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The long march of the 'Ndrangheta in Europe

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I. Introduction

The Calabrian 'Ndrangheta is currently the most powerful and dangerous form of mafia in Europe. It has long since moved beyond its home territory and set about conquering the regions of northern Italy and, more recently, several European countries. Further afield, it has successfully established a presence in some Australian states and Canadian provinces¹. The 'Ndrangheta originated in Calabria a few decades ago and has gradually expanded both its territorial presence and its fields of activity. It has done so systematically, silently, and wisely, using all the tools at its disposal, especially corruption and violence². However, until recently the countries of Europe have failed to properly realize it.

The alarm bells have begun to ring in recent years. As for northern Italy, the judiciary and scientific community has begun to refer to the advance of the 'Ndrangheta using the concept of colonization³. At the same time the presence of Calabrian clans has become increasingly entrenched in Switzerland and Germany, Spain and France, and they have recently established a foothold in Denmark and in the Slovak Republic. Recently, European public opinion has had to take note, with great surprise, of a growing presence of the mafia organization also in the Netherlands. How is such an advance that sometimes seems unstoppable and which takes the form of a real social movement of conquest, possible? What are its dynamics? What are the mechanisms of success? What role do luck and contingent opportunities play, and how important is the strategy used? What are the relationships between the business orientation and the vocation/willingness to exercise power?

1 N. Gratteri, *La malapianta*, Mondadori, Milano, 2009, conversation with A. Nicaso; E. Ciconte, *'Ndrangheta*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli 2008.

2 N. dalla Chiesa, *Passaggio a Nord. La colonizzazione mafiosa*, Edizioni Gruppo Abele, Torino, 2016.

3 G. Pignatone, M. Prestipino, *Il contagio*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2012; N. dalla Chiesa, M. Panzara, *Buccinasco. La 'Ndrangheta al Nord*, Einaudi, Torino 2012.

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These are questions that affect all the countries threatened by the presence of the 'Ndrangheta as well as the national and European institutions that are most directly involved in dealing with it. This contribution will try to address these issues starting, for simplicity, with the most classic, elementary questions: “who?”, “what?”, “why?”, “how?”, and “where?”, also exploring at the end new trends related to Covid-19. Many useful answers will be provided by the analysis of the most successful “foreign” experience of the 'Ndrangheta, that of northern Italy and especially of Lombardy. Here, in one of the wealthiest, most populous, and most cosmopolitan Italian regions, the 'Ndrangheta now boasts a presence of almost two-thirds of a century. As we will see, this is also the most scientifically studied region among new mafia settlements/scenarios⁴.

II. An unknown enemy: the 'Ndrangheta

The 'Ndrangheta has a long history, which dates back to the nineteenth century⁵. For almost a century, however, it has been identified, both in institutional terminology and journalistic language, with words that designated other organizations, such as the mafia or the Camorra⁶. In other words, for a long time it was deprived of its own identity. Its name began to spread in the post-war period, although the 1982 law establishing the crime of mafia association does not explicitly name it, expressly referring only to the Sicilian mafia and the Camorra from Campania, and adding a reference to other similar local organizations “however locally named”. It was first in 2010 that the 'Ndrangheta was included in the famous Article 416a of the Italian Penal Code⁷. From an institutional and semantic point of view, it is therefore the youngest among the three main Italian mafia organizations (Cosa Nostra in Sicily, Camorra in Campania, and 'Ndrangheta in Calabria) and the one that, until the 1980s, remained in a subordinate position on the national criminal scene.

4 E. Ciconte, *'Ndrangheta padana, Rubbettino*, Soveria Manelli 2010; N. dalla Chiesa, *Lombardy, the long march of the 'Ndrangheta: Old history and new stories*, in F. Allum, I. Clough Marinaro, R. Sciarone (eds.), *Italian Mafias Today. Territory, Business and Politics*, Elgar, Cheltenham, UK Northampton, MA, USA 2019, pp. 143–157; CROSS, *Monitoraggio sulla presenza mafiosa in Lombardia*, Università degli Studi di Milano, Milano 2019.

5 E. Ciconte, *'Ndrangheta dall'Unità a oggi*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 1992.

6 Useful for understanding similarities and differences, L. Paoli, *Fratelli di mafia. Cosa Nostra e 'ndrangheta*, Mulino, Bologna 2000.

7 On the history of this article of the Italian Penal Code, G. Turone, *Il delitto di associazione mafiosa*, Giuffrè, Milano 2015 (third edition).

Today the 'Ndrangheta is considered by all investigative agencies to be the most powerful criminal organization in Europe⁸. In the next paragraphs, we will see what reasons have allowed a rise that may sometimes seem unassailable. However, we shall first try to pinpoint its main characteristics. First: what does “mafia organization” mean? From a sociological point of view, it means an organization which claims to exercise an alternative jurisdiction to that of the state (although often using state resources) through the implementation of a specific model of power – and consequently of profit – based on four requirements: (a) control of territory; (b) a dense network of personal dependencies; (c) the efficient use of violence as a final resource for resolving economic, social, political, and institutional conflicts; (d) organic relationships with politics⁹. These four requirements stand in relationships of mutual functionality. The systematic use (or threat) of violence increases the capacity to control the territory. This ensures also control of votes, which in turn allows organic relationships to be built with politics. And the latter guarantee public resources (licensing, recruitment, careers, procurement) useful to develop and perpetuate relationships of personal dependence¹⁰. Of course, outside Calabria, this model is not realized immediately but step by step, according to the degree of the 'Ndrangheta's presence.

Calabria, and more precisely its southern portion, the area that is stretched towards the Strait of Messina that separates the region from Sicily, is the heart of everything. In the past, this area coincided with the province of Reggio Calabria, the ancient capital of the region. Then new laws made Catanzaro the capital and the province of Reggio was split into those of Crotona on the Ionian Sea, to the east, and of Vibo Valentia on the Tyrrhenian Sea, to the west. Today, the latter two and the city of Reggio Calabria are the undisputed kingdom of the 'Ndrangheta, which has continued to maintain its “own” geography to establish jurisdictions and hierarchies of power. More precisely, to grasp its internal dynamics, it is necessary to divide the tip of the Italian boot into three parts. The Tyrrhenian part of the old province of Reggio, the Ionian one, and the urban part that includes Reg-

8 See Dia, Italian Anti-mafia Investigative Direction: “The 'Ndrangheta is a leader in international drug trafficking” (Direzione Investigativa Antimafia, Relazione del ministro dell'Interno al Parlamento, gennaio-giugno 2020, p. 12); Luciana Lamorgese, Italian Home Minister, “The investigative and judicial findings confirm the supremacy of the 'Ndrangheta in world drug markets” (Luciana Lamorgese, report to the Italian Anti-mafia Parliamentary Commission, 30 October 2019, <https://webtv.camera.it/evento/15259>); see also, F. Spiezia, former vice-president of Eurojust, *Attacco all'Europa*, Piemme, Milano, 2020, p. 101.

9 N. dalla Chiesa, *Defining the Mafia: Between Sociology and Law*, in S. Carnevale, S. Forlati, O. Giolo (eds.), *Redefining Organised Crime*, Hart, Oxford and Portland, Oregon 2017, pp. 225–249.

