BLURRED BOUNDARIES : SICILIANS and their MAFIA

Social consensus, cultural embeddedness, and the humus that must be changed.

This paper has been written to accompany and provide context to a body of visual ethnographic films that reveal the values of some Sicilian criminals in Florence, and also social anti-mafia activists at work in Western Sicily. These were filmed between 1992 - 2016, and this paper draws on them for its ethnography. The films are listed in the filmography at the end, and may be seen on www.tonidebromhead.uk

Abstract

This paper examines the nature of Cosa Nostra, the way it depends on social consensus, and how it is culturally embedded within some sections of its community. It is through this situation that it manages to remain a meaningful structure that exists in parallel to the State. The paper also examines the approach taken by some social anti-mafia activists in their struggle to change a way of thinking that presently makes it possible for ordinary people to accept the Mafia. The paper cites examples taken from Blurred Boundaries, a body of visual ethnography that deals with this subject.

Introduction

The word mafia is used rather loosely as a label for organised crime, but in fact there are at least three of them that are significantly different in nature to most of the other mafias, and unlike them cannot "be reduced to ordinary criminality" (Cavadi 2009:32) These are the Sicilian Cosa Nostra, the Calabrian 'ndranghetta, and the Albanian Casalesi. In this paper I am dealing with the Sicilian mafia" Cosa Nostra, more commonly known as Mafia.
Unlike most organised crime, this is not just a criminal strata laid onto the society it exploits and abuses, instead Cosa Nostra is culturally and socially rooted into its society, so it is not just a horizontal layer but is tied into its community through vertical ties that thread through the different layers of Sicilian society. This makes it more difficult to eradicate because it requires more than a straight-forward combating of a group that corrupts, robs and kills - in addition it also requires changing the mentalità - the way of thinking of a people who are by default, tacitly, implicitly, or actively supporting their local Mafia family. (*Wind of Change*)

As a visual/social anthropologist, I have been researching the subject of Cosa Nostra and the Sicilian social anti-mafia for over twenty-five years, first working with Sicilian criminals (from Western Sicily) in Florence, and then moving to Western Sicily where I continued my work with social anti-mafia activists in the provinces of Palermo and Trapani. I particularly focused on one of my local towns, Castellammare del Golfo (Trapani), which has a beautiful fishing port and is now attracting tourists. It is a “high density” mafia town, and was the birthplace of the American Mafia boss, Joe Bananas.

There are numerous anti-mafia associations in Sicily, some island-wide but most of them are small and local to a particular area, and they are almost entirely run by volunteers. Three larger associations were expressly set up to help people stop paying the *pizzo*, and give them support if they take this step and collaborate in taking their persecutors to court. These are
AntiRacket (mostly in the South, but also in Northern regions, like the Veneto), Addio Pizzo and Libero Futuro (both founded in Palermo and now spreading out). They sometimes work together, such as in campaigns, and the differences between them are not always clear.

The situation is therefore complex, but when they are working well together, these associations can be effective. All too often, however, quarrels and petti-jealousies arise which undermine their strength and work. There seems to be a continuous process of alliance and fragmentation.

The national organisation Libera was founded by the priest Don Ciotti in order to counter this tendency. It brings together those small organisations who wish to join by offering them shelter under its large umbrella, so enabling them to retain their independence while also belonging to a larger entity holding far more clout.

For my project, I worked with an anti-mafia local television journalist, Pino Maniaci; Addio Pizzo (sometimes with AntiRacket and Libero Futuro); an association of young people who, sick of the situation in their home town of Castellammare, formed a political group to contest their local elections; and the Trapani province section of Libera. Each subject produced its own film, as well as other smaller films on aspects tangential to the main one. Most of the ethnography in this paper is drawn from this visual ethnography.
Background

There is a tendency to speak of Sicilian society and culture as something that is unified, the same single culture throughout an island with a population of five million, of which only five thousand are ritually initiated members of the Mafia association itself (Cavadi 2014:27). Popular literature and films mythologise Sicily, representing an island in which people adhere to a sometimes-veiled code of honour, of which mafiosi - 'men of honour' are the leading proponents. Some of the best-known elements include omertà (the rule of silence), controlling women's sexuality - also referred to as paternalistic masculinity (Cavadi 2009:33), and the use of violence - though most often only the threat of it. Though this code may once have belonged to a majority of Sicilians, such a view of Sicily’s society and culture today is far too reductive and, whatever it may have been in its peasant past and under foreign rule, Sicilian society is now as complex and fragmented as any other.

Those old values have not only mutated through time, but have mutated differently in different social classes and generations, though adherence to omertà does still seem to widely prevail, something I shall return to in the next section. More recently, with television and the social media, plus the much-improved education provided in schools, the young middle-class (as can be witnessed in A Town in Sicily) are like most other Western kids in their view of the world and their vision of life.
Despite this, the Mafia in Western Sicily is still alive and well. As has been mentioned, this is largely because the Mafia is rooted into rather than just layered onto the society it is violating, exploiting, depriving of freedom and true democracy. This said, it is also important to recognise that the Mafia is no more unified than anything else in Sicily, and what is true in one area may not be true in another.

