercises a cohesive social force. On the one hand, by listening to the repetition of the oath and by watching the reactions of the initiates, the other members are reminded of the power of the oath, and their dedication is strengthened. On another, their presence serves to remind the new affiliate that breaking the oath is punished by death at the hands of the fellow members of Cosa Nostra.

La punciuta, the burning of the sacred image and the final oath symbolise the death of the initiate as an ordinary man and his rebirth as a man of honour, and represent the official entrance into the organisation. 'From that moment on, the one who has been baptised will no longer be like others, like the mass of his acquaintances and his fellow citizens. He will be a Christian with two baptisms' (Ciconte 1992, 31).

³³ *Comparaggio*, also called 'San Giovanni' (St John), has a strong religious connotation in Sicily. It refers to the historical relation between St John the Baptist and Jesus Christ. In fact the popular expression *Avere il San Giovanni con qualcuno* ('To have the St John with somebody') means being *compare* to somebody else.

3.7. Authority, Secrecy and Power

The ritual of initiation into Cosa Nostra emphasises the idea of solidarity and inclusion between its members, while defining the internal hierarchy and roles. In fact, the ritual of initiation has two main, opposite purposes. From one perspective, it creates an egalitarian bond of solidarity and a spirit of unity. From another, it marks hierarchical boundaries within the structure of the organisation and horizontal boundaries with external society. Buscetta emphasised this point in his testimony:

Belonging to Cosa Nostra implied being men of honour: this was at the heart of everything. One could then invent hierarchies, positions, commissions, but within each Family you breathed an air of equality because we all felt that we belonged to a very special elite. (Arlacchi 1994, 69-70)

As Letizia Paoli observed (2003, 83), the ties of solidarity deriving from initiation rituals invariably lead to the exploitation of mafia affiliates by their bosses. In other words, while the principle of generalised reciprocity obliges mafia leaders to behave altruistically toward the lower ranks, it also enables them to exploit their subordinates in order to achieve their own goals. Bound by these ties, as pentiti have revealed, mafia ‘soldiers’ have no choice other than to comply with the orders of their superiors.

Leaders conducting and performing the ritual of initiation, have the ‘potential’ to let social structure emerge and, crucially, to transform it during the ritual actions. Having said that the emergent quality of performance depends on the enhancement of the experience and on the goals of the participants, one can see how mafia bosses have the possibility of enhancing their performance in order to gain control and authority over their audience and ‘to interpret both traditions and social settings, actively transforming both in the course of their performances’ (Briggs 1988, 7). By means of symbolic behaviour and religious language with reference to the Catholic

tradition, bosses ratify their belief in an existential dimension that provides unity and continuity to the 'morality' of the mafia social order. At the same time, they confer sacred and authoritative value to their general-order conceptions, thereby acquiring legitimisation with, and power over, new affiliates. Thus, the ritual of initiation becomes one of the main occasions for the organisation to re-affirm itself periodically and for mafia leaders to assert their authority. In this way, it becomes a means for creating solidarity among its members and for reinforcing social statuses, norms, and values.

Analysed in these terms, performance shows its potential to be effected with the strategic aim of maintaining and constructing identity categories whilst rendering 'social laws explicit' (Butler 1998; Bial 2008, 193). Within this perspective, the oath, the revelation of the secret knowledge and the rules clearly represent an example of what Butler defines as a 'performative' act. They are forms of authoritative speech which, by means of citations, perform a certain action (e.g. the initiation) and exercise a binding power on the action performed. The oath that is sworn, for example, rich in symbolic content, is the key phase of the ritual of initiation. As described La Fontaine (1985, 16), the essence of an oath is that it commits the individual entirely, binding him to other members, and its breaking usually involves powerful sanctions. Having reference to religious values, the oath in the mafia ritual has a sacred connotation that tightly binds the initiate at a psychological and emotional level.

Moreover, it is important to stress how the wording of the oath utilises a language which is effective by virtue of its high degree of formality and symbolic force. In this respect, the symbolic religious force and formality of the language used

by mafia leaders during the ritual of initiation do not derive from the fact that they 'see themselves or are seen as a direct emanation of God' or as 'interpreters of a divine mission' (Dino 2008, 73). Rather, it is a reflection of the authority with which mafia bosses are invested and which is deferentially recognised by the other mafia members; an authority built by means of performance upon a series of specific characteristics: *access* to secret knowledge, *legitimacy* to appropriate and comment upon texts or narratives, and *competence*, for instance, the knowledge and ability to speak appropriately in front of an audience.

As is commonly the case for rituals in secret societies (La Fontaine 1985, 78), the oath in the mafia ceremony represents the point which tests the candidate's acceptance of its authority over him. De facto, by repeating the words that are said to him, the candidate for affiliation shows obedience and acceptance of the authority of his direct 'godfather' and the rest of the mafia Family, as well as his personal commitment to the organisation. Mafia defector Giovanni Brusca, for example, recalls how he was initiated. In his case, it is evident how Totò Riina, the Family boss leading the ceremony, established his authority over the candidate for affiliation by means of symbolic gestures and performative language:

They took my finger and pricked it with a needle. They let some blood drop over the holy picture of a saint. It was then that Riina set it alight. And he made me hold it in my hands while he kept his hands over mine. I wanted to throw the burning paper away but he did not allow me to. And in the meantime he said: 'If you betray Cosa Nostra, your flesh will burn like this holy picture'. (Lodato 1999, 33)

The shared secret of being 'la stessa cosa', *Cosa Nostra* ('the same thing'), revealed through the initiation ceremony, represents an introduction to the language of highly significant and symbolic signs, gestures and glances, with which mafiosi communicate, and which further distances them from the external society at large. 'Cosa Nostra is secret', Calderone confessed, 'and is the association of men of

honour'. Since there is the obligation not to reveal one's affiliation to Cosa Nostra, for two members to be introduced it is necessary that an acquaintance of both introduces the two of them using specific language, such is 'He is the same thing', or 'He is like you and me'.³⁴

Codes of recognition like these, which share similarities to those used by the *Fraternities* of nineteenth-century Sicily, serve to identify members of the same organisation whilst remaining meaningless to outsiders. Therefore, they are of 'vital' importance for the secrecy of the society. This form of secrecy, as well as the need to use coded language, strengthens group cohesion whilst further widening the gap between them and the rest of the society. However, the claim that mafia group exercises upon its members also becomes total, as the Family representatives have absolute authority on the affiliates on all matters of their lives. The absoluteness of this claim was clearly seen by the Prosecutors of the Procura della Repubblica di Palermo:

From the moment of his *combinazione*, the man of honour progressively becomes aware of having lost a part of his autonomy and individuality; he no longer belongs to himself, because he now belongs to Cosa Nostra, he is an integral part of a system that organises his life.³⁵

Conclusion

Information gathered by the Palermo judicial authorities strongly indicates that, in the last few decades, rituals of initiation have been significantly reduced in order to contain the proliferation of *pentitismo* and to carefully select only trusted affiliates.³⁶

34 Procedimento Penale contro Michele Greco ed altri, n.3162/89 P.M., Vol.8, dichiarazioni di Antonino Calderone, 129–1293.

35 Procura della Repubblica di Palermo, DDA, Richiesta di applicazione di misure cautelari nei confronti di Abbate Luigi +87 (23 Dicembre 1993), 189.

36 Sentenza di Rito Abbreviato n.1579/07, nei confronti di Adamo Andrea + 56 (Sentenza Gotha),

Additionally, the intensifying conflicts between mafia factions following the Second Mafia War and the arrest of boss Totò Riina have increased the number of affiliations without a formal initiation. In general, the boss who selects new members without an official ceremony is the only one to know their identity.³⁷ This has been the case, for example, of mafioso Salvatore Calvaruso who, arrested along with Corleonese boss Leoluca Bagarella in 1995, confessed that the praxis of *la punciuta* had been reduced to limit the amount of information circulating within Cosa Nostra at a time in which pentitismo was spreading fast.³⁸

Nevertheless, in 2004, the police recorded a telephone conversation in which a mafia boss from Villabate, Nicola Mandalà, revealed the exact proceedings of his ritual of initiation to his girlfriend.³⁹ Additionally, in 2007, a series of notes containing the mafia Decalogue of rules and the initiation oath emerged among the documents seized by police during the arrest of Palermo mafia bosses Salvatore and Sandro Lo Piccolo.⁴⁰ These findings suggest that the ritual practices, while they may have diminished somewhat following the Second Mafia War (1981–1983), have not been completely discontinued. Furthermore, the 2008 police operation named ‘Perseus’ foiled the attempt by Cosa Nostra to restructure and form a new Commission.

Considering this, one might expect that mafia members would restructure the organisation upon the same system that allowed Cosa Nostra to remain ‘invisible’ for

105.

37 CdA di Palermo, Sez. III, n.19/1998 R.G.C Assise n. 5508/96 R.G.n.R.Sentenza nei confronti di Benigno Salvatore più 13, (1 giugno 2001).

38 *ibid.*

39 Cfr. int. 2 Febbraio 2004, riportata nella sentenza del TdP in data 16 Novembre 2006, Spera Benedetto e altri.

40 Sentenza di Rito Abbreviato nei confronti di Adamo Andrea + 56 (Sentenza Gotha).

over a century and a half. As discussed in this chapter, rituals have played a key role within the mafia 'system' in creating and strengthening solidarity and cohesion around a set of values that have remained largely unchanged throughout the history of the mafia. Indeed, Cosa Nostra has systematically changed structure, aims and activities over time. However, evidence demonstrates that the rituals of initiation have remained more or less the same for over a century and a half. Most importantly, it shows how the religious symbolism, which was used since the very beginning, has remained a central feature of mafia initiation.

This chapter has demonstrated how the initiation ritual of the Sicilian mafia can be effectively described in terms of a highly symbolic rite of passage that represents the idea of 'death' of the initiate as an ordinary man and his 'resurrection' as a man of honour. By performing the ritual and manipulating crucial cultural symbols related to the religious sphere, mafia leaders modulate the emotional and psychological states of the candidates for affiliation, and acquire legitimisation with, and power over, their audience. New affiliates abandon their previous individual identity in return for a stronger collective one, whilst mafia leaders acquire legitimisation and power by means of symbolic behaviour and language. Exploring the functional role of these religiously symbolic ritual practices is of fundamental importance to understand the ability of Cosa Nostra to transform itself over time whilst maintaining consistent 'moral' codes and practices. As Judge Giovanni Falcone stated in more than one occasion,

You might smile at the idea of a criminal, with a face hard as stone, stained by numerous murders, who takes a sacred picture in his hands, swears on it to defend the weak and not to desire other mafiosi's wives. You might smile at it as if it was an archaic ceremony, or you might think of it as a real joke. It is instead an extremely serious thing that affects him for the rest of his life. Entering the mafia is like converting to a religion. One never stops being a priest. Nor a mafioso. (Falcone 1991, 97)

CHAPTER FOUR

CASE STUDY: MICHELE GRECO

*Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them,
for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.*
(Matthew 6:1)

Introduction

I wish you peace, Your Honour, because peace is tranquillity of the spirit, of the conscience. And for the duty that awaits you, serenity is the foundation on which to judge. Those are not my words; they are the words of our Lord who commanded Moses: ‘When you must judge, decide with the utmost of serenity’. And I wish, Your Honour, that this peace accompanies you for the rest of your life and beyond.¹

With these now-famous words, Michele Greco addressed the judges and jury members of the *Corte d’Assise* of Palermo moments before they retired to consider their verdict at the close of the first maxi-trial against the mafia. Implicated by mafia defectors as the head of the Commission of Cosa Nostra, Greco became one of the key figures of the largest mafia trial in history, which opened in February 1986. The testimony of *pentiti*, including Tommaso Buscetta, Salvatore Contorno, Vincenzo Sinagra and Pasquale D’Amico, outlined a profile of Michele Greco, which the Court of Assise summarised as:

- ‘Head of the Sicilian mafia and representative of its allied Camorra Family’;
- Administrator of a heroin laboratory located within his property;

¹ RAI documentary *Processo alla mafia*, directed by Paolo Gambalescia, Pino Passalacqua and Aldo Vergine, 18 December 1987. Also seen in the RAI Storia documentary *Maxi + 25: anatomia di un processo*, directed by Alessandro Chiappetta and Graziano Conversano, 23 December 2012.

- ‘Protagonist of the mafia war and its related crimes’ and ‘accessory to numerous murders’, including those of prominent political and mafia figures;
- ‘Relentless persecutor of traitors and tenacious in his hatred of enemies’, as demonstrated by the persecution of Salvatore *Cicchiteddu* Greco and his whole family, and by the assassination of mafia members Stefano di Gregorio and Pietro Marchese;
- Wealthy landowner who, by means of intimidation and violence deriving from his association with the mafia, succeeded in a series of questionable operations (e.g. the acquisition of citrus estates belonging to the counts of Tagliavia);
- ‘Respected’ client of financial institutes, which backed his illicit commercial enterprises;
- A well connected individual frequently associated with prominent political, financial and ecclesiastical figures;

‘In conclusion’, the sentence read, ‘Michele Greco was one of the main protagonists of the “years of lead” that so dramatically marked the city of Palermo, the Sicilian region, and the whole nation’.² Called to account for hundreds of crimes before the Court in June 1986, Greco simply remarked: ‘Violence does not belong to my dignity’.³ This ambiguity represents a first, clear trait of Michele Greco. As the judges observed,

In light of the testimonies of mafia defectors, preliminary hearings and court hearings, the figure of Michele Greco has emerged in all its ambiguity.... He loves portraying himself as a ‘country gentleman’ by virtue of his enviable economic status, but he is described by Contorno and Buscetta as the person behind the death of all those victims guilty of belonging to rival mafia factions of the Corleonese Family.⁴

As would be described in the historical ‘Abbate + 459’ Sentence (1987), Michele Greco’s family background, and his recognised skills as Olympic rifleman, had allowed him to join the most exclusive circles of the Palermitan elite. Greco, ‘shrouded in an aura of respectability, and equipped with gun licence’, for many

2 TdP, CdA, Sez. I, n.29/85 R.G.A.Ass., n.39/87 R.G.Sent., Sentenza contro Abbate Giovanni +459, Tomo 6. Also reported in *Ordinanza-Sentenza*, Greco + 18, 1720–1721.

3 RAI documentary *Processo alla mafia* (1987). The complete transcription of the first hearing of Michele Greco was published in *Giornale di Sicilia*, 12–14 June 1986.

4 *Ordinanza-Sentenza*, Greco + 18, 1723–1724.

years had been a welcome guest in high social circles and noble families.⁵ In turn, he had regularly hosted clay-pigeon shooting parties and banquets at his Favarella estate for the social and political elite of Palermo—including politicians, bankers, police, judicial and ecclesiastical authorities. However, mafia defectors informed the magistrates of more clandestine activities taking place within Greco's estate. They revealed, for example, that the Favarella was home to a heroin refinery, and that dozens of mafiosi were once murdered there following a barbecue. According to some accounts, their bodies were roasted and subsequently fed to the pigs.⁶

Mafia defectors Filippo Marchese and Gaspare Mutolo confirmed that, during meetings at the Favarella estate presided over by Michele Greco, important decisions were taken on matters relating to drug trafficking operations, to murders to be carried out during the mafia war, and killings of high profile State figures.⁷ Nonetheless, as will be shown later in this chapter, the Favarella described by *pentiti* would appear under a completely different light in the description that Greco provided in court and in his memoirs.

The maxi-trial ended on December 16, 1987, after 638 days, 349 hearings, 1314 interrogations, and 35 days of jury deliberations. The Assise Court of Palermo found 114 defendants not guilty and 344 defendants guilty, sentencing Michele Greco and other eighteen mafia bosses to life imprisonment. The trial, initially built on the testimonies of mafia defectors Tommaso Buscetta and Salvatore Contorno,

5 *ibid.*, 1716–1717.

6 Felice Cavallaro, 'Greco, il "papa" che predicava la pace e ordinava gli omicidi', *Il Corriere della Sera*, 14 February 2008.

7 CdA di Caltanissetta, Sentenza nel procedimento penale contro Riina Salvatore +17, Ordinanza di custodia cautelare del 15/7/94 notificata il 27/7/94. For the testimony of Gaspare Mutolo see CdA di Palermo, Sez. I, n. 8/91 R.G.C.A., 9/95 Reg. Sent., Sentenza nei confronti di Greco Michele + altri, 109–110.

represented a turning point in the history of the Sicilian mafia. Until that point, Cosa Nostra had managed, with some success, to remain ‘invisible’ for over a century. The collapse of its wall of *omertà* caused by the phenomenon of *pentitismo*, the subsequent exposure with the trial and the arrest of top-echelon mafiosi represented an unprecedented defeat which would inevitably undermine the organisation and severely damage it at a structural and functional level.

Throughout the trial and the years of imprisonment, Michele Greco repeatedly protested his innocence, denying any form of association with the mafia and any responsibility for the crimes of which he had been charged. He defended his innocence from behind the bars of the Rebibbia prison in Rome until the day of his death on February 13, 2008. Former Chief Antimafia Prosecutor Pietro Grasso, who was *giudice a latere* (associate judge) during the maxi-trial, observed that ‘the most distinctive feature of Greco’s character, which captured one’s attention from his first court appearance, was his *overt religiosity* [emphasis added].’⁸ Between his arrest and the day of his death, Michele Greco would reinforce this image using Biblical quotes and repeated appeals to faith in his Court hearings, public appearances and interviews. In particular, the memoirs written while in prison after the end of the first maxi-trial would epitomise Greco’s apparent religiosity.

It is interesting to note that, despite Greco’s prominent position within the organisation, mafia studies have not dedicated particular attention to his role as a mafia boss. Whilst acknowledging his involvement in the events that led to the mafia war of the early 1980s, academic perspectives generally appear to have been largely influenced by the descriptions that mafia defectors gave of Greco during the maxi-

8 *Adnkronos*, 13 February 2008.

trial. The testimony of pentiti has undoubtedly helped investigating magistrates reconstruct the role played by Greco within Cosa Nostra. Nevertheless, as mentioned in the Introduction of this thesis, the possibility that these defections may be corrupted by a willingness to portray mafia rivals in a negative light cannot be underestimated. Moreover, as will be detailed in the course of this study, the way Greco represented himself in memoirs, court hearings and public interviews contrasts with the description of him given by pentiti. Therefore, it is fundamental to examine both perspectives in light of the historical context of Cosa Nostra as reconstructed and outlined in the work of judicial authorities and mafia scholars. Presenting Greco's character in all the 'ambiguity' emerging from contradictory perspectives is necessary to place his overt religious behaviour in the right context.

This chapter draws on anthropological theories of ritual, personal narrative performance, as well as on the micro-sociological approaches to performance in everyday interactions, and focuses on the religiosity of mafia boss Michele Greco. In particular, it discusses the functional role of religion in Greco's process of identity representation and construction, framing it within the wider context of Cosa Nostra in the late twentieth century. The first part of this study describes the influential position of the extended Greco family in Palermo and its province, as well as its role in the events leading to the Second Mafia War. An outline of the influence that the Grecos had exercised at a socio-economic and political level for over a century both inside and outside the mafia is important not only to comprehend the reasons behind Michele Greco's behaviour, but also to contextualise his role at the top echelon of the Sicilian mafia during the 1980s. Furthermore, this overview is necessary to give

perspective to the case study on Bernardo Provenzano and the Corleonese faction as a whole, which will be presented in the next chapter.

4.1. The War of the Grecos (1939–1947)

Since the late nineteenth century, the Greco family had extended its influence in the southeastern fringes of Palermo. It is believed that Salvatore Greco, indicated by Inspector Sangiorgi in his report (1898–1900) as the mafia boss of Ciaculli at the turn of the nineteenth century (Lupo 2004, 235; Dickie 2004, 254), was a common ancestor of the two clans which, by the time of the Greco War in the late 1930s, controlled, respectively, the *borgate* of Ciaculli and Croceverde Giardini. For over a century, the Grecos would remain one of the most powerful and influential mafia clans in Sicily.

Both *borgate* were located along the *Conca d'Oro*, the fertile citrus-growing area which also appeared as the background in the first accounts of the mafia detailed in the Sangiorgi report (Lupo 1988, 477). As previously discussed, it was the small properties in wealthy agricultural areas rather than the larger estates of the Sicilian hinterland that had initially provided the ideal ground for the mafia 'industry of private protection' (Gambetta 1996) to develop at a time when public security was inefficient and banditry was widespread:

(In) the Conca d'Oro...the structure of property was such that it allowed greater autonomy to the protector: whereas on large estates several men looked after one property, here, where properties were smaller, one man looked after several fields for different customers. The price of protection was therefore higher, since the independence of the protector was greater relative to that of the protectee. (Gambetta 1996, 86-87)

This is pertinent to the means by which the Grecos, by exploiting the estates where they had worked for generations, had established their empire. Mafia boss of

Croceverde Giardini, Giuseppe Greco, also known as ‘*Piddu u Tenenti*’ (Piddu the Lieutenant), had been *gabelloto* (land leaseholder)⁹ of a profitable estate of approximately three hundred hectares of citrus orchards belonging to the counts of Tagliavia.¹⁰ The boss of the adjacent *borgata* of Ciaculli was Piddu’s brother in law, also called Giuseppe Greco. Family relationships between the two clans had apparently been harmonious for over half a century (Figure 8). However, in 1939, a fight broke out between the two Families, sparking an internecine conflict that would gravely disrupt their relationship.

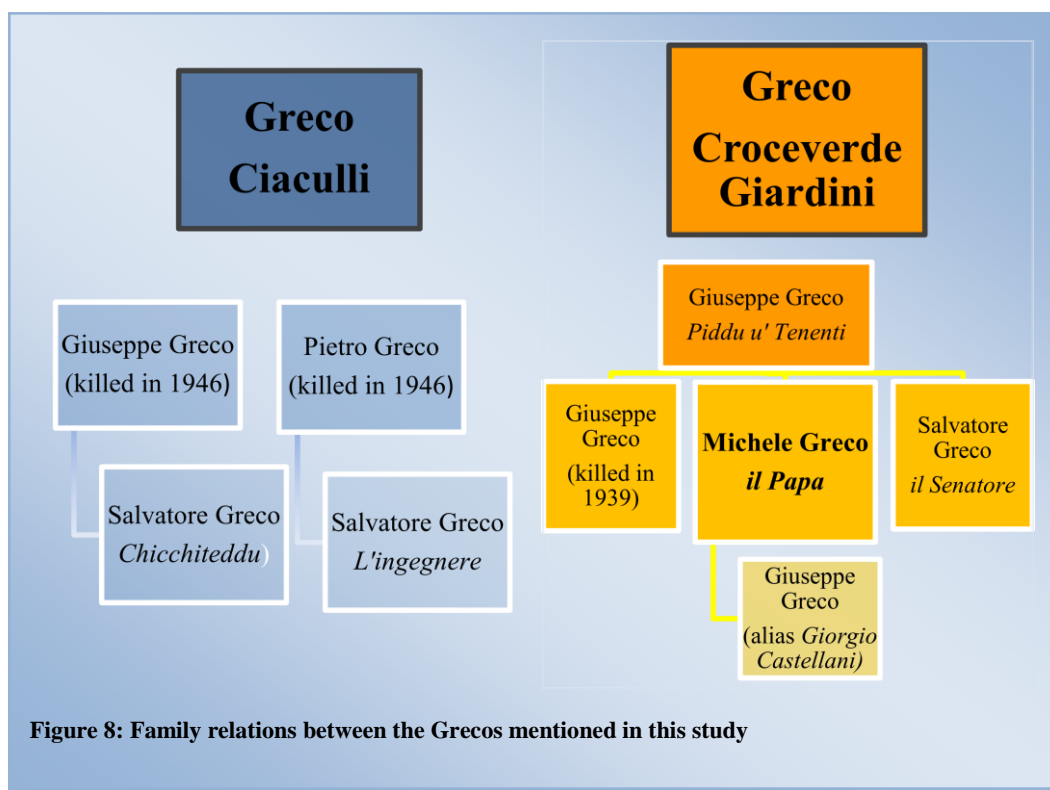


Figure 8: Family relations between the Grecos mentioned in this study

As reported in the 1971 *Commissione Parlamentare d'Inchiesta sul Fenomeno della Mafia in Sicilia* (CPI – Parliamentary Commission of Enquiry on the Mafia

9 Diego Gambetta defined *gabelloti* as the ‘rural entrepreneurs who leased the land from aristocrats more attracted to the comforts of the city’ (1996, 83).

10 Commissione Parlamentare d'Inchiesta sul Fenomeno della Mafia in Sicilia, (Legge 20 Dicembre 1962, n. 1720), V Legislatura, Presidente Francesco Cattanei, ‘Relazione sull’indagine riguardante casi di singoli mafiosi’, Doc. XXIII, n.2–*quater*, 1971, 137–138.

Phenomenon in Sicily), on the 1st of October 1939, both *borgate* gathered to celebrate the annual religious Ceremony of the Crucifixion (Good Friday). On that occasion, a peculiar altercation erupted between members of the opposite clans over a church bench. This resulted in the death of Giuseppe Greco, son of Piddu the Lieutenant, at the hands of the other clan. On August 26, 1946, Giuseppe Greco, the boss of the Ciaculli clan and brother-in-law of Piddu the Liutenant, and his brother Pietro Greco were brutally killed by their Croceverde counterparts. The Ciaculli faction retaliated by murdering two of Piddu's most loyal men. Shortly after these murders, two other members of the Ciaculli faction became victims of *lupara bianca*.¹¹ The escalation of this feud culminated in September 1947, when both clans faced each other with grenades and guns in an open battle that took place in the central square of Ciaculli.¹²

A total of eleven members belonging to both groups and several others were wounded in the feud before other mafia bosses of Palermo intervened, asking Piddu to bring about a rapprochement. The series of murders had begun to draw attention on the organisation at a time when the mafia was still largely unknown. In order to settle the dispute, an agreement brought peace, granting Salvatore Greco *Cicchiteddu* ('Little Bird'), son of Giuseppe Greco of Ciaculli who had been murdered in 1946, and his cousin Salvatore Greco *L'Ingegnere* (the Engineer) rights over the Giardini estate.¹³ It was the Grecos of Giardini under Piddu who emerged victorious from the war.

11 *Lupara bianca* ('white shotgun') is an expression used in journalism to refer to a type of mafia murders in which the body of the victim is never discovered.

12 *ibid.*, 137–140.

13 CPI 1971, 139.

These episodes made everyone—including the authorities—believe that a blood feud ‘motivated by honour and vengeance’ was at the origin of the conflict.¹⁴ Despite the blood relations existing between members of the two factions, it was, however, a war between mafia *cosche* rather than a blood feud (Lupo 2004, 236-237). The management of the citrus plantations, its related business and transport, as well as the control over the wholesale markets in eastern Palermo constituted the main reason for this violent feud. Indeed, it seems more probable that Piddu the Lieutenant used the episode of the church bench and his son’s death as an excuse to wage war against the Ciaculli faction and to take control of all the Ciaculli-Croceverde businesses. At the same time, by making everyone believe that a blood feud of family honour was at the route of the conflict, Piddu justified his actions in the eyes of the mafia organisation and of society at large:

When a boss is seen to look after his kin, his mafia honour and his status in the community are bolstered; he becomes known as someone whose friendship is worth cultivating. By making out that he was aggressively defending his own family, Piddu the Lieutenant was simultaneously boosting his own reputation.... Because of the manipulation of the truth, when the Grecos from Giardini emerged victorious from the war of 1946-1947, they would have been able to look back on their role with greater tranquillity. (Dickie 2004, 257–258)

Following the 1946–1947 struggle, Giuseppe Greco’s notoriety increased considerably. In alliance with the powerful mafia faction of Villabate and its American connections, he became the indisputable boss of the mafia in the Ciaculli-Croceverde area. While his influence reached political, ecclesiastical and judicial figures, Piddu’s reputation as a well known ‘man of honour’ guaranteed him

14 For example, hypothesising ‘revenge’ as the main cause of the Ciaculli War, a journalist of *La Voce della Sicilia* described on the 27th of August 1946 the victims of one of the numerous fights as: ‘local landowners, mafiosi because forced to live in that environment and renowned as intolerant to any misdeed against them’. ‘Nel regno della maffia dei giardini. A Ciaculli si ammazza in pieno giorno’, *La Voce della Sicilia*, 27 August 1946.

‘absolute respect from the inhabitants of the area’.¹⁵ Nobody dared go against him, not even his nephews on the Ciaculli side. ‘Piddu, the “old patriarch”, became a “man of respect”, in the best of mafia traditions.’¹⁶

Meanwhile, the three most important criminal figures of the Greco family – Salvatore *Cicchiteddu*, Salvatore *l’Ingegnere* and, in particular, Michele *il Papa* (‘the Pope’) Greco – had already begun their rise to power into the close circle of the Palermitan mafia.

4.1.2. The First Mafia War and the Ciaculli Massacre (1962–1963)

By the mid-1960s, the Grecos were considered the predominant faction among the emerging *cosche* in Palermo. Their authority was partly founded on established illegal activities, such as tobacco smuggling and drug trafficking. This recognition of their authority, however, came at a high price, as it was attained after an escalating war that made blood flow on the streets of Palermo in the early 1960s.

At that time, a large number of *cosche* struggling to gain control over the city of Palermo were deployed on opposing fronts in the First Mafia War. In particular, the conflict saw the Grecos of Ciaculli led by cousins Salvatore *Cicchiteddu* and Salvatore *l’Ingegnere*, and the Palermitan Family led by brothers Angelo and Salvatore La Barbera facing each other for the control of the profitable markets offered by the heroin trade to the United States and urban growth in Palermo.¹⁷ The numerous deaths during the ongoing war led Italian authorities to face the issue and a

15 CPI 1971, 139.

16 *ibid.*, 22–23.

17 The conflict erupted over an underweight shipment of heroin and the murder of Calcedonio Di Pisa in December 1962. The Grecos suspected brothers Salvatore and Angelo La Barbera of the attack. *ibid.* 174–176.

parliamentary commission was set up in 1962 to examine the origins and nature of the mafia, investigate its economic activities, and delineate an appropriate plan to eradicate it.¹⁸ The situation worsened further when, on the 30th of June 1963, a car bomb exploded near the house of the Grecos in Ciaculli, killing seven police and military officers who had been sent to defuse it after an anonymous phone call. Subsequent public outrage, as well as a considerable intensification in police operations and judicial investigations, had a profound effect on the mafia. As General Dalla Chiesa wrote in a report of the 1973 Parliamentary Antimafia Commission:

During the years between July 1963 and the end of 1968, mafia factions underwent a profound crisis and radical transformation, which could have potentially brought the organisation to a collapse if its most qualified exponents, who were able to restructure it, had not been freed from prison.¹⁹

Indeed, after the massacre in 1963, outbreaks of violence seemed to subside. Top-level mafiosi had been indicted, two hundred lower echelons mafiosi arrested, the mafia Commission dissolved, and many of those mafia associates who escaped arrest had moved abroad. However, the acquittal of all the bosses by the Corte d'Assise of Catanzaro in 1968 permitted a full resumption of mafia activities, after equilibrium was re-established. This apparent stability within Cosa Nostra would last until 1969, when a group of mafiosi killed boss Michele Cavataio, believed responsible for having orchestrated and ignited the First Mafia War.²⁰ The mafiosi who eliminated

18 CPI, Legislatura VI, Relazione sul traffico mafioso di tabacchi e stupefacenti nonchè sui rapporti tra mafia e gangsterismo italoamericano (relatore senatore M. Zuccalà), doc. XXIII, n. 2, Roma 1976, 396–397.

19 *ibid.*, 396.

20 According to Tommaso Buscetta, Michele Cavataio, boss of the Acquisanta faction of Palermo, was responsible for the Ciaculli bomb. Cavataio, who had lost out to the Greco clan in a war over the wholesale market in the mid 1950s, killed Calcedonio Di Pisa knowing that the La Barberas would be blamed by the Grecos, and a war would result. He kept fuelling the war through other bomb attacks and killings (Dickie 2004, 315).

Cavataio belonged to the Corleonese Family, a faction which, as will be discussed in the next chapter, would crucially change the course of mafia history.

Meanwhile the Grecos, who had remained without competitors during the years of the First Mafia War and especially since prominent mafiosi from other Families went in hiding, found favourable conditions to resume their illicit business.

As the General Dalla Chiesa explained in the 1973 report:

[T]he Grecos acquired even greater economic resources and prestige, which enabled them to create a network of relations and interests that, on the one hand, could guarantee recruitment from followers of hostile groups and, on the other, the decisive and ruthless elimination of the more obstinate adversaries and their followers.²¹

In regard to the definition of the mafia as an ‘industry of private protection’, Diego Gambetta specified that ‘owning a protection firm means owning a name, a reputation for supplying convincing protection’ (Gambetta 1996, 59). Seen from this perspective, the Grecos are the leading example of a dynasty where ownership and the reputation of a mafia boss has been passed on to his descendants. In particular, Michele Greco would follow the steps of his father establishing his authority as mafia boss, expert landowner and acquaintance of important individuals from political, religious and financial backgrounds. As expected, thirty years after the beginning of the First Mafia War, Michele Greco became ‘boss of bosses’ of Cosa Nostra.

4.2. Michele Greco: ‘The Pope’ of Cosa Nostra

Despite his descent from a prominent mafia family and his personal role in the implementation of its illicit activities, it was not until the beginning of the 1980s that the name of Michele Greco was officially associated with the Sicilian mafia. In 1981,

21 As cited in CPI 1976, ‘Relazione del Senatore M. Zuccalà’, 406.

the police arrested Salvatore Di Gregorio on suspicion of attempted theft. Talking to the police, Di Gregorio implicated ‘Don’ Michele Greco as head of the criminal organisation.²² However, Di Gregorio would never confirm his testimony in court as he was murdered in January 1982.²³

In 1982, the name of Michele Greco appeared again in a report drawn up by chief police officer Antonino ‘Ninni’ Cassarà.²⁴ Based on the anonymous confessions of *Prima Luce* (First Light), the codename given to Salvatore ‘Totuccio’ Contorno, the ‘Michele Greco + 161 Report’ implicated Michele Greco as the boss of the Sicilian mafia.²⁵ The name of the report itself signalled Greco’s importance over the other suspects. On the basis of this document, drafted by police and signed by the prefect of Palermo, Carlo Alberto Dalla Chiesa, hundreds of suspects were arrested in June of the same year. More importantly, it set the stage for the inquiry that would lead to the maxi-trial of Palermo four years later. The report highlights the significance of the findings in relation to Michele Greco’s mafia role:

For the last twenty years, the impenetrability and enormous prestige surrounding Michele Greco and people close to him have prevented not only the acquisition of information regarding his illicit activities, but have also prevented us from gathering specific confidential information, which could be verified.²⁶

In 1983, prosecuting magistrate Giovanni Falcone indicted Greco and fourteen other suspects, including Michele’s brother Salvatore ‘the Senator’, Totò Riina and Bernardo Provenzano, for the murder of the Prefect of Palermo, General Dalla

22 Ordinanza-Sentenza, Greco + 18, 1712–1713.

23 In 1984, mafia defector Salvatore Contorno revealed to prosecuting magistrate Giovanni Falcone that Di Gregorio was eliminated for having mentioned the name of Michele Greco to the police. ‘Dichiarazioni di Salvatore Contorno’ in Procedimento penale n. 3168/89, R.G. Procura della Repubblica; n. 1178/89 R.G.U.I.; n. 40/89 Reg. della Sez. VII del Tribunale Civile e Penale di Palermo, Coll. Vol. 23.

24 Ninni Cassarà and one of his escorts were murdered on August 6, 1985, outside Cassarà’s home.

25 Arma dei Carabinieri, ‘Rapporto dei 162’ a firma congiunta di Carabinieri e Polizia, n. 2832–2, 13 Luglio 1982.

26 *ibid.*

Chiesa (Stille 1995, 80). On the run for four years, Michele Greco was eventually arrested on February 20, 1986, in an abandoned house in the countryside of Caccamo, outside Palermo. He was charged with ordering seventy-eight murders, including that of magistrate Rocco Chinnici in July 1983, and joined hundreds of defendants at the maxi-trial ten days after it began.²⁷ Throughout the trial, pentiti confirmed that Michele Greco had been head of the mafia Commission since 1978. Having previously said that the Commission's approval was required for any 'significant' murder, Greco could be held responsible for the crimes attributed to him in his capacity as 'boss of bosses'. For this reason, he was found guilty of all charges and sentenced to life imprisonment at the end of the trial in December 1987.