10 Slightly different is the model proposed by Umberto Santino, *La mafia interpretata. Dilemmi, stereotipi, paradigmi*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli 1995, pp. 129–130.

gio and the surrounding areas¹¹. It is these three geographical and organizational constituencies that determine the internal balance of the 'Ndrangheta by rotating its representatives in the top positions. This is the territory in which the organization's ability to command is thickened, beyond its branches in the world and the levels of autonomy of its individual entities.

Of paramount importance are the demographic characteristics of the territory where the organization has its roots. It should be stressed that Calabria is, unlike Sicily and Campania, a region without major towns. Italy's political quirks have included Reggio Calabria in its list of so-called metropolitan cities. But Reggio is neither Naples, nor Palermo, nor Catania. It is a city of 180,000 inhabitants, comparable to one of the nine "municipalities" in which Milan is divided. The rest of the inhabited centers in the region are of this size. The 'Ndrangheta is mainly a phenomenon of small towns. There it has its citadels: easy to control, also because they are often distant from the cities where the police reside; out of the spotlight of national politics and the mass media; devoid of significant social aggregates and cosmopolitan intellectual centers. Incredible as it is, the expansion and colonization processes that we will talk about did not start in populous capital cities but rather in small villages with a few thousand inhabitants.

The author is currently working on a census of Calabrian villages that have had great influence on other regions, nations, and continents. It should suffice here to say that the world capital of the 'Ndrangheta, its "soul" to which everyone must obey, is San Luca, a village on the Ionian side of Aspromonte with around 4,000 inhabitants; so small that it does not appear on many maps of the region. If Aspromonte is the soul then Platì is the "mind" of the organization and the region from which its far-flung conquests, from Milan to south-eastern Australia, began. It may be added that those who bought luxury restaurants and bars in the famous Via Veneto in Rome, setting of the famous movie "La dolce vita", were not American or Chinese investment funds, but rather a clan from Sinopoli, a Calabrian village of 2,000 inhabitants. Moreover, Albert Anastasia, a major boss of the American mafia, emigrated from this location in the early twentieth century (from Parghelia, province of Vibo Valentia, which today counts 1,200 inhabitants). Similarly, the Siderno Group, originating in Siderno, the coastal center of the Ionian Sea (today 18,000 inhabitants), left the region in the middle of the twentieth century to spread the organization's reach to eastern Canada¹².

The demographic dimensions presented so far are also due to the continuous migratory flows that have occurred over the decades from Calabria to other re-

11 E. Ciconte (2008).

12 F. Forgione, *Mafia Export*, Baldini Castoldi Dalai, Milano 2009.

gions, countries, and continents. Today, the number of individuals with Calabrian roots in towns and cities across northern Italy, Germany, or Australia is often equal to or even outweighs the number who have remained in the motherland. For example, the Australian town of Griffith has twice as many inhabitants of Calabrian origin as Platì (3,800). Just as the village of Marina di Gioiosa Ionica has a number of inhabitants (6,000) equal to its emigrants in the little town of Lonate Pozzolo (12,000), on the northern border of Lombardy, in the province of Varese. This phenomenon has very important implications for the concrete penetration capacity of the 'Ndrangheta and the development of its local networks and relationships. Not because those who emigrate are necessarily bearers of 'Ndranghetista culture, but because of the extraordinary weight that the relationships of town communities have in the whole history of the 'Ndrangheta.

We shall now briefly turn to an analysis of the organizational characteristics of the phenomenon we are dealing with. Over and above the mafia model, which is a kind of common denominator of the three aforementioned organizations, the groups share few material similarities. For example, unlike the Cosa Nostra and the 'Ndrangheta, the Camorra has never had a single hierarchical center to respond to. In order to explain the functioning of the 'Ndrangheta, we must therefore refer to its four organizational levels, which are clearly visible in the Lombard example¹³.

The *first* is the clan level. This is the basic unit, called *'ndrina*, a family structure that originated in a particular Calabrian town or village, with which it maintains a one-to-one relationship. The most powerful clans from a given area generate the so-called *locale*, that is a *second* level of collective government in a specific territory (towns, villages, or their groups). Each clan is quite autonomous in its business and alliances although it must respect the sovereignty of other clans in their own areas of jurisdiction. Most strategies, therefore, develop at this level, including those that concern how to exploit the territory, cocaine trafficking, money laundering, and political relationships. It is possible that some clans help each other with their companies, especially in the construction or waste disposal business. This has occurred, for example, between Calabrian groups in Cologno Monzese and Buccinasco (small towns located in different areas of the Milanese hinterland).

The clans (as well as the *locali*) are, of course, not all equally important. Several factors of influence operate among the single units with consequences for the decision-making processes carried out at the *third* organizational level. This is the Lombard level, or the *'Ndrangheta Lombardia*, whose structural autonomy and unity have been recently (2014) exposed in a historic judgment of the Court of

13 See also M. Catino, *Mafia Organizations*, Cambridge University Press 2019, pp. 160–167.

Cassation¹⁴. Many general decisions are made at the highest organizational level, called the “control chamber”, as a famous meeting in Paderno Dugnano showed in 2009. Materials collected by the Carabinieri during the *Infinito* inquiry¹⁵ revealed how decisions about internal disputes were reached, collective responsibilities divided, and the distribution of opportunities offered by big public projects (such as motorways and high-speed train tracks). Members also discussed which particular candidate or political party to support in upcoming regional, national, or European elections.

While the single *'ndrina* or clan is functionally connected to, and morally dependent on, the corresponding Calabrian *'ndrina* (the *'ndrina* “mother”), the Lombard level is functionally connected to, and morally dependent on, the homeland, that is the unitarian Calabrian *'Ndrangheta*, the *fourth* organizational level. The latter is known since 2010 to be a single, distinct organization, and no longer as an independent archipelago of *'ndrine*¹⁶. All levels must obey the fourth one in terms of general perspectives and, especially, internal codes and hierarchies. Indeed, this was restated when the regional chief of the organization, Carmelo Novella, was killed in 2008 in San Vittore Olona, a small town located between Milan and Varese, because of his independent projects and desire to break away from the homeland.

Notwithstanding the importance of the organizational perspective, the mechanisms of the *'Ndrangheta*'s spread throughout northern Italy and its own history suggest that the *'Ndrangheta* can be seen, in theoretical terms, as a kind of *movement* imbued with the spirit of conquest, rather than simply an organizational structure or a complex network¹⁷. Sometimes it moves because it is forced to, but more often (especially nowadays) it does so as a result of autonomous choices and strategies. It is certain that it takes advantage of environmental weaknesses and collusions¹⁸. Nevertheless, it is also driven by an internal cultural sense of identity, of belonging, that intertwines perfectly with the need for achievement in business activities. The *'Ndrangheta* is a *walking idea*, more than a series of organizational dependences or relationships. Evidence of this is that the bosses themselves, in wiretapped conversations, often use the ideological ex-

14 VI Criminal Section of the Supreme Court, final ruling on the “Infinito-Crimine” trial, 7 June 2014.

15 Tribunale di Milano, *Ordinanza di applicazione di misura coercitiva nei confronti di Agostino Fabio + 159*, Ufficio del giudice per le indagini preliminari Andrea Ghinetti, 5 luglio 2010 (Operazione “Infinito”).