Although, as is generally known, members of Cosa Nostra are highly disciplined and the organisation is strongly hierarchical in its structure, each Mafia cosca (cell or family) may vary slightly, and regionally the Mafia may also differ. Thus, for example, paying the pizzo in Palermo province is obligatory for anyone who has a business, however small (sometimes only owning a flat if they are foreigners), because it is a sign of submission, a recognition of the Mafia's authority.

In the province of Trapani the situation is different. Here 'small' people and businesses are left alone, and the Mafia only approaches for the pizzo when they think the enterprise is doing well. Moreover the Trapani mafia is spoken of as being ‘seductive’, associated with bourgeois salons, and also some freemason lodges. Don Ciotti, founder of Libera affirms:

I believe this reality [of Trapani] is the most complex reality, the most difficult one today, where freemasonry crosses with the Mafia and a strong political element - here, really strong. (A Wind of Change)
There is also an ongoing discussion as how to describe the Mafia’s position within its host society. It is referred to as a subculture, a sub-branch of main society, or a discrete group that functions within that society. It is also described as being a trans-culture (Santino 2015:6-7) in the sense of a culture that has adopted different elements over time. However I prefer to describe it as a parallel structure within the State, with them both influencing and infiltrating each other in different ways at different levels. This is close to what Falcone put forward, that the Mafia "sees itself as a state within the State, and governs itself with laws or iron, imposes itself with violence towards its own members". (Falcone 1992:16)

Sicilian academics and activists also speak of the Mafia being embedded in their society (Giorgi 2009:39), as well as there being a social consensus that supports it, without which it could not survive. (Cavadi 2009:20; Giorgi 2009:30) These are not the same thing, however, and need to be differentiated for this paper. I begin by briefly outlining what I understand to be social consensus in relation to Castellammare, which is followed by an example of cultural embeddedness based on my work with Sicilian criminals in Florence. ix

Social Consensus

I believe that it is the lack of a sense of State, of State as an interior value, which is the root-cause of the distortions in the Sicilian soul: the dichotomy between society
and State; the consequent over-reliance on family, on group, on clan: the search for rationalisation that will allow everyone to live and work in perfect anomie, without reference to the rules of collective life. What is the root of the Mafia if not that mixture of anomie and primitive violence? The Mafia is, essentially, nothing but the expression of need for order, for the control of a State. (Falcone-Padovani 1993:56)

Most will say the Mafia emerged with the formation of the new Italian State, though many point out that it was already present during Bourbon rule (Santino 2015:43), when the Bourbons endeavoured to emancipate peasantry, so reducing the power of the land-owning aristocracy. This so-called anti-feudal policy created tensions between central government and the landowners, who were reluctant to lose control of their land and their peasants. This situation led to a situation of "conflict and accommodation between government, landlords and peasants. ... mafiosi were recruited from the ranks of the peasantry to provide the large estates owners with armed staffs to confront both the impact of the State and the restive peasants ...". (Blok 1974:10-11)

These mafiosi effectively became brokers between peasants, aristocracy and State and, among other things, became involved in resolving disputes, providing contacts (clientelismo), and finding employment for people. The Mafia still does all this today, and by taking advantage of what is offered, people put themselves into debt with them. It also seeks to make money in whatever way is possible, always adapting to new situations and
economies. Money is important, but even more important and the Mafia's prime objective, is the acquisition of power which money helps them obtain.\textsuperscript{xii}

When the newly formed Italian State replaced the Bourbons, not only was it weak, but it had scant interest in the South. Ordinary Sicilians had no reason to trust it, a political void was created which the Mafia now filled, offering their own system of law and order, so ensuring some sort of stability. It was never their intention to replace the State, rather they depended on it, gaining power and lodging themselves within it through infiltration - corrupt politicians, civil servants, Judges and police.\textsuperscript{xi}

Whereas the police today has become respected by those who have turned to it for help, as well as anti-mafia activists, this is not so true of local politicians. In 2006 the whole of the Castellammare \textit{comune}'s technical office was closed down because it was suspected of being infiltrated by the Mafia. This caused real difficulties for many ordinary people who had already embarked on different projects, invested money, only to have all works suspended for the duration of the investigation which lasted over a year.

It is this office that gives out contracts, and so this is one of the points where mafia and corrupt elements of the state may intertwine. It is a problem that came out forcefully in \textit{A Town in Sicily} when the young politicians had to select their would-be councillors for the campaign. They put enormous emphasis on selecting someone who would not conveniently turn a blind eye on ‘certain people’, and would not be tempted by offers of
money or give in to any intimidation. Depressingly, it seemed their choice was limited.

There are many different reasons for otherwise honest people to associate with the Mafia, and in all cases the individual usually has a choice: to find a legitimate way of acquiring what they need which will take time because of the bureaucracy involved, maybe cost money, with the result uncertain. Or turn to the Mafia which may be quicker, cheaper and more efficient, however doing this is not only illegal, but creates a debt which may or may not be called in\textsuperscript{xiii}.

The range of Mafia ‘services’ is quite broad: a quick buck can be made by doing a small one-off job such as delivering drugs, or obtaining full-time work as was the case with the restaurant I cite below.