Tommaso Buscetta and Salvatore Contorno, followed by other mafiosi who turned state's evidence, described Michele Greco as an individual with 'a dull personality and lack of charisma who had demonstrated opportunistic cynicism and greed of power by letting the Corleonesi under boss Totò Riina manoeuvre him'.²⁸ As Buscetta reported during his interrogation:

After the expulsion of Gaetano Badalamenti, Michele Greco was appointed head of the Commission. With his dull personality, he was the most appropriate person to lead the Commission in a way which did not interfere with the plans of Riina.²⁹

For example, Buscetta explained that the murder of Lieutenant Colonel Giuseppe Russo, commissioned by the Corleonesi in 1977 without the other mafia Families of Palermo knowing about it, had created a deep fracture within the organisation. On that occasion, questioned by Bontade and Badalamenti on the Russo murder, Michele

²⁷ Greco was also accused of having approved the killing of influential politicians and State officials including the antimafia magistrate Cesare Terranova, the General Carlo Alberto Dalla Chiesa, and the local secretaries of the Christian Democrat and Communist parties, Michele Reina and Pio La Torre.

²⁸ Sentenza contro Abbate Giovanni +459, Tomo 28, 5300–5301.

²⁹ TdP, Verbali di interrogatorio dell'imputato Tommaso Buscetta, 26–27.

Greco insisted that he was ‘in the dark’ since he had not been informed about the matter. However, the fact that no murder could be carried out without the approval of the Commission and, most importantly, that no sanctions were taken against the persons committing it, strongly implied that Greco had a direct involvement in the strategy implemented by the Corleonese faction. According to Buscetta, Greco would play a similar crucial role for the killing of other key mafia and public figures—including prominent mafia bosses Stefano Bontate, Giuseppe di Cristina, Salvatore Inzerillo, and antimafia police and judicial authorities Boris Giuliano, Piersanti Mattarella, Cesare Terranova, Emanuele Basile and Gaetano Costa.³⁰

In general, Buscetta revealed how the Corleonesi had forged a solid alliance with the Grecos, in order to change substantially the balance within Cosa Nostra. This alliance was ratified in 1978 when the faction led by the Corleonese boss Luciano Leggio and his ‘lieutenants’, Totò Riina and Bernardo Provenzano, replaced Palermo mafia boss Gaetano Badalamenti with Michele Greco at the head of the Commission.³¹ Riina, taking advantage of Greco’s position within the Commission, had first expelled Badalamenti from the decision-making body and, after ordering the murder of one of their fiercest rivals, Stefano Bontate, had Greco indirectly take over Bontate’s faction, which controlled the drugs trafficking market with the US. ‘In effect’, Buscetta argued, ‘the Corleonesi had brought the majority of mafiosi to their side and, breaching any traditional mafia rule, had begun their rise to power

30 Ordinanza-Sentenza, Greco + 18, 1734–1736.

31 Judicial authorities believe that, although Leggio had been arrested in 1974, he was still leading his faction from behind bars. Over time, however, Riina started taking command of the group with Provenzano as second in command. Dichiarazioni di Tommaso Buscetta all’interno del Procedimento Penale contro Greco Michele e altri – voll. 124–124 bis–124 ter., Tribunale Civile e Penale di Palermo, n. 2015/82 R.G.P.R.; n. 2289/82 R.G.U.I.; n. 132/82 R.S.U.I., n.139/82 Reg. Sez. VI, 27–41.

within Cosa Nostra.³² This would eventually lead to the Second Mafia War in the early 1980s.

Similarly, mafia defector Gaspare Mutolo, who turned state's evidence in 1992, described in his testimony how Michele Greco had betrayed the *moderati* represented by the historical mafia factions of Palermo, to defend the interests of the *violenti*, the group under Leggio and Riina. In particular, Mutolo revealed that Michele Greco was the man who secretly informed Totò Riina of Bontade's intentions to eliminate him:

Around 1975, when the Commission was reconstituted, there was the *moderate* group who are the Palermitans led by Gaetano Badalamenti, Stefano Bontade, Salvatore Inzerillo, Rosario Riccobono and—at least that is what everybody thought for a period—Michele Greco, who had not yet been appointed as head of the Commission. Then there was the *violent* group represented by Riina, Brusca, Provenzano and their men... After some time we found out that the man who secretly informed Riina was Michele Greco....No one could have ever imagined that Michele Greco was a Corleonese.³³

Greco was also accused of having given permission to, and thus being responsible for, the death of family and friends close to Contorno. Although he was simply a soldier in the hierarchy of the Santa Maria di Gesù mafia Family of Palermo, Contorno reported directly to his boss, Stefano Bontade. After Bontade was murdered, Contorno managed to escape death in several ambushes set up by the Corleonesi with the complicity of Michele Greco, and went into hiding. Interestingly, his ability to evade death earned him the nickname of *Coriolano della Floresta*, the famous character in the sequel to *I Beati Paoli* by Luigi Natoli. From a secret location, he sent anonymous letters to the police, revealing information about Cosa Nostra, its members, their whereabouts, and the unprecedented changes the

32 *ibid.*

33 TdP, CdA, Processo contro Michele Greco + altri, Udienza di Gaspare Mutolo, 5 maggio 1994, 18810–18812.

organisation was experiencing. His confessions provided Chief Police Ninni Cassarà with valuable information to draw a map of the Families of the Palermo area and to write a report on their increasingly hostile relations and involvement in narcotics (the previously mentioned 1982 ‘Greco + 161’ report).

What is most relevant for the present analysis is the fact that the revelations of Contorno represented the first time that authorities learned of Michele Greco’s association with the mafia. Previously, he had just been regarded as a rather wealthy landowner with a suspiciously high income and a dubious record of transactions. When Contorno turned state’s evidence in 1984 following the example of Buscetta, he provided investigating authorities with a long list of mafia Families and their members. The name of Michele Greco was placed at the top of this list.³⁴

Contorno accompanied his testimony with details of the numerous murders that took place at the *tenuta* (estate) Favarella of Michele Greco. He started by saying that one of the main principles of Cosa Nostra is the absolute prohibition on committing a murder within territory belonging to another Family without having previously obtained authorisation. ‘The violation of any of these principles has extremely serious consequences. [Committing a murder without authorisation] is a real act of war against the Family in whose territory the murder has been committed.’³⁵ As Buscetta claimed, this was the case with all the murders perpetrated within Greco’s territory by allies of the Corleonesi. On those occasions, contrary to any mafia principles, Greco had decided not to take action against the perpetrators,

34 Dichiarazioni di Salvatore Contorno all’interno del Procedimento Penale n. 3168/89 A.R.G. Proc. Rep.; n. 1178/89 R.G.U.I.; n. 40/89 Reg. Sez. VII del Tribunale Civile e Penale di Palermo. (Coll. Vol. 23) 1 Ottobre 1984–16 Aprile 1986, G.I. Giovanni Falcone, Paolo Borsellino e Giuseppe Di Lello, 465532.

35 Procedimento Penale contro Greco Michele ed altri, n. 3162/89, 1207.

thus rousing suspicions on his partiality as head of the Commission. Asked regarding the death of his family and friends by the President of the maxi-trial, Contorno resolutely replied ‘You should ask Don Michele Greco the reasons for their deaths...all these killings took place in his *borgata*, thus no one else except him could have granted permission to carry them out’.³⁶

The centrality of the figure of Greco within the structure of Cosa Nostra was reasserted and confirmed on numerous occasions by mafia defector Antonino Calderone. Calderone, while acknowledging the overall scheme of the Corleonesi to achieve sole control over Cosa Nostra, at the same time delineated a profile of Greco which appears to be more authoritarian than that described by other defectors. For example, he stressed how the authority of Michele Greco extended beyond the province of Palermo to other mafia Families located in Catania and Naples. Additionally, he recalled that Michele Greco had been nominated in 1977, along with boss Stefano Bontade, as the two most representative candidates to join the Masonic lodge *Propaganda Due* (P2). Another particularly significant detail of Calderone’s confessions in attesting the prestige of the boss of Ciaculli-Croceverde was the fact that the meetings of the Regional Commission, which officially should have been taken in turns in the territory of each member, were instead held regularly in the Favarella estate.³⁷

36 CdA, Sentenza contro Abbate Giovanni +459, 811–812.

37 TdP, CdA, Sez. I, Sentenza nei confronti di Greco Michele + altri, 12 Aprile 1995, n. 8/91 R.G.C.A, n. 9/95 Reg. Sent, Interrogatori di Antonino Calderone (Coll. VI. 22–22bis), udienza del 3 Novembre 1992.

4.3. Performing many parts in the same role

The examples reported in the previous sections highlight two aspects of Greco's role within Cosa Nostra. Mafia defectors referred to Michele Greco as an individual lacking personality and charisma. Judicial authorities, instead, including former Chief Antimafia Prosecutor Pietro Grasso, described him as a 'charismatic figure put in a prominent position to second the plans of the winning faction, and as a man of mediation between two detachments facing each other in the early 1980s Mafia War.'³⁸ These contrasting views contributed to endowing Greco's figure with a 'noticeable ambiguity'. As noted by the judges in the transcription of the Court hearing of the 11th of November 1987:

All this evidence contributes to shed a sinister light on the figure of Greco's character who has consistently shown, every time he has spoken in public, a noticeable ambiguity. The same sentence that he has repeated during the court debate 'violence does not belong to my dignity' is full of unsettling implications.³⁹

This apparent duplicity in Greco's behaviour to which the judges referred can be explained through sociological theories of presentation of the *self* in social interactions.

In Chapter Two, the 'role' that one takes in performing his *self* in front of others has been defined as all those behavioural rules that a person observes when occupying a particular social position. 'Part' refers instead to the pre-established pattern of action, which is unfolded during a performance (Goffman 1971, 27). Analysed in these terms, it is possible to see how Michele Greco, during the critical years leading to the Second Mafia War, played different parts while maintaining an apparently coherent role as head of the mafia Commission. Indeed, *pentiti* claimed

38 'Il Memoriale del "Papa" padrino picchiato in carcere', *La Repubblica*, 17 July 2008.

39 Sentenza contro Abbate +459, Trascrizione udienza dell'11 novembre 1987, vol. 407, f. 174961, 812-814.

that the façade of neutrality that Greco had given to the Commission was in reality an effective cover for the Corleonesi to hide their strategy of expansion. As it turned out, Michele Greco, through his apparent role of mediator and *primus inter pares*,⁴⁰ in reality had been allied with the Corleonesi of Riina since the 1970s and helped them to exterminate rival factions.

For example, on those occasions when the mafia bosses of Palermo had complained about the murders carried out by the Corleonesi without the other *capimandamento* being previously informed, Michele Greco had skilfully performed the role of a *super partes* mediator providing others with ‘impressions’ that were deceptive towards his interlocutors and inherently coherent with his desired goals. By playing different parts in the same prominent role, Greco had maintained a decisive position throughout the turbulent years in which the balance of Cosa Nostra was being dramatically altered. From one perspective, the pentiti’s accusations that Greco was ‘a puppet’ of the Corleonesi may suggest a certain lack of authority or personality; from another, one could also argue that the choice of following the stronger faction, thereby allowing him to survive the exterminations and maintain his family businesses, may have been the result of cunning calculation. In either case, because of the mafia war and of the fast spreading phenomenon of *pentitismo* that followed, Greco’s part was destined to change.

40 Antonino Calderone used this expression to emphasise that Michele Greco’s role as Secretary of the Regional Commission did not imply, in theory, a formal authority over other mafia members. Interrogatori di Antonino Calderone (Coll. VI. 22–22bis), Tribunale Penale di Marsiglia 9–15/04/1987, 4.

4.3.1. The personal front of Michele Greco's performance

The Grecos had successfully managed to establish their control and authority over the Giardini-Ciaculli territory and to extend their influence into the higher sections of the Palermitan society for generations. Suddenly exposed in his more covert role as mafia associate and head of the Commission, Michele Greco saw his image crucially damaged and that of his family substantially stained. At the same time, the negative light in which the pentiti had represented him had also compromised his identity within the mafia. To use a common Sicilian expression, in the midst of, and after, the mafia war, Michele Greco *piddu a facci*; this is perfectly translated by Goffman's expression of 'he lost *face*'.

In order to regain *face* and, thus, reinstate his social identity, Michele Greco needed to enact a role that was consistent with the *face* he had sustained over the years and with the façade that his family had maintained for almost a century. At the same time, it needed to be as distant as possible from the image of him portrayed by the defections of *pentiti*. A prerequisite for him being able to create and maintain *face* was to establish and follow a *line*, a pattern of verbal and non-verbal conduct that could portray his version of the situation, other people involved, and his *self*.

Greco protested his innocence maintaining the same *line* of defence throughout the trials and the years spent in prison. He insisted that most of his problems derived from mistaken identity with the Grecos of the neighbouring Ciaculli. 'If, instead of being Michele Greco, my name was Michele Roccapinnuzza, to choose a name, I would not be here now', Greco promptly replied to the presiding judge of the Court of Assise, Alfonso Giordano, when asked to explain the numerous

accusations against him. ‘We are not from Ciaculli, we are from Croceverde Giardina, we all know and respect each other’, Greco specified.⁴¹

I am a victim of slanderers, of whoever has orchestrated this tragedy of the century. They sent my family to the holocaust of public opinion, and we have endured it in silence. [Contorno] is a liar. His are slanders that I can easily dismiss with the evidence of my life. Thank God, my grandfather and my father, we have an empire. Thank God, we are wealthy, very wealthy. Therefore, how can somebody think that we could risk everything by establishing a heroin laboratory on our properties? A sorrow like this would have killed the dignity of my family, our social status.⁴²

Greco began to enact the role of an affable peace-loving landowner whose life and family had been defamed in ‘the tragedy of the century’. In a number of interviews, he explained how his family business had been passed on and expanded from generation to generation. In his version of the story, the Favarella estate was a ‘business made of work and dignity’, very popular with the high society of Palermo for the abundance of wild game to hunt and the wide-open spaces to host shooting parties. Greco gave the example of ‘His Excellence’ the Chief Procurator of Palermo Emanuele Pili and Lieutenant Colonel Giuseppe Russo⁴³ who, among ‘many others including the Palermo football team, had free access to the Favarella estate’.⁴⁴ This, according to him, was evidence of his generosity and good intentions, as well as a strong indication that, because of the presence of these authorities, illegal activities could not have taken place at the *fondo* Favarella. Moreover, Greco explained that his workers used to refer to him as *u’ zu Michele* (‘Uncle Michele’) rather than saying ‘Don’ Michele. In his view, this served to dismiss the false allegations of Di Gregorio and Contorno who had referred to him using the honorific title of ‘Don’,

41 RAI documentary *Processo alla mafia*, 1987.

42 Archivio RAI-teca di Palermo, *TG 2 Dossier*, 3 Novembre 1986. The reference is to Salvatore Contorno and to the anonymous letters that he sent to chief police Ninni Cassarà.

43 As previously mentioned, Colonel Russo was murdered in 1977 at the hands of the Corleonesi. In his capacity as head of the Commission, Greco had authorised the killing. (Interrogatori di Antonino Calderone, 812986).

44 *TG 2 Dossier*, 3 November 1986.

and represented an example of his good relationship with his employees. Interestingly, however, ‘*zu Michele*’ was the name with which mafia defector Vincenzo Sinagra referred to him in his testimony.

When a journalist asked him how a farmer could become an acquaintance of the elite of Palermo, Michele Greco explained that, since he was sixteen years old, his skills at clay pigeon shooting had given him an entrée into high society. ‘There [at Favarella], I met the best class of Palermitan society. I made friendships that have lasted throughout my life’, Greco replied, adding that the close relationship between his father and the counts Tagliavia had contributed to introducing his family into the Palermitan upper class. This was the life Greco alleged he had conducted until the day ‘he became Pope’:

I will tell you something; this honorific title appeared at fifty-seven years of age. Suddenly, the ‘white smoke’ was issued. Slanderers stuck on me the nickname Pope, because I never had nicknames before.... I accept it, because my dignity is not inferior to anybody. I am the most slandered man of the century, this is evident to everybody, but as dignity, mine is not inferior to anybody else’s.⁴⁵

In Greco’s view and in the view of the magistrates of the first maxi-trial, the nickname *Il Papa* derived from an erroneous transcription of *papà* (father).⁴⁶ Mafia defectors gave a more subtle explanation, suggesting, instead, that the name was used in order for Greco not to be identified in recorded telephone conversations. They further implied that Greco owed his nickname to his composure, ability to mediate and religious devotion.⁴⁷

For his identity as ‘hard-working farmer with solid connections in high Palermitan society’ to be successfully projected in his performance, Michele Greco

45 *ibid.*

46 *Procedimento Penale contro Greco Michele* + 18, Vol. 8, 1712.

47 Salvo Palazzolo, ‘Ascesa, omicidi e sconfitte. Tutti i segreti del "Papa"’, *La Repubblica*, 13 February 2008.

needed to present a compelling *front*. The *front*, which in Goffman's definition acts as a vehicle of standardisation (1971, 32), is particularly important for an individual concerned with a reality which is not immediately available to his audience to perceive. To re-enforce his *front*, Michele Greco needed to infuse his activity with signs that could confirm the role he performed. Evidence for this is found in the examples reported so far, in which Michele Greco supported his role and rendered his activity more significant by repeatedly referring to specific practices and values normatively consistent with the role he had assumed. For instance, he very frequently referred to himself as a 'victim of vicious slanders' and identified his victim status with the 'martyrdom' of a man who had done nothing in his whole life but respect commonly held social values like family, religion, work, and friendship.

On numerous occasions, Greco also used the concept of 'dignity' to characterise his image as a 'peace-loving and well-respected landowner' who had inherited from his forefathers the values of honest living, hard working, and, above all, a long list of close relations with the high society of Palermo. Thus, *dignity* represented the consideration in which Greco took himself and his own family, and that translated as the mannered, composed behaviour of a man who had made his social status and class a primary form of defence against his accusers.

4.3.2. *Performing social status*

The 1989 Procedimento Penale contro Michele Greco + 18 (Omicidi Politici) draws attention to the fact that, in his court hearings, Greco regularly referred to his social status and class to protest his innocence:

[Michele Greco] did not attempt to demolish the accusations and discredit the *pentiti* on empirical evidence; rather, he persistently tried to prove his innocence by referring

directly to his family name, his status and social rank. It seems as if Greco is not able to come out of his internal ambiguity.⁴⁸

Not only did Greco deny having ever met any of the other defendants or defectors despite their precise accounts of his house and secret hiding place, he also made the reliability of their defection a matter of family descent. ‘My world is not that of Buscetta or Contorno’, he told the judges to reinstate his non-involvement in the facts.⁴⁹ Greco flaunted all the superiority deriving from his status, for instance, when he referred, sarcastically, to ‘quel gran signore di Buscetta’ (‘that gentleman, Buscetta’) or to ‘quel personaggio simpatico di Contorno’ (‘that pleasant character, Salvatore Contorno’). During the maxi-trial, the mafia boss of Ciaculli gave a derogatory description of Contorno—the *pentito* who, more than anybody else, had implicated him—as ‘u figghiu di Sasà a crapara e di Don Antonino c’ un cuoinnu’ (the son of Sasà the goat herder, and don Antonino ‘cuckold’) who used to trespass his property to hunt rabbits.⁵⁰ Similarly, to respond to the accusations of mafia defector Gaspare Mutolo, who claimed that the murder of politician Piersanti Mattarella had been decided during a meeting held at the Favarella estate,⁵¹ Michele Greco exclaimed:

Your Honour Presiding Judge, I will tell you one thing which is true as true as the fact that the sun exists: I have never met this so called Mr Mutolo. If you examine the life of Mutolo and mine, you will realise that I could have never met this tramp. I did not even know who this Mattarella was. I have been a farmer my whole life and I have never had an interest in politics. [My only interest] was agriculture.⁵²

This aspect of Greco’s performance closely relates to two consistent components of what Goffman defined as a *front*’s ‘standardised expressive equipment’, namely

48 Procura della Repubblica di Palermo, Procedimento Penale contro Michele Greco + 18, n. 3162/89 A-P.M., Vol. 8, 1724.

49 Anselmo Colacicco, ‘Greco parla di un misterioso diario’, *Giornale di Sicilia*, 12 June 1986.

50 RAI documentary *Processo alla mafia*, 1987.

51 TdP, CdA, Sez. I, n. 8/91 R.G.C.A., 9/95 Reg. Sent, 198–202.

52 TdP, CdA, Sez. I., n. 8/91 R.G.C.A., n. 3162/89 R.G.P.R., 1165/89 R.G.G.I., Processo contro Michele Greco + 12, udienza dell’11 Aprile 1995, 21963.

appearance and *manner* (Goffman 1971, 34–35). The elegant and expensive clothes that Michele Greco wore during the Court hearings and behind the bars of the Court Bunker made his *appearance* perfectly consistent with the social status he aimed to project. Specifically, his *manner* was the main *stimulus* upon which his *front* as ‘hard-working, honest and respected agriculturist who had fallen victim to malicious slander’ was based. Indisputably, his posture, demeanour, facial expressions and speech pattern announced the interaction role he expected to portray whilst progressively solidifying his *personal front* and the *role* he had taken. Studying the video recording of Greco’s hearings during the maxi-trial, one can clearly see how he constantly maintained an apparent calm and composure. He sustained this conduct even when challenged by the judges with precise, damning allegations.

The interactions between Greco and the members of the court of Palermo represent a clear example of actions conducted following rules of *deference* and *demeanor*. In Greco’s case, the *deference* he demonstrated towards the Court with his code of conduct was apparent, for example, in those frequent ‘interpersonal rituals’ (e.g. salutations, thanks and apologies) which recurred during the trial. He apologised every time he was not able to hear the words of the presiding judge properly, constantly showing courtesy and respect. Similarly, he regularly thanked the Court at the end of each request. This deferential behaviour reflects the characteristics of what Goffman defined as ‘an apologetic *manner*’ (1971, 35): Greco gave off *impressions* to his interlocutors that he was willing to follow their lead and instructions in the particular circumstances of the trial. Yet, the deference he showed in Court was directly proportional to his own demeanour. Michele Greco’s demeanour encompassed his *manner* and was evident in his diction, poise under

pressure and modesty in specific claims regarding his life. Through these rituals of interaction, Greco carefully guarded and planned the symbolic implications of his acts in the immediate presence of his audience, thereby laying the foundation for a more explicit projection of his identity.

4.3.3. External perception of Michele Greco's figure

It is important to note that the manner and appearance that Greco consistently displayed in front of his audience—whether this be the court or the journalists who interviewed him—considerably influenced the external perception of him. Indeed, despite the pentiti's description of Greco as a man lacking personality and completely subjugated to the Corleonesi, the media emphasised other aspects of his role as mafia boss, including, for example, his prestige, authority and merciless leadership (Figure 9).

On the 21th of February 1986, the Sicilian independent daily newspaper *L'Ora*, renowned for its antimafia commitment, dedicated ample space to the arrest of 'the boss of bosses of Cosa Nostra'. On page 9 it read:

The enigma that Judges and investigators face in the next few months is to understand the new power balance of Cosa Nostra following the mafia war which has torn Sicily apart... What role did Greco have? Is it true that the boss of bosses, the king of the citrus estates of Ciaculli only had a representative role? Is Buscetta right in describing him as a 'dull figure' subject to Leggio's 'lieutenants', Riina and Provenzano?

However, reporting the words of *Criminalpol* Chief Tonino De Luca, the article concluded that, whatever his role was within Cosa Nostra during the years of the Second Mafia War, it was certain that, 'when it came to deciding on significant

murders, the last word belonged to the *capo dei capi* (boss of bosses) Michele Greco'.⁵³

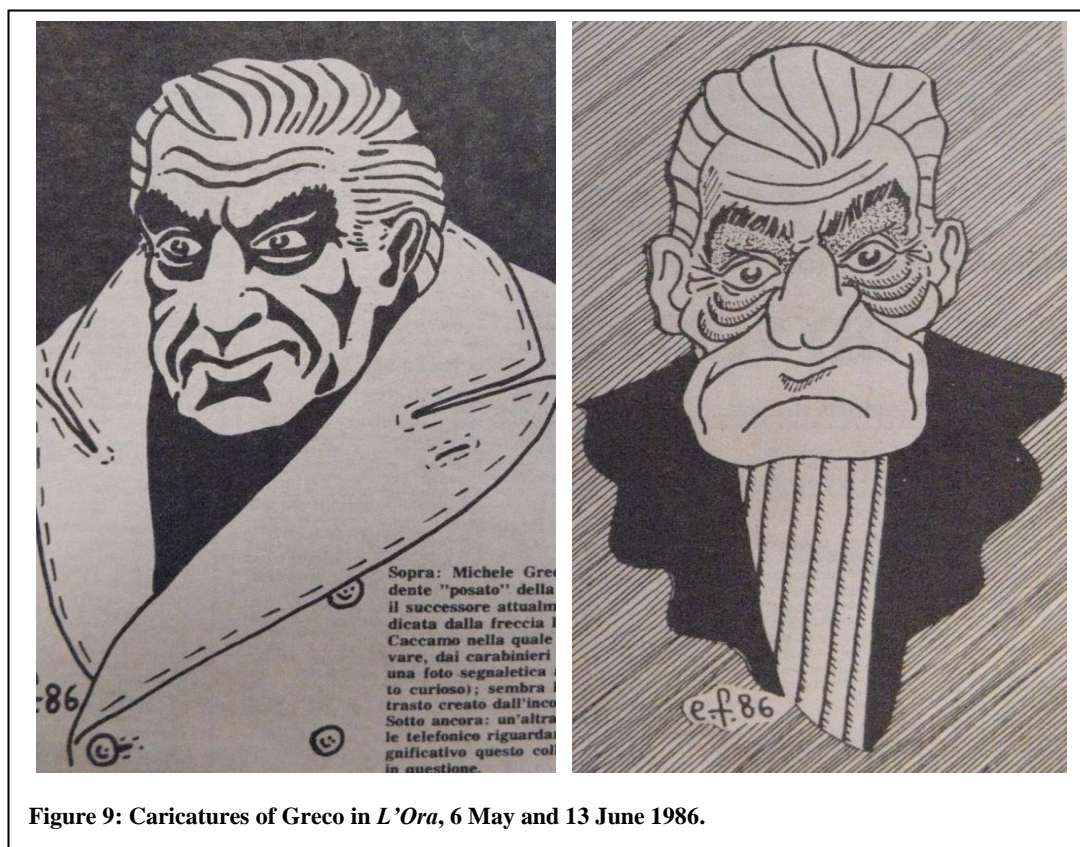


Figure 9: Caricatures of Greco in *L'Ora*, 6 May and 13 June 1986.

On numerous occasions, the press emphasised the leadership role of Michele Greco, stressing how, for example, ‘the scheme implemented by the Corleonesi had not diminished the prestige and authority of the *pope* of Cosa Nostra’. ‘One hawk is dead. Now it is time for the next one’, newspapers articles relayed, quoting the words allegedly pronounced by Greco to celebrate the murder of mafia rival Stefano Bontade and the death sentence on Salvatore Inzerillo.⁵⁴ In general, Greco was described as *la punta di diamante* (‘the cutting edge’) of the Sicilian mafia, courted by politicians, businessmen and notables, and able to hold the reins of the criminal

⁵³ P.M., ‘L’ultima parola spettava a lui’, *L'Ora*, 20 February 1986.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

organisation while remaining below the radar of police and judicial authorities for many years.⁵⁵ The media chronicled every move of his arrest. Every day new aspects of his mafia role would emerge, along with growing speculation on whether or not he would appear in Court. Therefore, when he joined the other defendants in one of the cells of the Aula bunker in May 1986, the media spotlight was entirely on him.

The 'Pope' is in the Aula Bunker. As a real mafia boss, he receives greetings and other signs of respect from his lawyers. For the first time a mafia boss defends himself as only a big fish can do.... There he is, the Pope of the mafia, wearing a camel coat, a cashmere jumper and brown trousers. He is extremely elegant.⁵⁶

In particular, the day of his first court hearing represented an unprecedented opportunity for Michele Greco to 'draw a masterly self-portrait', *L'Ora* wrote in its front-page article the following day. The author of the article commented on the skilful presentation and on the ability demonstrated by the mafia boss in representing a new image for himself:

Sometimes at the maxi-trial it is possible to get a real 'lesson on the mafia'.... When a complicated figure like Michele Greco, the *Pope* of Cosa Nostra, enters the Court, the lesson on the mafia reaches levels of masterly technique, superb quality; ambiguity becomes art, which renders the job of interpreting the mafia phenomenon even harder. Three hours of interrogation have been sufficient to remind us and confirm one thing: Michele Greco is a man of considerable personality. He is powerful and charismatic. It is the solid, compact, well-tested personality of a leader. One perceives immediately that it is a personality in keeping with the skills of a leader, a hierarchical vision of social relations, and an extremely selective and individualistic philosophy of life.⁵⁷

As these examples demonstrate, the image of Michele Greco emerging from media representations of him contrasted with the profile derived from the testimony of pentiti, further enhancing the ambiguity around his figure. However, there was one specific characteristic of Greco's behaviour, which would mostly attract attention becoming a coherent feature of his identity: his religiosity.

55 Giuseppe Cerasa, 'Le sue parole erano sentenze', *La Repubblica*, 21 February 1986.

56 Attilio Bolzoni, 'Il capo dei capi nell'aula bunker', *La Repubblica*, 9 March 1986.

57 Alfonso Madeo, 'Michele Greco. L'autoritratto di un "Papa"', *L'Ora*, 12 June 1986.

4.4. The religious performance of Michele Greco

As described in the previous section, in constructing his front, Michele Greco *gave off* certain impressions about himself – a dignified and humble mannerism, composed reactions, decorous clothing – to effectively convince the audience of the appropriateness of his behaviour and consistency with the role he had assumed. Another significant practice that can be identified in Greco's 'impression management' is the concealment of what Goffman defined 'dirty work' (1971, 53)—all criminal activities which were not appropriate to the role he was playing.

Furthermore, insofar as his performance had to be 'socialised' to fit into the understanding and expectations of the society to which it was presented, Michele Greco needed to *idealise* it significantly. *Idealisation*, in Goffman's perspective, meant 'to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of society' within one's performance to make it significant for the audience (Goffman 1971, 44–45). Thus, Michele Greco, for purposes of idealisation, not only systematically removed his criminal practices and illegal activities from his performance, but also enhanced and exaggerated those specific actions, which were coherent with the social values of the wider community. Among values in Greco's performance such as family, dignity and work, religion was undoubtedly the most prominent.

The only cupolas I know belong to churches. I do not understand what *capo-mandamento*, *capo-famiglia* means. I have always minded my own business, my ordinary life as honest worker. The mafia I know is the mafia everybody knows through the newspapers.... Even to talk about drugs disgusts me. My money is clean. All that I possess is the fruit of my work and the heritage of my parents.⁵⁸

58 Salvatore Cusimano, 'Michele Greco parla dal carcere', *Giornale di Sicilia*, 22 February 1986. Also cited in Salvo Palazzolo, 'Ascesa, omicidi e sconfitte. Tutti i segreti del "Papa"', *La Repubblica*, 13 February 2008.

In his strenuous public defence, Greco systematically accompanied the ‘bucolic tales’ of his family and the ‘deeds’ of his forefathers with strong appeals to faith. ‘Mi chiedo ancora di cosa ho mafiato (‘I still ask myself how I have mafia-ed’). Look, this is my mafia: work and faith in God’, Greco stated in an interview, showing off the tangerine trees that, even today, make the Ciaculli citrus estate famous at an international level.⁵⁹

On the day of his arrest in February 1986, the police found a copy of the Bible beside him on top of his bedside table. They reported that Greco initially tried to hide his real name behind false personal details. Allegedly, the mafia boss told the police officer who was taking a photo of him: ‘The Lord should illuminate some human mind to let it build a lie detector. It would show that I always tell the truth.’⁶⁰ Six hours later, Greco admitted he had lied about his identity. After an initial reluctance, his willingness to speak in public about the events that had implicated him increased in proportion to the amount of information mafia defectors were revealing against him. A few days into his detention in the Ucciardone prison of Palermo, Greco began making public declarations through his lawyers. He purportedly told his solicitors:

They call me Pope, but I cannot compare myself to popes, not even to the current one, in terms of intelligence, culture and doctrine. Yet, in terms of clean conscience and depth of faith, I feel equal if not superior to them.... I have always lived in the same country house where I have worked. After work my father used to bring us books and newspapers, but what I read most was the Bible. They are depicting my character as that of a bloodthirsty killer, which is absolutely false.⁶¹

During the same fifty minutes of conversation with his lawyers, Greco also initiated his attack against the ‘slanderers’ who had accused him. He claimed that ‘justice punishes criminals when they commit a crime, but it seems not to take action against

59 TV Interview of journalist Lino Jannuzzi with Michele Greco, Italia 1, *Speciale istruttoria*, 5 March 1991.

60 Attilio Bolzoni, ‘La mafia non ha più il suo “papa”’, *La Repubblica*, 22 February 1986.

61 Attilio Bolzoni, ‘La verità del capomafia’, *La Repubblica*, 23 February 1986.

the criminals who cause pain with a pen.’⁶² ‘The real pentito’, Greco argued, ‘is the one who repents before God. All the others are simply losers who tell lies and defamations to save themselves.’⁶³

These examples show that, by making religion a consistent component of his performance, Greco tried to idealise his social identity. He enriched and strengthened his *personal front* with *impressions* about his religious practices and activities that society deems desirable and honourable. The accuracy with which he followed the *line* taken to be *in face* is again evident in the fact that his language and behaviour remained largely consistent both inside and outside the court. His first court hearing, in particular, would represent the first and main occasion for Michele Greco to perform this religious image of himself in front of a large audience.

Before the hearing scheduled for the 2nd of June 1986, thus almost four months after his arrest, Greco’s lawyers announced that their client was tired but was ready to fight: ‘you all will have a big surprise when he starts to talk. You will see. You have built a monster but you will see in front of you a very different man.’⁶⁴ Indeed, the man people saw on live television sitting in front of the judges of the maxi-trial did not correspond to the profile that mafia defectors had delineated. In front of an audience of hundreds of journalists coming from all over the world, of relatives of the defendants, and of general public arrived to be present at the trial, the first words that Michele Greco pronounced were: ‘I will say only one word: violence does not belong to my dignity. I repeat. Violence does not belong to my dignity.’ He

62 The reference here is to Salvatore Contorno, who had incriminated him by sending anonymous letters to the police.

63 Bolzoni, ‘La verità del capomafia’.

64 *ibid.*

took advantage of that court appearance, which lasted approximately three hours, to defend his reputation ‘disgraced’ by the testimonies of *pentiti*.

Let me tell you one thing, Your Honour. Certain films of violence and pornography are the ruin of humankind because, if Contorno, instead of watching *The Godfather*, had seen *Moses*, for example, he would not have accused anybody.⁶⁵

Greco began by enacting the role of ‘martyr’ suffering from the defectors’ defamations, which he was bearing with ‘tolerance and patience’. ‘As a matter of respect towards this Court, I bear the pain of the accusations, swallowing it with patience. I have dignity’, he told a journalist from behind the bars of the Aula Bunker where the maxi-trial was being held.⁶⁶ Despite ‘the tragedy of the century orchestrated by the defamers’, which Greco insisted had ruined his life and that of his family, during the whole duration of the trial he seemed to be confident and hopeful of a positive outcome:

I really hope that justice will be done. I have an invaluable gift: interior peace. Nobody can give it to us. No shop can sell it... Interior peace is fundamental; it is everything for a man. Violence does not belong to my dignity. This is the only truth. I am accused of being Pope, boss, general... whatever I am, I need to be patient.⁶⁷

The following day, when another journalist asked him what he meant by ‘interior peace’, Greco replied that it was ‘all down to the Illustrious Guest he had received at his Christening and had held in his heart since then:

It is something very important for anyone who believes in Jesus Christ and in God Almighty. In these hard times, these verses come to my head: ‘Christian, recognize your dignity. Never let the Illustrious Guest go away from you’. I have Him here with me, I keep Him inside. This gives me serenity, even when I am alone I am happy because I have this interior serenity.⁶⁸

65 RAI Storia, *Maxiprocesso* +25.

66 Archivio RAI-teche di Palermo, ‘Michele Greco/Maxiprocesso’. Interview with journalist Salvatore Cusumano, February 1986.

67 *ibid*.

68 *ibid*. The reference is to the verses of Pope St. Leo the Great: ‘Christian, recognize your dignity. Remember who is your head and of whose body you are a member. Never forget that you have been rescued from the power of darkness’. Sermo 21, 3: CCL 138, 88 (PL 54, 192–193).

On another occasion, referring to the years spent in hiding before being arrested, Greco emphasised those specific aspects, which were consistent with the role of the devout gentleman he strived to portray:

(Greco) I have spent the last years of my life in the mountains. Those gentlemen the Carabinieri, I underline the word 'gentlemen' because they have been very kind to me, found me with my 'visiting card' when they arrested me. Do you know how they found me? I was alone and unarmed. Do you know what I had in my hands even though nobody talks about it? I had the Bible and the breviary, which is an invaluable thing for every true Christian.'