16 See again VI Criminal Section of the Supreme Court, final ruling on the “Infinito-Crimine” trial, 7 June 2014.

17 N. dalla Chiesa, F. Cabras, *Rosso Mafia. La 'Ndrangheta al Nord*, Bompiani, Milano 2019.

18 E. Ciconte (2010); N. dalla Chiesa (2016); for Piedmont see R. Sciarone, *Mafie vecchie, mafie nuove*, Donzelli, Roma 2009; for Emilia-Romagna see N. dalla Chiesa, F. Cabras (2019).

pression “Calabrian people” instead of the ‘Ndrangheta¹⁹. This is probably the organization’s true *sensemaking*²⁰ and seems the key to fully understanding and explaining the current process of colonization observed in Lombardy.

III. The context: successful factors

Important research findings allow us to argue that the ‘Ndrangheta is a particular movement of conquest *from below* that has developed during the last half century and particularly over the last three decades. It is silent and continuous and usually its violence is of a low-profile but extremely effective nature. “Colonization” may seem a strong word in this context, but more than any other it effectively describes the present reality. The term is in fact currently used by law enforcement agencies and the specialized press, although for a long time its use was generally rejected because of the prevailing opinion that the mafia was a typically southern phenomenon.

The Calabrian ‘Ndrangheta, on the contrary, has spread across the world and is particularly rooted in the north of the country in regions such as Lombardy, Piedmont²¹, and Emilia-Romagna. If we summarize, five reasons explain above all its growth and its almost absolute primacy:

- a) An epochal geopolitical reason. The fall of the Berlin Wall resulted in great investment opportunities in Eastern Europe for all three major Italian mafia organizations. But it took away from the Sicilian Cosa Nostra a decisive resource: the political income that came from the control of Sicily in a world divided in two, where Italy constituted the southern borderline between the West and the (communist) East. It was a first, important reason that weakened the historically most powerful Italian mafia.
- b) A media-political reason. With the massacres of 1992 and 1993²² the attention of politics and national media focused spasmodically on the Sicilian mafia, leaving the ‘Ndrangheta undisturbed, especially in the north, where the at-

19 N. dalla Chiesa, *Manifesto dell'Antimafia*, Einaudi, Torino 2014; for a broad formulation of this theory, N. dalla Chiesa, F. Cabras (2019), pp. 205–236.

20 K. Weick, K., *Sensemaking in Organizations*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, Calif. 1995.

21 R. Sciarone (2009), chapter V; R. Sciarone, D. Donatiello, V. Moiso, *La ‘Ndrangheta in Piemonte. Affari e politica nel Canavese*, in R. Sciarone (ed.), *Mafie del Nord. Strategie criminali e contesti locali*, Donzelli, Roma 2014, pp. 175–215.

22 In 1992, two attacks were carried out in Sicily that caused the death of the Sicilian magistrates Giovanni Falcone (23 May) and Paolo Borsellino (19 July). In 1993, between May and July, new attacks outside Sicily were organized. This included massacres in Florence and in Milan and bombs against the historic churches of San Giorgio al Velabro and San Giovanni in Laterano in Rome.

tention of public opinion was monopolized by the great corruption scandal called “Tangentopoli”, which led to the crisis of the old political system.

- c) A reason of criminal culture. After the massacres and the measures that exacerbated the repression against the Cosa Nostra, the latter witnessed hundreds of cases of members of the organization who started to collaborate with the police and judicial authorities. The 'Ndrangheta, which had no major cases of collaboration, immediately became the more reliable of the large criminal networks. The 'Ndrangheta became synonymous with trust, and this – along with other factors – quickly transformed it from a minor organization to the most significant Italian and probably European mafia organization.
- d) An inter-organizational reason. In 1991, the 'Ndrangheta established an internal agreement, the so-called federation pact, which brought peace between the clans after long and bloody internal wars. This allowed all the resources of the organization to be devoted to business and strategies of conquest.
- (e) A demographic reason. The aforementioned migratory flows from Calabria allowed the organization to rely on outposts that were set-up by “explorers”; these small colonies of “compatriots” could emerge practically anywhere, even in areas without a traditional presence²³.

It is not easy to rank these factors in order of importance. It seems correct to think that each of them played a specific role in relation to different contexts, issues, or stakeholders. Certainly, together they have had a decisive role in the 'Ndrangheta overtaking the Sicilian mafia as the country's dominant organized crime network from the early 1990s onwards.

IV. The motives of expansion

The previous analytical scheme serves to explain why, over the last thirty years, the 'Ndrangheta became the hegemonic mafia organization in Italy and across Europe, expanding to at least a dozen countries and intertwining itself with other underworld organizations. We now need to understand what has led the Calabrian organization to continuously, and increasingly, expand beyond the borders of its region of origin²⁴. To do so, it is important to classify the different reasons for moving towards other regions and countries. The first is historically that of *neces-*

²³ On this point, N. dalla Chiesa, *La convergenza. Mafia e politica nella Seconda Repubblica*, Melampo, Milano, 2010.

²⁴ See the concept of “liquid mafia” in F. Forgione, *'Ndrangheta. Boss, luoghi e affari della mafia più potente al mondo. La relazione della Commissione parlamentare antimafia*, Dalai, Milano 2008.

sity. This is, for example, the case of a mafia boss who is forced by the state to move to another region for reasons of public order. It is the mechanism provided for by the measure of “compulsory residency”, which the Italian state introduced in the post-war period with a specific law on mafia organizations (1965). This law was designed to drive bosses (usually acquitted in trials for “lack of evidence”) far away from their home, with the intent of removing the power and prestige they enjoyed among local populations. However, this coercive measure has had the opposite effect because it forcibly spread the presence of major mafia organizations throughout the country, especially to northern Italy.

The necessity to migrate can also arise if a mafia boss is convicted and goes on the run after trial. A mafia boss can remain a fugitive in his own town or in the surroundings, hidden in a house or an underground bunker. Alternatively, he can seek shelter under a false name abroad or in an abandoned village in another region. In this case, the relocation is also due, as in the case of mandatory resettlement, to a state punitive measure. There is a further situation in which the mafia boss seeks refuge away from his own town: to escape not the state but a mafia war in which his faction is losing, or to escape revenge against his own person. Here, too, the effect can be a growth of the mafia presence in distant territories (an example of this has occurred in southern Spain). Forced resettlements, fugitives on the run, and escape attempts are thus three variants that have resulted in the spread of the mafia. For a long time, the idea that the mafia could maximize its profits only by operating in its original context (characterized by a high degree of cultural compatibility) and that only necessity could explain its migration to other territories prevailed²⁵.