The Mafia got in touch with a builder I filmed when he let out a restaurant to an experienced restaurateur because, seeing it was doing well, they now demanded the pizzo. As a first step towards developing a relationship with the restaurant they suggested a woman who had experience in this field and would be perfect for a position. In this way the woman was obligated to the Mafia (they had found her a job), and the owner would be under obligation too. When the owner refused to pay the pizzo, they set his home alight. In this instance, therefore, setting up an obligation did not work for the Mafia, and the people involved were arrested. (Scorched Earth)
When a fugitive Mafia boss was found living in a house belonging to an elderly couple on the outskirts of my town in Sicily, it was immediately assumed that the Mafia must have previously helped them, and therefore they had no choice but to provide the lodging required. It is also equally possible that the couple was offered money they could not resist.

Another example of the Mafia's hidden system was given to me by a plumber who could no longer pay the exorbitant interest on a loan made to him by the Mafia, so he reported them. The Mafia retaliated by ensuring that no one in the town would give him work, not even the Church which usually employed him. He had always refused to pay the *pizzo*, but had he done so he believes they would have found him well paid work, so he would never have needed the loan in the first place. (*Scorched Earth*)

The Mafia can therefore be seen as a web that interweaves with the network of the state, and like the state it enforces its demands within the community through the use of intimidation, supported by the threat of violence. The difference is that the state’s enforcement and violence (which once included capital punishment) is declared legitimate and transparent, whereas the Mafia’s is illegal and shady, but how ordinary Sicilians may see this can, at times, be different.

Because the Mafia administers its own “system of justice" they do not usually resort to the State Judiciary though this may be changing. Rino Giacalone, an outspoken anti-mafia journalist who is also a member of the
association Libera, described a Mafia boss who had just died as being a *pezzo di merda* – a piece of shit, so publicly insulting and diminishing this boss's image and standing. Normally the Mafia would have sought to eliminate the journalist, either by convincingly discrediting him or, if necessary, having him murdered. Instead, and surprisingly, the widow turned to the law and accused Giacalone of defamation. The case went through three trials. The first, in Trapani, found it legitimate to use this description, the second over-turned the first and found him guilty of defamation, only for the court of appeal to find Giacalone not guilty. (*A Wind of Change*)

Although there are only about five thousand ‘signed up’ *mafiosi* in Sicily, men who have gone through initiation and formally belong to the organisation, a large percent of the population is, in one way or another, directly or indirectly, associated with the Mafia. Possibly because this might suit them, or because the connection to the Mafia may seem remote, but also because - as one informant put it - "Sicilians like short cuts". It is impossible to have exact statistics, but a large proportion of the population is tacitly tied into this second system, however remotely, and it is this situation which provides the Mafia with the social consensus it relies on to survive.

The situation in Castellammare can be described as a series of concentric circles spreading outwards from a Mafia core, with the Mafia involvement diminishing as the circles spread further out, until lastly there is
Binding these different circles together is the web of illegal connections and services existing, in part because many Sicilians still do not trust the State and so possibly explaining why they have little concept of civic duty, and not much interest in ideals beyond those belonging to the family.

As I am writing Sicily is in shut-down because of corona virus. In Palermo the Mafia has become involved in the distribution of food to those in need during this difficult time. Their message is clear: you cannot rely on the State, but you can rely on us, your friends and benefactors. Simultaneously, in Marsala, social anti-mafia activists are doing the same job because they want to ensure that neither the Mafia nor corrupt politicians step in and take over the void left by the State.

So, however bad the situation still is in Sicily, it must be recalled there are many Sicilians, especially among the young, who give all their free time as well as money they do not necessarily have, to the struggle for change (A Wind of Change; Kids at Risk). This includes all the Sicilian anti-mafia activists with whom I worked.

As was said earlier, the reason the Mafia largely has the support of the community in which it operates is through pragmatism rather than any particular belief in or liking of the Mafia. The social consensus therefore emerges from a way of thinking that accepts the Mafia as an alternative
system that can help people out in moments of necessity, even though the State rules this to be illegal.

Because of its very nature, precise statistics are unavailable for this social consensus, but evidence emerged in an unexpected way. During my research I filmed a number of men who had stopped paying either the *pizzo*, or the excessive compound interest on loans from the Mafia. One of these was the builder mentioned earlier who owned the restaurant. Each one told me they were supported by the police who were wonderful but, in varying degrees, they felt abandoned by the State, and the whole town turned its back on them. In this way most ordinary Sicilians reveal themselves as being complicit with the Mafia when they refuse to support its victims, either because they believe in *omertà*, or simply because they are afraid. In a controlled experiment with people who were subscribed to *Addio Pizzo*, it was found that "fear, imagination, worry, and dreams were quite similar with those who had received intimidations and menaces, and those who had not". (Lo Verso 2019:21)

Consensus also revealed itself in another way. During the year I worked with Libera in the province of Trapani, it came under unprecedented and continuous attack from the media, not only the media that is said to be sympathetic to the Mafia, but also elements of the anti-mafia itself. To give support to the activists in Marsala, Ingui organised a therapy session with a psychologist who is specialised in the Mafia mentality. It emerged that all
those present felt they had suffered some degree of hostility towards their anti-mafia activities from the outside world, which included local politicians as well as colleagues at work. *(A Town in Sicily)*