(Journalist) 'The breviary is the book of prayers for every hour.'

(Greco) 'Well done. I finally met somebody who knows what the breviary of the Bible is.'⁶⁹

The use of repetitive and stereotyped sequences of language patterns denoting his fervent religious devotion make Greco's behaviour and language a clear example of a symbolic ritual performance. In particular, it consists of episodes of repeated and simplified cultural communication in which both social actor and audience share a mutual belief in the descriptive and prescriptive validity of its symbolic content (Alexander, Giesen, and Mast 2006, 29). To say that Greco performed the role of a religious devout farmer does not imply that he merely 'pretended'; rather, his performance can be interpreted in terms of an 'enactment' of a role, a concept 'which contradicts neither the notion of belief nor the practice of theatrical acting' (Alexander 1997, 154).

In this regard, it is important to note that Michele Greco made an overt display of his religiosity not only in front of large audiences, but also in circumstances that were more private. For example, Cesare Vincenti, President of the GIP Section of the Court of Palermo, recalled that even during preliminary interrogations Greco would systematically carry his Bible with him to the Judge's

69 *ibid.*

office.⁷⁰ Similarly, the current Director of the Aula Bunker at the Ucciardone Prison, Giuseppe Mineo, who was present at the maxi-trial in his capacity as main clerk of court, described Michele Greco as ‘a fundamentally ambiguous figure: the acts of the trial delineated his image as a merciless mafia boss, while Greco consistently represented himself in a religious, peace-loving light both inside and outside court.’⁷¹ Former Prosecutor Pietro Grasso also commented on Greco’s religiosity on numerous occasions. He once observed, for example, how Greco’s continuous religious and biblical references perfectly suited a man whose nickname was ‘the Pope’: ‘The name *Papa* was well chosen. Michele Greco had a dignified aspect and a decorous attitude which reflected his authority.’⁷²

Viewed from a socio-anthropological perspective, the repeated use of religious symbolic language added ‘sacred’ value to the wider part that Michele Greco enacted. The sacredness with which his role was infused by means of religious symbols is evident, for example, in those circumstances in which he represented his *self* as a devout martyr fallen victim to the ‘devil’s friends’.⁷³ Sentenced to life imprisonment at the end of the trial in December 1987, Michele Greco would temporarily be released on appeal in February 1991.⁷⁴ Forty-eight hours after his release, at the entrance gate of his *fondo* Favarella, he told journalists about the

70 Personal communication, 27 July 2011.

71 Personal communication, 12 July 2012.

72 Francesco Viviano, ‘Il memoriale del “Papa” padrino picchiato in carcere’, *La Repubblica*, 17 July 2008.

73 Umberto Rosso, ‘Io, Michele Greco, un sequestrato come Cesare Casella’, *La Repubblica*, 01 March 1991.

74 In 1990, the Court of Appeal presided by judge Corrado Carnevale (nicknamed *L’ammazzasentenze* –‘the Sentence-slayer’) overturned the 1987 verdict of the Court of Assise over minor technicalities. The vast majority of mafiosi who had been convicted, including Greco, were released. When Giovanni Falcone became Head of the Penal Affairs Section of the Ministry of Justice in 1992, he introduced a decree which ordered the re-incarceration of Michele Greco and the other mafia associates.

sacrifice of having spent five years in solitary confinement and poor health. ‘*Vi voglio bene* (I love you) even though you do not love me’, he said, and added ‘Forgive me if I am not even able to give you my personal details, but after five years in isolation I am very ill. The devil’s friends have sentenced me to solitary confinement.’⁷⁵ After giving a friendly slap to a reporter, he continued saying that, when he was in isolation, the Bible was his only source of comfort:

In the isolation of my cell, I read Thomas Aquinas. I love reading. I read the Bible, which is the foundation of life. Some pigs out there are ironic about me reading the Bible. I do not care. Slanders offend those who care too much about them.... Since I was born, I have always hated evil. I am a Christian; therefore, everything that is contrary to this religious morality for me is negative. You do not you trust me? What can I do? I cannot insist. [Pointing his finger towards the sky] Up there, somebody is able to read my heart and my feelings.⁷⁶

By ‘pigs’, Greco referred to those journalists who had ironically commented on his manifest religiosity demonstrated in almost every public appearance (Figure 10).



Figure 10: Caricature of Michele Greco ‘il Papa’ in *L’Ora*, 7 May 1986.

75 Archivio Rai-teche Palermo, ‘Greco/Maxiprocesso’.

76 *ibid.*

Undoubtedly, Greco's overt religiosity and frequent references to the Bible had not gone unnoticed by the press. On the contrary, the 'humble man' people saw sitting in front of the judges, with his hands joined in prayer, who quoted verses of the Bible and constantly referred to his deep religious faith, further accentuated what magistrates had defined Michele Greco's 'sombre and dramatic ambiguity'.⁷⁷

4.4.1. Media representations of Greco's religiosity

The religiosity of Michele Greco became a prominent feature of his character since the day of his arrest. The media focused on his overt religious behaviour, consolidating the public image of Greco as a 'mafia boss with the Bible in one hand and the gun in the other' whose authority and 'almost ecclesiastical composure' resembled that of an 'authentic pope':

Even his nickname the pope...allegedly derives from his magnetic look, his extremely calm, almost ecclesiastical behaviour, which profoundly characterises him. From his 'papal throne' in his office in Ciaculli he used to receive peasants, mafia bosses, politicians and important businessmen. Legend tells that, at the end of his hearings, the mafia *Pope* paid homage to his guests giving them holy images of saints.... His was the life of a pope. On Christmas morning, every year, a crowd would gather outside the gate of the Grecos. It was the inhabitants of Ciaculli going to pay homage to their beloved godfather. To each of them Greco would respond with a warm smile, a handshake and a promise of help.⁷⁸

Similarly, the *Giornale di Sicilia* wrote on the same day: 'The *Pope*, a nickname which perfectly reflects the quasi-sacred character of Michele Greco and his image as a man whose absolute power commands fear and devotion'.⁷⁹ Although, on some occasions, ironic comments were made on Greco's overt appeals to faith (Figure 11), in general, no questions were raised regarding what could have appeared as an apparent contradiction between his religiosity and his role as ruthless head of a

⁷⁷ Ordinanza-Sentenza, Greco + 18, 1724.

⁷⁸ *L'Ora*, 21 February 1986,

⁷⁹ Franco Nicastro, 'In tre anni da insospettabile a superboss', *Giornale di Sicilia*, 21 Febbraio 1986.

criminal organisation. On the contrary, numerous examples demonstrate how, by means of symbolic performative behaviour and language, the religious component in Greco's role progressively became an intrinsic, prominent part of his social identity.

Further evidence of this can be seen in the interview of Michele Greco with journalist Lino Jannuzzi, which was broadcast on Italia 1 TV channel on the 5th of March 1991. That year, as previously mentioned, Greco was temporarily released from prison. Jannuzzi met him in his house at the *fondo* Favarella. During the whole interview, the only matters discussed related to tangerine cultivation, of which the journalist also seemed to be an expert. Greco described his estate showing his profound attachment to the land. Continuous references were made to his religious devoutness and to that of his family. For example, Greco claimed to be an avid reader of St. Ambrose, St. Augustine and of the Epistles of St. Paul. Significantly, no question related to any of the crimes of which he had been charged was asked during the entire interview. The underlying thread of the report was Jannuzzi's evident conviction that Michele Greco was a peaceful landowner, expert farmer and a father profoundly devoted to his family, his land and God.

Even his wife, Rosaria Castellana, during an interview indicated the profound religiosity of Michele Greco as undisputable proof of his innocence. Asked to comment on her husband's nickname, Castellana declared: 'It is an absurd frame-up. The pope? I have read it in the newspapers. If you only knew what peace-loving man he is! He loves our son and me so much. And, besides, he is so religious!' (Madeo 1997, 84-85).

The religious aspect of Greco's identity was also emphasised in its cinematographic representations. For example, in films and TV series on the mafia,

such as *Il Capo dei Capi* (2007), Michele Greco is depicted as an ‘old-fashioned, religious man of honour’ who dressed and spoke in a way appropriate to his role. A similar profile appears in *I Grimaldi* (1997), the film directed by Michele Greco’s son, Giuseppe (known as Giorgio Castellani).⁸⁰

I Grimaldi tells the story of ‘old patriarch’, head of a long established mafia clan, who embodies the stereotypical characteristics and values of the so-called, ‘archaic, benign mafia’. The protagonist, Don Antonio Chiaramida, fights to defend the honour of his family threatened by his nephew’s involvement in drug smuggling. The nephew of the old boss has fallen victim to an ordeal orchestrated by an emerging rival clan which frames him with involvement in narcotics production in order to hit at his grandfather. The film emphasises the emergence of a violent new mafia, dedicated to drugs trafficking and money accumulation in contrast to the society represented by Don Antonio, where values like religion, respect, honour and family reign. ‘Take this disgusting drugs business off my land, I do not want this sort of thing here’, don Antonio shouts at a group of criminals during the film. This and numerous other references to the life of Michele Greco and to his estate, where the film was partially shot, strongly suggest that Giorgio Castellani based the character of Don Antonio on his father. One prominent characteristic of the protagonist is his religiosity, which he demonstrates with repeated appeals to faith and participation in local religious ceremonies.

One might wonder why Giorgio Castellani based the character of the mafia boss upon the figure of his father. This, in fact, may seem to be in contradiction with

80 Antonino Calderone revealed that Michele Greco once introduced his son Giuseppe Greco to him as a ‘man of honour’ affiliated to the Ciaculli Family. Interrogatori di Antonino Calderone Tribunale di Marsiglia, 813046.

Michele Greco's intention to protest his innocence. It is important to consider that, by 1997, when the film was released, Michele Greco had already spent ten years in prison and, serving multiple life sentences, the possibility of being released was nonexistent. Therefore, the film can be interpreted as an attempt of Castellani to redeem the public identity of his father, and of his family as a whole, by distancing his image from the accusations of involvement with the mafia represented by the Corleonesi. From this perspective, it appears that *I Grimaldi* does not intend to prove Michele Greco's non-involvement with the mafia; rather, it reasserts that the mafia of which he was head was not the 'dishonourable' organisation that the pentiti had described associating it with the mafia of the Corleonese faction, but a 'mafia of honour' willing to use violence only to defend one's dignity and family. In doing so, Castellani appealed to that long-standing culturalistic tradition which, as discussed in Chapter One, had contributed to spreading an image of the mafia as a set of cultural behaviours and attitudes. Through this representation, the image of Michele Greco as a man dedicated to the values of family, honour and, above all, religion, was further reinforced.

4.5. The 1987 Memoir

Dear President, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Court,
I have decided to write this memoir to have the possibility of telling you in these pages something about my real biography and the history of my family. During the court hearings, I answered questions but I have not had enough time to talk about my life. During a conversation, it is very hard to remember every detail. Alone, in the loneliness of my prison cell, I have had time to think and write. What I will write is *Gospel* [emphasis added]. You can easily check if you love real justice and real truth. (Viviano 2008, 15)

With these words, Michele Greco opened his memoir addressed to the judges of the Court of Assise at the end of the maxi-trial in 1987.⁸¹ This one hundred page long handwritten document contains detailed accounts of his life and of the history of his family. ‘In the isolation of his cell’ Greco had the time to organise and record his thoughts on paper. More importantly, he had the time to re-write and re-present a version of the *self* which could overlay the image of mafia boss that the *pentiti* had portrayed, judicial authorities confirmed and mass media magnified, while remaining consistent with the role he had enacted during his court hearings and interviews.

In the memoir, Greco reinforced his *personal front* by giving further *impressions* of his social status. He described, for example, the Tenuta Favarella as an ‘oasis of peace’, which ‘Divine Providence had blessed with late flourishing tangerine trees’. Greco explained that, originally, the estate was part of the land of the Counts Tagliavia, in which the Grecos had worked for generations. ‘The Count of Tagliavia used to say that my grandfather was a great man, that he was very religious and nobody dared blaspheme in his presence’, Greco wrote, adding ‘My grandfather died without having ever had any convictions, like every other single member of my family’ (Viviano 2008, 31). He also emphasised the skills of his father, *Piddu u’ Tenenti*, demonstrated in the way he had managed to transform the small Favarella estate into a vast and fertile citrus fruit plantation of the Conca D’Oro.

Signs – or *impressions* – which highlighted and portrayed facts that gave confirmation about the *front* in Greco’s performance, can also be identified within the memoir in all those instances in which he claimed connections with highly

81 Greco wrote this memoir from his prison cell, after the sentence of the first maxi-trial had already been pronounced and the trial was in its appeal stages. It is worth remembering that the sentence of the 16th of December 1987 was only confirmed by the Court of Cassation in 1992. This memoir has been published by journalist Francesco Viviano in *Michele Greco. Il Memoriale*, 2008.

influential individuals. For example, he wrote how his friendship with members of high Palermitan society did not simply include politicians, businessmen and judicial authorities, but also prominent figures of the clergy. Archbishop Ruffini was one of them. In one particular case, Piddu u' Tenenti—at the Archbishop's invitation, and despite his limited financial resources—built a church that could accommodate all the inhabitants of Ciaculli. Michele Greco claimed that he inherited these important connections from his father; however, by virtue of his skills at clay pigeon shooting, he had also cultivated and maintained his own influential relationships.

Religion, which was already a distinctive trait of Greco's performative behaviour in court, was further stressed in the memoir as a primary element of defence not only for Greco himself, but also for his whole family:

Since he was a child, my brother Salvatore, called the Senator, was devoted to Our Lady. In fact, in the main square of Ciaculli there was a little temple dedicated to the Virgin Mary where my brother used to go every evening and light a candle. This devotion began when he was four or five years old. He used to go even when it was raining. In 1940, an earthquake destroyed the little temple; yet, my brother kept going to the church of Madonna del Carmelo. When he grew up, he became involved in every religious celebration and procession in the area. The women of this area started calling him 'sacrestano' (sacristan). Thus, he is *Senatore* and *Sacrestano*. (Viviano 2008, 42)

Greco wrote that his deep devotion helped him through the difficult times of his life. For example, in 1967, when his wife was diagnosed with a tumour and informed that she would only have a few months left to live, Greco 'asked for a divine intervention':

There was nothing I could do except raise my arms to the sky and put ourselves in the hands of God.... So one morning I left early and went to the church of San Giuseppe. It was very early and the sacristan was cleaning. In that church there are hundreds of candles at the feet of sacred images, I lit them all. The sacristan ran away to the priest warning him there was a mad man in the church. But the priest, who knew very well what we were going through, replied: "He is not crazy, his wife is seriously ill and he comes here every day to pray." A day later, my wife recovered completely. As soon as she felt better, we went to the church of San Giuseppe to meet the priest. He told us that it was only by God's grace that we had been saved. Twenty years have passed since then and I am still grateful to God. (Viviano 2008, 55)

As these examples show, Michele Greco in his memoir became narrator of a story of which he himself was protagonist. However, rather than simply recalling step by step a past experience, he recreated and restructured it in the process of writing, deliberately omitting those ‘facts’ that were not consistent with the identity he aimed at projecting. Consequently, not only were the events presented in a different light, but his *self* was ‘restructured’ through the events he had lived. This is evidence of the *reflexive* and *emergent* nature of Greco’s performance, whether in verbal interactions or in the written form of a memoir. The transposition of a portion of his own reality in an autobiographical text allowed him to reflect *a posteriori* upon it, to reconstruct and restructure relevant episodes of his life. In other words, he let ‘social structure’ *emerge* in his performance, to transform it substantially.

Through the systematic use of religious symbolic references, Greco ‘enhanced’ his performative text to transform the events and social settings he was interpreting in the course of writing. Biblical analogies and religious metaphors recur throughout the text:

Since my mum taught me to make the sign of the cross I have had a passion for Christian doctrine and, in the age of reason, this passion has grown day after day. The Bible has been and will always be a light in the dark path of my life. The Breviary is also excellent food for the soul.... My profound faith and innocence have always supported me. I have the shield of faith and the sword of the soul, which in this Calvary has given me the strength of a lion. Moved by an interior need, my spiritual sword became a pen and began writing. This is only the beginning. I am not a scholar, I am a very simple man, but, with my simplicity, I will write about my life and my Calvary. (Viviano 2008, 138)

In his studies on performance, sociologist Jeffrey Alexander argued for the actual enactment of a role to be internally consistent, it is important for an actor to choose an appropriate means of symbolic production. These can be identified in the ‘standardised expressive equipment’ that made up Greco’s personal *front*. Indeed, his

appearance and *manner* can be considered as icons of the morals and meanings of the cultural texts to be performed.

As analysed in previous sections, these elements became the ideal vehicle for Michele Greco to effectively perform his social status and power that he had derived not only from past life and work experiences, but also from the name and authority of his family. In order to preserve his social power and the ability to exercise social control, Michele Greco needed to develop an effective form of expressive communication that could project persuasive symbolic forms. Hence, he portrayed himself as a protagonist of the events in ‘simplified narratives’, representing his role, argument and status as exemplifications of sacred religious and secular texts (Alexander, Giesen, and Mast 2006, 52). This is evident, for example, in the analogy of Greco’s family with the family of Nazareth:

Since I got married on the 22 June 1949, God has given me a real wife, intelligent, educated, and very religious; her extended family had a clean criminal record. Since we got married, I have only had one ideal: God and my family. I have never had bad habits of any sort, only work and family and then every Sunday, without exception, we went to mass. I have always been extremely close to the sacraments.... My family, made of three people, is the real image of the family of Nazareth, union (even though I am now locked in a cell), the affection, the faith and the respect for the parents reign. (Viviano 2008, 54-55)

Through a performance which was founded in religious symbols belonging to a shared cultural dimension, Michele Greco sought to create ‘psychological identification’ with, and ‘cultural closeness’ to, his audience, thereby setting the conditions for an ‘emotional connection of the audience with actor and text’ and for his cultural text to be communicated convincingly. Evidence of this is seen in the continuous references to the Bible and the breviary, which refer both to a cultural dimension that is widely recognised and held as sacred by external society:

The breviary contains the prayers of every hour, from dawn to midnight. The prayer of dawn is the one our Lord prefers the most. It is an incredible feeling to find oneself alone with the breviary in one’s hands, in the heart of the desert (or the mountain)...

when dawn is breaking. Mother Nature wears the best colours in the morning; birds singing greet the Father of life. Praying at that hour one feels like being face to face with the Creator. (Viviano 2008, 108)

In relation to Alexander's analysis of how power can be maintained in performance, one can see in Greco's text evidence of narratives that cast his opponents as 'narrative antagonists, as insincere and artificial actors who were only role-playing to advance their interests'. This refers to Greco's frequent attack on the 'slanderers' who had accused him. As he wrote after almost two years from his arrest,

In this period of real interior life, a life full of suffering and prayer— I say of great suffering because moral tortures are the most atrocious—I am accused of ninety murders. These 'gentlemen' who accuse me with their slanders of these misdeeds need to go and take a proper bath in the Jordan to clean their conscience. They cannot destroy families with infamy to satisfy public opinion. What they have done to my family is what the Nazis did to the Jews; the only thing there is left for them to do is take us to extermination camps. In our society there are persecutors who desire these things. I call them 'followers of Nero', as they are the greatest plague of modern society. (Viviano 2008, 109)

The closing paragraph of his memoir read:

Your Honour President Professor Alfonso Giordano, Judge Pietro Grasso, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Court,
I ask you to read carefully what I have written.... I have a profound faith, which gives me hope. My hope tells me that one day a ray of light will come full of justice. Both for me and for you all, and above all for your children, may this Court be that ray of light full of justice.
p.s. may you forgive all my writing mistakes. I have been a peasant all my life. Now that I am an old man, I have changed profession. Unfortunately.
Michele Greco. (Viviano 2008, 138–139)

The reference to the life of the judges and that of their children in the very last sentence may raise questions about whether it represented a veiled threat rather than a wish. Similar doubts had been aroused on the occasion of the wish which Michele Greco addressed to the members of the Court of Assise moments before they retired to deliberate (as has been reported in the first paragraph of this chapter). It is impossible to determine what the real intentions of Michele Greco were with those remarks. Nevertheless, in light of the events which followed the maxi-trial and that saw the first open attack of Cosa Nostra against prominent political and antimafia

figures, one plausible interpretation of Greco's words is that it may have represented more of a warning.

'People must read what I will write...what I will write is Gospel', Greco wrote in the last page. Commenting on this sentence in the introduction to the book that contains the transcription of Greco's first memoir Sicilian writer Gaetano Savatteri argued that the autobiographical text, in reality, was addressed to the people of Cosa Nostra (Viviano 2008, 10). However, having described the role of Michele Greco both inside and outside the mafia, and, above all, that of his family, the idea that the memoir was primarily addressed to external society also seems plausible. As Greco would write in his last memoir seven years later, it was in the eyes of society, including 'his ninety-eight year old mother, his wife, and son' that he needed to reinstate his identity and the name of his family.

4.6. The 1994 Memoir

After the end of the first maxi-trial, Michele Greco was kept under the harsh 41-bis prison regime.⁸² During those years, he continued to be implicated in crimes committed while he was head of the mafia Commission. At a hearing on the 8th of April 1994, Greco handed another memoir to the judges (Figure 11).⁸³

82 The art 41-bis of the Act n. 354 of 26 July 1975 is a piece of emergency legislation introduced to increase the severity of detention for those subjects who have committed particularly heinous crimes and, specifically, for those held for association with terrorist and mafia organisations. The person detained under prison regime is in constant solitary confinement with no possibility of communicating even with family members.

83 TdP, CdA Sez. I., Procedimento Penale n.8/91, contro Michele Greco + altri, 17944-17955. Permission has been granted by the Court of Palermo to utilise images of this memoir in this thesis.

7
 Onorevole Signor Presidente e Signore della Corte,

Sono otto anni che vivo in isolamento assoluto e guardato a vista, in carcere e alle dove ho dimenticato che esiste il sole.

Questa situazione per tanto tempo e la mancanza di cure adeguate per le sofferenze fisiche, mi ha distrutto.

L'eccezionale detenzione a cui sono sottoposto, non è conforme ad un essere umano, perché è fuori da ogni umanità. Cerco e preisco che ero un caso d'innocenza, senza rabbia e senza rancore per alcuno.

Qui, posso affermare che la sofferenza tallora lo spirito. Una esperienza acquisita nel corso di tempo, ed in seguito parlerò brevemente di questo argomento.

Ma i tanti acciacchi di cui sono, la più noiosa è l'amnesia per cui in alcuni momenti se mi chiedono le circostanze non so rispondere. Infatti in un'occasione al centro clinico di Pisa" dove sono stato ricoverato dopo sette anni e mezzo di reclusione", ho fatto presente questo serio disturbo mentale al medico di guardia, il quale aveva predisposto un consulto col neurologo e lo psichiatra. Ma la causa del mio ricovero non si è fatto, ed ho dovuto interrompere anche le varie terapie che mi avevano prescritto, perché gli esami clinici mi avevano trovato un rottame.

La solitudine la soffrono anche gli animali fierissimi un essere umano. Al nostro cervello ha bisogno di stimolarsi con quello degli altri, altrimenti è come l'acqua di un pezzo che non è alimentata dalla sorgente, col tempo impudridisce e si evapora. Infatti alcuni detenuti sottoposti alla solitudine porta al suicidio e alla pazzia. Per me è stato mai concesso nemmeno di partecipare alla celebrazione della Settimana, pur essendo un mio diritto che nessuno dovrebbe calpestarlo. Comunque la sera alla televisione che viene trasmessa ogni domenica alle 11 sul primo canale, e mi è stato permesso di vedere chi recitano per coloro che soffrono e vivono soli.

Le cause di quanto ho citato qui sopra non sono più in condizioni di poterle esprimere oralmente, pertanto ho deciso di scrivere questa lettera, avendo il tempo.

La possibilità di pensare nella solitudine e nel silenzio di un'isola remota, ed è in me vivo. Che io ricordi, non sono stato mai

Figure 11: Memoir of Michele Greco (1994), page 1.

The opening section reads:

Your Honour, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Court,
I have been living in complete isolation and closely guarded for eight years, in a small cell where I have forgotten that even the sun exists. This long segregation and the lack of appropriate treatment for my physical suffering have destroyed me. The special detention in which I am kept is not appropriate for any human being; it is against humanity. I define my case as inhuman without any anger or resentment towards anybody. Yet, I can assert now that sufferings like these reinforce the soul.

Just over ten pages long, this previously unknown and as yet unpublished document represents a shorter work than the one addressed to the members of the court in 1987. Despite certain similarities in terms of content and tone, the two memoirs differ substantially in many respects. In the latter memoir, for example, Greco dedicated only a marginal place to his personal life and family.

There are few references to the events that had led to his sentence and to the *pentiti* who had ‘condemned’ him:

With slanders and defamations, they have radically changed my biography. Public opinion has reduced me to pieces; the stain on my image has been magnified day after day, starting with the Chinnici trial. This bombardment of devastating news can destroy the image of any man and cause prejudices, because human nature is extremely fragile....In these long years, I have endured unspeakable tortures: I have been despised, humiliated, defamed, persecuted and used as a scapegoat.

There are also references to those political figures for whose murders Greco had been indicted. In most cases, he denied having ever met any of them, or having any reasons to want them dead.

Mostly, however, this memoir constitutes the ultimate attempt by Michele Greco to rest his case on appeals to faith. More than in any other court appearance or autobiographical text this document represents the *summa* of Greco’s religious performance. Quotes from the Bible and other religious references recur systematically throughout this memoir. Saint Paul, for example, is invoked in the manuscript to condemn ‘the earthly passions that afflict humanity’ (Figure 12):

omni in condizioni disumane, ma con pazienza e serenità.
 Certo ho sofferto molto, soffre ancora, ormai sono familiare con il
 patir. Ma in questo calvario conosco la disperazione, l'anoressia,
 la tristezza ed il turbamento, ne sono testimoni i vari agenti di
 custodia dell'illecezione e per un anno quelli di Trinità Smerese.
 Ma ciò non lo cito per gloriarvi, io posso gloriarvi della mia
 miseria, ma mi glorio in Colui il quale mi ha concesso la Sua
 grazia dandomi il dono della fortezza, della pazienza per
 affrontare questa terribile prova da vero Cristiano. Dio provò Abramo,
 Isacco, Giacobbe e Ettore, perché non dovrebbe provare anche me?
 Siccome ho la coscienza pulita e tranquilla, così dopo tante atroci
 sofferenze, arido con orgoglio: Sono un vero Cristiano! E non è facile dire
 sono un vero Cristiano, ma io lo dico senza paura di arrischiare di Veracogna.
 Perché non sono affatto il nostro preabbricato con tanta superficialità.
 In queste condizioni di vita disumana conosco l'ozio che è il peccato
 minico dell'anima. Amo molto la lettura, e trascorro l'intera giornata
 in essa, perché non vado all'aria, sempre inspirato con i miei
 amati libri che continuano la parola di Dio, cibo eccellente per lo
 spirito. Il nostro corpo ha bisogno di nutrimento per vivere, ma più
 del corpo è il nostro spirito che ha bisogno di nutrimento ad
 incominciare dal mattino con una Toilette spirituale che dà all'uomo
 calore umano, ed è il calore umano che dà dignità, saggezza ed
 onestà. In questa Toilette mattutina la faremmo tutti di ricambio
 il mondo sarebbe diverso. L'uomo senza calore umano è veramente un
 mostro. La ragione più alta della dignità dell'uomo consiste nella
 sua vocazione alla comunione con Dio che rende la coscienza
 integerrima. Purtroppo nella vita normale si conoscevano le varie tristezze,
 perché si è presi dal mondo e travolti dalle varie passioni che affliggono
 l'umanità. Infatti S. Paolo non si stancava mai di dire:
 Invidiate alle cose di carne e non alle cose di quaggiù.
 Ma nella solitudine, nel silenzio e nella sofferenza con la lettura e l'ascolto

Figure 12: Memoir of Michele Greco (1994), page 4.

‘Saint Paul used to say: “Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.”⁸⁴ I have learnt that in silence, in loneliness and in suffering one can discover invaluable horizons just by reading and listening to the word of God’. Greco also compared his pain of being ‘chained’ to that suffered by Saint Paul when imprisoned in Rome between 61 and 62 A.D.:

One day, when I will meet Saint Paul, we will talk about our journeys in chains because, like me, Saint Paul also had to travel in chains. From the day I met these chains and the prison until today, when I am seventy years old, I have travelled along the dark valley of defamation and calumny. Along this cruel journey, the word of God has been my only comfort and the only light to illuminate my steps, and I am not just rambling when I say this; I am talking by the experience I gained through atrocious suffering (Figure 13).

Jesus Christ’s Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1–11) and ‘the sense of humour of Saint Teresa of Ávila’ are also cited in the memoir as sources of comfort for Michele Greco during the years spent in isolation:

Saint Teresa of Ávila, who suffered atrocious pain in her leg, constantly prayed for Jesus to help her alleviate the pain. But Jesus replied to her: ‘Teresa, this is how I treat my friends’. And Teresa replied: ‘No wonder you have so few friends’. I am suffering in the same way, but I am glad, because I am aware of being one of the few friends of Jesus.

Saint Augustine is cited, for example, in regard to the fact that, as part of routine prison inspections, Greco had to dress and undress prior to leaving his cell for court hearings:

Considering my age and my poor health this is a serious matter. Indeed, everyday, prison guards feel embarrassed when following these instructions with an old man like me. But I always encourage them that I have never complained about this disposition or about others, because short is the pain of endurance and infinite are the centuries of eternal rest. Obviously, those who decided on this decree have never read Saint Augustine, who fought for the maximum respect of the man in chains.

84 This verse is derived from the Bible, Colossians 3:2, ESV.

The story of Susanna (Book of Daniel, 13) and Queen Esther (Esther 1), on the other hand, are cited in Greco's memoir as 'lessons on the importance of evaluating the accusations that may seem to be honest, but are not'.⁸⁵

In this manuscript, it is possible to identify those specific strategies that social actors adopt to display their communicative skills: the choice of selected words and reported speech like the quotations from the Bible; the emphasis placed on particular details concerning moral and physical suffering; parallelisms and metaphors. These metalinguistic features are essential in that they carry instructions on how to interpret other messages being communicated. Moreover, being grounded in the cultural context of the narrator, they constitute an effective vehicle for Michele Greco to appeal to tradition whilst displaying communicative competence.

Michele Greco's memoirs can be specifically analysed in terms of personal narrative performance, involving a communicative interaction between the writer (Greco) and the audience to whom the memoir is addressed. As previously specified, it is only in the interaction between narrator and audience, and through a shared cultural understanding, that the overall narrative is complete (Lawler 2012, 16). For the audience to be able to actively engage in interpretation and assume meaning for the episodes narrated, personal narrative must necessarily refer to, or draw on, wider cultural narratives. In Greco's instance, the Bible and other religious symbols, which are immediately and officially recognised as culture-specific, represent the cultural narratives from which Greco consistently drew to create and perform his own stories. Furthermore, since the personal narrative in Greco's memoir is deeply embedded in the individuality of his personal experience and in his attempt to construct a self-text

⁸⁵ Chapter 13 in the Book of Daniel was added by Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches.

for audience evaluation, it provides an ideal context to study how his experience and religious identity are performatively constructed. For example, Greco repeatedly referred to himself as a ‘true Christian’ and a ‘true believer’ to whom God had given the gift of strength, endurance and patience for the ‘terrible tests’ he was facing:

God tested Abraham, Isaac and Job. Why should He not test me too? Since my conscience is clean, today after years of suffering I can proudly shout: I am a true Christian! It is not easy to say this, but I say it without any fear of blushing in shame because I am not the monster that has been created with such superficiality. (Figure 12)

Greco explained that being a ‘true believer’ for him meant ‘to believe in reincarnation, in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and in the apostolic tradition’. It meant ‘not to fear death’, even though, at seventy years of age, he felt he was ‘close to the end of his life as it is written in the Sacred Scripture: “The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty”’ (Psalm 90:10).

Another example is represented by the fact that Greco regularly compared his patience to the proverbial ‘patience of Job’, who had demonstrated faith and patience with God while suffering many severe trials (Book of Job; James 5:11–20):

My conscience is clean and serene. My faith is strong. I am a convinced believer and continue along my way carrying on my shoulders two crosses: the cross of physical suffering and that of moral suffering which is even heavier. Carrying the cross of moral suffering, the words of Job come to my head: “I am full of disdain.” I am also full of disdain and faith like Him...and for this reason I do not give up, as giving up is for pagans.

Through narrative, both text and context are embodied in the personal story narrated. In particular, the events narrated and the cultural symbols constituting the plot of the memoirs’ narrative are told in such a way that they explain how Greco had come to be the person he was. In other words, it is the combination of personal and cultural narratives that defines, creates and presents the identity that Michele Greco aimed to project in his memories.

For example, the numerous references to Calvary recurring throughout the memoir indicate that the role Greco intended to portray was that of a martyr whose patience and faith God was testing.

‘In this Calvary, I have never refused to answer the questions I was asked. I wrote two other memoirs and some letters, but I have not been believed, because the barbaric lynching of public opinion has discredited my image’, Greco wrote. Saying this, he compared his public ‘lynching’ to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ: ‘in a historical trial, it was the people who shouted to the President of that tribunal: ‘If you release this man, you are not Caesar’s friend. Two thousand years have passed and nothing has changed.’⁸⁶ These frequent analogies with Biblical and evangelical narrations are necessary for Michele Greco to present an ‘image’ of himself as an ‘innocent martyr’ through a set of symbols and narratives which are not only familiar to a wider audience, but also appeal to a tradition which is held highly in comparison to other forms of profane knowledge. This process allowed Greco to create psychological identification and cultural extension with his audience, affect it at an emotional level, and successfully project his intended self through performance.

It is important to remember at this point that the approach to the analysis of identity adopted in this thesis is based on the assumption that identity is not a coherent, inner category, ‘but a multiplicity of selves or personae’ among which the narrator (or the social actor) can choose what *self* to represent when discussing his or her life (Langellier 2001).

86 The reference is to the Jews who cried out “If you release this man, you are not Caesar’s friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar”, against Jesus Christ when Pilate sought to release him (John 19:12).

Terra è tutto fatica e dolori, ed io a sessantadue anni conobbi le catene
 ed il carcere. In questi piccoli anni ho fatto diversi viaggi in Catene,
 e quando mi capita di vedere qualche film storico dove si vedono
 gli schiavi in Catene, dico in un sospiro: io l'ho provato. Un giorno
 quando incontrerò J. Paolo, abbiamo da discutere molto in
 merito ai viaggi in Catene, perché anche così i viaggi in Catene.
 Dalla data che conobbi le catene ed il carcere fino ad oggi che ho
 settant'anni ho viaggiato veramente nella valle oscura a causa
 d'infanzia e della calunnia. Osa in questo crudele viaggio la
 parola di Dio è stata lampada per i miei passi e non parlo
 e taccio, ma è una esperienza acquisita nell'atroce sofferenza.
 Ora io mi chiedo: è mai possibile che nell'ultima cartella
 della mia vita con un patrimonio che mi convertita una vita
 arida, "con una famiglia che dopo della mia vita" e soprattutto
 con i miei sentimenti me mi ardevo a fare il criminale?
 Senza scopo, senza pochi interessi come è stato accertato, mi
 coinvolgevo in fatti refferati? Ah no! Non sono né pazzo
 né criminale né assassino, non sono il mostro di Firenze e
 nemmeno quello di Foligno. Sono un uomo col cuore di padre
 e di sanone col Santo Timore di Dio. Dio ci crea liberi, a noi
 la scelta, ed io ho fatto la scelta fondamentale fin dall'età della
 ragione che è il Santo Timore di Dio. Questa scelta fondamentale
 mi ha dato dignità e calore umano, mi è testimone tutto il
 mondo che mi conosce abbastanza bene.

Tra tante calunnie ce ne è una dichiarazione che compie
 tutto quanto ho rivelato in questi anni e cioè: non sono un
 assassino! Infatti timo la in una conferenza televisiva parlavo
 in merito, si avvicinavo al significato, ma non del tutto, perché
 la dichiarazione è fatta con un termine dialettale, contadinesco,
 ma il significato esatto è che non sono un uomo sanguinario,
 ma un uomo sante e di pace. Di questo argomento mi si parlava

Figure 13: Memoir of Michele Greco (1994), page 8.