However, reality, in particular the reality of the 'Ndrangheta, has shown that there are three other important types of motivation to extend beyond the original territorial boundaries. Paramount is that of *contingent* opportunities, represented by particular situations, including social “emergencies”, which open up important business possibilities: an earthquake (Irpinia, Abruzzo, Reggio Emilia), a great sporting event (the 2006 Winter Olympics in Turin), major public works (high-speed railways), public hygiene emergencies (waste disposal) or health emergencies (the recent pandemic). With the exception of the reconstruction after the Irpinia earthquake of 1980, which was a monopoly of the Camorra, the 'Ndrangheta has made excellent use of all the other mentioned opportunities, taking advantage of its territorial dissemination to bring its businesses into the

25 P. Reuter, *The Organization of Illegal Markets: An Economic Analysis*, U. S. National Institute of Justice, New York 1985; D. Gambetta, *La mafia siciliana: un'industria della protezione privata*, Einaudi, Torino 1992; see the discussion in F. Varese, *Mafias on the move*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2011.

affected regions and strengthen its local presence. It must be said that these interventions in favorable/emergency situations are successful mainly thanks to the inattention or tolerance of local authorities, business communities, and public opinion. The case of Expo 2015 in Milan demonstrated that rigorous cooperation between all authorities (police, judiciary, government, press, civil society etc.) can greatly reduce the likelihood of successful mafia strategies²⁶.

The types of investment activities also vary. The organization or its individual clans may decide to invest in areas far from the territories of origin: in tourism, legalized gambling, catering, health, wholesale, real estate, alternative energies, or even in new drug trafficking routes. In all these cases, movements of people, organizational structures, and capital accompany the new processes: in Spain as in the Netherlands, in Germany (think of the chain of pizzerias and restaurants in and around Erfurt) as in Slovakia, and of course in central and northern Italy²⁷.

A last type of subjective motivation for expansion, of a very general kind but anthropologically very interesting, is the vocation to conquer, without which one would not understand much of the 'Ndrangheta dynamics, especially in recent decades. The drive to colonize new territories, to gradually bring one's own laws, customs, businesses, methods, and code of silence to new areas is much stronger than that of entering the stock market. Enlightening in this sense was the telephone tapping carried out in Lombardy as part of the famous operation of the public prosecutor offices of Reggio Calabria and Milan, called "Crime-Infinity", in which an older boss explains to a younger boss: "(...) and remember: the world is divided in two, what is Calabria and what will become Calabria". A real treatise on criminal anthropology.

Of course, these types of motivations can overlap and feed each other, but they should be kept separate from an analytical standpoint. One can nevertheless deduce the existence of a strategic dimension with its own weight in orienting operational choices and displacements in space.

V. Methods and mechanisms

So far, we have outlined the overall context that has allowed the 'Ndrangheta to take on international primacy and we have indicated the different and intertwined motivations that have led it to expand its scope and roots. We must now

²⁶ N. dalla Chiesa, *Expo 2015 davanti alla mafia: strategie e dilemmi tra cultura e politica*, in E. Ciconte, F. Forgione, I. Sales (eds.), *Atlante delle mafie*, vol. V, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli 2017, pp. 105–129.

²⁷ F. Cabras, *La sanità*, in CROSS (2019) pp. 74–107.

understand how this expansion takes place concretely. In other words, we must examine the methodological and strategic complex that is being put in place to progressively implement the colonization processes. We need to understand not only the stages involved, but also the mechanisms and favorable factors. Studies make it possible to identify similar patterns in different geographical areas and across different time frames. It is important to break these findings down in a scientific manner to build appropriate interpretative frameworks and to define effective suppressive strategies.

First of all, it must be repeated that the 'Ndrangheta strategy is a strategy of conquest *from below*. This is a typical character²⁸. No conquest armies arrive, nor are the leaders and reference values of a society suddenly dismissed and replaced. They do not start with CEOs, but rather with janitors, nurses, greengrocers, or bartenders. Not from the finance sector but from small companies with backward technologies. In other words, microprocesses with a high capacity for cooperation within increasingly dense and integrated networks are activated, until society suddenly discovers that it has changed its identity and that “now the Calabrians are in charge”²⁹. The expression “the Calabrians” in this case constitutes a hasty simplification of the local protagonists, not to say that all Calabrians are *'ndranghetisti* (members of the 'Ndrangheta) but to emphasize the geographical origin of the new masters.

An initial recurring element is the presence in the territory of ambassadors or representatives. These do not necessarily have to be affiliated with the organization or even share its culture; it suffices that they come from the same home region and for this reason, as is typical of Calabrian culture, they feel bound by a superior loyalty to their fellow countrymen. This means that they will not deny a favor, a recommendation, the introduction to a local personality, or any other form of support useful to fruitfully settle in the new environment that will host them. And, given the previously mentioned extraordinary demographic dissemination that has occurred, opportunities for such assistance are many in any geographical area that proves to be of interest to this or that clan.

The second step occurs with the start of on-site traditional activities. These could be illegal activities, such as drug trafficking, to the extent permitted by the local situation, also in terms of possible criminal competition, or legal activities

²⁸ For more on these mechanisms see N. dalla Chiesa, F. Cabras (2019).

²⁹ This is a phrase commonly used in the last ten years by magistrates, entrepreneurs, or journalists when describing the new reality of northern Italy. See, for instance, P. Lodetti, M. Panzarasa, *L'uso del capitale mafioso in Emilia e in Lombardia orientale. Dalle contiguità culturali agli effetti dell'impresa mafiosa*, in “Rivista di Studi e Ricerche sulla Criminalità Organizzata”, 2020, vol. 6, n. 3, pp. 51–105.

such as the opening of a bar, restaurant, or pizzeria, always with the aim of quickly transforming the commercial activity into an instrument of control of the territory, construction of privileged relationships with professional and institutional contexts, and also criminal aggregation. All this happens as the clans mingle with migrant communities of Calabrian origin, thereby camouflaging themselves and gaining favors and support. Participating in community activities, with the provision of generous contributions to Calabrian secular and religious celebrations, which will be reciprocated in the most diverse forms, including electoral favors.

As soon as sufficient capacity for action has developed, and with the support and coverage of their community, the *'ndranghetist* clans will begin to assert the two persuasive resources in which they excel: violence and corruption. They will try to extort work from local businesses, especially in construction³⁰. When they do not succeed, they will use arson to intimidate: a truck, a bulldozer, a gate. Usually after the first arson attack they will get what they ask for. It will only be the first step towards generalizing the method in favor of other new businesses, including other sectors, for example for the supply of/to obtain a supermarket or a night club. At this point the market rules will be distorted or annulled and the weapon of corruption will be brought into play: to obtain licenses, to curb investigations, to obtain the benevolence of local administrators.

It should be noted that these mechanisms will not normally be activated in big cities, where social and political controls are much stronger and where it is more difficult to block the action of law enforcement officials. As already mentioned, the clans begin their activities in smaller regional centers, even small villages, without any presence of law enforcement agencies, and in which an electoral heritage allows (especially in the presence of certain voting practices) to have their “own” alderman elected. These centers are usually of no interest to the national press and politicians yet they are decisive for advancing the colonization strategy of the *'Ndrangheta*.

When the presence of the *'Ndrangheta* has reached a certain size, many moral concerns of local professionals and entrepreneurs will also disappear. Some of them will be attracted by the profit and capital made available to them by the clans. In this way, the clans will acquire the skills and relationships that they are missing and will be able to permanently settle and exercise their influence within the previously foreign context.