**Cultural embeddedness**

*In appropriate circumstances appeals to honour, the justification of behaviour in terms of honour, and attempts to deprive others of their honour are means of acquiring power and wealth. ... honour may inspire a man to do things that are disapproved by the dominant sectors of society.* *(Davis 1969:69)*

As can be understood from the discussion on social consensus, one of the big problems in the struggle against the Mafia is that, in the minds of the majority of Sicilians in Castellammare, the boundaries between what is legal, what is illegal or only mildly and so acceptably illegal, are sometimes blurred. But when it comes to the sector, or social milieu of the disadvantaged, the boundaries dissolve altogether, and this is due to cultural embeddedness. Because of this, and also because doing odd jobs for the Mafia may be the only work they can easily get in such areas, the anti-mafia association Libera pays particular attention to the disadvantaged who are seen as especially vulnerable. Because of Libera's concern, the Italian Ministry of Justice now works in collaboration with the association in the rehabilitation of young offenders.

The values of masculinity among many disadvantaged men are close to those of the Mafia code, but each adheres to these values for different reasons. I do
not know why these values are similar in both these groups, nor does this seem useful to explore this here as it would add little to the discussion, but they are values that have accumulated over time, some old and some antique. For instance variations of honour and shame systems have belonged to Mediterranean societies for centuries, whereas the Sicilian value of òmerta probably emerged during the Spanish Inquisition, though why is less certain.xxxi

My own research in the values of Sicilian masculinity as practiced by a group of disadvantaged men was done with Sicilian criminals in Florence. At the time of my Florence research I was confused by the similarity of their values to those of the Mafia code, and it made me wonder, however unlikely this seemed, whether these men were not in fact mafiosi rather than ordinary criminals, and this confusion remained until I started working with anti-mafia activists in Sicily, which included kids in rehabilitation. I learned that these values particularly belong to men in disadvantaged areas, such as the modern and neglected suburbs of Sicily's larger towns. Today, as in the sixties, kids here often leave school illiteratexxxii (I Ragazzi delle Piagge), they do not respect the police ("without their badge, what sort of 'man' would they be?"), and they do not trust the State. Instead they look up to the Mafia.

While working with anti-mafia television journalist, Pino Maniaci, someone in the town of Castelvetrano (the home of fugitive boss Matteo Messina Denaro) had written a graffiti which said: MATTEO M. DENARO I NEED YOUR HELP. PLEASE LIGHT MY PATH, COURAGEOUS MAN. (The Scream of Telejato) Ingui confirms
this when, at a conference, he says he is struck by the way his kids in rehabilitation eulogise and mythologise Mafia bosses such as Matteo Messina Denaro. (*Wind of Change*)

The Mafia code appears, therefore, to be based on old Sicilian values of masculinity, as are the values of disadvantaged men, however the Mafia has manipulated and exploited the code for its own ends. I will now compare the use of the code in both milieus.

**Respect:** The most important thing for both *mafiosi* and the disadvantaged, and still many Sicilians today, is the accumulation and maintenance of respect (the word normally used instead of honour in Sicily) which should be seen as a capital resource. In the old peasant economy to be respected was something positive and could help a man get work, because such a reputation meant he was serious, trustworthy and hardworking, and so someone to employ or do deals with. This accumulation of respect was the indirect manifestation of competition between men, the real issue being a competition for scarce resources which, when it comes to work, still exists today.

Within the Mafia gaining respect is necessary if a man is to hold his own within the organization, as well as operate as a *mafioso* within the wider community: "... respect is the most precious thing in life. Women, money and health come and go; but respect once lost has gone for ever." Anonymous 1991:13) What this *mafioso* does not say is that respect in the Mafia is linked to fear, the more
a man is feared the more he is respected, and this is also true of the disadvantaged.

Unlike with *mafiosi*, however, gaining respect and being feared among the disadvantaged is only useful within their own group, it sorts the men out into a loose hierarchy that operates in the streets and the bars. Accumulating respect in the way I describe is also one of the only means through which they may gain status and gratification. The degree of fear that some individuals may gain gives the stronger men power over the weaker men but this, unlike with *mafiosi*, may not impress anyone outside their group, such as the middle-class with whom they may in some way interreact.\textsuperscript{xxv}

Given that respect is ephemeral and so fragile, the stronger a man the less he can permit any slight that may diminish him, however small and unintended it may be. The perpetrator has to be dealt with immediately, though in what way depends on the nature and degree of the slight, and on the relationship between the men involved.