In constructing his identity by means of personal narrative performance, Michele Greco did not simply use cultural narratives related to the religious sphere, but he also drew on apologetic culturalistic narratives which for a long time defended the idea of the mafia as a subcultural behaviour. As he wrote in this memoir:

What I have written is Gospel, I wrote it with the tip of my heart and not of a pen. This is me, not the monster that has been represented day after day during the trials. I would like to point out to this Honourable Excellent Court that I have nothing to do with all those dirty things which sully today's society, those are: drugs trafficking, weapons trafficking, extortion, usury, and so forth. Unfortunately these ingredients attract people who are thirsty for money and power...they are the idols of this pagan society.

After saying this, Greco re-stated, once again, his love for his land, family and his fervent religious devotion as indisputable evidence of his non-involvement in these 'dishonourable' practices. This same rhetoric would recur, three years later, in the film *I Grimaldi* directed by his son Giuseppe Greco.

The concept of justice, to which Greco repeatedly referred in his memoirs, is worth closer analysis. On one occasion Greco wrote, for example, that one day 'peace and real justice may triumph in a world full of inequality and violence', adding:

I am sure that honest men who administer justice act with conscience. Conscience is the true guide for a man. But justice is a prerogative of God, not of men. Men only need to respect divine justice. There are innumerable judicial codes and articles, but the true foundation of justice is to be found in the Bible. The words of our Lord are the real tests which explicitly concern justice. Unfortunately, I noticed that our lawyers do not know this. Unfortunately, many wise people have never read the Bible. I am simply a poor ignorant man, but I keep it close to my heart.

As analysed in the previous chapter on initiation rituals, the concept of justice that in mafia ideology frequently appears to overlap with 'divine justice' is evident in this example. It shows how, for Michele Greco, the term justice seems to be completely separate from any legal and social obligations. To his eyes, divine justice is the only existing justice individuals need to observe. Consequently, its observation and respect are sufficient not only to grant immunity from guilt, but also to demonstrate

innocence. Even in this case, religion appears to be perceived as a system of rules, values and practices that are confined within the totalising, utilitarian scheme of mafia ideology. It represents a sacred, authoritative source of legitimisation for behaviour as long as its message can be conveniently adapted to mafia needs and, above all, as long as it does not require actual adherence to any social or legal commitment. In the ‘double moral’ of Michele Greco, religion offers a set of narratives from which to draw to construct one’s social identity. Since these narratives are familiar to external society, their use represents a mechanism through which one can create an affinity with the target audience.

Interestingly, on the 16th of December, the final day of the maxi-trial, relatives of the defendants – including members of the Greco family – and members of the public gathered inside and outside the gates of the Aula Bunker, where they began shouting that the ‘whole trial had been a joke’, and that certain crimes could only be tried by divine justice. ‘Only God can absolve or condemn. Real justice has to be done, and the innocence of these good men proven’, people protested in defence of their relatives behind bars.⁸⁷

On 1st of August 1995, Michele Greco was granted permission to leave prison to attend his wife’s funeral. Dozens of armed police officers escorted him to the house, impeding access to unauthorised visitors or journalists. Despite the heat of the early afternoon hours and the tight surveillance, which had closed the streets of Ciaculli, the whole town gathered outside Greco’s house to show their respect

87, Sandra Rizza, ‘Il coro dei parenti. Solo dio può assolvere o condannare’, *L’Ora*, 17 December 1987.

through a religious silence.⁸⁸ That would be the first and last time Greco returned to his *Fondo Favarella* after his conviction in 1992.

When he died in February 2008, Father Pietro Cappello of the Maria Santissima del Carmelo church in Ciaculli solemnly announced to the community that a funeral mass and procession would be held the following day in honour of their ‘beloved brother Greco’. These plans did not go ahead as expected as the police commissioner Giuseppe Caruso prohibited the public funeral, allowing only a smaller ceremony in the cemetery church of Santissimo Spirito where the Greco family chapel is located. Nevertheless, more than two hundred people joined with close relatives to pay tribute to Michele Greco on the day of his funeral. ‘May God welcome in the glory of his kingdom our father Michele Greco’ was the phrase that concluded the funeral homily.

88 Alessandra Ziniti, ‘La moglie muore, il Papa della mafia torna nel suo feudo’, *La Repubblica*, 1 August 1995.

CHAPTER FIVE

CASE STUDY: BERNARDO PROVENZANO

Give a man a reputation as an early riser, and that man can sleep till noon.
(Mark Twain)

Introduction

Bernardo Provenzano was arrested on the morning of the 11th of April 2006. Wanted since the 9th of May 1963, he had remained on the run for forty-three years, by far the longest time a fugitive has ever evaded capture in the history of the mafia. At the time of his arrest, no recent images of him existed to help identification, except for a single photo taken in 1959 when he was only twenty-six years old, from which Italian police had constructed a photo fit image to predict the likely appearance of an aged Provenzano (Figure 14).



Figure 14: Last known photograph of Bernardo Provenzano taken in 1959
Right: Police computer generated photo fit.

When the police broke into the hideout in Montagna dei Cavalli, two miles outside his hometown of Corleone, Provenzano emphatically whispered: ‘Voi non sapete quello che state facendo’ (‘You don’t know what you are doing’).¹ In the following days, these prophetic words echoed throughout the media around the world. Newspapers articles and television news reports chronicled every instant of the arrest and reported on every known aspect of the life of *il capo dei capi* of Cosa Nostra about whom very little was known at the time.

During the four decades prior to his arrest, conflicting information about Provenzano had been given to judicial authorities, making a coherent profile of his role within Cosa Nostra impossible. On the one hand, the Corleonese fugitive was represented as ‘the uncatchable’ par excellence, the gun fighter who ‘shot like a God’,² and one of the most ferocious masterminds behind the strategy of terror implemented by the Corleonesi in the early 1990s. On the other, more recent testimonies of mafia defectors provided investigators with a description of Provenzano as the moderate, clever deviser of a new strategy aimed at restructuring Cosa Nostra after a decade of internecine conflicts, the hardening of the State’s reaction, and the breach in the wall of omertà caused by the spreading phenomenon of pentitismo. Furthermore, one year prior to his arrest, the Public Prosecutor’s Office in Palermo released the letters written by Bernardo Provenzano to his close collaborator Antonino Giuffrè.³ These small type written, hand-delivered notes, called *pizzini*, which Giuffrè had made available for the investigating magistrates

1 RAI 3 documentary *Scacco al re: La cattura di Provenzano*, written by Clelio Benevento, Mariano Cirino and Salvo Palazzolo, and directed by Claudio Canepari, Mariano Cirino and Paolo Santolini, 2007.

2 Interrogatori del collaboratore di giustizia Antonino Calderone, *Ordinanza-Sentenza*, Greco + 18, 1742–1743.

3 Salvo Palazzolo, ‘Autoritratto di Provenzano’, *La Repubblica*, 3 August 2005.

when he had turned state's evidence in 2002, gave a glimpse of Provenzano's character as a humble, religiously devout interpreter of what was believed to be the new philosophy of Cosa Nostra born from the ashes of the Second Mafia War and the attack on the State in the early 1990s: to pursue its businesses under a more covert guise while reinstating its historical connections with the political and economic world.⁴ The *pizzini*, replete with recurrent religious references and biblical quotes, presented a side to Provenzano that strikingly contrasted with the persona of the 'beast' described by *pentiti*.⁵

The evident differences between these representations match the variability in nicknames attributed to Bernardo Provenzano down the years: he was known as '*u Tratturi* (the Tractor), '*u zu Binnu* (uncle Binnu), '*u Raggiuneri* (the Accountant), '*u Viddanu* (the Peasant), *la Bestia* (the Beast), '*u Professuri* (the Professor), *Tabula Rasa* and the *Il Fantasma di Corleone* (the Phantom of Corleone). The ambiguity around his persona seemed to have increased in proportion to his ability to evade capture, thereby enhancing the aura of mysticism surrounding him. This explains why the aspect of the arrest that most captured media attention causing surprise or even 'disappointment' was the spartan conditions in which Italy's most powerful criminal appeared to have been living.

The 'mere ramshackle cottage'⁶ where Provenzano had hidden was scrutinised not only by investigators and forensic experts, but also by a team of journalists, contrary to standard police procedures. On the evening of Thursday, 13th April 2006, RAI 2 anchorwoman Anna la Rosa and her colleagues meticulously searched and

4 *Pizzino* (pl. *pizzini*) derives from Sicilian dialect *pizzinu*, meaning 'small piece of paper'.

5 Definition given by police informant Giuseppe Di Cristina in 1978. TdP, Sentenza emessa nel procedimento penale contro Greco Michele + 18 (Omicidi Politici), 1755.

6 Federico Varese, 'The Sopranos? No, the Shepherds', *The Times*, 14 April, 2006.

exposed to a live audience the ‘shepherd’s shack’ and the ‘stable’ where Provenzano had been hiding.⁷ ‘Here it is possible to see some pieces of ricotta cheese and the pot containing chicory’, La Rosa commented, noting small details of the house that gave an insight into the primitive conditions of Provenzano’s lifestyle. Accompanied by live commentary, video cameras of the national TV programme lingered on the implements used to make ricotta, on the Bibles and other religious artefacts found around the house, on the few pots where chicory had been boiled, and on the external rural landscape populated by shepherds and their flocks.

‘This was Provenzano’s world’, Federico Varese observed in the *Times* on the 14th of April 2006, drawing a comparison between the Corleonese Sicilian hinterland and the village of Milocca, in the south of Palermo, described by the American anthropologist Charlotte Gower in the 1920s. In Varese’s view, the modestly furnished accommodation seemed to define the character and style of Provenzano, a ‘diminutive, silver-haired senior’ whose ‘cultural and human horizon was that of an uneducated shepherd’ and whose identity was far removed from the stereotypical cinematic image of gangsters rendered by the *Godfather* or the *Sopranos*:

In stark contrast with the media-savvy dapper American don John Gotti, Provenzano has no style, no ability to articulate, no contacts outside a very small network of mountainous villages in the hills outside Palermo. Despite all the talk of protection in high places, Provenzano’s most valuable contact in his time in hiding was another shepherd, a childhood friend who owns a few sheep and sells ricotta in the local market.⁸

The parallel between Provenzano and the fictional character of Don Michael Corleone made famous by Mario Puzo’s bestseller *The Godfather* (1969) became a staple of media reports of the arrest.

7 RAI-teca Palermo, Servizio TV su Bernardo Provenzano di Anna La Rosa, RAI 2, 13 April 2006.

8 Varese, ‘The Sopranos? No, the Shepherds’.

The frame is agricultural: chicory is boiling, homemade cheese, a sleeping bag on a net. This was the life of a mafia boss returned to Corleone, the crossroad of the two stories: Don Michael began his adventure in Corleone; in Corleone Provenzano's parabola ends. The fictional character and the man came close without meeting. We have been looking for the godfather, and we have found the shepherd.⁹

The figure of Provenzano, surrounded until that moment by the 'mythical' aura of somebody who had successfully managed to lead an entire organisation for years without leaving a trace, inevitably contrasted with the primitive setting in which he was found during his arrest. This apparent paradox was further enhanced by the religious setting that profoundly impressed police who broke into the abandoned country house in Montagna dei Cavalli. Chief Police Renato Cortese, who led the operations of the *Squadra Mobile* 'Gruppo Duomo', revealed, in fact, that the first thing to strike them was 'the religious setting surrounding the mafia boss':

It was the place where we had always imagined he would be. We found him beside his typewriter, immersed in papers and pizzini, in religious texts and the Bible. The thing that struck me the most when I saw him were the crucifixes he wore around his neck, that immediately give you the image of this character immersed in a religious context.¹⁰

Furthermore, the hundreds of *pizzini* seized by police on this occasion contained frequent religious expressions and biblical quotations threaded throughout otherwise routine instructions. This religious dimension to Provenzano's behaviour did not escape media attention. On the contrary, it became an intrinsic component of his image, which was being progressively constructed through media representations. A few days after the arrest, a popular Sicilian newsreader reported:

Bernardo Provenzano is religious. A demonstration of his religiosity is what has been found in his hideout here in Corleone: a picture of The Last Supper, two pictures of the Virgin Mary, dozens of rosaries, some of which were even in the bathroom, three Bibles, a calendar of Padre Pio, a book of prayers entitled *Pregate, Pregate*, ninety-one holy pictures, seventy-three of which represented Jesus Christ with 'Jesus, in You I trust' written at the top.¹¹

9 Alessandro Mastroluca, 'I due volti del personaggio Provenzano. La parabola del boss tra mito e realtà', 13 April 2006, *Magazine di comunicazione e media*, Dipartimento di Comunicazione e Ricerca Sociale, Università Sapienza, Roma.

10 RAI 3 documentary *Scacco al re* (2007).

11 *Teleacras*, news report by Angelo Ruoppolo, 13 April 2006.

What the vast majority of the media failed to mention was that Provenzano had only spent a few months in the cottage of Montagna dei Cavalli before being apprehended. Indeed, police informant Luigi Ilardo revealed to Lieutenant Colonel Michele Riccio in 1995 that the boss from Corleone had spent the most part of his period in hiding between Villabate and Bagheria, 'his historical stronghold'.¹² 'In Bagheria he had lived peacefully with his family in a large, beautiful, eighteenth century-style villa', Ilardo confessed, adding also that 'it was the place where Provenzano received his men and ran his businesses'.¹³ Similarly, mafia defector Angelo Siino dismissed 'this story of the peasant who cannot stay away from his pastoral life' as 'pure fairytale'.¹⁴ Siino portrayed a rather different image of Provenzano, describing him as the man who wore casual but elegant clothes, cashmere Ballantyne pullovers, branded shoes and who had not abstained from a past lifestyle of luxury or from the company of women.¹⁵

In general, the massive media coverage of Provenzano's arrest added to an already extremely approximate and misleading image of the mafia boss. Focusing, in fact, on aspects such as the backwardness of his life style or on his alleged religiosity, the mass media did not give proportional attention to other far more relevant aspects of his role as mafia leader, for example, the solid connections with prominent figures in political and economic sectors. One of the risks associated with

12 Testimony of police informant Luigi Ilardo to Lieutenant Colonel Michele Riccio in 1995. Ordinanza 'Grande Oriente' emessa dal GIP di Palermo Renato Grillo il 6 novembre 1998 nei confronti di Provenzano Bernardo + 20. Also in TdP, seconda sezione penale, Processo Castello Simone + 5, (udienza del 13 ottobre 2000).

13 *ibid.*

14 Nicknamed 'Cosa Nostra's minister of public works', Siino was the businessman who oversaw all the mafia's public-sector contracts.

15 Giuseppe D'Avanzo, 'La vera storia di Provenzano. Siino: "Sparava come un dio"', *La Repubblica*, 14 aprile 2006.

this kind of representation is that it gives an extremely superficial reading of an otherwise deeply rooted and widespread phenomenon. Moreover, as described in the first chapter of this thesis, it contributes to the reinforcement of apologetic, ‘culturalistic’ discourses on the mafia that have offered an interpretation of the mafia as a phenomenon with vague outlines, inextricable from the Sicilian ‘subculture’ for over a century.

In the past six years, the immediate reaction of the mass media to Provenzano’s capture has been followed up by a wealth of literature on the topic, which continues to outline the profile of the mafia leader from a journalistic, judicial, economic and narrative perspective (Bellavia and Mazzocchi 2006; Oliva and Palazzolo 2006; Zingales 2006; Abbate and Gomez 2007; La Piana 2007; Grasso and La Licata 2007; Palazzolo and Prestipino 2008; Follain 2008; Longrigg 2008; Palazzolo 2010; Dino 2011). Within these studies, the religious element of Provenzano’s language and behaviour has been noted, either to stress the apparent contradiction with his role as a ‘ruthless criminal’ or to imply that a secret code might be hidden behind the religious references and biblical verses (Palazzolo and Prestipino 2008). However, despite these studies, scant attention has been given to the functional role played by religion at a communicative level of interaction between Provenzano and other mafia members.

This case study adopts an interdisciplinary approach to analyse the religious language of Bernardo Provenzano contextualising it within the wider framework of Cosa Nostra and the external socio-economic and political system of connections that allowed the mafia boss to rescue an organisation which was in a state of terminal decline. In particular, it examines the role played by religion within the

communicative system implemented by Provenzano in the mid-1990s in socio-anthropological terms of religious rituals and symbols, and through the *social drama* approach.

5.1. The rise to power of the Corleonesi

Bernardo Provenzano maintained control over Cosa Nostra from approximately 1995 until his arrest by the Italian police in April 2006. Prior to his arrest, he had evaded capture for over forty years. During this period, the Sicilian mafia witnessed an escalation in power of the Corleonese faction under Luciano Leggio and his *belve* (beasts), Totò ‘shorty’ Riina and Bernardo ‘the tractor’ Provenzano. When he turned police informant in 1978, Giuseppe di Cristina – mafia boss of Riesi and son of Francesco di Cristina mentioned in the Introduction – revealed that:

Riina Salvatore and Bernardo Provenzano, nicknamed ‘the beasts’ for their ferocity, are the most dangerous elements available to Luciano Leggio. Each guilty of at least forty murders...they have also been responsible for the murder of Lieutenant Colonel of the Carabinieri, Giuseppe Russo, on orders from Luciano Leggio.¹⁶

Mafia defector Antonino Calderone provided a similar description:

The Corleonesi were very ignorant, but they were canny, diabolic, astute and ferocious; a rare combination in Cosa Nostra. Totò Riina was very ignorant, but he had a good intuition, he was intelligent. He was very difficult to understand or to catch. At the same time, he was bestial. His philosophy was that, if someone's finger hurts, it is better to cut off his whole arm just to be safe. Bino Provenzano was nicknamed *u viddanu*, il villano.... My brother called him *u tratturi* for his ability as a killer and the effect of his intervention on a problem or a person. (Calderone ad Arlacchi 1994, 29)¹⁷

Luciano Leggio had begun his career in the 1940s as estate guard protecting the properties of absentee landowners (Longrigg 2008, 13). Around the same time, he

16 In March 1978, Giuseppe Di Cristina revealed to the police the internal clashes existing between the Corleonesi and the Palermitan Families led by Salvatore Inzerillo, Gaetano Badalamenti and Stefano Bontade, and described the plan of the Corleonesi to exterminate anyone ‘who dared oppose them’. Two months later, Di Cristina was murdered. *Ordinanza-Sentenza*, Greco + 18, 1740.

17 See also *ibid.*, 1762.

had also been recruited as a hit man and enforcer by the boss of the Corleone Family, Doctor Michele Navarra, known as *U Patri Nostru* ('Our Father'), who wielded considerable power in Sicily through influential political connections (Lupo 2004, 233-235). In the 1950s, a dispute emerged between Navarra and Leggio over the building of a dam, which Navarra feared would disrupt Cosa Nostra's monopoly of the water supply used to irrigate citrus estates in the *Conca D'Oro* (Longrigg 2008, 15). This was only the first evident symptom of a deeper internal fracture within the Corleonese group, which would eventually lead in the late 1950s to an open war for the control of Corleone. By 1958, more than fifty members belonging to both sides of the conflict had lost their lives, including Navarra. Navarra's death not only ratified the supremacy of Leggio's group in Corleone, but it also symbolised the first step in the rise to power of the Corleonese group within the mafia organisation across Sicily. Totò Riina, Bernardo Provenzano and Leoluca Bagarella were the most loyal members of Leggio's faction.

Emerging victorious from the Corleonese war, Luciano Leggio began to establish his roots in Palermo, historically the mafia's most powerful province.¹⁸ Indeed, the long-term tactic implemented by the Corleonesi consisted of acquiring power over other mafia Families and Cosa Nostra's Commission. However, in mafia history, acquiring power has rarely been an end in itself, unless it also facilitates an entrance into, and control over, lucrative economic activities. As mafia defector Antonino Giuffrè remarked during his interrogation with public prosecutor Giuseppe Pignatone in 2002, 'the Corleonesi had a very clear view of the situation and very

18 Tribunale Penale di Marsiglia, Processo verbale di interrogatorio di prima comparazione di Antonino Calderone (25 Agosto 1988).

clear interests: to get their hands on the economy of Palermo first, and that of Sicily soon after'.¹⁹

The Corleonesi, in fact, progressively moved from the illegal meat market, which they had taken over in Corleone, to the far more profitable construction business and, above all, to the business of narcotics where the Palermitan Families had an exclusive monopoly.²⁰ In particular, Stefano Bontate, Salvatore Inzerillo and their respective allies had controlled the narcotics trade to the US throughout the 1960s–1970s, ‘running refineries in Sicily and supplying the American market’ (Follain 2008, 85).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, in the early 1960s control of the illicit heroin trade with the United States had also been the *casus belli* behind the First Mafia War (1962–1963) between the Grecos of Ciaculli and the La Barbera brothers. This war, which culminated in June 1963 with the ‘Ciaculli Massacre’ and the subsequent public outrage, had forced Italian authorities to set up a Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry, to intensify police investigations, and to adopt severe repressive measures. The subsequent arrest of hundreds of mafiosi from lower levels of the organisation and the indictment of mafia bosses resulted in a temporary suspension of all activities of Cosa Nostra and in the dissolution of the mafia Commission. As mafia defector Antonino Calderone revealed:

Cosa Nostra did not exist any more in the area of Palermo after 1963. It was knocked out...and the Families were dismembered. The bare minimum was done. No killings took place. There were common homicides of the kind where the murderer was

19 Interrogatorio di Giuffrè Antonino al P.M. di Palermo in data 6 Novembre 2002, in *Criminalità, legalità ed economia*, Università Bocconi, *lectio magistralis* of Chief Prosecutor Giuseppe Pignatone, 14 Novembre 2011. On the close relationship between Giuffrè and Provenzano see TdP, Sez. III Penale, Sent. n. 187/08, n. 12790/02 R.G. Notizie di Reato, n. 74/05 R.G.Tribunale, 18/01/2008, 180.

20 Ordinanza-Sentenza, Greco + 18, 1761.

immediately found, but they were never mafia murders. Not even protection money was collected in Palermo. (Arlacchi 1994, 72)

It has previously been stated that the murder of mafia boss Michele ‘the cobra’ Cavataio in 1969, which became famous as the ‘Viale Lazio Massacre’, had put an end to the apparent stability reigning among the various factions in the mid-1960s. It is important to note the crucial role played by Provenzano on that occasion. According to the testimonies of Buscetta and Calderone, later confirmed by mafia defector Gaetano Grado, a hit squad was organised to kill Michele Cavataio, powerful boss of the Acquasanta *mandamento* of Palermo.²¹ Cavataio was held responsible for igniting and further fuelling the internal conflicts that had led to the early 1960s war and to the Ciaculli Massacre:

Cavataio was ruthless and mean. He would have been able to let an entire building collapse killing innocent people in order to eliminate his enemies. His plan was to hit [the other mafia Families], weakening them by means of internal fights or police arrests, so that he would remain the last mafia boss standing in Palermo. (Arlacchi 1994, 70)

The decision to kill Cavataio was taken collectively by all of the major Sicilian Families. This is demonstrated by the fact that the hit squad included members of factions from Palermo, Corleone and Riesi. That day, Provenzano earned himself the reputation and nickname of ‘the tractor’ for finishing Cavataio with the butt of his jammed machine gun.²² As Calderone phrased it, ‘where he passed, the grass no longer grew’. This represents a clear example of how the Corleonesi had entered the historical mafia circles of Palermo making their weapons and fiercest hit men available in the service of well-established Families.

21 Procedimento Penale contro Greco Michele ed altri, n. 2289/82 Reg. Gen. Ufficio Istruzione, 139/82 Reg. Sent. Vol 124 (Interrogatorio dell’imputato Tommaso Buscetta). Also in Tribunale Penale di Marsiglia, Interrogatori di Antonino Calderone (Coll. VI. 22–22bis), 1987, 813029–813030.

22 Ordinanza-Sentenza, Greco + 18, 1762–1763.

Many years of concerted, cumulative work by the Parliamentary Antimafia Commission, the police and the judicial inquiries principally led by magistrate Cesare Terranova produced a series of reports that described the aims and workings of the Corleonese faction.²³ More importantly, these investigations culminated in a number of trials in which Leggio and his men were indicted, although they were always acquitted on ground of insufficient evidence. Provenzano, in particular, was always tried in absence, making his ability to evade capture a distinctive feature of his character even at the early stages of his career.

As explained in the previous chapter, following the initial reaction against the mafia in the early 1960s, the progressive loosening of the State's response had allowed mafia factions to regroup and engage in their previous activities after a temporary suspension. The importance of maintaining a low profile in order for the organisation to be restructured would remain an important lesson for Provenzano and would influence the way he would rule Cosa Nostra twenty years later. The favourable circumstances allowed, among other things, the mafia Commission to be re-formed in 1970. Initially it was ruled by a Triumvirate before resuming its official structure a few years later. The fact that Luciano Leggio was at the head of the *Cupola* along with prominent mafia bosses Stefano Bontade and Gaetano Badalamenti is clear evidence of the weight that the Corleonesi had acquired within the organisation.²⁴ Indeed, by the time he became a member of the Triumvirate in 1970, Leggio had already extended the influence of his faction into the economic and

23 Cesare Terranova (1921–1979) is considered the predecessor of magistrates Falcone and Borsellino for his antimafia commitment. He was secretary of the first Antimafia Commission (1963) and a key figure in the investigations which led to the indictment of mafia bosses in a series of trials during the 1960s, including the famous 1965 'Trial of the 114', in which 114 mafiosi were tried for their role in the First Mafia War and in the 'Ciaculli Massacre'.

24 Ordinanza-Sentenza, Greco + 18, 1743.

political life of Palermo, setting the stage for the Corleonesi to become the dominant clan in Sicily. Confirmation of the importance that the Corleonese faction had acquired can be found in the testimony given by Leonardo Vitale in 1973. Vitale described Riina and Provenzano as ‘two of the most ferocious and bloody figures of Cosa Nostra’ who, ‘as early as 1973, already exercised enormous power within the organisation.’²⁵

Over the years, the Corleonesi progressively accumulated wealth and power on many levels. Their influential connections to prominent political figures, including the Christian Democrat mayors of Palermo, Vito Ciancimino and his predecessor, Salvo Lima, had allowed them to enter and exercise their increasing monopoly over the lucrative public construction business by seizing key posts within the public and private administration of ‘areas ripe for development’ (Longrigg 2008, 20–21). Indeed, the building spree known as the ‘Sack of Palermo’,²⁶ which began when Lima was mayor of Palermo and Corleonese-born Ciancimino assessor for public works, continued until the 1980s, when Ciancimino, now in his capacity as mayor, gave out a record number of licenses for building constructions that were largely managed by the Corleonesi.²⁷

Buscetta argued that the Corleonesi had absolute control over Ciancimino in political matters and business.²⁸ Through these influential connections, they invested profits from illegal activities in the consolidation of their power both inside and

²⁵ *ibid.*, 1738.

²⁶ This expression refers to the construction ‘boom’ that led to the destruction of the city’s green belt and Liberty style villas to allow the building of apartment blocks without a coherent town planning scheme or regular calls for competitive bids for contracts.

²⁷ CdA del TdP, Sez. I, n.8/91 R.G.C.A. n. 9/95 Reg. Sent. Sentenza di primo grado contro Greco Michele + 6, (audizione del pentito Buscetta, 26 November 1992), 151.

²⁸ *ibid.*, 206.

outside the organisation. Above all, by systematically using ruthless violence to demonstrate their power, the Corleonesi managed to make ‘the ability to deploy violence’ the main tool through which to sustain their rise to power within Cosa Nostra. ‘In a sense, the Corleonesi became within the body of Cosa Nostra what Cosa Nostra was within the body of Sicily: a secret and deadly parasite’ (Dickie 2004, 333).

Sometime after Leggio’s arrest in 1974, Totò Riina, now with Provenzano as second in command, became the effective boss of the Corleonese faction, thereby acquiring a position within the Commission, which, as previously noted, had been re-established in its original format in 1974 to substitute the triumvirate.²⁹ Riina continued the strategy of his predecessor, waging war against the most prominent mafia Families of Palermo. As Antonino Calderone explained:

His diabolic plan was to eliminate [his enemies] one by one every single time there was occasion to do so, and to eliminate them in a way that the victims seemed to be in the wrong, thus preventing other factions from intervening or reacting.³⁰

By 1979, a year after the killing of mafia bosses Giuseppe Di Cristina and Giuseppe Calderone, ‘in the Commission there was already a substantial predominance of what will soon become the absolutely dominant stream within the same ruling body: the Corleonesi under Riina.’³¹ They had successfully infiltrated the opposing factions and recruited allies to be placed in strategic positions within the Cupola. For example, Michele Greco substituted Badalamenti as head of the Commission in 1979, and Pippo Calò and Rosario Riccobono, bosses of the Palermitan Families of Porta Nuova and Partanna Mondello, were among those senior mafiosi who sided with the

29 Ordinanza-Sentenza, Greco + 18, 1744.

30 *ibid.*, 1748.

31 TdP, CdA Sez. I, n.8/91 R.G.C.A. n. 9/95 Reg. Sent. Sentenza di primo grado contro Greco Michele + 6, 130.

Corleonesi against their historical allies. By then, the term ‘Corleonesi’ referred not only to the original group of members from Corleone, but to mafiosi who had been recruited from other Families by means of threats, blackmails or promises of generous compensations.

According to Leonardo Messina, Riina subverted the democratic criteria which regulated the appointment of mafia bosses as head of *mandamenti* or representatives within the Commission.³² He managed to steadily centralise power under his control by placing his men in key positions at top echelons of the organisation. The Commission, in fact, which usually dealt with important narcotics trade and had exclusive competence in the matter of ‘excellent homicides’ (judges, politicians and institutional representatives), became a flexible vehicle for Riina to exercise sole control of the organisation.³³ Furthermore, in 1983, Riina substituted Michele Greco as head of the Regional Commission, thereby extending his ‘dictatorship’ throughout the 1980s and early 1990s to other *mandamenti* across Sicily.³⁴ This resulted in the progressive isolation of the Corleonesi’s fiercest rivals represented by the leaders of historical Palermitan mafia Families: Cinisi mafia boss Gaetano Badalamenti fled to Brazil after being expelled by the Commission and replaced by Michele Greco; Stefano Bontade, the ‘Prince of Villagrazia’, and Salvatore Inzerillo, boss of the Passo di Rigano Family, were both killed in the early

32 CdA di Palermo, Sentenza dell’ 11 Giugno 2004, contro Agate Mario + altri.

33 CdA di Caltanissetta, Sentenza n. 5/02 Reg. Sent, n. 31/99 Reg. Gen.n.2430/93 Reg. n.R. nel Procedimento Penale contro Riina Salvatore + altri (Borsellino Bis), deposizione del collaboratore Salvatore Cangemi.

34 Tribunale di Termini Imerese, Procedimento Penale n. 124/97 R.G. a carico di Biondolillo Giuseppe + altri, udienza del collaboratore Antonino Giuffrè, 16 Ottobre 2002, (c/o Aula Bunker Carcere Due Palazzi – Padova).

1980s in the midst of the conflict, radically altering the balance of powers within Cosa Nostra.³⁵

5.2. The Second Mafia War

The escalation of violence, which began in 1978, culminated in the early 1980s in the Second Mafia War, a period also known as *la mattanza* (the slaughter) for being one of the bloodiest conflicts in the history of the Sicilian mafia (Dickie 2004, 367–375; Lucarelli 2004). Between 1981 and 1983, several hundred mafia killings took place in Palermo and as many again across Sicily. In addition, more than one hundred and fifty people became victims of *lupara bianca*. Not only were prominent mafia bosses killed, now too were their relatives, along with any mafia member who had not sided with the Corleonesi. Similarly, the attack on the State which had begun in 1971 with the murder of Chief Prosecutor of Palermo Pietro Scaglione and, in 1977, of Lieutenant Colonel Giuseppe Russo, continued throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s. Amongst these ‘eminent corpses’ were the President of the Sicilian Region Piersanti Mattarella and the leader of the Communist Party Pio La Torre, chief police investigators Emanuele Basile and Boris Giuliano, antimafia magistrates Cesare Terranova, Gaetano Costa and Rocco Chinnici, along with General Carlo Alberto Dalla Chiesa in 1982.

Mafiosi on the losing side who had survived the extermination decided to collaborate with the Italian judicial system in return for reduced sentences, protection from, and revenge against, the Corleonesi. Investigating magistrates Falcone and Borsellino made use of their confessions to build the largest mafia trial in history,

³⁵ Ordinanza-Sentenza, Greco + 18, 1707.

which, as previously stated, concluded with the conviction of hundreds of mafiosi. Against mafia expectations, the sentence of the Assise Court was officially ratified by the Cassation in 1992. The unprecedented value of these verdicts for the judiciary has been stressed throughout this thesis. What still remains to be assessed is the impact that this had on the faction emerging victorious from the Second Mafia War. As the Assistant Public Prosecutor Guido Lo Forte wrote in a 1996 report:

What really mattered for Riina and his men at that point was that their traditional political contacts had not been able to guarantee immunity in such a critical historical phase. Those individuals who, like magistrates Falcone and Borsellino, had been at the forefront of the Antimafia struggle, needed to be eliminated. In a moment that seemed to be the death of Cosa Nostra, the death of its myth of invincibility and immunity, the killing of those people had to demonstrate, with the use of the unmistakable language of terror, that Cosa Nostra was, and would remain, stronger than its enemies and than those powerful 'friends' who had now turned their back on it.³⁶

In fact, between 1992 and 1993, Cosa Nostra under Totò Riina's command retaliated by killing former political reference point Christian Democrat Salvo Lima, and by launching, a few months later, a bombing campaign that killed twenty people including prominent anti-mafia magistrates Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino.

The strategy of terror implemented by the Corleonesi had several aims: to eliminate political contacts who did not honour the underwritten pact with Cosa Nostra, as well as key antimafia institutional figures; increase the already unstable national political climate through a series of massacres and acts of terror aimed at the final collapse of the pre-existing political system; create new external relations with the political world in order to allow the reconstruction of the organisation once the crisis had subdued.³⁷ However, this strategy failed to achieve the desired outcome.

36 Procuratore Aggiunto della Repubblica presso il Tribunale di Palermo, Guido Lo Forte, *L'atteggiarsi delle associazioni mafiose sulla base delle esperienze processuali acquisite: la mafia siciliana*, 1996, 78–79.

37 In this regard, mafia defector Antonino Giuffrè confessed that the murder of Salvo Lima had marked 'the end of an era' and that 'a new era began with a new political force on the horizon which provided a guarantee that the Christian Democrats were no longer able to deliver. To be

This unprecedented attack by the criminal organisation unleashed a severe backlash from civil society, the State and the Church, which ended a long period of silence by openly taking a position against the mafia. In the days following the massacres of Capaci and Via D'Amelio, in which magistrates Falcone and Borsellino were killed, thousands of people took to the streets of Palermo and in other major mainland cities to vent their anger against the mafia in what represented the first open civil reaction on a national scale to organised crime. Also, stringent measures in the anti-mafia struggle were employed, including the implementation of the 41-bis regime, the severity of which was further augmented by the geographical remoteness of the prisons where mafiosi were sent. Even the Church officially broke the silent consensus that had historically surrounded the mafia phenomenon. On the 9th of May 1993, Pope John Paul II gave a powerful speech from the valley of the Temples in Agrigento condemning the mafia and urging 'i responsabili' (those responsible) to repent before God as 'one day God's judgement would arrive.'³⁸

To make matters worse for Cosa Nostra, the phenomenon of pentitismo was rapidly spreading. By Salvatore Cangemi's definition, pentiti were 'the biggest evil for the mafia. Cosa Nostra believed that it could destroy everything, except mafia defectors. *La mazzata* (the blow) given by pentiti had been extremely powerful.'³⁹ The *Articolo 41-bis* and the *Legge sui pentiti* introduced in 1991 risked worsening this phenomenon by urging mafia defendants to collaborate in return for reduced

clear, that party was *Forza Italia*.' Philip Willan, 'Berlusconi aide "struck deal with mafia". Supergrass tells of switch of political allies', *The Guardian*, 8 January 2003.

38 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xJglbBLxHE> (Accessed 05 October 2012).

39 TdP, Sezione CdA, processo contro Michele Greco + altri, udienza del 4 Maggio 1994 dell'imputato Cangemi Salvatore, 18770.

sentences and softer restrictive measures.⁴⁰ It was necessary for Cosa Nostra to plan a new strategy to demolish the credibility of mafia defectors, to modify the law on the use of pentiti in trials, and to abolish the Art. 41-bis prison regime. ‘Provenzano and Riina would have bet even their own teeth to eliminate the law on *pentiti*. They explicitly said that this was the major damage for Cosa Nostra.’⁴¹

Indeed, the phenomenon of pentitismo had torn down the solid wall of secrecy that for over a century and a half had allowed Cosa Nostra to remain invisible to external eyes and impermeable to judicial investigations. Therefore, for a criminal association whose longevity had depended largely on internal secrecy and external ambiguity, this sudden exposure represented an unprecedented defeat that would inevitably change the course of its history. This was the Cosa Nostra that Provenzano inherited in the mid-1990s.