30 M. Chiavari, *La quinta mafia. Come e perché la mafia al Nord oggi è fatta anche da uomini del Nord*, Ponte alla Grazie, Milano 2011.

At this point the most classic denial mechanism will intervene: the presence of mafia organizations in the territory will be strongly denied. This will be done in the name of the prestige of the territory or the city, to uphold the honesty and hard work of its inhabitants who do not deserve to be slandered. A perfect scheme that is more easily achievable the more the affected system demonstrates weakness of public spirit and low social capital (in the Putnamian sense of the term³¹).

A final element of this complex social and cultural architecture must finally be emphasized. What happens in a Lombard, German, or English town or city will generally take place not as a result of the coexistence of clans from different towns of Calabria (i.e., generically “Calabrian”) but it will develop because of the presence of a clan from a *single* Calabrian town, with which a one-to-one relationship will be built: Platì will rule in the south-west hinterland of Milan, Cutro in Reggio Emilia, San Luca in Erfurt. Understanding the 'Ndrangheta or combating it while ignoring the importance of each of these mechanisms, and their psychological, anthropological, and political roots, is illusory and unlikely to result in success. This is the core knowledge to be acquired on the subject we are discussing.

VI. The expansion in Europe

A paradigm example of this expansion process can be witnessed in the case of Lombardy, both because the region has been affected by the presence of the mafia throughout all historical phases of its expansion and because it is the most populous and economically-powerful Italian region (21% of Italy's GDP). The next paragraphs will discuss the Lombard example and present a number of important cases.

1. The Lombard paradigm

With regard to the presence of the mafia in Lombardy, we can talk about a two-step expansion process. The first step took place between the 1950s and 1980s, especially in the west of Lombardy, the heartland of industrialization as well as immigration from southern Italy. Here, both spontaneous relocation and forced resettlement (as a result of compulsory residence orders) were present, with the

31 R. Putnam, *Traditions in Modern Italy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1993, in collaboration with R. Leonardi and R. Nannetti, 1993.

Cosa Nostra being the regional hegemon. The second step developed mainly from the 1990s and saw a gradual spread of the mafia towards eastern Lombardy, with the formation of an area of interchange with (and contamination of) the northern part of Emilia-Romagna³². At this stage the movements were almost totally spontaneous, often in response to “strategies” of investment and conquest; it is also the decade that coincides with the indisputable rise of the ‘Ndrangheta³³.

This overall process of the spread to Lombardy appears to be characterized by: (a) the fundamental role of smaller municipalities as the main places of social roots; (b) the previously mentioned logic of conquest from below; (c) the favoring of specific sectors of activity – construction, public works, wholesale agri-food trade, catering, legalized gambling, waste disposal, health – and the establishment of genuine sectoral monopolies (e.g., in earth-moving); (d) the use of “low-scale” violence: this does not generate public alarm at a regional or national level, but is enough to effectively intimidate the victims, especially local entrepreneurs and administrators (arson, bombs on construction sites, car vandalism, targeted threats)³⁴; (e) the construction of a vast network of relationships to enhance the capacity for influence and corruption. This is the context of colonization, in which local rules and public spirit gradually become “compatible with” or even “homogeneous to” those of the original contexts of the clan.

2. Three models in Europe

The next important aspect is to ascertain what characterizes the models of expansion in Europe outside of Italy and whether (and to what extent) these models correspond to those seen in northern Italy. Expansion models are of course not always the same: they will invariably differ to a certain extent in time, context, and activities practiced. Here, we will not take into account established settlement models such as those of Australia or Canada³⁵, characterized by a

³² P. Lodetti, M. Panzarasa, *L'uso del “capitale mafioso” in Emilia e in Lombardia orientale. Dalle contiguità culturali agli effetti dell'impresa mafiosa*, in “Rivista di Studi e Ricerche sulla Criminalità Organizzata”, 2020, vol. 6, n. 3, pp. 51–105.

³³ CROSS, Osservatorio sulla criminalità organizzata dell'Università degli Studi di Milano, *Primo rapporto per la Presidenza della Commissione parlamentare antimafia sulle aree settentrionali*, Roma 2014.

³⁴ See N. dalla Chiesa, speech at the forum *La violenza delle mafie*, coordinated by Monica Masari, in “Meridiana”, vol. 18, n. 90, 2017, pp. 252–292.

³⁵ F. Forgione (2009); E. Ciconte, V. Macrì, *Australian 'Ndrangheta*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli 2009; A. Sergi, *The evolution of the Australian 'Ndrangheta. An historical Perspective*, in “Australia & New Zealand Journal of Criminology”, 2015, vol. 48 (2), pp. 155–174; F. Allum, D. Bright, *Italian*

long presence and strong local specificities. We will rather focus on three models that prevail in Western Europe. One model concerns the western Mediterranean, namely France and Spain (and Portugal, still in an embryonic phase). These are countries where many fugitive mafia members from all three major Italian organizations have found refuge³⁶. These bosses have been involved in economic and business activities linked to extensive money laundering operations in the legal economy. Mainly tourism as well as the entertainment and nightlife sectors have been the target of their investment activities, as evidenced by the high mafia presence in the French Riviera or the south-east of Spain. The members of the clans and the *'ndrine* operating in these two countries also ceased to carry out directly illegal activities, especially drug trafficking. Overall, the presence of the 'Ndrangheta here is not comparable to the situation in Lombardy, which is characterized by control of the territory, investments in a multiplicity of sectors, and large-scale reproduction of the communities of origin. The long presence of Italian immigrants in France (not in Spain) does not seem to play a relevant role for organized crime. We can call this first model “criminal transplantation”.

A second model is the one that seems to have been established, with multiple variants, in Northern Europe, from the Netherlands to the United Kingdom and Denmark³⁷. In these cases, we are not faced with massive immigration processes. Rather, we have selective demographic movements that produce Calabrian communities here and there almost coincidentally. What characterizes this model is the entry of clans into valuable illegal markets (starting with the drug trade) with a role at the crossroads of crucial points of underworld activity. The members of the 'Ndrangheta are trying to build and oversee business platforms to meet and cooperate with other business partners and stakeholders. We will call this second model, which also applies to Scandinavia, “criminal presidium”.

A third model covers two key countries on the northern routes of Italian emigration: Switzerland and Germany. Here, we are much closer to the Lombard experience, that of *colonization*. Of course, no mandatory residence orders are served in these countries. However, a large and continuous migration flow from Calabria towards Switzerland and Germany began in the 1950s and is still ongoing. This flow was mainly directed towards the mining and industrial areas of the north-west just as it addressed the so-called “industrial triangle” of north-

mafias in Australia: the dominance of the Calabrian 'Ndrangheta, in F. Allum, I. Clough Marinaro, R. Sciarrone (eds.) (2019), pp. 208–224.

³⁶ F. Forgione (2009).