I observed this when Nicola, a strong man who did well as a small builder, won on the horses and invited people to a meal in a classy Florentine fish restaurant to celebrate. Doing this was a way of gaining status in the street and bars through conspicuous hospitality. The waiter brought the wine which Nicola then poured, so filling our glasses. His *amico di cuore*, a 'weaker' man called Stefano who had learned to be a waiter in prison, reprimanded Nicola. He told him he should first pour a small amount in his glass to taste it, before filling all the
glasses. I am certain that me filming the lunch made Nicola more sensitive to the situation than he might otherwise have been, but he immediately dismissed Stefano's criticism with a rather clumsy joke: "The wine is still the same, no? So then?!" (Pawns in a Game)

There was another interesting instance when Nicola came out after a period of six months inside. During this time Stefano (who normally worked for Nicola) had done some work for one of Nicola's clients, a woman who lived in the street. This seemed acceptable given the circumstances, so I thought nothing of mentioning it. Stefano immediately explained the situation to Nicola and apologised. Even though they were close friends, Stefano clearly felt Nicola might think he had breached his trust, and he was very nervous indeed. Nicola was fine about it, but this moment revealed how the fear of offending was very present.

On quite another scale, when Maniaci (local anti-mafia television journalist) continued to publicly mock the Mafia despite it giving him warnings (by burning his car, for example), the boss's son tried but failed to strangle him. He continued working as before, but now had a permanent police escort. An example of how Maniaci belittles the Mafia is found in the situation of the graffiti mentioned earlier. Having shown the graffiti Maniaci continued: "... we go to Castelvetrano ... to talk about Matteo Messina ... Last year someone wanted him as Mayor, and someone else wanted to meet him. Today, more than needing help, someone needs him to light his path. This is a moment to be clear and to reflect, to assume responsibility. It's a moment for collective consciousness, to decide where one
stands. ... They say Matteo Messina Denaro continues to hide here. We hope he'll soon be caught, that he gives himself up because, after all, he is a PDM, *pezzo di merda* - a piece of shit ... so to all those people who continue to praise a fugitive *mafioso*, we have something to say: do you truly think these are men of honour? These are men of dishonour, who have dishonoured an entire land, Sicily. Who have dishonoured all honest citizens on this island. Who've organised massacres, killed married couples, destroyed families. But you still think in this way. You are more disgusting than *mafiosi*. You are more disgusting than *mafiosi.*" (*The Scream of Telejato*) Maniaci has a permanent escort because his insults belittle the Mafia in the eyes of his many viewers, they are too public to let pass, and his life must always be in danger. But it is exactly the same mechanism as with the slight inflicted on Nicola by Stefano.

**Omertà.** This, as has already been described, is a value that is still shared by many ordinary Sicilians, be it through belief in this value, thinking one should mind one's own business, or from fear. The Mafia has an interest in maintaining this situation as it protects them from being reported to the police, and as has been described, in Castellammare it still clearly functions.

Within the Mafia adherence to *omertà* is considered to be essential as a quality of manhood. Through giving primary importance to this value the organisation protects itself from disloyalty and lack of discretion among its own members even though, when under threat from within the organisation, *mafiosi* do collaborate with the police and talk.
Among the disadvantaged respecting *omertà* is also an important measure of manhood, though it was not normally useful as a form of protection unless they committed some petty crime. During my research in Florence I was at first surprised that the dominant man, Nicola, had Stefano as a close friend. I came to realise, however, that there was considerable flexibility within the system, so enabling it to function in a situation where most men would otherwise be failures.

Thus while most men in this milieu would be considered weak (or a failure) in some aspects, they were able to redeem themselves through others in which they were successful. So while Stefano was unable to control his wife who dealt in and took drugs alongside her son, he had vindicated himself in the eyes of other men through *omertà*. When in prison he had witnessed a murder but he refused to say anything to the authorities, even though his sentence was extended to ten years as a result. For this Stefano was hugely respected and it maintained his position in the hierarchy of men.

**The family:** The family as an economic unit is still important within Sicilian society and its economy, although this is a situation that is changing. Loyalty to the nuclear and extended families is still a significant value therefore, to the extent that during the campaign for the local elections this potential conflict of loyalties was sometimes brought up: "... the closer we come to voting, the more tense things become. Tension among the candidates because the cousin is voting... but the uncle had promised... but then this happened, and that
happened... and usually unpleasant things happen." (mayoral candidate in *A Town in Sicily*)

As in other Sicilian social milieus, the blood family is honoured among the disadvantaged, and whereas it is perfectly acceptable for women to work (as has always been the case in peasant culture), men accept the ideal of being their family's chief provider and feel their success or failure in this to be a measure of their manhood. But failure is inevitably more frequent here than in other milieus because they may not be able to earn enough in a consistent way, possibly leaving the wife to be the primary bread winner.\textsuperscript{xxvi}

Mafiosi, however, are in the anomalous position of having to honour two families, their blood one and their fictitious one. Unlike the Calabrian 'ndranghetta, a Cosa Nostra mafia 'family' or *cosca* is not necessarily based on a blood family, though some families have a tradition of being *mafioso*. However the fictitious family must be prioritised over the blood family, so their first loyalty goes to the *cosca*. Considerable symbolic weight is given to the *cosca* by using the ideology of the family, and so a *mafioso*'s ties to it.