5.3. The Riina-Provenzano Axis: two sides of the same coin

When, in 1984, Buscetta revealed to Judge Giovanni Falcone the structure and workings of Cosa Nostra, he named every member of each faction, including the Corleonese Family:

Corleone. The current boss is Luciano Leggio, even if he is in prison. In his absence, the faction is led by Salvatore Riina and Bernardo Provenzano, who have equal powers. However, Riina is far more intelligent than Provenzano, and thus has a more prominent role.⁴²

Interestingly, judicial documents, including preliminary investigations, court acts, hearings and interrogations provide evidence of how, throughout the first maxi-trial

40 D.L. 15/1/1991 n. 8 (conv. con modif. nella L. 15/3/1991 n. 82), modificato nel 2001 nella Legge 13/2/2001 n. 45.

41 Processo contro Michele Greco + altri, udienza dell'imputato Cangemi Salvatore, 18770–18771.

42 Procedimento Penale contro Greco Michele ed altri, n. 2289/82 Reg. Gen. UI, Processo verbale di interrogatorio dell'imputato Buscetta Tommaso, 19.

of Palermo (1986–1987), the name of Provenzano only appeared in the shadow of Luciano Leggio and, in particular, of Totò Riina, thus assuming an apparent secondary role in the strategy implemented by his faction. Consequently, as judicial enquiries demonstrate, until the mid-1990s police and magistrates did not make determined and concerted efforts to find Provenzano. This was also due to the fact that the information provided by *pentiti* regarding Provenzano did not always coincide or was in any way corroborated by factual evidence.

When, in 1992 Provenzano's partner Saveria Benedetta Palazzolo and his two sons, Angelo and Francesco Paolo, suddenly returned to Corleone after spending years in hiding, authorities even believed that Provenzano was dead.⁴³ It was only after Riina's arrest in 1993 that references to Provenzano as the new leader of Cosa Nostra would become more frequent in the confessions of mafia defectors, thereby turning police and magistrates' attention more and more on him. In particular, the testimony given by *pentito* Giocchino Pennino to Public Prosecutor Teresa Principato in the summer of 1994 would begin to delineate an image of Provenzano as 'the accountant and the mind of Palermitan politics'.⁴⁴

This extract of the 4th of May 1994 court hearing of Salvatore Cangemi, former mafia boss of the Porta Nuova Family and member of the Commission, gives an indication of the scarcity of information on Provenzano available to judicial authorities at the time:

Judge: In particular, I would like to ask you about Bernardo Provenzano, since many previous defectors have not even given this Court specific indication about whether he is still alive. Do you know Bernardo Provenzano? Can you tell us if in that period he

43 Though they never married, Bernardo Provenzano and Saveria Palazzolo lived in hiding together with their two sons for many years.

44 Procura della Repubblica di Palermo, procedimento penale n. 3538/94 n.R. nei confronti di Giulio Andreotti, verbali di interrogatorio di Giocchino Pennino, 30 Agosto 1994.

was member of the Commission, what role he had, along with Riina and Michele Greco? Was there a schism under way between the two main rival wings?

Cangemi: Yes, Your Honour, I can tell you with absolute certainty that the head of the Commission at the time was Michele Greco. Bernardo Provenzano and Riina have always taken decisions together. They used the strategy of sending only one of them to Commission meetings, but the decisions were always taken together.... I have personally met Provenzano twice. Once was when I heard him say that he wanted to capture and kill a chief policeman. This, by the way, confirms what I already said, that these decisions were taken together with Riina. But after Riina was arrested, Provenzano remained alone to bring forward those evil things... because they are devils, those people are Lucifers [sic] who only wanted to kill, and thus I think that Provenzano will carry forward Riina's strategy.⁴⁵

The fear of being killed on the orders of Provenzano, once Riina had been arrested, was one of the reasons behind Cangemi's 'traumatic' decision to dissociate from Cosa Nostra.⁴⁶ As the first member of the Commission to have turned state's evidence in mafia history, Cangemi's revelations were of central importance – 'oro colato' (liquid gold) Buscetta defined them – in reconstructing the role played by Provenzano in the rise to leadership of his faction.⁴⁷ For example, an important point which Cangemi emphasised in his testimony was that Riina and Provenzano were strongly united in their intentions and outlook.⁴⁸ 'Riina told me that he and Provenzano were the same person. If you said Riina you said Provenzano and when you said Provenzano you said Riina. I can say this for certain.'⁴⁹ This was also confirmed by mafia defector Francesco Marino Mannoia in reference to Provenzano's responsibility in the La Torre murder in 1982: 'the Corleonesi were so in tune and united together', Mannoia revealed, 'that in no way was it possible to

45 TdP, CdA, Processo contro Michele Greco + altri, udienza del 4 Maggio 1994 dell'imputato Cangemi Salvatore, 18762–18763.

46 TdP, CdA Sez. I, n. 8/91 R.G.C.A., n. 9/95 Reg. Sent., 12 Aprile 1995.

47 'Morto Cancemi, fu il primo pentito della «cupola» di Cosa Nostra', *Corriere del Mezzogiorno*, Redazione online, <http://corrieredelmezzogiorno.corriere.it/palermo/notizie/cronaca/2011/27-gennaio-2011/morto-cancemi-fu-primo-pentito-cupoladi-cosa-nostra-181342243092.shtml> (accessed 15 04 2012).

48 Processo contro Michele Greco + altri, Udienza dell'imputato Cangemi Salvatore, 18762–18763.

49 CdA di Caltanissetta, Sez. III, (Borsellino Ter) Sentenza nel Procedimento Penale 23/99 R.G.n.R. – 29/97 R.G.C.A. contro Agate Mariano + 25.

imagine that there might have been an exception, or that one of the two was not informed or contrary to this decision...their being united was almost pathological.’⁵⁰

Cangemi’s revelations would contribute to define Provenzano’s image from a judicial perspective, and would lead, one year later, to his indictment as one of the main defendants accused of the murders committed between 1979 and 1983 of high profile victims. Among these ‘eminent corpses’ were Michele Reina, Secretary of the Christian Democratic Party, Piersanti Mattarella, President of the Sicilian Region, Pio La Torre, Secretary of the Communist Party in Sicily, and his driver Rosario Di Salvo.⁵¹

The 1995 sentence of the Assise Court of Palermo, later confirmed by the 1998 sentence of the Assise Court of Appeal,⁵² condemned Provenzano, Riina, Michele Greco and other members of the mafia Commission for mafia association according to the Article 416 bis of the penal code and for the murders committed at the turn of the 1980s. Based on the confessions of pentiti including Marino Mannoia, Pennino and Cangemi, the verdicts confirmed the role played by Provenzano as member of the faction emerging victorious from the Second Mafia War:

Since the spring of 1974, following yet another arrest of Leggio, Provenzano became, along with Riina, the effective boss of the Corleone Family. This allowed them to enter the newly reconstituted Commission within which they progressively managed to acquire prominence and eventually arrive at the ferocious ‘Second Mafia War’ in Palermo, of which Provenzano and Riina were masterminds... Given their unity of intention, it is possible to assert that precisely when called to take decisions on important murders like those in question, Riina and Provenzano can be held equally responsible.⁵³

50 TdP, CdA Sez. I, n.8/91 R.G.C.A. n. 9/95 Reg. Sent. Sentenza di primo grado contro Greco Michele + 6, 324.

51 *Ibid.*, 10.

52 Corte di Assise di Appello di Palermo, Sez. III, Sentenza contro Michele Greco + 10, n. 21 R.G. n. 4/98 R.S.

53 CdA, n. 9/95 Reg. Sent., 12 aprile 1995, 331–334.

Pentiti stressed the active role that Provenzano had played in the rise of his group to power; yet, at the same time, they also detailed important aspects of Provenzano's role which investigations prior to the 1990s appear to have underestimated.

One important aspect emerging from more recent testimonies of pentiti is that, between Riina and Provenzano, the latter had always been the one in charge of dealing with Cosa Nostra's political contacts. For example, Provenzano was indicated as the man in touch with Christian Democrat mayor of Palermo, Vito Ciancimino. 'In light of the interest in the construction business that they shared', Cangemi declared, 'Ciancimino was completely in the hands of Provenzano, more than in those of Riina...he didn't do anything without Provenzano's approval.'⁵⁴ Antonino 'Nino' Giuffrè and Giovanni Brusca also confirmed that the direct contact of Ciancimino was Provenzano:

In political matters, the advisor *par excellence* of Provenzano was Vito Ciancimino. Without a shadow of doubt I can define Ciancimino as the person with whom Provenzano met to discuss business and politics. By business, I mean mainly contract works.⁵⁵

Nino Giuffrè, one of the most important mafia defectors to shed light on the political and business network in which Provenzano –and Cosa Nostra in general– operated, explained after he turned state's evidence in 2002 that:

Although Provenzano was a 'nobody' within the Commission except the right hand man of Riina, he enjoyed considerable support. He piloted politics, he was in contact with big entrepreneurs, and he dealt with other provinces, in particular Agrigento and Caltanissetta.... Provenzano did not have a *mandamento*, Provenzano was not a representative; as far as I know Provenzano did not have a personal army within the Commission. What he had was an ability to weave those contacts, those friendships

54 TdP, CdA, Processo contro Michele Greco + altri, Udienza del 4 Maggio 1994 dell'imputato Cangemi Salvatore, 18767.

55 TdP, Sez. V, Procedimento Penale n. 3538/94 R.G.n.R. contro Andreotti Giulio. Direzione Investigativa Antimafia di Palermo. Udienza del collaboratore Antonino Giuffrè del 18/06/1996.

with important people. This was his army. This is extremely important. He did not have his own army but an army of people who were at his disposal.⁵⁶

To have ‘an army of people at one’s disposal’ is clear evidence of skills which go far beyond the ability to use ruthless violence or ‘shoot like a god’.

A report signed by Colonel of the Carabinieri Angiolo Pellegrini detailed, as early as 1984, the outlines of what investigators have defined as the ‘Provenzano Holding’ (Oliva and Palazzolo 2006, 136): a series of companies (Scientisud, Medisud, Polilab, Biotecnica) specialised in the supply for hospitals and private medical services of electronic devices and equipment.⁵⁷ This further demonstrates that, while Riina waged open war against rival factions and accumulated a treasure trove hidden beneath the pavement of a house in Castelvetrano,⁵⁸ Provenzano increased his network with politicians, public administrators and entrepreneurs into a series of fast growing businesses. In particular, the health care system, linked as it is with political and economic control centres of primary importance, was a successful choice as it offered a large potential for profit. Indeed, the supply of private and public health services and building contracts for public works are both ideal vehicles to intercept and channel large amounts of public funds in ‘apparently’ legal ways.⁵⁹ Consequently, this has made the tracing of mafia business traffic a far more difficult task.

56 CdA di Palermo, Procedimento Penale n. 2992/95 contro Aglieri Pietro + 46. Udienza del collaborator Giuffrè del 14/05/2003; see also TdP, Sez. GIP, Sentenza di Rito Abbravito n.1579/07 Reg. Not. Reato, n.800165/07 Reg. GIP, nei confronti di Adamo Andrea + 56, 97–103.

57 Legione dei Carabinieri di Palermo, Nucleo Operativo Sez. I, Rapporto giudiziario n. 3033/16 – 1983, 10/04/1984, nei confronti di Gariffo Carmelo +29.

58 Felice Cavallaro, ‘Oro e diamante, il Tesoro di Riina’, *Corriere della Sera*, 26 September 1996. http://archivistorico.corriere.it/1996/settembre/28/Oro_diamanti_tesoro_Riina_co_0_96092812444.shtml

59 TdP, Sez. III Penale, Sent. n. 187/08, n. 12790/02 R.G. Notizie di Reato, n. 74/05 R.G. Tribunale, 18/01/2008, 158.

At the same time, Provenzano had also begun weaving a web of relationships within Cosa Nostra among affiliates who, despite their official consent, did not agree with Riina's strategy of terror. For example, Ino Corso, boss of the Santa Maria di Gesù mafia Family, told the authorities that, in the post-massacre period, 'common people looked to him [Provenzano], rather than to the other one [Riina], who was acting in the interests of four raving mad individuals'. Corso proudly confessed:

I have given my life for these people. I am honest when I say that Riina is raving mad. The other one [Provenzano], instead, is a moderate. I have talked to him, I had dinner with him. He is a different thing. He is wise.... [Riina] is the one responsible for this situation. This worthless man has consumed us all. When common people needed something in the past they used to come to us rather than going to the *sbirri* (police). Today that bond is broken (Palazzolo and Prestipino 2008, 138-139).

In light of these considerations, one can glean how, from behind the scenes, Provenzano had managed to build a solid network of relationships both inside and outside the organisation, on an economic and political level, which constituted a key strategy in his subsequent rise to the leadership. His ability to build relationships with key figures in strategic positions in order to ultimately develop, consolidate and sustain businesses would become the point of strength of what Pino Lipari defined 'il sistema Provenzano' (the Provenzano system), which would come into play the moment Provenzano assumed control of the organisation.

5.4. Bernardo Provenzano: from 'tractor' to 'professor'

Initially known as *u tratturi* (the tractor) for his reputation of extreme violence against enemies, Bernardo Provenzano later became known as *u raggiuneri* (the accountant) or *u professuri* (the professor) for his diplomatic skills in ruling Cosa Nostra (Grasso and La Licata 2007, 48-51). This transition from the character of 'the

tractor’ to that of ‘the accountant’ mirrored the perception that other mafiosi had of him before and after he took control of the organisation (Merlino 2012a).

Nino Giuffrè, mafia defector and close collaborator of Provenzano, delineated the active role played by Provenzano in the rise to power of the Corleonese faction and in the Second Mafia War. For example, he described to Assistant Prosecutor of the DDA (Direzione Distrettuale Antimafia) of Reggio Calabria, Michele Prestipino, the former nail factory in Bagheria used as a ‘death camp’: there, in the early 1980s, Provenzano used to hold his meetings and exterminate any mafioso who opposed the Corleonese strategy.⁶⁰ Furthermore, when asked whether Provenzano was in accordance with the overall strategy of terror implemented by Riina, Giuffrè did not hesitate to confirm the responsibility of Provenzano in the matter: ‘I repeat a famous sentence which Riina used to say to me [about Provenzano]: “We never leave the table until we are in complete agreement”. I can tell you without shadow of doubt that Provenzano was absolutely fine with Riina’s plan.’

However, Giuffrè also confessed that, when he left prison in 1993, he found Provenzano to be a very different man: ‘From being combative as he had been, he was now showing symptoms of sanctity’ (Palazzolo and Prestipino 2008, 22). The mafia defector explained that the State’s response to the attacks of the Corleonesi had exceeded mafia expectations:⁶¹ the increased severity of pre-trial custody, restrictive prison regime, confiscation of goods, new laws on money laundering and on mafia

60 Tribunale di Termini Imerese, Procedimento Penale n. 124/97 R.G. a carico di Biondolillo Giuseppe + altri, Udienza del collaboratore Antonino Giuffrè, 16 Ottobre 2002 (c/o Aula Bunker Carcere Due Palazzi – Padova).

61 Procedimento Penale no. 124/97 R.G. contro Biondolillo Giuseppe + altri, deposizione dell’imputato Antonino Giuffrè, udienza del 16 Ottobre 2002 110–139. Also in Commissione Parlamentare d’Inchiesta sul Fenomeno della Criminalità Organizzata Mafiosa o Similare (istituita con legge 19 ottobre 2001, n. 386), Doc. XXIII, no. 3. 51–52.

defectors had had a devastating impact on the organisation at economic and structural level.⁶² Hence, by the time he had assumed control of Cosa Nostra in the mid-1990s, Provenzano had already changed the direction of his predecessor's tactics and sought a strategy of 'submersion' aimed at rendering the organisation 'invisible' again. To put it in Leonardo Sciascia's terms (1980), Provenzano had opted for the old mafia tactic of 'calati juncu ca passa la china' ('Bend over reed and let the flood pass you by').⁶³ Giuffrè explained:

The massacres in 1992 had been sheer madness, too much damage had been caused and it was necessary to find remedies.... Provenzano needed to create a new image for himself because he had emerged with his bones broken from the slaughter. That's how his group has come to be known as the one which was against the massacres. But this wasn't true at all, because Provenzano in political matters and in political murders has always been number one. (Palazzolo and Prestipino 2008, 24)

'Do you see this calm, that now nothing is happening?' Cangemi revealed in this regard, 'It's a strategy. "For the moment it is better to keep still", we have been told. Riina was more of a beast, more vulgar. This silence is a strategy, Cosa Nostra will never end' (Gruppo-Abele 2005). Indeed, despite his undoubted involvement in the mattanza and the myth of the 'tractor that mowed everything down', the general perception of Provenzano both inside and outside the organisation was now far removed from this identity.

For example, mafia defector Salvatore Barbagallo described him as a distinct, very well-mannered man. In the hearing of the 11th of December 2000, prosecuting magistrate Nino Di Matteo asked Barbagallo for information regarding Provenzano's nicknames:

62 Sentenza di Rito Abbreviato n.1579/07, nei confronti di Adamo Andrea + 56 (Sentenza Gotha), 154.

63 A Sicilian proverb which is used to describe the mafia ability to stay under the radar in moments of difficulty, and to raise its head again once the danger has subdued.

P.M. Earlier on you mentioned the ‘accountant’, the so-called ‘accountant’, who were you referring to?

Barbagallo: Provenzano.

P.M. Was it a commonly used nickname for Provenzano?

Barbagallo. Well, you see, among all the people I have known, nobody knew him as the ‘tractor’. I have never heard anybody calling him *the tractor*.... I have always known him as *professor*, *accountant*, and then the last one was *tabula rasa*, which began to circulate around 1994–1995 among the *picciotti* who were part of the change in strategy. When we used to talk about Provenzano we would say ‘*Tabula*, or *tabula rasa* will think about this matter’ and that’s it. I have never heard *tratturi*, or Binnu. Within Cosa Nostra I have always heard positive things said about him.

P.M. Who did you hear using these nicknames?

Barbagallo: For example the uncle of my father in law, Falletta Francesco, called him *u professuri*; Abbissenti and Di Gesù called him *ragioniere*, Panzeca and Giuffrè called him *tabula* but never *the tractor* [italics mine].⁶⁴

By the time Barbagallo gave this testimony in 1997, the strategy of ‘submersion’ was demonstrably in play.

Mafia defectors explained that Provenzano, aware that the sequence of killings and bombs which killed prominent institutional figures could irredeemably damage the interests of the organisation, took a peripheral but nonetheless decisive role within Cosa Nostra during Riina’s time in command. Vito Ciancimino’s son Massimo told authorities in 2010 that ‘Provenzano decided to step aside. His plan being that of making others believe he had disappeared’, so as to maintain a distance from the decisions which the ruling group led by Riina were taking (Dino 2011, 79). Furthermore, in 1992, foreseeing the disastrous consequences that Riina’s bombing campaign would have for Cosa Nostra, Provenzano withdrew further from the scene.⁶⁵ In doing so, he positioned himself to be effortlessly perceived as the natural successor to Riina’s dictatorial command once the dust of conflict settled.

In fact, some time after the arrest of Riina in 1993 and that of Leoluca Bagarella in 1995 – who had intended to continue the strategy of terror – Provenzano

64 TdP, Seconda Sezione Penale, Processo Castello Simone + 5, deposizione del collaboratore Salvatore Barbagallo, udienza dell’11 dicembre 2000.

65 This coincided with the return of his partner and sons to Corleone, which suggested to the outside that Provenzano was dead.

held a meeting with his most reliable collaborators to convince them of the urgency of a period of ‘submersion’, whereby the organisation could be silently restructured before resuming its previous activities and engaging in new businesses under a more covert guise.⁶⁶ During this period, no killings could take place except in extraordinary circumstances and only if authorised by Provenzano. He cancelled Bagarella’s plans to continue Riina’s tactic of murdering politicians, magistrates or police and brought back the practice of collecting protection money whilst substantially reducing the amount paid. At the structural level of the organisation, he implemented strict order and rules by creating a ‘democratic and hierarchical’ directorate—a Senate—composed of old trusted *capimandamento* who would delegate the running of local and territorial activities to their most efficient and trusted affiliates. This reticular system would facilitate the establishment of relations with external networks while, at the same time, centralising the process of taking decisions and compartmentalising the circulation of strategic information, which were now limited to a restricted group of Provenzano’s trustees (Dino 2011, 114)

Antonino Giuffrè explained that Provenzano’s strategy of submersion was essentially based on creating a reticular, yet centrally directed system of relations between individuals, in terms of internal relations and external relations between the organisation and key sectors to be exploited. Both collaborators and intermediaries had to be chosen carefully, since they needed to demonstrate helpfulness and

⁶⁶ It is important to note that the transition in leadership from Riina to Provenzano was not immediate nor an easy process. Although they all belonged to the Corleonese faction, a schism arose between members answering to Brusca and Bagarella, and those answering to Bernardo Provenzano and his trusted allies, Benedetto Spera e Pietro Aglieri. Only after the arrest of Bagarella in 1995, did Provenzano and his allies exert sole control over the organisation. CdA di Palermo – Terza Sezione – n.19/1998 R.G.C Assise n. 5508/96 R.Gn.R Sentenza nei confronti di Benigno Salvatore + 13, (1 giugno 2001), 421–459.

moderation skills. One of these selected networks of influential personalities and strategic intermediaries included, for example, ‘the engineer’ Michele Aiello, the entrepreneur accused of laundering money for Cosa Nostra and exploiting his relationships with the business, criminal, and law-enforcement sectors to ensure his immunity and to pursue lucrative activities in Sicily’s health care and construction industries; Giuseppe Guttadauro, prominent surgeon and mafia boss of the Brancaccio faction, who was in close contact with Domenico Miceli, Palermo public health councillor, and with the President of the Sicilian Region, Salvatore Totò Cuffaro; Pippo Ciuro, officer of the *guardia di finanza* and of the DIA (Antimafia Investigative Department), and Giorgio Riolo, officer of the Carabinieri.⁶⁷

Provenzano’s aim, in essence, was to reactivate the social capital of Cosa Nostra, consisting of a system of relations with professional figures, entrepreneurs, political administrators, and politicians to control fundamental economic sectors like construction, commercial centres and the health care system. These are, in fact, highly remunerative sectors through which Cosa Nostra provides jobs to the unemployed, thereby acquiring prestige in the eyes of outside society.⁶⁸

Nonetheless, before fully implementing this strategy, it was initially necessary for Provenzano to devise a plan which would allow him to establish and consolidate his leadership over Cosa Nostra while, at the same time, facilitating his role of mediation between mafia factions. Without these prerogatives, it would have been impossible to bring the organisation back into contact with public institutions, regain the social consensus lost after the bombing campaign, and eventually resume control over territory.

⁶⁷ On the relationship between Provenzano and important figures of the political and entrepreneurial context see TdP, Sez. III Penale, Sent. n. 187/08, n. 12790/02 R.G. Notizie di Reato, n. 74/05 R.G.Tribunale, 18/01/2008.

⁶⁸ Cfr. sentenza di giudizio abbreviato del TdP, 5 Aprile 2004, nei confronti di Abbate e altri in fald.12 vol.5.

5.5. The pizzini

Bernardo Provenzano led the mafia for over a decade whilst in hiding. In order to maximize secrecy and minimize the risks of being discovered, he carefully avoided the use of telephones, computers and personal meetings, revealing his whereabouts only to a restricted group of trusted men who would become his closest, most valuable collaborators.⁶⁹ Moreover, to minimize further the risk of being apprehended, he began to issue orders via a new form of secretive communication, the *pizzini*. This ‘efficient, private postal service’ (Follain 2008, 265), which was revealed by the police operations ‘Grande Mandamento’ and ‘Ghiaccio’, consisted of typing messages that would then be folded up many times and sealed with adhesive tape in a way that only a number corresponding to the recipient was left visible on the top. The distribution network for these notes consisted of a large number of carefully selected messengers and was based on a fast, efficient, and compartmentalised system of communication.⁷⁰ On more than one occasion, Giovanni Brusca referred to Provenzano’s behaviour as ‘caution personified’ (Follain 2008, 265) in reference to lengths to which Provenzano went in maximising the secrecy of his communication system. For example, the name of each of the recipients was concealed under a number from 1 to 168, with Provenzano being number 1. In addition, the mafia boss for a period used a code similar to the Caesar cipher,⁷¹ consisting in assigning a number to every letter of the alphabet by

69 Testimonianza di Antonino Giuffrè, TdP, Sez. III Penale, Sent. n. 187/08, n. 12790/02 R.G. Notizie di Reato, n. 74/05 R.G.Tribunale, 18/01/2008, 183.

70 Sentenza di Rito Abbreviato n.1579/07, nei confronti di Adamo Andrea + 56 (Sentenza Gotha), 152.

71 Caesar cipher consisted of increasing each letter of the alphabet by three, for example A=D, B=E, and so on.

alternately increasing or decreasing by 4 the value given to each of the 21 letters of the alphabet (the number 5 stood for the letter 'A', 4 for 'B' and so forth) to further conceal particular words or names. Each folded and sealed pizzino would then be passed from hand to hand until it reached the final addressee.

The first examples of pizzini sent by Provenzano date back to 1994, when police informant Luigi Ilardo gave his copies of pizzini to Lieutenant Colonel Michele Riccio. No evidence has been found to indicate the use of pizzini as the main system of communication for the entire organisation before this juncture. As mafia defectors and investigating authorities have confirmed, the use of pizzini perfectly suited the needs of Provenzano's strategy of submersion. While other copies of messages were found over the years, it was only with the discovery of the archive in Provenzano's hideout in 2006 that the scope and dimension of this communication system would be revealed.

This archive has been an invaluable resource for a number of important reasons. From a juridical perspective, the decryption of the letters found in Montagna dei Cavalli resulted in the arrest of several mafiosi whose names had been hidden behind an encrypted number in Provenzano's code. Furthermore, it enabled investigating authorities to establish a clear, chronological record of the mafia's most recent activities, the network in which it operated, along with the legal and illegal channels through which its profits travelled. The pizzini described different issues relating to the daily activities of Cosa Nostra: from the collection of protection money, to minor conflicts between associates, from the question of the *scappati* (escapees) – specifically the Inzerillos – who wanted to return to Sicily after escaping

to the US during the *mattanza*, to suggestions on how to cure the prostate problems afflicting Provenzano.

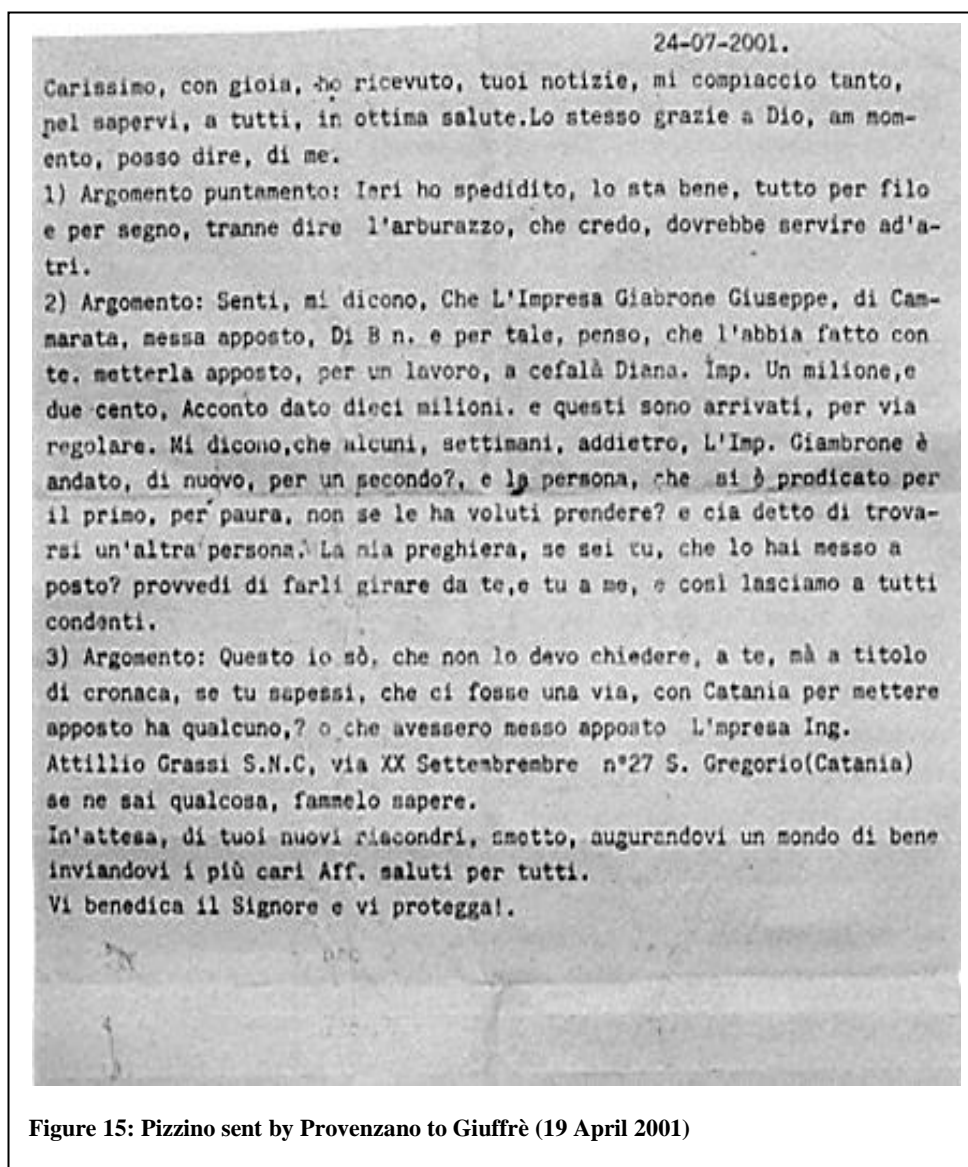


Figure 15: Pizzino sent by Provenzano to Giuffrè (19 April 2001)

One prominent characteristic of the pizzini, apart from the recurring grammar and syntactic mistakes and the repetitive lexicon, is the regularity with which certain expressions recur. In particular, the openings and conclusions are consistently the same in every pizzino. Each message begins with the standard sentence 'Mio carissimo. Con gioia ricevo tue notizie. Mi compiaccio tanto nel saperti, in ottima

salute. Lo stesso grazie a Dio, al momento posso dire di me.⁷² The subjects comprising the core of the messages are listed and numbered as ‘Argomento 1, 2...’ (Subject 1, 2...) and so forth (Figure 15). The closing line of Provenzano’s pizzini regularly included wishes and greetings for everyone related to the recipient.

As also demonstrated in a letter to Antonino Rotolo (number 25), the closing line of Provenzano’s messages contained the nearly invariable words: ‘In attesa, di tuoi nuovi riscontri, smetto, augurandovi un mondo di bene inviandovi I più cari Aff. saluti per tutti. Vi benedica il Signore e vi protegga!’ (Figure 16).⁷³ Another common feature of Provenzano’s messages was the presence of greetings for upcoming religious festivities. As he wrote to his nephew, Carmelo Gariffo, in the Easter of 2006:

Chiedo scusi del disordine nello scrivere, spero non succedermi nell’avvenire. Spero non dimenticarmi niente. Ora colgo l’occasione, per augurarvi di potere passare una Buona Felicissima Serena Santa Pasqua per tutti inviandovi augurandovi per tutti un mondo di bene, inviandovi i più cari aff. Saluti per tutti BUONA PASQUA B [capital letters in the original]. In’attesa di tuoi nuovi e buoni riscontri smetto augurandovi per tutti un mondo di benè.Vi benedica il Signore e vi protegga!⁷⁴

72 In this case study, the pizzini are presented in their original Italian format including the numerous spelling mistakes, broken and repeated sentences and, at times, unintelligible words. Reading the letters directly in their citation is necessary in light of the hypothesis (discussed in the course of this chapter) that a secret code may hide behind the religious content of the pizzini. More importantly, it is useful to understand certain aspects of the figure of Provenzano and his collaborators from a more ‘personal’ perspective. Representing a source of information derived from sections of private conversations which were not aimed at an audience other than the mafia community itself, the pizzini have a different value when compared to pentiti’s testimony or to Michele Greco’s written memoirs. The last paragraph of this chapter will return on this last point in more detail. English translations are provided as footnotes to facilitate understanding: *My dearest, with joy I received your letter. I am very pleased to hear that you all are in good health. The same, thanks to God, I can say about myself.* Polizia di Stato, Questura di Palermo, Servizio Centrale Operativo, Divisione I, Squadra Mobile ‘Gruppo Duomo’: Pizzino sent from Provenzano to Matteo Messina Denaro, between October–December 2005.

73 Translation: *Waiting for your kind reply, I conclude, wishing you all the goodness of this world and sending you my dearest, most affectionate greetings. May God bless and protect you all!* SCO, ‘Gruppo Duomo’: Pizzino inviato da Bernardo Provenzano ad Antonino Rotolo nel Dicembre 2005.

74 Translation: *I beg forgiveness for my disordered writing, I hope it won’t happen to me again in the future. Hopefully, I have not forgotten anything. Now I will take this occasion to wish all of you to spend a good, happy, serene holy Easter and to wish you all the goodness of this world. I send you my most sincere affectionate greetings for everybody. HAPPY EASTER. Waiting for your kind reply I conclude for now and wish you all the goodness of this world. May God bless and protect you!*

On numerous occasions, Provenzano included apologies for linguistic errors in the closing sections, also apologising in advance should his answer not be to the satisfaction of the recipient. This is evident, for example, in a *pizzino* that he wrote to his collaborator Luigi Ilardo in July 1994:

Mio caro continuare ancora, se non fosse impedito di altri impegni, e devo concludere, chiedendoti perdono, sia delle miei errore, e sia perché non rispondesse a tutto quello che ti agrada. Comunque sappia, che là dove ti posso essere utile, con il volere di Dio sono a tua complete addisposizione.⁷⁵

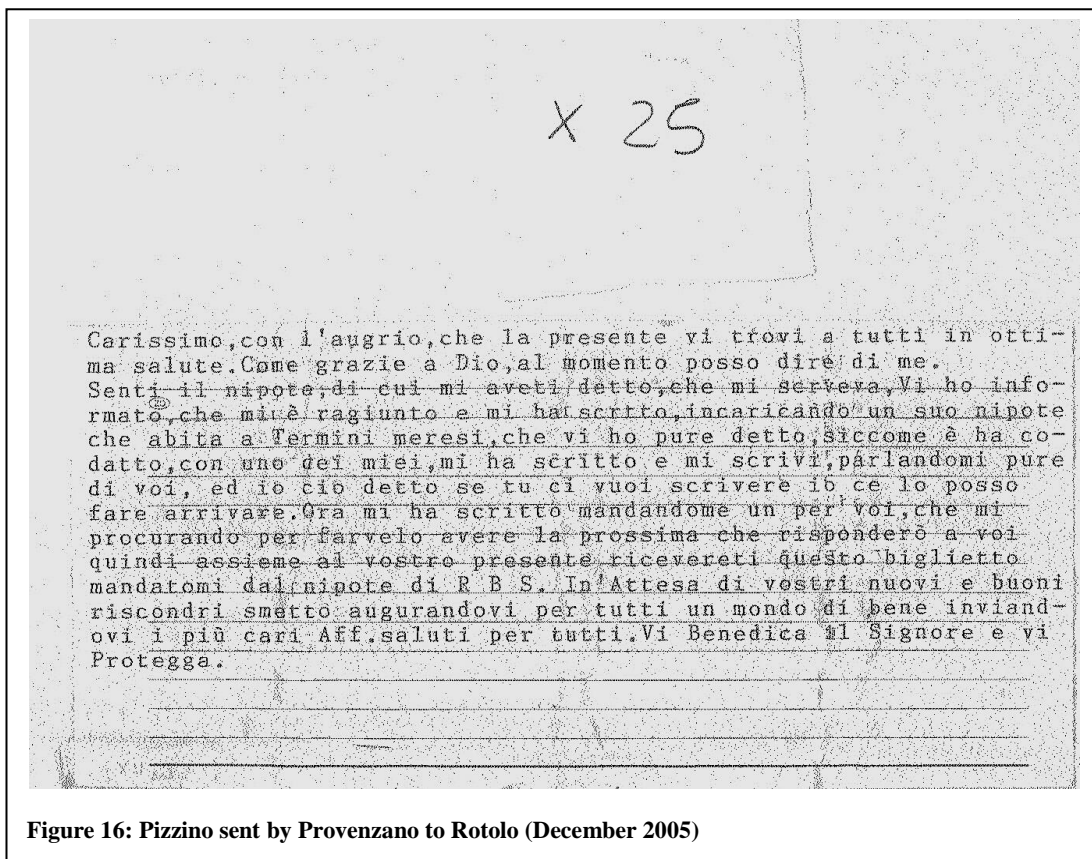


Figure 16: Pizzino sent by Provenzano to Rotolo (December 2005)

SCO, Gruppo Duomo: Pizzino da Provenzano a Carmelo Gariffo, Aprile 2006.