³⁷ For an interesting perspective, S. Pizzo, *A peculiar colonisation: the 'ndrangheta in Central Northern Europe*, Università degli Studi di Milano, Bachelor thesis, 2020.

west Italy³⁸. This movement of people functioned like a river, bringing relationships of kinship and companionship, friendships and solidarity that were exploited by the clans. In these two cases, the demographic movement was carried out by establishing a one-to-one relationship between the towns of origin and the towns of destination. Moreover, in both cases, it was possible to identify two historical phases. An initial one, in which members of the 'Ndrangheta themselves were included in the (more random) migration flows and demographic movements and a second phase in which specific locations for activity were chosen by the clans based on strategies of opportunity which, as a result, also led to new migration flows³⁹. Of course, there are profound differences between these cases and the Lombard paradigm: political (German reunification), institutional (Switzerland and Germany are both federal republics), and historical (the succession in East Germany of two totalitarianism regimes for almost sixty years; Switzerland's non-membership in the European Union). And yet these two countries have significant similarities with the Lombard model, whether one looks at the scenario from the 'Ndrangheta point of view or from that of the institutions that should fight it. We will now propose some brief notes on both cases.

3. The Swiss case

The first territories occupied in Switzerland by the Calabrian clans were those closest to the Italian border. Obviously, they were the most affected by demographic movements, the most geographically, and above all, linguistically accessible⁴⁰. The first Calabrian "colonies" were formed close to the borders, starting (classically) in small towns⁴¹. Other colonies gradually formed further afield. There are, for example, a large number of people from Vibo Valentia and its neighboring municipalities in Fraenkel, or from Condofuri and nearby municipalities in Valais, etc. From these rural footholds, Calabrian immigration to Switzerland began to spread in every direction.

38 M. Bedetti, N. Dalponte, *La 'Ndrangheta globale: il caso tedesco*, in N. dalla Chiesa (ed.), *Mafia Globale*, Laurana, Milano 2017, pp. 57–98.

39 Also E. Mendicino, *Il contrasto alla 'Ndrangheta in Germania. Tra orientamenti interni e cooperazione internazionale*, Università degli Studi di Milano, Master thesis, 2017.

40 M. Rossi, *Mafie italiane in Svizzera. Panorama, percezione e quadro legislativo*, in "Antimafia Duemila", May 2019.

41 To this day, the Swiss canton of Ticino has a large presence of people from the area around Crotone, namely from the municipalities of Mesoraca (in 2013 there were more than 4,500 people just in Ticino), Petilia Policastro (as well as other neighboring villages), present massively in Lamone (1,700 inhabitants), and Cadempino (1,500 inhabitants).

In 2014, internal information from the Swiss Federal Judicial Police (PGF)⁴² revealed that in the whole country members or flankers of almost thirty criminal organizations of the 'Ndrangheta were present. The highest known presence was in the south, in Ticino and Valais, in the north, in the area of Aargau, Zurich, Turgovia, and St. Gallen and in the area of Bern, Soletta, Jura, and Fribourg.

In general, there is a homogeneous spread throughout Switzerland that rarely turns up in major cities but rather in *small municipalities* of a few hundred or a few thousand inhabitants. The choice to settle in municipalities of modest size is not to be underestimated because, in the right context (including Switzerland), it takes the form of real colonization⁴³, as has occurred in Ticino⁴⁴. This phenomenon follows a very precise strategy⁴⁵ and implies a great ability to penetrate the social fabric, even going as far as to influence the customs and traditions of the host nation.

There have been several important investigations that exposed the behavior and the usual practices of the clans in these contexts. The first investigation was called "Grave", which highlighted the extreme ease the clans had in committing a long series of crimes and showed the common traits of organized crime, characterized by episodes of threats and violence⁴⁶. It was found that the level of intimidation that the 'Ndrangheta held over the large Calabrian community in Ticino (primarily comprised of honest and working men and women) resulted in their subjugation and silence.

As a result of this and other information gathered by Swiss law enforcement agencies, in 2002 the so-called "efficiency project" came into force to strengthen the rule of law and the state's ability to prosecute⁴⁷. With this reform, the Swiss Confederation set up new powers and instruments to prosecute at inter-cantonal and international levels in the area of cross-border organized crime, money laundering, corruption, and economic crime. Yet the deep roots and ingrained nature of the Calabrian clans in Switzerland remains an issue today⁴⁸. Even when impri-

42 E. Pironaci, *Le organizzazioni mafiose in Svizzera. La percezione del fenomeno e le misure di contrasto*, final paper for the "Corso di Perfezionamento in Scenari Internazionali della Criminalità Organizzata", Università degli Studi di Milano, academic year 2019–2020.

43 N. dalla Chiesa, M. Panzarasa (2012).

44 See the example of Lamone and Cadempino.

45 N. dalla Chiesa (2016).

46 The investigation concerned subjects from the area around Crotone, in particular from Mesoraca, Petilia Policastro, and neighboring villages, involving the so-called "cosca Ferrazzo", headed by Mario Donato Ferrazzo called "Baby Mouse".

47 E. Pironaci (2019–2020), p. 9.

48 *Ibidem*, pp. 10–14.

soned, clan bosses have been able to maintain the smooth operation of their criminal enterprises and, upon release, they have immediately returned to their criminal roots: often at greater capacity than before.

Summarizing the developments of the 'Ndrangheta's presence in Switzerland, we can observe the following historical traits: (a) the presence of the Calabrian clans is high, it has historically been concentrated in areas close to the Italian-Swiss border but has gradually spread throughout the country; (b) the presence has been concentrated in smaller towns and villages. In addition to these historical features, however, three more recent ones, which are the result of strategic choices, must be underlined: (1) the transfer to Switzerland of several members of the clans operating in north-west Lombardy, who have chosen to reside across the border to escape the increasingly stringent investigations of the Anti-Mafia District Directorate of Milan⁴⁹; as magistrates have pointed out, a sort of "commuting mafia" has originated from this phenomenon; (2) the fast and silent development of brand new Calabrian colonies in the heart of Switzerland, considered a "hospitable" country, with a rapid population increase in many rural villages; (3) an increase in the number of clan members around Lake Constance, which seems to display a strategy on the German border similar to that witnessed on the Italian border.

The colonization is, therefore, moving on to what we have defined as a second phase. Swiss institutions have proven weak, especially because they have been reluctant to consider the mafia a priority issue with regard to democracy and the rule of law in the country. This lack of sensitivity also emerges from the absence of specialized literature and in-depth research, but above all from the total lack of training in both academic and institutional spheres, including the continued education of magistrates and police officers.

A step forward might be represented by the latest report published by Fedpol that contains a new strategy in the fight against organized crime that is to be enacted from 2020 to 2023⁵⁰. At the top of the list is the fight against the Italian mafia, as seen in the following quote: "Italian mafias currently pose a considerable threat to Switzerland. Its members have been active in our country for a few generations and in different categories of crime. This important long-standing presence, family ties in Switzerland and linguistic closeness explain the possible mafia infiltration into the administration and economy which, in this scale, is unprecedented for a criminal organization. The Italian mafias therefore pose a threat

⁴⁹ A. Dolci, coordinator of the Anti-mafia District Directorate of Milan, lecture given at PhD course "Studies on Organized Crime", University of Milan, 16 April 2020.