Once again this unusual priority, this distortion of a deep-rooted Sicilian value, has to do with protecting the organisation. Curiously anti-mafia activists talk about amoral familism in terms of the Mafia, an idea of the family that is centred entirely on itself at the expense of all else and all others, which permits it to make exceptions and distort the normal rules of civil society. According to
Joe Bananas the Mafia can compromise everything except the sacred trilogy of "family, religion, attachment to Sicily". (Cavadi 2009:41)

Work: For most Sicilians there is dignity in working well and earning money to maintain the family. To have the reputation of being a serious man and a good worker enabled men in the peasant economy to find jobs more easily, and this is still true today. When I passed my neighbour, a builder put on traffic duty because they were doing works on a local road, I grinned and waved inanely. Although there was no other traffic, he only acknowledged me with a tiny nod, and neither smiled nor waved. When I saw him later I commented on this. He gravely explained that traffic duty was a serious job, if you did it badly you could cause an accident, and so it would be inappropriate to be distracted by anyone, be they friend or family, or a neighbour like me. Throughout my research I found this attitude towards work, whatever that work might be.

Here too Mafiosi see the situation differently and again distort normal Sicilian values. They gain no dignity or status through work. For them to have money without being seen to work for it carries its own prestige, possibly something they picked up on from aristocrats in the past, for whom they were originally estate managers. Nor is money in itself the primary objective in Mafia business, rather it remains "subordinate to the principle end of gaining power". (Cavadi 2009:20)
**Women:** In the past most Sicilian women were limited to the family, the family business, and the home, whereas the men had to ensure their women always behaved in an appropriate way lest they shamed the family, so losing their men respect. Although the situation has totally changed now, there are still some points of interest in the two groups that chiefly concern us here.

If a married Sicilian from a disadvantaged background is able to afford a mistress or have girl-friends outside his marriage (as was quite common among Florentine men), and provided he is suitably discrete, then there is prestige attached to the situation, at least among men outside the family. However if he is unable to afford such a divertimento - amusement, he would be seen as scemo - stupid, lacking in judgement, in respect for his wife, and in his duty to his family.

Within the Mafia, however, even though they may be able to afford them, mistresses are discouraged, and looking at the wives of other mafiosi is forbidden. Given that keeping a mistress may give prestige to men throughout Sicilian society, this may seem unexpected but, yet again, it has to do with the protection of the organisation. Trouble with women may cause jealousies and disloyalty in the blood family as well as the fictitious family, and this can lead to indiscretions and betrayals that may harm the Mafia. As such this represents another inversion within the Sicilian values of masculinity.

**Power:** As has been said, the Mafia’s dominant interest is power. There are several areas in which mafiosi may wish to exercise it, within their local community as well as power in relation to corrupt politicians and other
representatives of the State. For *mafiosi* power is useful to their organisation and in the community. In a similar way politicians may be said to be more interested in power than in money, provided they have sufficient money, and it is their successful (or otherwise) use of power that may gain or lose them votes.

On the other hand, the disadvantaged are in no position to gain power at all, except among themselves though the adherence to and execution of their values of manhood, and even this is difficult for them to achieve. Yet it remains important to them as it is almost their sole source of identity and status, at least within their group. Unlike the Mafia, but similarly to most ordinary Sicilians, for them money is more important than power because they lack it and need it - just for everyday survival. Acquiring it and using it well may also bring them respect, whether it was ill-gotten or not, such as buying a vehicle which may help them get work, as was the case for Stefano when, with great pride, he managed to buy a small three-wheeled *ape*-truck. (*Pawns in a Game*)

If, however, their families suffer from any unnecessary expenditures these men will lose respect, and be seen as *scemo* instead. As has already been described, Nicola used his winnings on the horses to offer lunch to his friends in the street. He gained prestige from this because the money had been won and so an unexpected surplus, and he also let it be known that he had kept back a fair amount for his family.

Mafiosi also indulge in conspicuous hospitality as a way of expressing and affirming their status. A builder I know was invited to the wedding of a Mafia
boss’s daughter. Afterwards he talked about the wedding meal with some awe, recounting how the boss had filled his swimming pool with live lobsters. Among some people, at least, he had gained in prestige for having attended such a wedding meal, and so the boss's prestige spread out to benefit those who were there.

**Violence:** In the previous section the use of Mafia violence was mentioned in relation the State, the first being ruled illegitimate by the State, and the latter being legitimate when correctly applied. Within the present context Mafia violence and violence among the disadvantaged are seen as being legitimate as well as sometimes necessary not least, in the case of the Mafia, because it does not recognise the official system of law and justice. The Mafia's use of violence is controlled, it has to be sanctioned by the *cosca*, and it is only used as an ultimate resource. As such it is chiefly used to create fear of the organisation, and so maintain its system and authority in its territory. It does not add prestige to anyone who uses it, however, because the man who delivers it is merely acting as an arm of the Mafia.

Violence among disadvantaged men, however, is less controlled, most often spontaneous as when a fight may break out. The exception is in situations of vendetta, when reprisal is likely to be calculated. For them the more measured violence of the vendetta is still perceived as being a necessary part of their social system, in part to regain any loss of respect, reinforced by lacking the means or
resources which would enable them to turn to the law, which they have no reason to trust anyway.