⁷⁵ Translation: *My dear, I would continue if I was not busy with other commitments. I must conclude asking you to forgive me for my mistakes and for my answer should it not be what you expected. However, know that wherever I can, with God's will, I am at your complete disposal, but know also that I detest confusion, and if things are said clearly in a way that I understand them I will be happy to help if possible.* TdP, Sezione GIP, Ordinanza di custodia cautelare del GIP Renato Grillo, procedimento penale n. 4668/96 (Grande Oriente) nei confronti di Provenzano Bernardo + 20, 6 Novembre 1998.

Similarly, in a letter sent in September 1997 to Salvatore Genovese, mafia boss of San Giuseppe Jato, Provenzano wrote:

Ora chiedentoti perdono, per i miei errori, che incontri nel mio scritto, e per le miei risposti, che non sono, come tu tel avessi potuto aspettare chiedo ancora perdono, e smetto ripetento che per il bene sono a tua completa disposizioni, vi auguro un mondo di Bene, inviandovi, i più cari Aff. Saluti, per te e tuo Padre. Vi benedica il Signore e vi protegga!⁷⁶

As can be seen in these examples of *pizzini*, the most consistent feature of Provenzano's writings was the inclusion of religious references, which appear alongside both routine instructions and business matters.

5.5.1. The pizzini: totems of a religious ritual of interaction

In order to establish his authority and control over an organisation severely diminished by internal conflicts and external pressure, it was necessary for Provenzano to send something more than mere information or instructions through his messages. He thus included repeated religious references and biblical verses which could add sacred value to his persona and to the communication system as a whole. For example, in a letter written in April 2005 to Bernardo Riina (indicated with the number 5) Provenzano included a series of blessings and religious expressions, together with instructions on how to accompany him to the doctors for a blood test. The conclusion of the letter read:

Augurandovi per tutti un mondo di bene, Colgo l'occasione per augurarvi per tutti un mondo di bene, Colgo l'occasione per augurarvi se non ci Sentiamo più prima della

⁷⁶ Translation: *I beg you to forgive me for the mistakes you will find in this writing and I beg forgiveness again for my answers should they not be what you had expected. Now I conclude, reminding you that I am always at your complete disposal. I wish you all the goodness of this world and send you and your father my dearest, affectionate greetings. God bless and protect you all!* Pizzino datato 1 ottobre 1997 acquisito nell'ambito del Procedimento Penale nr. 1687/96 R.G.n.R. DDA. Inviato da Provenzano a Salvatore Genovese, e sequestrato in occasione dell'arresto di Giuseppe Maniscalco il 10 Ottobre 1997.

Santa Pasqua a Tutti vi augura di passare Una Buona Felicissima Serena Santa Pasqua
Inviandovi i più cari Aff. Saluti Vi Benedica il Signore e vi protegga!⁷⁷

The blessing ‘Vi benedica il Signore e vi protegga’ (May God bless and protect you) closes almost every *pizzino*. ‘Preghiamo il Nostro Buon Dio che ci guidi a fare opere buone per tutti’ (‘Let’s pray Our merciful God that He might lead us to do the right things for everybody’) is also frequently encountered in Provenzano’s letters. As he wrote in a message concerning two other mafia members (here indicated with the initials *G V* and *mm*):

Io vedo che tutti siamo bisognosi, chi più, chi meno, mà credo che tutti e due *G V*, *mm* ne hanno più bisogno, se c’è il volere di Dio, e noi possiamo fare, cose buone, possibilità permettendo facciamoli. (Palazzolo and Prestipino 2008, 142)⁷⁸

More than any other expression, *Con il volere di Dio* (With God’s will) recurs more than fifty times in the known *pizzini*, and more than once it appears in the same piece of communication:

Comunque, sappia, che là dove ti posso essere utile, con il volere di Dio sono a tua completa addisposizione, mà sappia pure che detesto la confusione, e quindi avendo le cose dette chiari in modo che io possa capirle, se è nelle mie possibilità, sono felice di poter esser utile.... Senti sarebbe per me un gran piacere vederci di presenza, cosa che al momento mi è impossibile farlo, mà lo faremo con il volere di Dio, appena possibile, mà non per quello che tu mi chiedi.⁷⁹

Another example of this is seen in a *pizzino* sent to Luigi Ilardo, concerning the payment of protection money:

77 Translation: *Wishing you all the goodness of the world, I take this occasion to wish you all the goodness of the world. If we don’t hear from each other before the Holy Easter, then I wish all of you to spend a Good, Happy, Serene, Holy Easter. Sending you my dearest wishes, May God bless and protect you all!* SCO, ‘Gruppo Duomo’: *Pizzino da Provenzano a Bernardo Riina*, n. 5, April 2005.

78 Translation: *I am aware that we all, some more so some less so, are in need, but I believe that *GV* and *mm* are more in need than anybody else. With God’s will, in the hope that we might do good things, if possible, then, let’s do them.*

79 Translation: *Know that with God’s will I am at your complete disposal, but I detest confusion...with God’s will I want to be your servant, command me if possible with calm and secrecy and let’s try and move on, hoping in your collaboration with *mm*. I conclude for now with the typewriter but not with my heart, and I send my dearest, most sincere and affectionate greetings to everybody.* Procedimento penale n. 4668/96 (Grande Oriente) nei confronti di Provenzano Bernardo + 20.

Io sono solo uno che posso aiutarvi, con il volere di Dio che non ci faccia mancare pure questi ultimi persone, che possono prodigarsi per fare andare avanti questa cosa, sempre con il volere di Dio ti prego e non ci confondiamo.⁸⁰

In the *pizzini* God also appears to be invoked in matters of violence, ‘I have nothing to say except let the will of God be done’, Provenzano wrote discussing a murder plot (Longrigg 2008, 151). Similarly, a business issue related to a chain of Despar supermarkets involving mafiosi from the provinces of Agrigento and Trapani, was left to be sorted by ‘the will of God’:

Perché volle che si chiudesse questa situazione al più presto. No dò colpa a nessuno. Mà se c’è il volere di Dio, e dell’interessati ho bisogno di chiuderla al più presto. Spero che l’atteggiamento negativo fino ad’ora tenuto da parte despar, possa cambiare in positivo e che ai nostri bisogni di lavoro si mostrino più accondiscendenti e disponibili. Le ho dato il mio parere, fà lei quello che ritiene più giusto, da parte mia ciò che stabilisce la sua persona mi và bene, avendo io piena fiducia in lei. Resto in attesa di sapere a cosa posso servire, nelle mie possibilità, smetto con l’augurio di ogni bene x lei e per i suoi cari, sia fatta la volontà di Dio.⁸¹

On other occasions, God was invoked to lead and guide mafiosi through specific problematic circumstances or, more generally, through the difficult times ahead: ‘A noi il Signore ci deve dare la forza di non farci cadere in errore e di darci sempre la calma’ (May God always give us the strength not to fall in error and to be calm), Provenzano once wrote to mafia boss Luigi Ilardo (Palazzolo and Prestipino 2008, 140). Another example is seen in a *pizzino* sent to noted mafioso Antonio Rotolo, in which Provenzano asked his recipient to be patient, expressing his gratitude to Divine Providence for the means of communication provided (Bolzoni 2008, 81).

80 Translation: *I am simply somebody who can help. May God spare us these persons who can help bring this thing forward. Always with God’s will I beg you and hope we don’t misunderstand each other. ibid.*

81 Translation: *Because I want to close this matter as soon as possible. I don’t blame anybody. But, with God’s will and with the will of the people in question I need to conclude this as soon as possible. I hope that the negative attitude that Despar has so far shown changes towards the positive and that they become more helpful and compliant towards our works. I am giving you my opinion, then you do what you think is best to do, whatever you decide is fine by me, I have complete trust in you. I am available to help where I can, in my current capacity, I conclude for now, wishing every good for you and your family. May God’s will be done. SCO, Gruppo Duomo: Pizzino inviato da Provenzano a Giuseppe Falsone il 20 Agosto 2005.*

In two particular circumstances where Provenzano evaded police raids after tip-offs, the reference in his pizzini to the help of God aroused suspicion that the religious invocations might hide a secret code. However, the recipient of the pizzini in question, mafia defector Nino Giuffrè, dismissed this interpretation (Palazzolo and Prestipino 2008, 8–10). Another episode, detailed in a letter from Provenzano to mafioso Giuseppe Lipari on the 25th of September 1998, roused suspicion that the religious references contained in the pizzini were not what they appeared to be. Lipari – who was in prison at the time – received the letter through his son, who had copied it into another format in order to covertly pass it to him during a prison visit. However, in copying it, Arturo had omitted the various ‘Ave Maria’ believing they were not relevant to the message. His father strenuously complained, asking him to write the complete message in future because ‘among those *Ave Maria* there were things he could understand.’ Despite this cryptic comment, there is no strong evidence to date that a secret code lies behind the religious references contained in the pizzini.

Analysed from the socio-anthropological perspectives described in Chapter Two, the written system of communication devised by Bernardo Provenzano presents the same characteristics of a highly symbolic ritual of communicative interaction that has a demonstrable transformative effect on the participants involved (Lincoln 1981, 183). Indeed, its patterned and repeated sequences of words and symbolic religious references can be studied both for their meaning and for their effects on the ritual participants. Reflecting Durkheimian theories of religious rituals, the ritual consisting in the exchange of pizzini, imbued with repeated religious expressions, became the occasion for mafia members to feel united by common interests and a moral religious

tradition that has always been a constant in the mafia transcultural dimension, and in the tradition of wider Sicilian society. The ‘collective consciousness’ of their moral unity was needed to strengthen ties between each member and the mafia group and, eventually, to rebuild the social identity that, after war and the loss caused by *pentiti*, Cosa Nostra appeared to have lost.

In a sense, the *pizzino*, with its characteristic religious, mystical tone became a ‘totemic’ element for Provenzano’s ritual of communication: the sacred object of a ritual, in which mafia members could recognise themselves and the existence of their group, thereby feeling solidarity and allegiance to one another. The combination of religious symbols and ritual collective actions in the communication system implemented by Provenzano served to integrate the organisation by promoting in its members recognition of the group’s existence and of their membership of it. The religious, quasi-monastic tone of the writing added sacred value not only to the ritual of written interaction implemented by Provenzano, but to his whole role as leader conducting the ritual. In order to create his role and successfully project it in interaction, Provenzano drew from the same source of cultural narratives which mafia boss Michele Greco utilised to construct his identity: the Bible.

5.6. The Bible of Bernardo Provenzano

Five copies of the Bible in different editions were found in Provenzano’s hideout the day of the arrest. One copy in particular⁸² appeared to have been used to underline and copy passages, take notes, and mark specific sentences with the use of adhesive stickers. Nearly 90% of the biblical text was underlined. Upon these stickers,

82 *La Sacra Bibbia*, Edizioni Paoline, 1968.

Provenzano drew arrows, sequences of letters, and numbers before attaching them to the pages in correspondence of passages he had underlined (Figure 17):

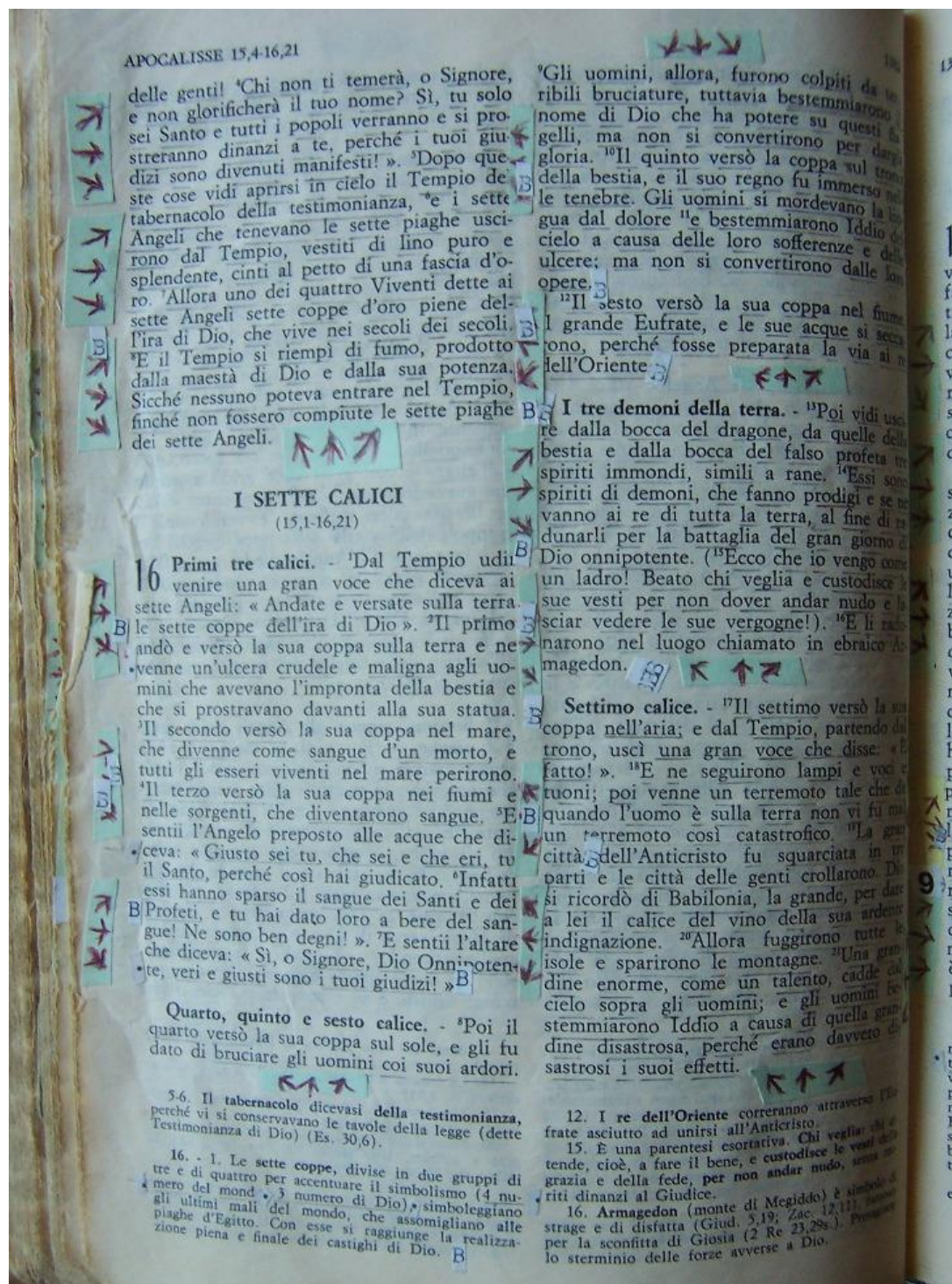


Figure 17: An annotated page of Provenzano's Bible.⁸³

⁸³ This page of the Bible used by Provenzano shows the typical markings, stickers and notes found

Lines of three arrows appear to have been drawn in red directly on some pages. The use of these notes may indicate that Provenzano wanted to avoid writing directly on the text of the Bible which he held to be sacred. However, extensive underlining of verses with ink more strongly indicates that these notes were used to be easily attached, removed and re-attached again in different sections. This explanation is consistent with the most accredited interpretation that the mafia boss read and used the Bible as a source of inspiration to write his *pizzini*.

There are strong indications that parts of the underlined verses were to be addressed to specific recipients of Provenzano's missives. For example, a note has been found on page 502 of his Bible upon which the mafia leader had written 'Esdra, pg 503 Per mio figlio Angelo' with the last two words barely readable after being partially deleted. In the Book of Ezra (9:2) other verses are underlined and highlighted with blue stickers, including the opening line: 'anzi, i capi e i magistrati sono stati i primi a compiere questa trasgressione'.⁸⁴ Although certainly not corresponding to their original Hebrew meaning, the reference of the words 'capi' and 'magistrati' in Provenzano's context is self evident. The name Angelo is also written on top of the page 523 of the Book of Tobias (3:16 –12:22) (Figure 18) and in correspondence of the verses containing the recommendations of Tobit to his son Tobias. This hints at the intention of Provenzano to copy those verses to be destined for his son Angelo.

throughout the text. A selection of 21 pages from the original copy of the Bible used by Provenzano have been made available by journalist Salvo Palazzolo in his website <http://www.ipezzimancanti.it/?p=514>.

⁸⁴ 'In this faithlessness the hand of the officials and chief men has been foremost'

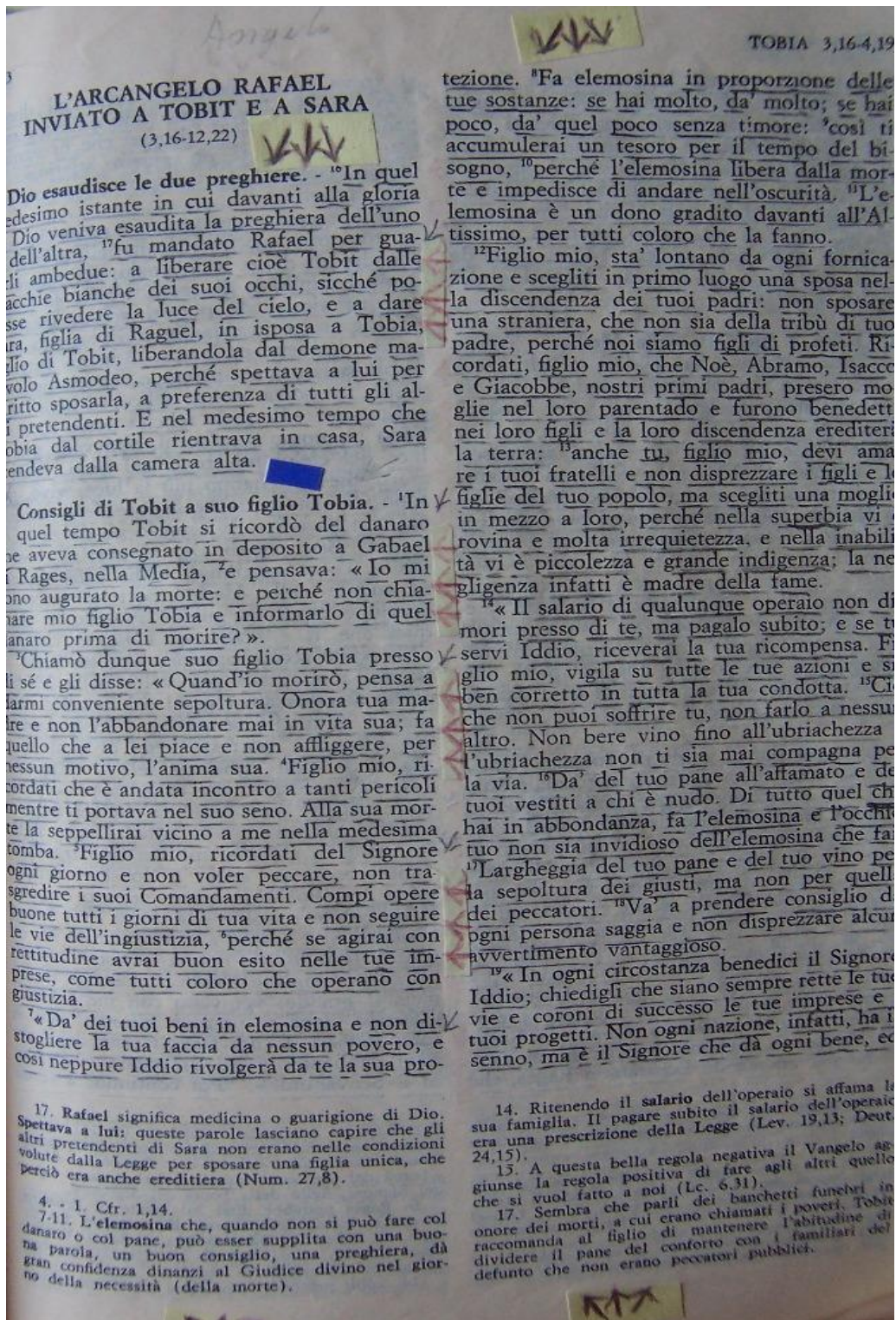


Figure 18: Reference in Provenzano's Bible to his son Angelo⁸⁵

85 The hand-written name Angelo, most certainly referring to Provenzano's son, is visible on top of

The parts highlighted with arrows and visible in the picture included the following:

My son, when I am dead, bury me; and despise not thy mother, but honour her all the days of thy life, and do that which shall please her, and grieve her not. Remember, my son, that she saw many dangers for thee, when thou wast in her womb: and when she is dead, bury her by me in one grave. My son, be mindful of the Lord our God all thy days, and let not thy will be set to sin, or to transgress his commandments: do uprightly all thy life long, and follow not the ways of unrighteousness. For if thou deal truly, thy doings shall prosperously succeed to thee, and to all them that live justly. (Tobit 4:3–6)⁸⁶

On page 839, 'x Angelo' is written at the beginning of chapter 19 of the Book of Isaiah. On the following page Provenzano wrote '47 v 13 ogni mese' with reference to the verse 47:13. Four words, 'fanno sapere ogni mese', appear to have been singled out individually and highlighted with circular pen marks: 'si levino ora a salvarti quelli che misurano il cielo, che osservano le stelle e ti *fanno sapere ogni mese* quello che accadrà.'⁸⁷ In a note attached to the last page of the Book of Job, there is a reference to somebody else's opinion on whether prostitution is considered to be a sin in the Bible: 'TT. a detto a M. che nella Bibbia c'è scritto prostituirsi none Peccato.'⁸⁸

Since the chronological records of pizzini seized by police are incomplete, it is difficult to establish to what extent the verses underlined in the Bible were then reported in the messages. Yet, some evidence can be found, for example, in the letter sent by Pino Lipari, in which Provenzano's close collaborator expressed his gratitude to the mafia boss for the verses of the Bible he had previously sent him. The verses to which Lipari referred were the following:

the page, indicating the person to whom the verses underlined were addressed.
<http://www.ipezzimancanti.it/?p=514>.

86 Protestant 'Apocrypha'. The version reported in the main text is derived from *The Bible*, King James Version, 1997.

87 ESV: 'let them stand forth and save you, those who divide the heavens, who gaze at the stars, who at the new moons make known what shall come upon you.'

88 *TT told M that in the Bible it is written that prostitution is not a sin.*

So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. (Matthew 7:17–20)⁸⁹

Another example, the expression *Vi benedica il Signore e vi protegga* (The Lord bless and keep you), that closes every *pizzino*, is derived from the Book of Numbers (6:24). In his messages, Provenzano recurrently thanked ‘Our Lord Jesus Christ’, and referred to ‘Divine Providence’ and ‘Our beloved Lord’ expressing the hope that ‘He might help us to do the right things’. References to the importance of doing the right things, a concept on which Provenzano frequently insisted, are, for instance, in 1 John 3:7, Isaiah 1:17, in Proverbs 11 and in the following verses derived from Galatians 6:9–10, which are underlined in the Provenzano’s copy of the Bible:

And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

A *pizzino* sent by Matteo Messina Denaro in response to the message that Provenzano had previously sent to him, reads:

mio caro zio nella sua lettera ho trovato delle belle parole, lei mi dice che siamo tutti e due sulla stessa barca e dobbiamo fare di tutto per non farla affondare, mi dice pure di studiare come superare per non essere criticati ma apprezzati.⁹⁰

One can perhaps surmise from the words of Messina Denaro that Provenzano had likely used the analogy of the sinking boat, derived from the *Book of Romans* (3:13) ‘The Message: We’re all in the Same Sinking Boat’, to describe the critical situation of Cosa Nostra.

89 Viviano, Francesco, ‘Assegna appalti, legge la Bibbia; ecco le lettere segrete di Binu’, *La Repubblica*, 4 October 2002.

90 My dear Uncle, I read your letter and the beautiful words you used. You say that we are in the same boat and we have to do our best not to let it sink, and that I have to find a way to overcome the difficulties in order for us to be appreciated again rather than criticised. SCO, ‘Gruppo Duomo’: *Pizzino inviato da Matteo Messina Denaro a Provenzano il 25 Aprile 2004*.

The continuous underlining, numbering and use of arrows suggested to judicial authorities and police the existence of a secret code behind the verses of the sacred text reported in the *pizzini*. FBI cryptographers (the Cryptanalysis and Racketeering Records Unit) and the Italian police central operations service (SCO) scrutinised Provenzano's copy of the Bible. Magistrates, academics, theologians and a mathematician all collaborated in this analysis, yet, to date, these investigations have not resulted in a definitive indication of a code. The report written by the SCO chief investigator Maurizio Ortolan concluded that no secret codes were hidden in the biblical text and that the most difficult thing to understand was the 'uncertain calligraphy of the writer and the linguistic mistakes'.⁹¹

However, one possible interpretation advanced by investigating magistrates, including Michele Prestipino, deputy public prosecutor at the Direzione Distrettuale Antimafia (DDA – Antimafia District Directorate) of Reggio Calabria, is that the Bible provided the mafia boss with a widely available instrument to communicate with other mafia affiliates.⁹² Being available even to those mafiosi incarcerated under the 41-bis prison regime, the Bible could represent the ideal—and sole—mode of communication. According to this interpretation, the type-written capital letters of the alphabet which Provenzano cut and copied over specific verses of the Bible may hide a secret code devised to communicate with a restricted number of selected collaborators. This would explain the reason why, for example, after the arrest Provenzano insisted on having his own copy of the Bible rather than any other.

91 Questura di Palermo, Squadra Mobile, Servizio Centrale Operativo I Divisione, Esame della Bibbia sequestrate a Provenzano Bernardo in occasione del suo arresto, a Corleone, l'11 Aprile 2006, redatto da Maurizio Ortolan, dirigente del Servizio Centrale Operativo.

92 Personal Communication, 27 July 2011.

Another hypothesis that has been suggested is that the Bible was used for personal spiritual needs. As Father Giacomo Ribaudo pointed out, the religiosity of Provenzano does not represent a novelty in Cosa Nostra where numerous examples can be identified of mafiosi who declare themselves religious, go to mass and use religious symbols without adhering to the basic evangelical precepts of the Christian doctrine.⁹³ Within his Bible, Provenzano had kept the image printed in 1941 of S. Gaspare del Bufalo, the founder of the *Missionari del Preziosissimo Sangue*; one picture printed in 1953 of Jesus Christ bearing the inscription ‘Gesù confido in te’, which was similar to the other seventy-three found at his arrest. He had also kept a holy card printed in 1977 celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the religious profession of Sister Colomba Gambino and Sister Assunta Sciarba. The presence of this series of holy pictures that were enshrined in the Bible for years prior to the implementation of the *pizzini* system thus indicates that Provenzano’s religious devotion was not merely constructed *ad hoc* or *de novo* as part of a well thought strategy, but was an intrinsic component of his personality that derived from a cultural tradition of the wider social group to which he belonged.

5.6.1. The Bible as an instrument for creating identity

The impossibility of determining with any precision where, in the religious behaviour of mafiosi, authentic belief ends and exploitative deceit begins has been stressed in the introduction to this thesis. It is important at this point to re-state that the purpose of this study is not to investigate if, or to what extent, Provenzano is religious. As Erving Goffman argued, the study of interaction ‘is not the individual

93 *Giornale di Sicilia*, 13 April 2006.

and his psychology, but rather the syntactical relations among the acts of different persons mutually present to one another' (Goffman 2005, 2). What concerns this analysis is the role that the religiosity of the pizzini played on Provenzano's identity and on the collective identity and structure of Cosa Nostra at large.

Alessandra Dino argued in this regard that, through the use of verses from the Bible and the Gospels, Provenzano 'showed his intention to follow a path of humility and obedience, of renunciation and sacrifice, as if he wanted to assume the responsibility for a work of mediation with God' (2008, 125). It is difficult—if not impossible—to establish with any certainty the intentions behind Provenzano's choice of biblical references in writing his pizzini. Nevertheless, it is important not to overestimate the ability or knowledge of a man who, however clever, capable and forward-looking he was in his role as mafia leader, remained semi-illiterate and incapable of complex theoretical speculations. Rather, his religious behaviour reflects the characteristics of the 'superficial and choreographic dimension' of what in Chapter One has been described as the 'devout, popular model of Sicilian religiosity' (Stabile 1996). The Catholic tone of Provenzano's writing is indeed redundant in a religious culture inculcated by generations of monks, nuns and priests in sermons and catechism lessons; a culture, which does not imply the conscious elaboration of theological theorizations, but rather the assimilation of religious precepts that remain constricted within individualistic and familiar horizons. The Bible, in this context as in the context of Michele Greco, represented for Provenzano the cultural text of reference from which to draw models of behaviour and criteria of judgement, as well as inspiration to delineate and enrich his own role.

The role performed by Provenzano in his ritual of symbolic interaction can be interpreted in terms of ‘enactment’, a concept which, as previously stressed, encompasses both the notion of belief and that of theatrical acting (Alexander 1997, 154). Specifically, Provenzano enacted the role of a charismatic leader⁹⁴ inspired by his faith in God, who found in the Bible a source of inspiration not only to write his *pizzini*, but also to build and portray his identity in a renewed religious light. This is evident in the tone of the messages and of particular verses he underlined in his Bible when referring to this role, represented through the selection and use of specific biblical phraseology.

For example, in his Bible, particular attention was dedicated to the Book of Isaiah, especially the chapter concerning the arrival of the Messiah. The word *Messiah* has in fact been written above the beginning of different verses which are underlined and highlighted with the use of arrows and capital Letters. The Letters A and B are attached over the arrows pointing at the verses 8–9:

Thus says the Lord: “In a time of favor I have answered you; in a day of salvation I have helped you; I will keep you and give you as a covenant to the people, to establish the land, to apportion the desolate heritages, saying to the prisoners, ‘Come out’, to those who are in darkness, ‘Appear.’”

The hypothesis that Provenzano drew inspiration from the Bible to create and sustain his role as ‘humble and devoted saviour’ of an organisation in crisis is evident in the emphasis given to those verses related to the Servant of the Lord. He underlined and circled footnote 7 ‘The servant will be depreciated and outraged, but in the end he will be glorified’, and footnote 4, ‘although the mission imposed on him by God was hard and dangerous, the servant did not refuse the task.’ The reference of the latter is

94 On the differences between the role of ‘leader’ and that of ‘boss’, see the interesting observations of Alessandra Dino (2011, 122-123).

to verses in chapter 50 of the Book of Isaiah which appear to have been emphatically singled out with the use of multiple sets of arrows, underlining and pen drawn references:

The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary....The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious; I turned not backward. I gave my back to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting. Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the voice of his servant? Let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God (Isaiah 50: 4–8).

Interestingly, the image of the ‘servant’ frequently recurred in Provenzano’s pizzini. As he wrote on different occasions, ‘God willing, I want to be a servant; give me orders’ (Follain 2008, 266). Similarly, it would also recur in the pizzini written by fellow mafia members.

At the beginning of chapter 59 of the Book of Isaiah, entitled ‘I peccati ostacolano la salvezza’ (‘Evil and Oppression’ in the ESV), Provenzano wrote, ‘Copiare fino al verso 8’ (to copy until verse 8). The verses he intended to copy are about sinners whose ‘hands are defiled with blood and fingers with iniquity and whose lips have spoken lies’, which suggests a possible reference to pentiti. Similarly, in Deuteronomy 27 he underlined and emphasised verse 24 of the Curses from Mount Ebal: ‘Cursed be anyone who strikes down his neighbour in secret. And all the people shall say, Amen’, and verse 27:26: ‘Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.’ Among the Blessings of Obedience of chapter 29 of Deuteronomy, specific verses were also singled out and underlined:

And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God....The LORD will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before you. They shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways. The LORD will command the blessing on you in your barns and in all that you undertake. And he will bless you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. The LORD will establish you as a people holy to himself, as he has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in his ways. And all the peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they shall be afraid of you. (Deuteronomy 29:7–10)

Further evidence of the fact that Provenzano drew inspiration from the Bible for the enactment of his role is in the notes kept between the first pages of his Bible:

In qualsiasi posto o parte del mondo mi trovo, in qualsiasi Ora io abbia a comunicare con T... Sia parole, Opinione, fatti scritti. Chiedere a Dio il suggerimento, la sua guida, la sua esistenza affinché con il suo volere Possano giungere Ordine per lui eseguirlo affin di Bene.⁹⁵

Another handwritten note read ‘Dio è Spirito che entra nel Corpo, Anima e Cuore. Guidando L’essere come vuole Dio. Affinchè si compie il Volere di Dio. Guidando con il suo Spirito di Dio, nelle cose soprannaturale.’⁹⁶ These notes contained religious references which were not directly derived from the text. Also, since they were not addressed to any specific recipient but to Provenzano, they appeared to represent personal affirmations intended solely for the author’s eyes.

Anthropologist Victor Turner emphasised in his studies that the use of powerful symbols in rituals works effectively on the most superficial, cognitive and emotional level of the participants. Furthermore, those symbols referring to the cultural codes of reference have a high sensorial and ideological intensity that allows them to create emotions and add sacred value to the ritual performance. Analysed from this perspective, it is possible to see how the textual references from the Bible and the religious formulas in the pizzini have a high symbolic charge that allowed Provenzano to add sacred value to his performative ritual of interaction, and to his identity. At the same time, by means of symbolic reference to a shared cultural patrimony represented by the Bible, Provenzano ratified his belief in an existential

95 Translation: *Whatever place of the world I find myself, at whatever time I find myself needing to communicate with T...either words, opinions or facts, always ask God for suggestions, guidance, for his existence, in order that with his will orders may arrive for me to follow in his name for the good of everybody.*

96 Translation: *God is the Spirit which enters the body, soul and heart, moving the human being as God wants to let God’s will be done. Guiding his Spirit according to the will of God in supernatural things.*

dimension, which provides unity and continuity to the ‘morality’ of the mafia social order (Merlino 2012a).

Therefore, beyond the immediate communicative function, the biblical references in the *pizzini* would serve the fundamental purpose for Provenzano to create and represent his image as mafia leader inspired by his faith in God, while simultaneously recreating that sense of collective identity and internal cohesion which decades of conflicts and the State’s repressive measures had severely damaged.

5.7. Religious ritual performance and social drama

In the *pizzini*, it is possible to identify the characteristics which Richard Bauman identified in the *emergent* quality of performance, namely the enhancement of the overall experience, the competence of the social actor, and the general goals of the ritual participants (Bauman and Babcock 1984, 38). The examples of *pizzini* hitherto reported show how Provenzano enhanced his performance by manipulating symbols related to the religious dimension, adding sacredness to the ritual experience and creating a ‘collective effervescence’ among the participants. In this regard, Bauman observed that the social actor gains prestige and authority over his audience as this occurs: ‘prestige for having effectively displayed his competence, authority and control for holding the flow of the interaction in his hands. When the performer gains control in this way he has the potential to transform social structure’ (1984, 43–44).

Indeed, ‘emergence’—the ability to let social structure emerge to meta-comment upon it and offer new alternatives—is an evident quality of Provenzano’s performative behaviour and language. References to the factors that had threatened

the stability of the organisation frequently emerged in Provenzano's written interaction with other mafiosi. In the above mentioned letter sent by Messina Denaro to Provenzano in 2004,⁹⁷ the 'analogy of the sinking boat' and the awareness of the need to overcome the difficulties in order for Cosa Nostra 'to be appreciated again rather than criticised' are a clear example of meta-commentary upon the consequences that Riina's strategy had had on Cosa Nostra.