⁵⁰ <https://www.fedpol.admin.ch/dam/data/fedpol/publiservice/publikationen/berichte/jabe/jabe-2019-i.pdf>.

to the institutions of the rule of law and the Swiss financial center”⁵¹. Given past delays and uncertainties, this new approach is to be commended.

4. The German case

In Europe, the spread of the mafia across Germany most closely resembles the paradigm seen in Lombardy⁵². Firstly, it has been accompanied by considerable migratory flows from the regions of southern Italy to the areas that experienced the greatest economic development in the country. These movements started in 1950s and were made possible by a treaty between Italy and Germany that opened up West German labor markets to Italian citizens, especially those from rural populations of the south. The industrial and mining regions of the Upper Rhine and Baden-Wurttemberg were particularly affected, with the cities of Düsseldorf, Cologne, Duisburg, and Stuttgart at the forefront of the migration. As in northern Italy, the strong migratory movement, facilitated by the establishment of the European Community in 1957, resulted in the movement of individuals who were close to or belonged to the clans. Thus, Germany – even more so than northern Italy – provided newcomers with a high-level of coverage and camouflage.

The special demographic movement initially showed a significant Calabrian and Sicilian presence. Over time, the component from Calabria took over, also due to the higher levels of youth unemployment in the region that led to stronger migratory flows abroad. Unlike northern Italy, Germany has never had to deal with the phenomenon of mandatory residence orders. However, those legally emigrating to the country have still found ample opportunity to conduct legal and illegal activities, due both to a flourishing economy and the absence of meaningful social awareness concerning the presence of the mafia.

Just like in northern Italy, the first phase of growth was linked almost exclusively to general migratory movements; the second phase was more strategic in nature, aimed at the realization of investments and the conquest of new territories. The beginning of this second phase dates back to the fall of the Berlin Wall. German reunification and the huge differences that existed between the former East and West opened up extraordinary possibilities for the clans to exploit their wealth and to settle in former East Germany, in particular around the centers of Erfurt and Leipzig. However, possibilities for profitable investments were opening

51 Ibidem, p. 4.

52 S. La Viola, *Italian mafia organizations in northwestern Germany: settlement models*, University of Milan, 2018, Bachelor thesis.

up not just in the former East but throughout the entire country, and the reunified nation of Germany became an almost legendary destination for migrants coming from the countryside of the Italian south⁵³. The flourishing economic conditions in Germany, matched with the financial liquidity held by the 'Ndrangheta clans, enabled them to seize large sectors of the cocaine market. In addition, a second factor typical of the northern Italian experience was present: the denial, for a long time, of the presence of mafia clans on the territory⁵⁴ (indeed in the case of Lombardy, this denial lasted until 2010 (the year of the previously mentioned judicial operation "Crime-Infinity")⁵⁵. Not even the Duisburg massacre of 2007, involving two rival clans from the village of San Luca (the world capital of the 'Ndrangheta, as it has been called) after a ritual of affiliation carried out in a local pizzeria, managed to shake up German public opinion and politics. It also seemed to have little impact on the judiciary and the police. As has occurred over the last thirty years in northern Italy, the feeling seems to be widespread that the mafia is a peculiar problem of "southern Italy", which cannot be transposed to a fundamentally different and healthy society.

The difference with northern Italy is, however, that even in Lombardy or Piedmont, Italian national laws enacted after the Palermo massacres apply: from the introduction of the crime of mafia association, to the legislation on the confiscation of the assets of bosses and other figureheads, to the increase in police and judicial investigative powers. These are lessons that most advanced sectors of Italian institutions learned, but that are currently lacking in Germany, just as there is a lack of social awareness concerning the ongoing process of the mafia's infiltration of the country⁵⁶.

These processes have a further, third element in common with northern Italy and Switzerland. In Germany too, there is a significant presence of people and companies of the 'Ndrangheta (or close to the 'Ndrangheta) in smaller centers that are easier to colonize, and a strong presence in the "legal" sectors of earth-moving, catering, real estate, and the entertainment/nightlife industry: sectors that allow for local conquest through sectoral monopolies⁵⁷.

53 A splendid portrait of the image of Germany at the time among southern Italian immigrants is found in G. Fava, *Processo alla Sicilia*, Ites, Catania 1967.

54 M. Bedetti, N. Dalponte (2017); S. La Viola (2018).

55 E. Ciconte (2010); N. dalla Chiesa (2016).

56 V. Zoppei, *La disciplina antiriciclaggio in Germania*, in "Rivista di Studi e Ricerche sulla Criminalità Organizzata", 1916, vol. 2, n. 3, pp. 63–77.

57 Report of General Pasquale Angelosanto, commander of the Special Operational Group of the Carabinieri, at the webinar "Advisora" on "Mafia and Health", 15 December 2020. The reference on the occasion was to the Düsseldorf area.

Today, the situation is slowly evolving⁵⁸. However, the presence of the clans of San Luca and Plati has become strategic, and other new clans have starting to migrate to Germany, including the Grande Aracri (which is also spreading in Lombardy and Emilia) and the Carelli (originally from the province of Cosenza). In the meantime, Germany has also taken on an increasingly integral role in the transportation of illegal drugs⁵⁹.

VII. The pandemic risk

What we have discussed so far also helps us to analyze a fundamental issue of the present, namely the Covid-19 pandemic. Will mafia organizations be able to enrich and strengthen themselves thanks to the health tragedy that is currently affecting the planet? “Yes”, would seem to be the answer to this question: they will inevitably profit from it⁶⁰. However, countries should be able to limit the extent of this profit on the basis of their own awareness of the situation and the quality of the legislative and operational instruments they have so far enacted to fight organized crime. The likelihood that mafia organizations will seek to enrich themselves as a result of the pandemic stems from the realization that their activities are no longer focused on specific sectors (such as drug trafficking or the construction industry) but are now increasingly general and transitory, as illustrated by their past ability to profit from the “emergency economy”. Large-scale emergencies, such as natural disasters or pressing public works, as well as other pressing social problems and international events, allow for the rapid accumulation of profit.

Emergencies, however they may come about, are, in short, the ideal situations for the mafia to operate in. Urgency generally makes the time factor more pertinent to the legality factor and violations of legal norms and requirements may seem tolerable when urgently required to meet social or public needs or host international events. It should be pointed out, however, that predatory mafia projects that seek to benefit from urgency do not always succeed. For instance, when Milan hosted the Expo 2015 the City of Milan and the Italian state implemented a

58 On a nascent civic anti-mafia consciousness in Germany see G. Norberti, *Anti-mafia Initiatives in Germany*, in “Rivista di Studi e Ricerche sulla Criminalità Organizzata”, 1917, vol. 3, n. 3, pp. 52–78.

59 Osservatorio europeo delle droghe e delle tossicodipendenze – Europol, *Relazione sui mercati della droga dell'UE. Panoramica strategica*, The Hague, 2016.

60 N. Gratterer, A. Nicaso, *Ossigeno illegale. Come le mafie approfitteranno dell'emergenza Covid-19 per radicarsi nel territorio italiano*, Mondadori, Milano 2020.

preventive strategy to curb the involvement of the mafia (and associated businesses) as well as a broad campaign of social awareness. This effort allowed very little space for the 'Ndrangheta to infiltrate, certainly much less than such organizations had long imagined.