Both physical strength (probably because most of them are manual workers) and the use of violence may also add to a man's status in this milieu. I never saw the men in Florence use violence, but the North African drug dealers would slash each other’s faces with knives so that most of them had scars, and sometimes open wounds too. The Italians did not like this method of violence, they thought it \textit{scemo}, but recognised it as legitimate within that culture. Instead I witnessed vendettas being played out in a very different and even more public way.

I followed Florentine medieval football through a year, a violent game which was part football, part rugby, and part wrestling. In June the four teams played against each other through three matches held in the Piazza di S. Croce, in front of the famous church. Nearly all the players came from the disadvantaged suburbs, many of them were \textit{meridionali} - Southern Italians, and this game provided them a controlled outlet for their violence in a situation in which physical strength was appreciated. The annual tournament was more problematic, however, and men played out vendettas that belonged to the street because they could do so with impunity, without it apparently contravening the law. However this was only between men in different teams and not within their own team. The year I was researching, however, police heard of threats being made to different players, and one of them specifically mentioned a close friend of
The police therefore sent warning messages to the different teams and the Prefect of Tuscany came in person to meet each team, admonishing the players to stick to the rule and avoid incidents.

As it turned out if was the worst ever year for violence. One player had his knee deliberately crunched into the ground, so causing multiple fractures. Another player managed to slip a chisel onto the pitch and attempted to gauge out Nicola's friend's eye with it. Nicola himself was severely beaten up by three players who went for him at the beginning of the game, though he was later criticised for having brought this on himself, having stepped forward before the starter-whistle blew. But the attack was so viciousness that one could only assume it was personal. Nicola ended up in hospital with three broken ribs and a punctured lung. All three incidents were certainly vendettas being played out.

**Changing the humus**

The ethnography (more in the films than what is referred to here) also provides a context which goes beyond the 'humus' I am discussing here, embracing conditions of life, social practices, weak institutions and relationships that may condition views and events. Through the visual ethnography, the over-all situation is shown to be extraordinarily complex, and thus simply focusing on the 'humus, as I am doing in this paper, is inevitably reductive, but it also brings greater clarity to the work of the activists.
The previous two sections I have largely focused on the *mentalità*, or the humus in which the Mafia is rooted and on which it depends for its survival in its present form. When social anti-mafia activists speak of a way of thinking that needs to be changed, this is what they are talking about, and also why they tend to say it is a process of re-education rather than straight education: they are not instilling a set of values, they are attempting to change an existing one, which is far more demanding.

One of the difficulties is that such education is entirely voluntary at present, and therefore patchy. There is a small budget available in schools for anti-mafia teaching and activities, but beyond that it is left to the teachers' own discretion, there is no systematic or obligatory program. That said, there is an emphasis on civic education in Italian schools, and this refers to "that area of values and problems that essentially concern the dimension of citizenship, without forgetting its connections with the ethical, civil, social and economic issues relating to the individual and the worker" (Gunnarson 2008:83) Although civic education covers a broad area, and may be interpreted differently by different teachers, throughout an emphasis is placed on the fundamental rights and duties of all individuals and citizens.

The anti-mafia activists therefore have an important role to play in this field though, again, what is done is for the different associations and individuals to decide. One of the criticisms levelled at the social anti-mafia is that it does not reach new people, it is always the same ones that turn up at
the various events. This may be true of adults, and probably inevitably so
because adults are less able or willing to change, but every year the activists
are reaching another generation of children, and great hope lies here.

Events organised by activists are imaginative and varied, and often
colourful. But one consistent theme throughout is the commemoration of
innocent victims of the Mafia, with Libera celebrating all innocent victims of
the Mafia throughout Italy on March 21st. They would like this to be
recognised officially and become adopted as their 'Holocaust' day.

Remembering these dead is a way of keeping the Mafia's murders alive
in the collective memory of the island, but it is also a way of teaching
something about the history of the Mafia. (Wind of Change) In this way it is
felt that these victims did not die for nothing.

The activists are very aware that changing a way of thinking cannot be
done by citing laws and penal codes. Instead there is a search to reach
everyone, but especially the young, at an emotional level rather than an
intellectual level, and though this may sometimes seem tough, it is effective.

My first example was an individual initiative done through a social
centre (a villa confiscated from a mafioso) in Castellammare that is run by
the association Castel Libero. Domenico Grassa, a young lawyer (who also
works for Libera), devised a four month course (one session a week) for
sixteen-seventeen year olds, all from one school but from different
backgrounds. The objective of the course was for the kids to learn about a
Mafia victim from their town, a forester called Gaspere Palmeri who, in 1991, had been killed in a Mafia cross-fire and was now almost forgotten.

Grassa invited the kids to write an imaginary letter that might have been written by the young forester, telling people about his life and aspirations. This was supported with copies of old photographs given to the project by Gaspare's family. By being invited to step into Gaspare's shoes, the kids were encouraged to use their imagination, and through writing this letter they came to emphasise with the victim and his family - by the end he was no longer just a name but had become a part of the kids' consciousness. When completed, this letter was stuck onto a series of boards which were hung from olive trees in the space where participants of the Libera' summer workshops camped. This further extended the project's life.