Similarly, in the first *pizzino* that Provenzano wrote to Luigi Ilardo in July 1994 (therefore the first *pizzino* ever found by the police), the mafia leader stressed the importance for everybody to overcome 'adversities' and to recover 'whatever was left to redeem'. He expressed his wishes for a 'sincere and correct collaboration':

Mio carissimo G. Con gioia, ho ricevuto il tuo scritto, mi compiaccio tanto, nel sentire, che godeti tutti di Ottima Salute. Lo stesso grazie a Dio posso dirti di me. [...] Mi auguro una senera, ecorretta collaborazione. Anche sè, abbiamo molte avversità, sia fuori che dentro di noi stessi, cercati di recuperare, il massimo del recuperabile. Ora ti prego di volermi scusare dei miei errore, felicissimo del tuo condatto resto in attesa di tue notizie pregandoti di dare i miei Saluti a tutti e bacetti ai bambini che ora saranno fatti grandicelli bacetti per bambini e i suoi genitore augurandovi un mondo di bene inviandovi un i più cari Aff.Saluti.⁹⁸

In another letter sent to Ilardo in the same year, Provenzano drew attention to the 'sofferenze sofferti' [sic] ('suffering suffered') during the crisis of Cosa Nostra:

Ti prego di essere sempre calmo e retto, corretto e coerente, sappia approfittare l'esperienza delle sofferenze sofferti, non credere a tutto quello che ti dicono, cerca sempre la verità prima di parlare, e ricordati che non basta mai avere una prova per

97 SCO, 'Gruppo Duomo': Lettera inviata da Matteo Messina Denaro a Provenzano il 25 Aprile 2004.

98 Translation: *My dearest G., it is with joy that I received your letter. I am pleased to hear that you all are in good health. This, thanks to God, I can say about myself. I wish for us a sincere and correct collaboration from now on. Even though there are many adversities both outside and inside ourselves you need to try and recover what is recoverable. Now I hope you can forgive my mistakes. I am very pleased to be in touch with you. Waiting for your reply, I beg you to send my regards to everybody and kind kisses to the kids who now must have grown up, and to their parents. Wishing you all the goodness of this world I send you my dearest, most affectionate greetings.*' TdP, procedimento penale n. 4668/96 (Grande Oriente) nei confronti di Provenzano Bernardo + 20.

affrontare un ragionamento. Per essere certo in un ragionamento occorrono tre prove, e correttezza e coerenza. Vi benedica il Signore e vi protegga.⁹⁹

The same tone accompanies a *pizzino* addressed to Giovanni Brusca, boss of San Giuseppe Iato and one of the Corleonesi's main allies. Concerned about the disputes occurring between other mafiosi, Provenzano invited Brusca to ask them on his behalf to avoid doing 'cose sgradevole' (unpleasant things) and, at the same time, to help him rein the organisation in:

Mà dimmi che cosa fanno ? e poi tu sai che quando si vuole tutto si può fare, glielo chiedi da parte mia, se potessero cercare di evitare cose sgradevole ?, e nel mentre mi fai sapere che cosa fanno di male. Mà accertati che sia la verità quello, che si dici ? e nello stesso tempo di dirci di salvare il salvabile. è una mia preghiera.¹⁰⁰

These examples demonstrate that Provenzano progressively let the social structure emerge during this ritual of interaction by questioning those parameters which had led to the crisis of Cosa Nostra. Cosa Nostra can be considered in this context as a community whose social structure is made up of the entire system of relationships that maintains order. According to Turner's theory of *social drama*, when a conflict arises in the structure, the arrangement of positions or social status collapses, causing a breach within the community. For more than a century prior to the Second Mafia War, Cosa Nostra had aimed, with some success, at remaining 'invisible'. Analysed in terms of social drama, it is clear that the Corleonesi's strategy of violence and the consequent phenomenon of *pentitismo*, caused a breach within the structure of the criminal organisation. This rupture threatened the stability of the social unit and

99 Translation: *I beg you to be calm and diligent, correct and coherent, to learn from the experience of suffered suffering. Do not entirely dismiss what other people say, but remember that one proof is never enough to judge; you need at least three, and correctness and coherence. May God bless and protect you. ibid.*

100 Translation: *Tell me what they are doing. You know that you can do anything if you really want, please ask them on my behalf if they can please avoid doing unpleasant things? In the meantime let me know what they do wrong. Just make sure that what you hear is true. Also tell them to save whatever can be saved. Tell them that is my prayer.* Pizzino inviato da Provenzano a Giovanni Brusca, sequestrato nell'ambito dell'arresto di Giovanni Brusca a Cannatello di Agrigento il 20 Maggio 1996, Procedimento penale no. 3634/96.

widened into a phase of crisis. In Turner's scheme, this threat to the group's unity and continuity needed to be resolved by redressive public action undertaken by the group's leader. Provenzano's redressive action constituted an essential part of the mafia *social drama*.

After the initial breach and the consequent crisis, Provenzano opted to question the parameters around the social structure of the organisation, with the intention of piecing them together again to prevent the crisis from leading to an irreparable schism. Firstly, in order to pacify all internal conflicts and establish his authority over the organisation, he needed to perfect a secure means of communication, which could enable mediation between rival mafia 'families' whilst living in hiding. Thus, the decision to use the *pizzini* as the chief means of communication answered the specific needs of the strategy of 'submersion'.

Furthermore, in order to gain consensus within the rest of the organisation, Provenzano needed to enact a role that represented a rupture with the mafia of the recent past and mirrored instead the characteristics of what mafiosi generally refer to as 'the mafia of the origins': sense of honour, ability to mediate, wisdom, religious devotion (Biagi 1994, 142–146). The tactics adopted by the mafia boss clearly reflect the dynamics of the redressive phase of the social drama.

In the previous sections, it has been explained how the *pizzini* can be interpreted in this framework as a highly symbolic social ritual of interaction through which Provenzano was able to 'enact' his role of a *primus inter pares* who does not issue orders with the authority of an undisputed dictator but with the diplomacy of a charismatic mediator sustained by his religious devotion. In regard to the considerations about the liminal features of the redressive action in the social drama

of Cosa Nostra, we can hypothesise a liminal, levelled anti-structure. The three main components that Turner identified in liminality— communication of sacred symbols, reconstruction and reinterpretation of social values, simplification of social structure— recur within the ‘drama’ of the Sicilian mafia (Merlino 2012a).

Bernardo Provenzano communicated sacred values through the use of symbolic religious language and Biblical verses to represent the unity and continuity of a social group in crisis. The use of recurrent references to the ‘moral’ dimension of Cosa Nostra, where religion has always occupied a central position, ultimately provoked the audience to reflect on the communitarian ‘values’ of the mafia. In addition, the enactment of the role of *primus inter pares* in contrast to that of boss *legibus solutus* of his predecessor, allowed Provenzano to simplify the relations which make up the social structure of the mafia. By doing so, he created a less hierarchical, more horizontal structure while simultaneously leaving his leadership as the sole form of authority. The affiliates experienced this liminality as a transition between what the organisation had recently been and what it was to become (in Turner’s words they were ‘betwixt and between’ two states). Emotionally influenced by the crucial values referred to by their leader in his ritual performance, mafiosi now shared that feeling of solidarity and unity characteristic of a *communitas*: the unstructured, or elementarily structured, community of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elder (Turner 1969, 128-129). The religious performative behaviour and language used by Provenzano in his written communication became a means for the production of solidarity in the form of collective emotions and their symbolic representations. Evidence for the

effectiveness of Provenzano's redressive action can only be found in the response of the audience to his ritual performance.

5.8. The response of the audience

An analysis of the *pizzini* addressed to Provenzano and written by other mafia and family members is useful to show the effects that the leader's performance had on his audience.

Giuseppe Falsone, one of the mafia bosses in the province of Agrigento, concluded every *pizzino* addressed to Provenzano with the expression: 'Smetto con lo scritto ma non con il cuore, augurandole ogni mondo di bene e che il signore la benedica e la protegga.'¹⁰¹ The first sentence of his *pizzini* was also consistently: 'Carissimo zio, spero che la presente la venga a trovare in bene e in buona salute come grazie a Dio le posso dire di mè.' In Falsone's letters religious expressions like 'with God's will' and 'thank God' frequently recur. 'Come lei dice sé c'è la volontà di Dio, le cose camminano', he wrote in a message addressed to Provenzano.¹⁰²

Similarly, in a letter sent one month later regarding a business issue which had not yet been resolved, Falsone expressed his inability to intervene in the matter using the words: 'Io sono qui, paziente e in attesa che gli eventi siano favorevoli, con la volontà di Dio',¹⁰³ adding also his wishes for better conditions to speed up the resolution of the issues 'con il volere di Dio'. These examples clearly demonstrate the close resemblance between the opening and closing lines used by Provenzano in

101 SCO, 'Gruppo Duomo': *Pizzino* inviato da Giuseppe Falsone a Bernardo Provenzano il 28 Luglio 2004 . Translation: *My dearest uncle, I hope this letter finds you in good health. The same, with God's will, I can say for myself... I conclude with the pen for the moment but not with my heart, wishing you all the goodness of this world, God bless and protect you.* The first words: *My dearest uncle, I hope this letter finds you in good health. This, thank God, I can say about myself.*

102 *As you say, things work with God's will. ibid.*

103 *I am here, waiting patiently for things to become favourable with God's will.*

his pizzini as well as the religious expressions which most frequently recurred in his correspondence.

An analogous tone to that used by Provenzano on the occasion of Easter or Christmas festivities appears in the letters written by Sandro Lo Piccolo (indicated with the number 31), a young mafioso and son of the powerful mafia boss of Palermo, Salvatore Lo Piccolo:

Zio mio carissimo, augurandomi sempre che lei, ed i suoi stiate bene, le scrivo questo breve scritto, per augurarle di cuore, di trascorrere serenamente e nei migliori dei modi questa santa Pasqua. Lo stesso Augurio lo rivolgo sia ai suoi cari, che a tutti quelli che le stanno vicino, e che la vogliono bene. Carissimo zio, la Prego di scusarmi, se non mi faccio sentire spesso, ma le Assicuro che è costantemente nei miei Pensieri!!! E in Qualsiasi momento sono a sua completa disposizione....Ora caro e affettuosissimo zio mio, insieme ai miei più sinceri Auguri di Buona Pasqua, le invio dal mio più profondo cuore, un'infinita di abbracci e baci. Con tantissima stima
Suo nipote 31
Le voglio un bene immenso!!! E che Dio , l'aiuti sempre!!!!¹⁰⁴

In general, the same opening and closing sentences appear in virtually all the pizzini written by other mafia members and addressed to Provenzano. An evident example is provided by the correspondence exchanged with mafioso Ignazio Ribisi of the Agrigento province. The first and last sections of a pizzino which Ribisi sent to Provenzano on the 8th of October 2005 show a similar writing style to that used by the mafia leader. Above all, it demonstrates the high level of deference and obsequiousness which mafiosi at lower level displayed to their leader. As the final section reads: 'I beg you not to leave us, we are in your hands, and we are ready to give our lives for you, as a son would do for his father' (Figure 19):

104 Polizia SCO, 'Gruppo Duomo': Pizzino inviato da Sandro Lo Piccolo a Bernardo Provenzano il 26 Marzo 2006. Translation: *My dearest uncle, I truly hope that you and your family are well. I write this message to you to wish you well from the bottom of my heart, in the hope that you may spend this Holy Easter in the best and most serene way. I apologise if I don't write to you as often as I would like, but I can guarantee you that you are always in my thoughts. And in every moment am I always at your complete disposal. Now, along with my Easter greetings, I send you infinite hugs and kisses from the bottom of my heart. Your nephew 31. I love you so much!! May God always be with you!!!*

1

08-10-2005

CARISSIMO ZIO B. SPERO COME NEL SUO SCRITTO
 CHE STIA BENE E IN OTTIMA SALUTE COME IO
 POSSO DIRE DI ME. LA INFORMO SU MIO ZIO
 IGNAZIO CHE PUR ESSENDO ASSOLTO
 DALLI OMICIDI ACCUSATI DA (REI FERRE IL PENTITO)

LA PREGO NON CI ABBANDONI
 SIAMO NELLE SUE MANI, E SIAMO PRONTI
 A DARE LA VITA PER LEI, COME I FIGLI
 FANNO PER IL LORO PADRE.
 CON QUESTO CONCLUDO,
 LE PORGO I MIEI PIU' SINCERI SALUTI
 L'ABBRACCIO COME SE DAL VIVO
 E CHE IL SIGNORE LA BENEDECA.

N.B. SE CI TERRA IN CONSIDERAZIONE «NON»
 SIAMO SEMPRE A SUA COMPLETA DISPOSIZIONE.

SALUTI (GIUSEPPE BISSI)
 DI TERMINI

Figure 19: First and last section of a pizzino by Ignazio Ribisi

Similarly, in response to the verses of the Bible that Provenzano had sent him, his close collaborator Pino Lipari wrote:

Carissimo, spero la presente ti trovi in buona salute così come tutti noi. Rispondo alla tua cara lettera cercando di soddisfare le tue richieste. Ti ringrazio sempre per la tua disponibilità nei miei riguardi e credo non puoi fare di più di quanto non abbia fatto sino ad ora: rileggo quei passi della Bibbia che tu mi hai inviato e mi ha colpito la massima «secondo cui l'albero si riconosce dal suo frutto». Vedo che trovi tanto del tuo tempo per dedicarlo alla lettura ma la tua saggezza per non dire quella di tutti noi non si forma con la lettura che certamente aiuta molto ma bisogna che l'uomo nella sua struttura sia propenso alla riflessione, alla calma e altruista nell'aiutare il prossimo. Tu hai tutte queste caratteristiche e quindi affronti la vita così per come si presenta come un dono di Dio. La tua fede è massima e ti aiuta moltissimo. Dio ti ha molto illuminato e spero sempre con preghiera che ti protegga sempre per il bene tuo e di tutti quelli che ti vogliamo bene. Dopo questa dissertazione passo ai vari argomenti.¹⁰⁵

This letter clearly contains a language and tone which notably reflects those utilised by Provenzano in his written communication. Moreover, by acknowledging characteristics like altruism, wisdom, calm, and a deep religious faith that Provenzano projected in his ritual of interaction, it demonstrates the efficacy of the mafia leader's performative act.

Indeed, the pizzini found in Montagna dei Cavalli strongly indicate that, by 2006, Provenzano had gained a total consensus from, and established complete authority over, the rest of the mafia community across Sicily. Yet, numerous examples of pizzini sent by other mafiosi do not simply show a recognition of Provenzano's authority and charisma; they demonstrate a precise form of deferential 'devotion'. Goffman described deference precisely as a 'mark of devotion' that represents the ways in which an actor 'celebrates and confirms his relation to a recipient' (Goffman 2005, 56). The more mafia members acknowledged their

105 Translation: *My dearest friend, I hope this letter finds you in good health. This I can say about myself. I reply to your kind letter trying to satisfy your requests. I thank you for your helpfulness and I do not believe you can do more than you have already done. I read the verses of the Bible you sent me and I was particularly impressed by the verse according to which a tree can be recognized by its fruit. I can see that you are able to dedicate most of your spare time to reading. However, your wisdom does not just derive from reading, which certainly helps. It is necessary that a man by his nature has a propensity towards reflection, calm, altruism in helping the others. You have all these characteristics, you take life as it comes, like a gift from God. Your faith is strong and sustains you. God has enlightened you and I always pray that He will always protect you for your own good and for that of all of us who love you. After this disquisition I move on to other subjects. Cited in Palazzolo 2004.*

leader's competence and authority, the more Provenzano's identity was 'allotted a kind of sacredness displayed and confirmed by symbolic acts'. Indeed, through practices of deference and demeanour, which were progressively *institutionalised* in the course of written interaction, Provenzano's identity became part of a ceremonial ritual, a 'sacred object which had to be treated with proper ritual care and in turn had to be presented in a proper light to others' (Goffman 2005, 91). In order to establish and project this sacred *self* on a regular basis, the mafia leader acted consistently with an appropriate demeanour, displaying deference to, and being treated with deference by, his interlocutors. This can be seen, for example, in a letter sent by Ignazio Ribisi to Provenzano in June 2005 regarding 'the succession to the throne' of two mafia candidates in the province of Agrigento:

Carissimo zio Bennardo,
Benché non ho mai avuto la suprema gioia di abbracciarla dal vivo, tuttavia la raggiungo per fatti delicatissimi che mi stanno strettamente al cuore. Or io mi permetto di indirizzare questo mio messaggio perché dentro di me sento l'assoluta certezza che lei mi stima così tanto da analizzare e prendere in considerazione quello che dignitosamente le sto per dire....Naturalmente, comunque sia la sua decisione, noi resteremo sempre e per la vita i suoi fedelissimi devoti.... Prima di salutarla tengo moltissimo a dire: [noi] viviamo per lei, per cui qualsiasi cosa possa aver bisogno, la preghiamo vivamente di non risparmiarci di nulla che noi saremo felicissimo di servirlo. Frattanto con altissimo ed imperituro senso di massimo rispetto lo abbraccio paternamente. Suo devotissimo Ignazio¹⁰⁶

The 'absolute devotion' and 'highest sense of imperishable respect' expressed in this letter, are evidence of the consideration and esteem that Provenzano enjoyed within the mafia community. Above all, the quasi-monastic, religious tone of this written correspondence responds to a precise need of emulating the tone of the leader in

106 SCO, 'Gruppo Duomo': Pizzino inviato da Ignazio Ribisi to Provenzano, Giugno 2005. Translation: *My dearest uncle Bernardo, even though I have never had the supreme joy of hugging you in person, I write to you regarding some issues which are extremely important to me. I dare to write you this message because I feel in my heart that you appreciate me so much to take into consideration what, with dignity, I am about to write....Obviously, whatever your decision may be, we will always remain for the rest of our lives your most faithful servants.... Before concluding, it is important for me to say this: we live for you, therefore whatever you might need we beg you not to spare us from the pleasure of serving you. In the meantime, with the highest imperishable sense of respect, I send you a paternal hug. Your most faithful, Ignazio.*

order to be in his ‘grace’, as well as part of this new community that Provenzano’s scheme had been shaping progressively. This can also be seen in the *pizzini* sent by Matteo Messina Denaro who, still on the run, is currently considered to be the new ‘boss of bosses’ of Cosa Nostra. In a letter sent to Provenzano on the 25th of May 2004, Messina Denaro (who signed his letters as *Alessio*) wrote:

La ringrazio per le belle parole che lei ha usato per me nei loro confronti e ne sono onorato, vorrei però umilmente dirle che io non sono meglio di lei preferisco dire che io appartengo a lei, per come d'altronde è sempre stato, io ho sempre una via che è la vostra, sono nato in questo modo e morirò in questo modo, è una certezza ciò.... Spero che questa mia la venga a trovare bene assieme ai suoi cari tutti, la prego di stare sempre molto attento, è sempre nei miei pensieri e nel mio cuore e spero che Dio l'aiuti sempre. Sappia che nel mio piccolo sono sempre a disposizione per qualunque cosa e senza alcun problema. So che lei non ha bisogno di alcuna raccomandazione perchè è il nostro maestro ma è il mio cuore che parla e la prego di stare molto attento, le voglio bene. Le mando un abbraccio forte forte ed un affettuoso bacio. Con immutata stima e l'affetto di sempre, Suo nipote Alessio¹⁰⁷

It is in their private correspondence that Messina Denaro acknowledged Provenzano’s undisputed authority with a deference that was directly proportional to the demeanour of his boss. In a letter sent in 2004, Messina Denaro listed the reasons for asking Provenzano to personally handle a matter involving a third person:

Perchè io ho fiducia in lei e solo in lei; 2) perchè io ho cercato lei per risolvere questa faccenda ed ora non vedo il motivo per cui si deve interessare qualcun altro; 3) perchè io riconosco soltanto a lei l'autorità che le spetta; 4) perchè noi due ci capiamo anche se non ci vediamo...io la ringrazio immensamente di questa fiducia che lei mi da, posso solo dirle che io mi affido nelle sue mani, quello che lei fa per me è ben fatto e se fa lei possiamo solo essere apprezzati, ciò lo penso e lo dico con la massima onestà e sincerità.¹⁰⁸

107 SCO, ‘Gruppo Duomo’: Pizzino inviato da Messina Denaro a Provenzano. Translation: *I thank you for the beautiful words you used about me. I am honoured. But, humbly, I would like to say that I am not better than you. I prefer to say that I have always belonged to you. I follow a way in my life which is your way, I was born this way and I will die this way, I am certain of this. I hope this letter finds you well and those dear to you. I beg you to be careful, even though you need no recommendation because you are our master. You are always in my thoughts and heart and I hope God always helps you. I send you a big kiss and a strong hug. With unchanged esteem and the usual affection, Your nephew Alessio.*

108 SCO, ‘Gruppo Duomo’: Pizzino inviato da Matteo Messina Denaro a Provenzano nel 2004. Translation: *1) because I trust you and you alone; 2) because I looked to you to sort this matter out and there is no reason for having anybody else involved; 3) because I recognize only your authority; 4) because we are able to understand each other even without the need to see each other.... My gratitude for your trust in me is immense. To this, I can only add that I put myself in your hands, that whatever you do is right, and the way you do things can only lead us (Cosa Nostra) to be esteemed again.*

Matteo Messina Denaro has stated on several occasions that he is not religious.¹⁰⁹ However, after the arrest of Provenzano, Messina Denaro, who occupied a prominent position in the leadership of the organisation along with Salvatore Lo Piccolo, used religious references in his correspondence with other mafia members. For example, in a letter addressed Lo Piccolo (Figure 20).

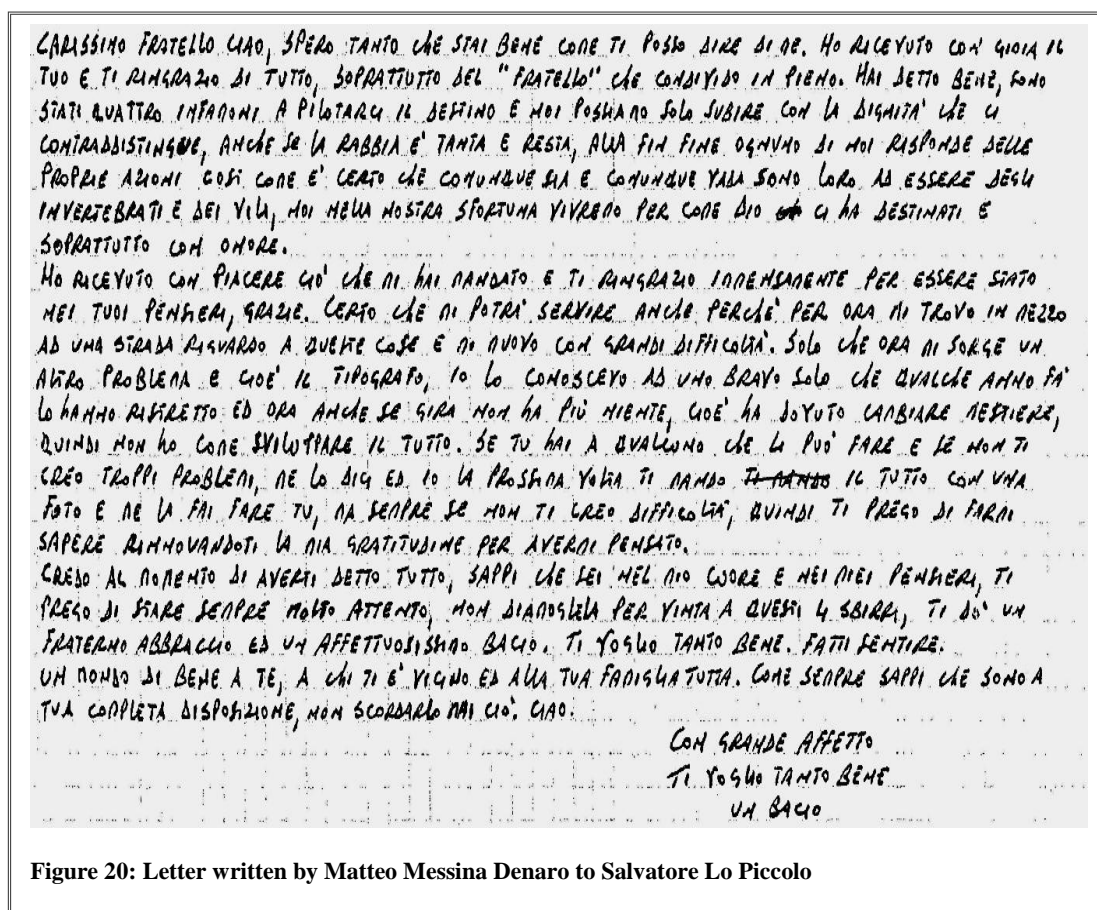


Figure 20: Letter written by Matteo Messina Denaro to Salvatore Lo Piccolo

Denaro blamed four *sbirri infami* (traitors) for ‘piloting’ his destiny and that of Lo Piccolo and for ‘leaving them with no other choice but to suffer the same fate with the dignity that distinguishes them from the others’. ‘Despite the anger’, he

109 Letter sent from Messina Denaro to Antonino Vaccarino on 1 February 2005 <http://www.ipezzimancanti.it/?p=615>

continues, ‘they (the traitors) remain invertebrates and cowards, while we, in our misfortune, will live according to God’s will and above all, with honour’.¹¹⁰

Similarly, in his correspondence to the former mayor of Castelvetro, Antonio Vaccarino, Messina Denaro included wishes for the upcoming religious festivities: ‘Credo al momento di averle detto tutto’, Messina Denaro wrote, and added ‘a breve sarà il Santo Natale e le auguro di trascorrerlo in serenità con i suoi cari, così come vi auguro un buon anno’.¹¹¹ These letters also hint at Messina Denaro’s attempt to follow in Provenzano’s steps by demonstrating the art of diplomacy necessary to mediate among the mafia ‘families’ and deal with political contacts whilst establishing his authority as a leader. Interestingly, a passage that Provenzano underlined in his Bible, ‘For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die’ (Ecclesiastes 3:1–2), also recurs in one of the obituaries that Matteo Messina Denaro writes in memory of his father every year since 1998.¹¹²

The intention of following Provenzano’s steps after his capture in 2006 was also evident in the fact that Sandro Lo Piccolo copied expressions used by his leader into what appeared to be a ‘dictionary of the perfect mafia boss’, a series of notes found by the police in Lo Piccolo’s hideout in 2007 (Figure 21).¹¹³ ‘I hope from the bottom of my heart that this message finds you in good health’, the mafioso wrote,

110 The original Italian is highlighted in Figure 20. <http://www.ipezzimancanti.it/?p=615> (accessed January 2011).

111 I think I have written everything I had to say for the moment. Soon it will be Holy Christmas, I wish you to spend it in serenity with your loved ones, and I also wish you a happy new year. *ibid.*

112 Available online at <http://www.malitalia.it/2010/12/vangelo-latino-e-mafia-i-necrologi-di-francesco-messina-denaro/>

113 Copies of these letters have been kindly made available to the author of this thesis by journalist Salvo Palazzolo.

along with expressions like 'With God's will' and 'In life there is a human value that counts more than freedom, and it is honour and dignity'.

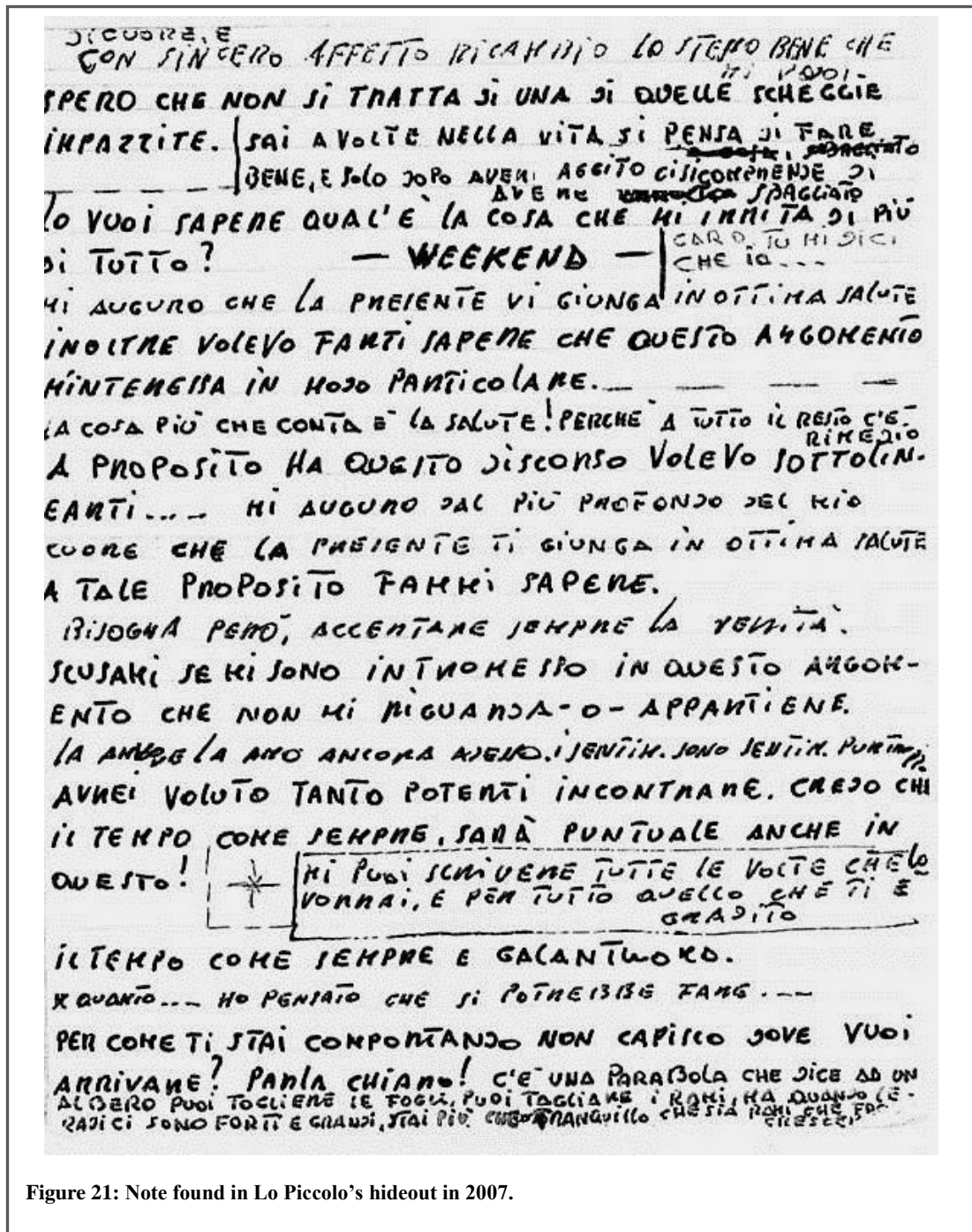


Figure 21: Note found in Lo Piccolo's hideout in 2007.

Likewise, Lo Piccolo may have singled out a number of sentences such as 'You can count on me any time you want' and 'ask me and I will be happy to help' as expressions denoting wisdom, willingness to be useful; and understanding. A

renunciation and willingness to sacrifice similar to that seen in Provenzano's pizzini is represented by phrases like 'Destiny has put a strain on me' or 'Despite the adversities, I try to mark every day of my life in the best way I can' and 'In the adversities of life I put myself in God's hands'.

He concluded one of these notes writing: 'There is a parable that says that you can take out the branches and the leaves from a tree, but if the roots are big and strong you can be sure the branches and leaves will grow back.' Even though this exact parable is not present in the Bible, references to the importance of having solid roots can be found, for example, in *Romans 11:16* and in *John 15:4-5*. This suggests the possibility that, along with other expressions mentioned above, Lo Piccolo may have copied also biblical quotes used by Provenzano in his correspondence.

People who were not affiliated to the organisation also used religious references in their letters to Provenzano. The six letters written by Saveria Benedetta Palazzolo which were found in the pizzini archive of Montagna dei Cavalli contained opening and closing lines resembling those found in the *pizzini* of her partner:

Carissimo Amore mio con il volere di Gesù Cristo ho ricevuto il tuo scritto e leggo che stai bene. Così ti posso dire di noi che stiamo bene. Amore...noi siamo tranquilli, quello che è destinato da Dio non si può cambiare però il Signore ci deve dare la forza di sopportare.... Vita mia termino con la Santa Benedizione che la luce del Signore splende su di tè e ti aiuta e noi ci dia la forza di sopportare e dacci Santa fede.
Vita ti abbraccio fortissimo. Amore se dimentico qualche cosa farmelo sapere.¹¹⁴

A wish for 'La Santa Benedizione di Dio' (The Holy Blessing of God) also concludes the letters written by Bernardo Provenzano's son Angelo. For example, in a pizzino that Angelo wrote to his father giving instructions on how to treat kidneys

114 *My Dearest Love, with God's will I received your message and I read that you are well. The same I can say about us... My Love, we are serene, what has been destined for us by God cannot be changed, but the Lord needs to give us the strength to resist... My Life, I conclude now with the Holy Blessing, may the light of God shine on you and help you, and may it give us the strength to tolerate all this and the holy faith. My life, I embrace you warmly. My love, If I have forgotten something, let me know. SCO, 'Gruppo Duomo': Pizzino inviato da Saveria Benedetta Palazzolo a Bernardo Provenzano nel Marzo 2006.*

problems, he concluded saying ‘Ora termino con la penna ma non con il cuore che Dio ti protegga e ti benedica e possa alleviare le tue sofferenze’.¹¹⁵

5.9. The role of writing and the novelty of the pizzini system

It is important to emphasise the novelty and value of Provenzano’s system of communication via the pizzini in comparison with other known forms of communication utilised by Cosa Nostra.

Forms of writings like the pizzini were employed by the mafia as early as the nineteenth century in the form of the so-called *lettere di scrocco* (‘scrounge letters’)(Cutrera 1900, 64-67), used to extort money from landowners. Palermo police officer, Antonino Cutrera, wrote in his ‘La Mafia e i Mafiosi. Origini e manifestazioni. Studio di sociologia criminale’ (1900):

Al capo mafia tocca di diritto fare le lettere di scrocco. Che cosa è la lettera di scrocco? É una lettera anonima, che arriva per la posta a qualche ricco proprietario di fondi, ove con tono dimesso, quasi di chi domanda per dono dell’importunità, o con estrema arroganza e tono di minaccia, e quasi sempre con la minaccia di commettere gravi danni sulla sua proprietà o persona, si chiede a quei tale proprietario di giardino, una data somma, perché i picciotti (intendendosi gli affiliati) hanno bisogno di essere sovvenzionati.¹¹⁶

As one of these letters stated:

Egregio Signor,
Vi pregano gli amici vostri se voi non voletei distrutti i beni che voi possedete vi pregano di mandarsi lire 3 mila se volete vivere ancora dovete fari questo le mandati sul Piano Balestra montagna Catalfamo nella casuccia confinante Luigi Scardina, mandarli

115 SCO, Gruppo Duomo, Pizzino inviato da Angelo Provenzano a Bernardo Provenzano il 7 Gennaio 2006. I now conclude with my pen but not with my heart. May God bless you and protect you and alleviate your pain.

116 Between 1893 and 1899 a total of 219 lettere di scrocco were seized by the Questura di Palermo. Translation: *The mafia boss is in charge of writing the lettere di scrocco. What is a lettera di scrocco? It is an anonymous letter which arrives by mail to some rich landowner. The tone of the letters is either humble as if asking forgiveness for any disturbance...or extremely arrogant or threatening. In either case, the aim is to ask for money needed by the local picciotti (meaning the affiliates) and with the threat to commit a serious damage to his person or property.*

collomo vostro Rosario...orario mezzanotte per tre giorni. Li prego di non mancare o pure la vita vostra. (Cutrera 1900, 65)¹¹⁷

Furthermore, there is evidence that brief messages used as a form of communication were employed in more recent times, albeit before Provenzano's strategy of submersion entered into play. For example, mafia defector Antonino Calvaruso, former driver for the Corleonese boss Leoluca Bagarella, revealed that one of his duties was to deliver *palummedde* (literal translation 'little doves', meaning small notes) to other men of honour. These brief messages, which were sealed by adhesive tape, were sporadically employed to set appointments or provide information on important matters (location of murders, for example) that could not have been communicated via other means for security reasons. Furthermore, they had to be destroyed after reading (Dino 2002, 149). Brusca, for example, mentioned during his testimony in 2000 that in the 1980s he once had to go to Bagheria to deliver to Provenzano some messages written by Totò Riina.¹¹⁸ Interestingly, he used the term *bigliettini* (little notes) to refer to these messages, rather than the word *pizzini*. Assistant Prosecutor of the DDA of Reggio Calabria Michele Prestipino also recalled that ten notes were found in Riina's pockets at the moment of his arrest in 1993, although they were simple memoranda.¹¹⁹

The lack of evidence of a communication system akin the *pizzini* indicates that, before Provenzano, Cosa Nostra had primarily, but not exclusively,¹²⁰ used face-

¹¹⁷ In this letter a 'gentleman' is kindly asked to pay the sum of three thousand lire and send the money through one of his men to a secret location. A failure to do so would cost him his life.

¹¹⁸ TdP, Seconda Sezione Penale, Processo Castello Simone + 5, deposizione del collaboratore Giovanni Brusca, udienza del 12 dicembre 2000.

¹¹⁹ Personal Communication, 27 July 2011.