The current situation offers an opportunity to effectively apply an already tried and tested methodology to take advantage of the emergency situation in at least four areas.

- (a) The first is the healthcare system, especially with regard to the establishment of new healthcare facilities or the urgent recruitment of auxiliary nursing staff. In particular, this area also concerns the procurement of medical supplies, from doctors' gowns to personal protection equipment, through wide-ranging international traffic routes already identified by the Italian National Anti-Mafia and Anti-Terrorism Directorate⁶¹. The disposal of medical waste is an ancillary healthcare sector service which offers opportunities for the mafia.
- (b) The second area is the potential use of the great liquidity that is currently available to mafia organizations. Faced with the seriousness of the economic crisis, this use of liquidity may manifest itself in two forms. Firstly, as already occurred at the beginning of the pandemic, to offer usury money to businessmen and entrepreneurs in financial difficulty. Secondly, through the direct purchase of companies bankrupted or seriously damaged by the economic fallout of the pandemic, especially in the tourism and catering sectors (those traditionally preferred by the clans), with the effect of a rapid extension of mafia activities in the legal economy⁶².
- (c) The third area is that of fraudulent access to state and European aid and support measures. False certifications, the purchase of companies already close to bankruptcy, changes in the name of companies, and other forms of corruption are likely to facilitate the appropriation of substantial flows of public money.
- (d) Finally, the fourth area is that of procurement/participation in tenders and subcontracting in the public works plans which governments will initiate to relaunch national economies. The mafia has had decades of experience in participating in such programs from the creation of *ad hoc* companies to the maximum reduction in prices.

⁶¹ F. Cafiero de Raho, round table on *L'economia mafiosa: dal narcotraffico all'emergenza sanitaria*, Istituto Italiano di Cultura, Berlin, 5 November 2020.

⁶² See the recent document from the Commissione speciale antimafia, anticorruzione, trasparenza e legalità – Comitato tecnico-scientifico per la legalità e il contrasto alle mafie, Regione Lombardia, *Nota di sintesi sul primo ciclo di monitoraggio del fenomeno usura e delle tendenze osservabili in Lombardia in questa fase, per conoscenza e ad uso di S.E. il Prefetto di Milano*, Milano 24 July 2020.

Of course, as the Milan Expo 2015 has shown, there are possibilities to prevent enrichment of and social infiltration by criminal organizations. Much depends on the level of awareness of the risk in individual countries and a willingness to act proactively. Given the growing presence of the mafia throughout Europe and against the background of hitherto naïve problem awareness, the pandemic-induced emergency could be the ideal wake-up call for governments and law enforcement agencies to finally make a decisive step in the right direction.

VIII. Concluding Remarks

This contribution began by asking the following questions about the spread of the 'Ndrangheta in Europe:

How is its continuous advance possible? How does it take the form of a social movement of conquest? What are its dynamics? What are the mechanisms of success? How much of a role do luck and contingent opportunities play, and how important is strategy? What are the relationships between business and power?

To summarize, we can now outline some empirically informed answers. The advance of the clans – which has sometimes seems unstoppable and has even taken on a character of conquest⁶³ – is made possible due to some basic reasons: a) it is driven by a strong, almost “natural” calling of conquest; b) it is accompanied by a substantial demographic movement that serves as both a protective screen and a pool of (even legally innocent) allies; (c) it uses proven criminal knowledge and special know-how which is mainly concerned with the management of social relationships and the construction of its own social capital; d) it develops relatively quietly, generally resorting to “low-intensity” violence; and (e) it takes advantage of the denial of the presence of mafia organizations by the local ruling classes.

The dynamics of this conquest display impressive fluidity, which suggests something like a river. Like all rivers, conquest proceeds in the directions in which it finds the points of least resistance. The river always has a source that feeds it. And it is the country of the motherland, the country of origin of each individual clan, which offers men prestige, military strength, feelings of belonging, and social and moral cohesion.

As for the mechanisms of success, they have been studied by many researchers⁶⁴. What is clear is that a real pattern exists that repeats itself over time. It starts

⁶³ N. dalla Chiesa, F. Cabras (2019), chapter 10.

⁶⁴ R. Sciarone (2009); Federico Varese (2011); N. dalla Chiesa, M. Panzarasa (2012); R. Sciarone (ed.), *Mafie del Nord*, Donzelli, Roma 2014; CROSS (2014); CROSS, *Secondo Rapporto per la Presidenza della Commissione parlamentare antimafia sulle aree settentrionali*, 2015; CROSS, *Terzo Rap-*

with a “demographic thickening” that then leads to the infiltration of both legal and illegal economic sectors and finally to the control of the territory and the maximization of political representation. The use of these mafia methods at every stage of the advance guarantees a decisive competitive advantage.

All this results in an expansive strategy, with some caveats. For example, the clans of two different Calabrian towns (or villages) will not compete in the same territory. Yet the strategy is not total, as it never is for large organizations that are accustomed to operating in a “turbulent” environment⁶⁵. On the one hand, the advance proceeds according to migratory movements, even if it occasionally produces them. On the other hand, the choice to move and concentrate forces, physical or economic, may depend on various factors: urban planning, business liquidity crises, major public works, natural disasters (earthquakes, Covid-19, etc.), political breakthroughs (German reunification, collapse of the USSR), changes in the policies of local governments, etc.

Finally, we should ask whether the 'Ndrangheta is a great profit machine? The simple answer to this is that it most certainly is. However, we must not be fooled by this obvious truth. The 'Ndrangheta seeks and produces profits in every possible field, and with great innovative spirit. But its substance is power⁶⁶. An alternative power to the official one, although it sometimes corrupts and even merges with the official one. After money and business, the control of territory comes next. Judge Giovanni Falcone once told the Swiss authorities: “First their money comes. Then they come, with their methods”⁶⁷. The 'Ndrangheta, like any real mafia organization, is first and foremost about power. A power that lies locally in the individual *'ndrine* (basic units of the organization) and in the great collective heritage (moral, military, network) that they have behind them. It is only thanks to their power that the “mafia method” enables the mafia to accumulate profits. The heart of this power is in the Calabrian motherland, in small towns and villages. Yet this power only grows as it extends deeper into northern Italy, Switzerland, and Germany. Sometimes it is not seen though it can be “felt” immediately. That is the very least that needs to be learned.

porto per la Presidenza della Commissione parlamentare antimafia sulle aree settentrionali, 2017; N. dalla Chiesa (2016); N. dalla Chiesa, F. Cabras (2019).

⁶⁵ See especially F. E. Emery, E. L. Trist, *The Causal Texture of Organizational Environments*, in “Human Relations”, 1965, XVIII, 1, pp. 7–20.

⁶⁶ N. dalla Chiesa, *L'impresa mafiosa. Tra capitalismo violento e controllo sociale*, Cavallotti University Press, Milano 2012.

⁶⁷ G. Falcone, *Cose di Cosa Nostra*, Rizzoli, Milano 1991, in collaboration with M. Padovani.