¹²⁰ A widespread belief until recently was that Cosa Nostra is a secret society solely based on an oral tradition. In 2003 [2000], for example, sociologist Letizia Paoli wrote in regard to Cosa Nostra and the 'Ndrangheta that 'in both associations it is forbidden to write down any information concerning the mafia group. In Cosa Nostra this prohibition is categorically respected, so much so that no

to-face interactions to communicate. Thus, the extraordinary value of this novel communicative method implemented by Provenzano as a key element of his strategy of submersion lies in the unprecedented inside view it offers of the dynamics of power, the social relations and cultural values inside the organisation. In particular, it permits an analysis of Cosa Nostra's main protagonists from their own standpoint, without the 'filters' which testimonies of mafia defectors necessarily impose. Furthermore, writing does not represent a neutral form of communication, but it has, and puts into practice, its own logic. One of the main effects of writing as a form of communication in social organisations is that it increases the 'objectification' of the relationship between command and obedience, while simultaneously allowing the writer to dissimulate the command under the guise of suggestions and advice (Santoro 2007, 132). Also, writing implies a greater level of reflexivity than speaking, in that it enhances the level of awareness and introspection, thereby creating a sort of distance which increases reflection, planning, and retrospection.

This may help to explain the reasons behind the decision of Provenzano to utilise a written communication system. First of all, written communication facilitates mediation between different parties or individuals, while, at the same time, allowing the writer not to take a position, leaving the responsibility of deciding to others when necessary. Evidence of this can be found, for example, in the *pizzini* exchanged between Provenzano and his joint deputies in Palermo, Nino Rotolo, *capomandamento* of Pagliarelli, and Salvatore Lo Piccolo, *capomandamento* of San Lorenzo. The issue of the return to Sicily of the Inzerillos who had escaped to the US during the *mattanza* was at the basis of a conflict between Rotolo and Lo Piccolo and

exception has yet been recorded' (Paoli 2003, 112).

their respective factions. Questioned on whether or not to allow the return of the Inzerillos, Provenzano systematically took time, leaving them the responsibility to decide. ‘I don’t know anything’, he wrote, as if he did not have the power to decide in this matter. Provenzano’s ‘message said everything and nothing at all’, lamented one of the recipients.¹²¹

Secondly, contrary to the image of primitiveness with which the mass media represented the mafia boss at his arrest, the choice of this system did not derive from an inability to use, or indisposition towards, modern systems of communication; rather, it answered a precise need for secrecy that computers and telephones could not guarantee.¹²² Above all, through the use of written messages Provenzano was able to take time to reflect on the decisions to be adopted. This possibility to decide on the timing and extent of the communication, extending or shortening it at will, represented a mode of exercising power; a style of governance which, by means of writing, allowed Provenzano to defer decisions and, ‘with calm and with God’s will’, plan the strategy to follow. As a result, the pizzini would become not only the established means of communication for the entire organisation, but also the ideal vehicle for Provenzano to rebuild Cosa Nostra upon a solid ideological structure based on a renewed religious identity.

Is it not yet known if Provenzano’s place within the organisation has been replaced. In this regard, it is worth noting an interview of Bernardo Provenzano’s son Angelo with journalist Dina Lauricella for the RAI programme *Servizio Pubblico*, on the 14th of March 2012. During this interview, Angelo openly asked the authorities to

121 Sentenza di Rito Abbreviato n.1579/07, nei confronti di Adamo Andrea + 56 (Sentenza Gotha), 152.

122 *ibid.*, 150.

respect his father's 'dignity' by granting him the recognition of partial mental disability and the possibility of receiving adequate medical treatment which, in his opinion, the *41 bis* prison regime cannot guarantee. Interestingly, towards the end of the interview Angelo Provenzano used a few sentences out of context:

I am perfectly aware of the fact that that many people could stand up now and say 'for what he [my father] has done he deserves this and much more.' [Pause] Well, to all these people I want to say that if my father is who everybody thinks he is, and if there is judicial evidence to sustain this point, and since now he is in prison, then there is a vacant place. Whoever feels like becoming part of a State which does not apply rights is free to go and occupy that chair. Otherwise one has to understand that the rules have to be respected.¹²³

It seems to have escaped media attention that these four sentences put together have little if no meaning. In light of the considerations elaborated in this thesis, it seems plausible that the idea of a 'vacant place' related to a State which does not 'applica i diritti' (apply rights) may have been directed to 'people' other than the immediate general audience of the TV programme. In other words, the reference to the 'succession to the throne' of Cosa Nostra could have been a message sent by Provenzano to the rest of the organisation through his son. If this interpretation is correct, then the 'rules that have to be respected' may refer to the historical rule of Cosa Nostra that a boss, even when behind bars, remains the boss; a rule which in this case could refer to Bernardo Provenzano as well as to Totò Riina, both still currently imprisoned under the strictest surveillance.

Prior to this interview, Provenzano's sons had only been interviewed by BBC journalists in 2007, as part of a documentary on the life of Bernardo Provenzano, entitled 'The Real Godfather.'¹²⁴ On that occasion, when the BBC journalist asked

123 It is possible to watch the interview at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BRRp836T99A> (Accessed 12 April 2012).

124 BBC 2 Documentary, 'This World, The Real Godfather', 20th September 2007. The only exception is an interview with Italian daily newspaper *La Repubblica* on the 1st of December 2008,

them what were the most valuable suggestions which their father had ever given them, Angelo Provenzano replied saying: ‘To get up early in the morning and, whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them. Although these are just small sentences, they give a sense of life.’ Interestingly, the second suggestion given by Provenzano which his son had treasured, was derived from the Gospel of Matthew (7:12), in particular the *Sermon on the Mount*, which represents the longest collection of teachings and sayings from Jesus in the New Testament. These verses, as expected, are underlined in Provenzano’s Bible.

in which Angelo and Francesco Paolo Provenzano publicly asked for their privacy and that of their mother to be respected.

Conclusion

The numerous instances of a relationship between the Sicilian mafia and religion described in this research demonstrate, first and foremost, the centrality of religious values for the organisation throughout its history. They show how deeply the ‘ideological’ codes of Cosa Nostra are interwoven with the socio-cultural fabric of external society. This makes the religiosity of the mafia an extremely varied and complex phenomenon, which requires interdisciplinary approach.

As described in Chapter One, it is only in recent years that this topic has become the focus of academic attention. Theological and sociological studies have dedicated substantial attention to the response of the Catholic Church towards the Sicilian mafia. However, they have only marginally dealt with the importance of mafia religion in the processes through which mafia leaders construct their identity and establish their authority, while also intervening in the structure of the organisation. For example, scholars and theologians have underlined how the lack of a firm antimafia position on the part of the Church and the connivance between members of the clergy and mafia representatives have contributed to confirming the legitimacy of religious practices for Cosa Nostra. In particular, these studies have observed how mafiosi have routinely sought pastoral support as a personal means of suppressing feelings of guilt, thereby bypassing the authority of the legal system.

Culturalistic interpretations of the mafia, predominant until the 1980s, influenced the delay with which not only the Church, but also academic studies have dealt with the apparent incompatibility between mafia ethos and religious values.

The idea of the mafia as a vestige of traditional Sicilian society, inextricable from its wider socio-cultural milieu, affected public and political discourses on the phenomenon, which resulted in an oscillation between apologetic tones, resolute scepticism or even outright denial. Simultaneously, it influenced the way mafiosi represented and perceived themselves as ‘men of honour and social order’.

The first maxi-trial of Palermo (1986–1987), which resulted in the unprecedented conviction of hundreds of mafiosi, represented a crucial turning point in mafia history and in its interpretative paradigms. The confessions of pentiti, upon which the trial hinged, helped judicial authorities acknowledge and document the corporative dimension of the mafia for the first time. These testimonies have proven invaluable not only for the judiciary in tracing the structure and workings of the organisation, but also for scholars of different disciplinary backgrounds in defining its inner logic. The image of the mafia emerging from these collective analyses has been that of one single criminal organisation, able to combine in its structure the all-encompassing features of a state, business and a secret society. However, a well-organised management structure, an enforceable system of rules and solid connections with political and economic sectors would not alone be sufficient for Cosa Nostra to survive changing times, internal wars and arrests at the higher echelons. The ability to achieve external consensus and internal cohesion is also a fundamental component of mafia activity that cannot not be underestimated.

As stressed throughout this thesis, the links between the mafia and civil society are not based exclusively on economic and political ties, but also on a solid cultural framework that the mafia has adapted for its own needs to better disguise and penetrate the territory it aims to control. By deriving its ‘moral’ codes from a

cultural system shared with external society, Cosa Nostra has managed to establish its authority and legitimise its existence both inside and outside the organisation. At the same time, it has provided its affiliates with a powerful collective identity to be assumed in return for unconditional loyalty. This sense of identity appears to be essential for maintaining solidarity between affiliates and allegiance to their leaders, and for making Cosa Nostra an integrated, secret society. Therefore, an analysis of the role of cultural values, such as religion, in the processes through which Cosa Nostra achieves internal cohesion and external legitimisation also contributes to explaining the ability of mafia bosses to exercise unconditional claims upon their subordinates while establishing indissoluble ties amongst them.

Adopting a necessary interdisciplinary approach, this thesis has presented an in-depth analysis of the relationship between mafia and religion from a novel analytical perspective. Socio-anthropological theories of religious rituals, symbols and performance have been utilised to interpret the extent to which religious language and behaviour used by mafia leaders in selected instances of communicative interaction affects their identities, roles and authority, as well as the structure of the organisation as a whole.

Diverse, yet complementary, roles of religion within the internal communicative dynamics of Cosa Nostra have emerged from this research. Firstly, religion constitutes an essential element of the mafia *transcultural* system through which Cosa Nostra is able to achieve internal cohesion and maintain stability in its social structure while defining and legitimising its collective identity. Furthermore, religious rituals and symbols are fundamental for mafia leaders to establish their authority with the rest of the organisation. Religion appears to be a key component of

mafia identity for its affiliates since the ceremony of affiliation, where symbols adapted from the Catholic tradition and numerous analogies with religious liturgies recur. The case study presented in Chapter Three has focused on the initiation ritual of Cosa nostra to examine the effect of religious symbols and values on the candidates for affiliation and, above all, on the identity of mafia leaders conducting the ceremony. The numerous descriptions of rituals provided by mafia members throughout the history of the organisation demonstrate that the rite of *la punciuta* has largely remained unchanged over time. In regard to the origins of this ritual, historians have highlighted many analogies with Masonic rites. Nevertheless, the fact that the mafia primarily utilises symbols derived from the Catholic canon suggests a stronger connection with associative models prevalent in southern Italy in the first half of the nineteenth century. For example, it was previously argued that secret societies like the *Carboneria* adopted Catholic symbols and practices in their rituals of initiation in order to present a more appealing face to external society, particularly to lower social classes (Rath 1964; Dito 1905).

As the testimony of mafia defectors demonstrates, the mafia claims descent from the Carbonari, as well as from powerful myths belonging to the cultural patrimony of Sicily. Both the *Carboneria* and the legendary medieval sect of *Beati Paoli*, who fought oppression and injustice, provide Cosa Nostra with a set of cultural narratives upon which to build its collective identity. It has been noted in the course of this thesis how this myth perfectly suited an organisation which had established itself as a protection business able to enforce privately law and order that the State had failed to impose. The considerations presented in Chapter Three on the development of the mafia in the years which preceded and followed the Unification

of Italy serves as a necessary background to contextualise both the culturalistic representations of the mafia and the representations given by mafiosi themselves. Indeed, by referring to a mythical past in which private justice and violence are legitimised by higher ideals, mafiosi have represented themselves as ‘ministers of social justice’ and ‘men of order’. The hypothesis that Cosa Nostra found inspiration in this legendary sect to confer authority to its claim of descent is consolidated by the similarities between the mafia initiation ceremony and that described in the *Beati Paoli* novel. The wording of the oath, the ritual proceeding and the religious symbols utilised show evident similarities.

The initiation ritual of Cosa Nostra has been described in terms of a highly symbolic rite that represents the idea of the ‘death’ of the neophyte as a common man and his ‘resurrection’ as a ‘made’ man of honour. Each stage of the mafia ceremony presents ritual activities that symbolise the different phases of a *rite of passage* during which the initiate is separated, transformed and re-incorporated into society with a new identity modelled on the values of his newly acquired affiliation. This ritual creates a schism between the individual and his previous allegiances, while simultaneously forging a new, inseparable bond with the mafia community. A reified, collective identity is acquired by means of a sacred pact that only death can break. In return, the candidate for affiliation swears absolute loyalty to his fellow members and acceptance of the boss’s authority over him. This has evident implications for the role and image of the mafia bosses conducting the ceremony.

By referring to mythical traditions and manipulating crucial symbols that are shared with wider society, mafia leaders legitimise their authority and the existence of the organisation in the eyes of new affiliates. In particular, the manipulation of

religious symbols allows mafia bosses to add sacredness to the event and to affect the candidates undergoing affiliation at a deeply emotional level. In this process, pre-existing ties between members are strengthened and new bonds are forged as a result. Through these ritual occasions, in which Cosa Nostra routinely reaffirms and consolidates its collective life, historical narrative and dominant cultural values, religion becomes an integral component of its collective identity. At the same time, it becomes the main vehicle for mafia leaders to legitimise their authority and roles while creating internal cohesion and maintaining stability in the social structure of the mafia community.

Another fundamental role of religion within the internal dynamics of Cosa Nostra has emerged from this research. Cultural values, necessary to 'make' both mafia and mafiosi, not only contribute to explaining the ability of the mafia to achieve internal cohesion, but they also help to understand the way Cosa Nostra faces perilous situations and changing circumstances. The case study of mafia boss Michele Greco, for example, has provided a context in which to analyse the functional role of religion in a critical situation for a mafioso at a senior level in the organisation.

Referring chiefly to sociological approaches to identity as constructed by means of performance, this research has focused on the dynamics through which religiosity became an intrinsic component of Greco's identity as enacted during court hearings, interviews and in his written memoirs. The analysis of these documents has demonstrated how religion was a fundamental element upon which Greco constructed his identity and his line of defence from the accusations of pentiti who had implicated him.

As discussed in Chapter Four, Greco belonged to a well-established powerful mafia family which, over different generations, had extended its influence and control in the province of Palermo. Following the steps of his father, Greco became a 'man of respect' with influential connections with Palermitan high society, and one of the main protagonists in the key events leading to the Second Mafia War. Mafiosi who decided to turn state's evidence exposed his mafia role during the maxi-trial of Palermo. In particular, pentiti including Tommaso Buscetta detailed a profile of Greco as a man lacking charisma who, in his capacity as head of the mafia Commission, had seconded the plans of the Corleonese faction at the expense of the historical mafia Families of Palermo. While investigating authorities later confirmed this role, they also detailed a profile of Greco as an ambiguous, authoritarian mafia boss who had mediated between different factions by virtue of his prominent role within the mafia hierarchy. Specifically, Greco was accused of having approved the killing of key antimafia political and judicial figures, and having housed a profitable heroin laboratory on his property.

Michele Greco sought to redeem his public image and that of his family, exposed and publicly diminished by the negative light in which the pentiti had portrayed them, by enacting the role of a devoted religious farmer who had fallen victim to 'the malicious slander of disreputable defectors'. During his court hearings, interrogations and public appearances, he continuously appealed to his religious faith and referred to the Bible as proof of his innocence. Analysing this behaviour in sociological terms of performance of the *self*, this thesis has described how, in order to re-establish the *face* he had *lost*, Greco enacted a *role* which was consistent with the *face* he had maintained over the years and with the social identity of his family

prior to the trial. This is particularly evident in the two memoirs that Greco wrote while incarcerated.

Both documents, replete as they are with biblical quotations and repeated religious formulae, represent an extreme attempt by Michele Greco to rest his case on appeals to faith. In the reflexive process of writing, he recreated and transformed the events of the story in which he himself was the protagonist. This allowed him to deliberately emphasise certain aspects of his social role, while omitting others that were inconsistent with the identity he wished to portray. Theories of personal narrative performance have been utilised to demonstrate how the systematic use of rhetorical narratives imbued with religious symbolism allowed Greco to configure his social role in a coherent and compelling manner. In particular, the use of narratives derived from a cultural dimension which the wider audience acknowledges as official, sacred and authoritative *idealised* his performance, creating a mechanism for identification between himself and his audience. Evidence for this is seen in the fact that media representations of Greco and the perception that external society had of him reflect the characteristics of his identity which he most tenuously constructed through performance and which he forcefully strived to portray. These include narratives derived from culturalistic interpretations of the mafia as a set of subcultural attitudes and a sense of honour.

Examined in light of the culturalistic viewpoint of mafia interpretations discussed in Chapter One, Michele Greco attempted to represent himself according to the stereotypical old-style man of honour inspired by his faith in God and by commonly held cultural values. Indeed, a strong sense of dignity, family, work ethics and a profound religiosity saturate his memoirs, court hearings and interviews and,

consequently, the representations of him in the media. The religiosity of Michele Greco was emphasised not only in newspapers and TV broadcasts, but also in cinematographic representations of his character. For example, in the film *I Grimaldi* (1997), directed by his son Giorgio Castellani, Greco was represented as an old-fashioned man of order, boss of ‘a bygone mafia of honour and principles’, which the rise to power of a modern mafia had destroyed.

This dichotomy between an ‘old mafia of honour and respect’ and a ‘new, entrepreneurial mafia’ concerned primarily with wealth and power has consistently been promoted in cultural and academic representations of the mafia, as well as in those generated by mafiosi themselves. For example, Tommaso Buscetta among many others contrasted his ‘old mafia of honour and principles’, with ‘the new mafia of ruthless violence and accumulation of power’ represented by the Corleonesi. He denied any involvement in the drug trafficking business with the US despite judicial evidence demonstrating otherwise. However, the considerations elaborated in Chapter Three on the impact that belonging to Cosa Nostra has for an affiliate at a psychological and social level serves as a *caveat* against accepting this dichotomy *tout court*. In understanding what being a mafioso means, it is necessary to perceive the trauma a mafia member goes through when making the decision to abandon the organisation and a deeply ingrained identity. Therefore, it is fundamental to understand the need for a pentito to justify his actions by referring to a system of values which are held sacred by the organisation and by external society. Similarly, the appeal to the religious dimension for a high-ranking mafioso like Michele Greco responds to the precise need to confront a sudden exposure of his mafia role and the consequent loss of his social stature. To restructure his identity and that of his family,

Greco drew from the set of cultural narratives that is widely familiar and held sacred by society.

Bernardo Provenzano's mafia represents another prominent example of this ethos. Specifically, his case shows that religious values play an equally central role during conflict resolution involving the mafia organisation as a whole. By adopting anthropological approaches to the role of rituals and religion in social groups facing crises (*social drama* approach), this research has demonstrated how, by means of a communication system imbued with religious references, Provenzano managed to subtly establish his authority over the mafia across Sicily and restructure an organisation in crisis.

During the maxi-trial of Palermo, mafia defectors implicated Provenzano as a member of the Corleonesi who had always played a peripheral role in the shadow of boss Totò Riina. In 1994, following the massacres of Capaci and Via D'Amelio and the institution of severe antimafia laws, pentiti who had been previously allied to the winning faction, began contributing to a complete picture of Provenzano as one of the masterminds behind the rise to power of the Corleonesi. Yet, mafia defectors also pointed at the particular ability of Provenzano to create and consolidate networks with key figures of the political, economic and judicial world. This ability to create a system of working relations was the main difference with the 'despotic' style of leadership exercised by Riina, and the key to Provenzano's strategy of 'submersion' implemented once he took control of Cosa Nostra.

The Cosa Nostra he inherited in 1995 was an organisation severely damaged by years of internecine conflicts and by the unforeseen consequences of the bombing campaign against prominent antimafia figures. In addition, by the mid-1990s the

phenomenon of *pentitismo* had consolidated, bringing an unprecedented level of exposure to Cosa Nostra. Most of all, the reaction of the Church, State and civil society had critically undermined the historical relations of Cosa Nostra with key sectors of external society.

Despite his undoubted involvement in the rise to power of his faction and in the extermination of rival mafia Families, when he assumed leadership over Cosa Nostra, Provenzano changed direction. He devised a tactic aimed at reinstating Cosa Nostra's connections with the political and economic world in order to resume previous activities while remaining well below the radar. In order to maximise secrecy, Provenzano chose the *pizzini* as the main system of communication for a strictly selected network of trusted collaborators, which included mafia members and individuals external to the organisation. These messages, heavily imbued with religious references and biblical quotations, in themselves became a symbol of Provenzano's new strategy.

In this research, the *pizzini* have been interpreted as *totems* of a ritual of interaction in which mafia members could recognise themselves and the existence of their group, thereby feeling a renewed allegiance to one another. The religious content and the monastic tone of the text make the exchange of these letters a perfect example of a social ritual through which Provenzano constructed his own identity as a humble yet charismatic leader illuminated by faith in God. Analysed in terms of social drama, this research has demonstrated the ability of Provenzano to let the *social structure* of Cosa Nostra *emerge* during this ritual of communication, to meta-comment upon it and transform it. By means of religious performative language, he created an *anti-structure* where, instead of the centralised, authoritarian figure of the

mafia boss, there was a system of social relations directed by the diplomatic measures of a 'devout' mediator.

The copy of the Bible that police recovered from his hideout, along with numerous other religious artefacts, strongly suggests that Provenzano read the Bible and used it to derive inspiration for the form and content of his messages. Referencing biblical text also enabled him to create his character on a common cultural heritage shared with the rest of the mafia community and with external society. By doing so, Provenzano conferred sacred value to his role and strategy, and acquired the legitimisation of his leadership over the group. The sense of solidarity, cohesiveness, and the feelings of unity and comradeship shared by the mafia *communitas* as a result of his actions are evident in the response of the *audience* to Provenzano's ritual performance.

The analysis of pizzini and letters written by other mafia members has shown the extent to which Bernardo Provenzano's *redressive action* worked within the *social drama* of Cosa Nostra. Firstly, the evident practice of deference and demeanour that existed between the mafia leader and the rest of the organisation contributed to defining his role and conferring 'sacredness' to his identity. Secondly, the analysis has highlighted a clear attempt by the rest of the mafia community to emulate Provenzano in his language and style. Not only has the practice of utilising pizzini to communicate been maintained after his arrest, the religious formulas and expressions denoting wisdom, humility and the ability to mediate also recur in the written correspondence seized by police during recent arrests of prominent mafiosi.

From these three case studies, mafia religion has emerged as a system of rules, values and practices which can be conveniently adapted to the needs and

interests of the organisation. Religious values function as a source of sacred, authoritative legitimisation, offering in addition a set of narratives from which to draw in constructing one's social identity. Since these narratives are familiar to external society, their use represents a mechanism through which one can create an affinity with the target audience. Within this perspective, the appeal to religious values does not imply a conscious process of interiorization or theoretical speculation on Catholic dogma. Rather, it appears to remain limited to a superficial level of 'belief without commitment'. This system works as long as it does not require actual adherence to any social or legal duty. In this regard, it has been noted how the concept of justice in mafia ideology appears, paradoxically, to overlap with the notion of 'divine justice'. Indeed, on numerous occasions mafiosi have stressed their intentions to repent before God rather than men. Michele Greco, for example, repeatedly appealed to divine justice in his memoirs as the ultimate, indisputable authority one needs to acknowledge. This notion of justice, free of any legal and social obligations, gives a precise idea of how religion is perceived within the mafia transcultural dimension. Furthermore, it demonstrates the effect which the culturalistic myth of the mafia as 'dispenser of social justice' and the support provided by members of the clergy to mafiosi over time have had in legitimising mafia religious practices and beliefs.

Nevertheless, one important point stressed throughout this thesis is the necessity not to perceive mafia religion as an isolated phenomenon, circumscribed within the cultural boundaries of the organisation; nor should the religious dimension of Cosa Nostra be interpreted merely in terms of a rational, cynical exploitation. Rather, every aspect of mafia religion requires contextualisation within the

framework of the Sicilian ‘devout’ model of religiosity that has been described in Chapter One. The fact that in Sicily and in many other areas of southern Italy the process of modernisation and secularisation progressively widened the gap between the religious creed and its choreographic, ceremonial apparatus (Stabile 1992, 289–290) offers one possible explanation for the reason why mafia members acknowledge the ‘weight’ of religious values and symbols without the necessary moral commitment. Furthermore, this aspect is also a key component of the ‘double morality’ of the mafia (Aqueci 1989): the need to create an ideological apparatus which derives part of its rules and values from the Catholic tradition, but which does not imply an actual observance of the same principles.

Cosa Nostra between continuity and transformation

The arrest of Bernardo Provenzano in 2006 fuelled enormous public and media interest. Through the years, Provenzano has been described as a ‘political mastermind’ (Oliva and Palazzolo 2001), a ‘business strategist’, a ‘great mediator’ (Longrigg 2008), and as the founding father of a *Cosa Nuova* (‘New Thing’ or New Cosa Nostra) (Oliva and Palazzolo 2001; Lo Bianco and Rizza 2006). Yet, in the first part of Chapter Five other aspects of his personality and role within Cosa Nostra have been highlighted which should represent a clear warning against easy nomenclatures and categorizations. It has been said, for example, that Provenzano began his career as ruthless killer of Luciano Leggio; that he collaborated closely with Totò Riina in the 1980s in the implementation of a strategy for the supremacy of their faction over the historical Palermitan mafia families. Only in the early 1990s, foreseeing the ruinous consequences of the strategy of terror, did Provenzano opt for a different set of tactics aimed at rendering Cosa Nostra ‘invisible’ again. This

strategy of ‘submersion’ does not represent a completely new direction for the Sicilian mafia. Nor does it suggest a specific inner inclination of Provenzano towards peaceful and moderate methods. Instead, it is the expression of the historical ability of Cosa Nostra to alternate moderation and violence, where violence is employed as *extrema ratio*.

Similar considerations are applicable to the pizzini system. The choice to utilise pizzini as sole system of communication did not derive from the astute calculation of an ‘innovative mastermind’, but from the immediate need for secrecy and for a vehicle which could facilitate mediation between mafia factions across Sicily. In this regard, evidence demonstrates that sporadic, written communication based on the exchange of small messages was employed as early as the nineteenth century in the form of so-called *lettere di scrocco* and *palummedde*. What is novel in the pizzini system is the extent of their application and their symbolic religious content.

While the mafia under his leadership undoubtedly had a different organisational structure and strategy from that of his predecessor, it would be misleading to interpret it as something completely novel. One needs only contextualise Provenzano’s mafia within the historical framework of Cosa Nostra to observe similarities with the mafia of Tommaso Buscetta or Calogero Vizzini. Indeed, a line of continuity can be drawn throughout the history of the Sicilian mafia where similarities are not only seen in terms of means and objectives, but also in the strategies employed to achieve the same end of continuity and development.

From the outset, Cosa Nostra has systematically infiltrated any business which could guarantee substantial profits: from the exploitation of the fertile citrus

estates and water supplies of the *Conca D'Oro*, to building speculation during the 'Sack of Palermo'; from drug trafficking to the infiltration into the legal business of private health care and waste management, and to the investment of large profits into the Stock Exchange. The systems through which the Sicilian mafia has made and recycled profits derived from these legal and illegal activities have undoubtedly changed over time. However, the need for expansion and control of territory have always been the main objectives for Cosa Nostra. In this regard, the ability to change structure, establish relations with political and economic sectors and gain consensus with external society have been a consistent, functional means to this end. In addition, the practice of selling private protection and trust against potential threats that the mafia itself partly poses to society also remains a consistent strategy implemented to achieve control over territory. These elements are characteristic of Provenzano's Cosa Nostra as they were of the mafia described by Chief Police Ermanno Sangiorgi in 1898 and by Melchiorre Allegra in 1937.

That the Sicilian mafia has always had an interest in maintaining a low profile in order to facilitate the smooth running of its activities and its infiltration into controlling sections of society is well known. So too is the fact that internal conflicts between members of the same Families or rival factions have always been the main cause of friction to the harmony of this system. The clashes between the Grecos of Ciaculli and Croceverde Giardini, and between the Grecos and the La Barberas described in Chapter Four represent a clear example of how regularly mafia clans have resorted to violence to resolve conflicts. In particular, they demonstrate that the Second Mafia War was not the first episode in which an escalation of violence brought Cosa Nostra to a threatening point of exposure. Twenty years earlier, in fact,

dismembered in the aftermath of the First Mafia War, Cosa Nostra had been able to restructure itself and to resume its activities only after a period of ‘submersion’ lasting six years.

As stressed throughout this thesis, another identifiable constant in mafia history is the need for Cosa Nostra to be rooted in a fertile ideological ground. The necessity to refer to a value system derived from the external cultural context is evident for mafiosi both at a personal level and at a collective level for the organisation as an integrated society. In this sense, Provenzano’s Cosa Nostra, with its less centralised structure, larger delegation of responsibilities and solid footing in a religious ideology does not constitute an entirely new phenomenon. On the contrary, it represents nothing but the essence of the Sicilian mafia: the ability to adapt to changing times using violence and mediation when necessary; to combine modern business strategies with archaic systems of communication; to create social consensus through a solid religious identity. Provenzano, Judge Giovanni Falcone would say, represents an intrinsic characteristic of the mafia’s nature: ‘its ability to change, while fundamentally remaining the same’ (Falcone 1991, 42).

To date, it is not known if Provenzano’s role within the organisation has been replaced. On the 5th of November 2007, Italian police arrested Salvatore Lo Piccolo, his son Sandro, and two other bosses at a hideout near Palermo. One year later, ninety-nine mafiosi at different hierarchical levels were arrested in the province of Palermo during a meeting held to take organisational decisions. These successful antimafia operations have undoubtedly further weakened Cosa Nostra at a structural

level. Nevertheless, legal and illegal mafia activities appear to have remained unaffected by these arrests, and continue to generate substantial profits.¹

Investigating authorities, scholars, and former mafia affiliates turned state evidence have advanced two hypotheses. The first is that, should the organisation be unable to restructure its Commission following the arrests of mafia bosses in recent years, Cosa Nostra may assume a structure similar to the Calabrese 'Ndrangheta's *ndrine* (clans) which rule their territory independently of each other. This implies that the various mafia Families across Sicily could control their territories separately, in the absence of an overarching ruling body. Contrary to what is generally believed, this would not constitute a novelty for Cosa Nostra where, prior to the establishment of a Commission in the mid-1950s, mafia Families had always enjoyed a large degree of autonomy from each other in the running of their businesses.

The second hypothesis is that Cosa Nostra will find a new leader endowed with the same charisma and skills as Provenzano (Dino 2011, 9). Indeed, since the arrest of Salvatore Lo Piccolo, Matteo Messina Denaro has been suggested as the likely successor. This theory is substantiated by evidence found during the *Perseus* police operation in 2008, which foiled an attempt by Cosa Nostra to restructure, and form a new Commission. On that occasion, a tapped telephone conversation revealed that the main objective of the mafia meeting during which ninety-nine mafiosi were arrested was to 're-establish an old style mafia', with one main 'boss of bosses' and a ruling Commission at provincial level.²

1 The 2012 report by *Confesercenti* shows that the mafia phenomenon across Italy has an estimated turnover of 140 billion euros and a profit approaching 90 billion euros.

<http://www.confesercenti.it/notizia.php?id=6238> (Accessed 20/10/2012)

2 'Mafia, così il progetto di rinascita', *La Repubblica*, 16 December 2008. See also 'Maxi blitz antimafia: 99 arresti Operazione tra la Sicilia e la Toscana. L'accusa: si voleva ricostituire la

The written statute found in Lo Piccolo's hideout confirms this attempt by Cosa Nostra to restructure according to the model existing prior to the 1980s.³ It delineates the different roles within the hierarchical structure, the procedures for selecting the candidates for affiliation, for the election of Family representatives and for establishing a ruling body to coordinate the factions. It shows, in particular, that rituals of initiation are still in practice. This tape-written document represents the 'constitution of Cosa Nostra, its Ten Commandments'. As reported in the 'Gotha' sentence in 2007:

A few sections are sufficient to seal a pact of continuity with the mafia association of the 1970s and 1980s described by Tommaso Buscetta, and impressed in the historical sentence which concluded the first maxi-trial of the Sicilian mafia. That document is one face of the double organisational model of Cosa Nostra in the area of Palermo. One face remains consistent through time. The other face changes expression according to the moment.⁴

This document demonstrates, above all, the need for Cosa Nostra to consolidate around a cultural system which has largely remained unchanged over time.

Scope for future research

This thesis has focused on the role of religion for the Sicilian mafia. Yet, a strong religious component is also evident in other forms of organised crime. For example, religious symbolism permeates the Calabrese *'Ndrangheta* ritual of initiation. Known as 'Baptism', during this elaborated ceremony a small cross is cut into the initiate's skin and a holy picture burnt while swearing the oath of loyalty (Ciconte 1992, 32-35). The ritual for *'Ndraghetisti* at higher level who reach the rank of *Evangelisti* involves the swearing of allegiance to their boss with one hand resting on a Bible.

«cupola» di Cosa Nostra', *Corriere della Sera*, 16 December 2008.

3 Sentenza di Rito Abbreviato n.1579/07, nei confronti di Adamo Andrea + 56 (Sentenza Gotha).

4 *ibid.*

Interestingly, in order to maximise secrecy in the 1970s the *'Ndrangheta* established a secret nucleus within the organisation. Called *Santa* (Saint), this secret group of elite *'Ndranghetisti* contains different ranks including that of *Vangelo* (gospel) and *Santista* (Paoli 2003, 114). Both *'Ndranghetisti* and *camorristi* (members of the Camorra) appear to play a prominent role in religious public festivals and processions in Calabria and Campania, respectively. In addition, a recent analysis by writer Roberto Saviano has exposed a common practice of the Camorra using the religious aedicule in the streets of Naples as altars to commemorate the death of local camorra bosses.⁵

Religious practices and behaviour are also evident in organised crime outside Italy. For instance, affiliates to the *Mara Salvatrucha* or MS-13 (Salvadoran Gang), the powerful Central American organised network, utilise religious tattoos to identify their clan and ranks within the organisation. Mexico's Federal Police Chief, Facundo Rosas, who has long investigated Mexican drug cartels and crime syndicates, argued that these organisations use religion as a means of creating group identity as well as a vehicle of personal redemption. He specifically pointed to the ability of drug traffickers 'to evolve, adapting to new technologies, new businesses and markets', while keeping and reproducing 'a subculture based on religious values and symbols.'⁶

5 Roberto Saviano, 'Quegli altari nelle via di Gomorra. Lumini e fiori per vittime e carnefici', *La Repubblica*, 12 August 2012. http://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2012/08/12/news/saviano_edicole-40810917/ (Accessed 13 August 2012).

6 'Religión y crimen, mezcla explosiva' Los delincuentes denominan sus asesinatos o ejecuciones acciones de "limpieza social"; quien mata no es el ser humano, sino la "justicia divina", indica el comisionado', *El Universal*, 23 June 2009. <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/169196.html> (Accessed 05 April 2012).

It is important to note that, with the exception of studies on mafia religion listed in the literature review of this thesis, virtually no attention has been dedicated to the role of religion in other types of organised crime in Italy and abroad. The combination of approaches utilised in this research and, in particular, the novel application of ritual and performance studies to organised crime, may constitute a interpretative model for future analysis in the study of other criminal organisations whose sources of social legitimisation are similarly rooted in religious values and other cultural codes.

It may also be useful for exploring the role of women in relation to mafia religion. Recent studies (Siebert 1996; Principato and Dino 1997; Ingrascì 2007; Puglisi 2005; Longrigg 1997) have challenged the commonly held assumption that women in the mafia have traditionally played a passive or secondary role. One particular study (Principato and Dino 1997) has highlighted how women have played a crucial role in transmitting mafia values at a family level, while guaranteeing a 'reassuring' public image of the mafia by presenting a pious, devoted front to the outside. An exploration of whether, and to what extent, this role has changed in the stage of transition, when repressive measures and investigative successes of the last decades have reduced the appearances of mafiosi in religious occasions to a minimum, may represent an interesting subject for future analysis.

This research is aimed at contributing not only to studies of the mafia, but also to academic disciplines that have adopted performance as a model of analysis for social behaviour. Chapter Two described the broad range of applications that theories of ritual and performance have in describing modern social phenomena. In particular, it has stressed the value of extending the functionalist and structuralist notion of

ritual to that of performance in order to encompass a larger set of potential applications. Integrating the concept of performance to that of ritual allows the exploration of a wider set of social phenomena ranging from theatre activities to religious ritual practices. Furthermore, it permits an analysis of the role of ritual not only in terms of mechanical solidarity within social groups, but also in relation to processes for the construction of identity and delineation of hierarchies. The performance and ritual theories utilised and integrated into this thesis have not previously been applied to the study of organised crime. Therefore, this research constitutes a novel example of how this theoretical approach can be applied to the real-life context of a communicative interaction within a criminal organisation, with specific reference to its religious dimension.

It is hoped that, through the derivation of models that describe the flux of hierarchies, the dynamics of power and the processes by which these are built and maintained within criminal organisations, it may not only be possible to understand their behaviour and rationales, but also to predict their future activities.

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