Another deeply moving moment was when Ingui took a group of disadvantaged kids to visit the bunker where a twelve-year old boy, Giuseppe Di Matteo, was imprisoned, strangled, and his body dissolved in acid. In order to stop Giuseppe's father, a mafioso, from turning State witness, the boy was kidnapped and held captive for two years during which time his guards never, ever, spoke to him.

The kids first visited the miniscule and windowless under-ground bunker where the boy had been kept and killed, and then they gathered in the garden where Ingui read from the court record of the subsequent trial, so using the testimony of one of Giuseppe's murderers. The horrific details
given in the captors' own words made it very immediate: the boy had been killed and his body was left to be dissolved by acid. One of the mafiosi went to check: "I went down below. I tried to stir it with a stick. All I saw was a piece of leg. The corpse of the poor boy had been entirely liquified, nothing was left except for the rope that had been around his neck. I took up the metal drum and seeing the rope Brusca joked that we should keep it as a trophy." (A Wind of Change)

When Ingui finished his reading, the kids remained totally silent before making comments that revealed shock and disbelief, with some of them saying that the men involved should have been tortured and then given to the pigs. This approach may seem exaggerated, however making a child's suffering alive to these kids is an effective way of countering the values they grew up with. It compels them to realise that the Mafia is truly bad, and not some Robin Hood association that did not harm children and women, and took care of the community.

The process of re-education is slow, and it is too soon to evaluate the work being done by social anti-mafia activists at present. However the Judiciary and the police are clear they cannot succeed in eliminating the Mafia in Sicily without the contribution of the voluntary sector. Mafiosi that are arrested and removed are always replaced, so there has to be a partnership between the forces of order, the Judiciary, and the work of re-education.
The Prefect for the province of Trapani expressed this powerfully at an event organised on land confiscated from a *mafioso*. There was a fierce sirocco blowing the day this terrain was definitively confiscated by the court. That night the ripe wheat in these fields was set alight by *mafiosi*. The following day Libera organised an event on these burnt fields which activists attended, as well as anti-mafia magistrate Piero Grillo and the Prefect Leopoldo Falco.

Out there, with a wind that made it difficult to hear or to breathe, speeches were made before the Prefect started up a harvester that was standing by, ready to save the wheat that had survived the fire. In his speech the Prefect said:

This fire will be one of many fires today. I think that the great Mafia, that always seemed it would win... if it's reduced to burning what we've taken from them, it's taken a significant step backwards. I notice that every time I speak of Libera, people start getting irritated, as though I was saying who knows what. I put forward a simple concept. Libera's aims coincide totally with those of the State, and Libera is on the front line and is thank God, strongly present. Libera is part of the establishment, so those who attack Libera attack the State. It's so banal, so obvious. (*A Wind of Change*)
Conclusion

My reason for writing this paper was to offer a context for my visual ethnography on the subject of social anti-mafia activism, but I also wanted it to be an end in itself. Its chief aim is to explain a way of thinking in Sicily that permits the Mafia to continue in its present form, a humus that social anti-mafia activists are anxious to change - through example as well as a process of re-education. Although the focus of this paper is narrow, the ethnography reveals much more and we see activists involved in a myriad different situations - not only seeking to re-educate Sicilians, but attacking institutions and criticising the State (for instance Pino Maniaci in *The Scream of Telejato*).

I have examined the two important elements (among many others) that make it difficult to eradicate the Mafia in Sicily, a set of values and pragmatic considerations that cannot simply be legislated against, which is why the situation requires a process of re-education alongside the work of the police and the judiciary. These elements are those of social consensus and cultural embeddedness.

Cultural embeddedness has to do with a set of values, some of which are said to be antique, and often thought to be shared by all Sicilians though, as was explained at the beginning, this is not so. Whatever the situation was in the past, many of these values are mostly residual in the vast majority of the educated middle classes, although *omertà* and the family are still
significant. However they remain important for two groups, the first being the Mafia, and the second being disadvantaged men. Among disadvantaged men the values are probably reasonably close to those held and had sense in the old peasant economy, but are adhered to by these men to fill a gap left through lack of education, lack of opportunity, lack of work, and a lack of status within the wider society. How well they put them into practice defines them as men in lieu of much else, and gives them a place within the loose hierarchy of men with whom they socialise in the street and in the bars. I should add that while I saw the men continually seeking to impress each other through the two years I spent researching, I never saw them impressing any of the women.

The Mafia, on the other hand, distorted and exploited these values to their own ends - to make their own members feel important (men above men), to mystify people in the community and, most importantly, to protect themselves and their association.

Social consensus is something quite different, although it is shored up by the embedded value of omertà. It has more to do with practical considerations on the part of a wider population that turns to the Mafia system, directly or indirectly, for those things that it can offer because this is easier or more certain or, as in the case of money loans, because the banks will not help them. Indeed, as emerges in Scorched Earth, some bank managers may even be in collaboration with the Mafia. It is this acceptance
of the Mafia as something useful that permits the Mafia to remain rooted in this humus.

Although social consensus is supported by *omertà*, I would otherwise describe the situation as one of fluidity, one in which a majority negotiate their way through the options, their choices being based on pragmatism rather than on their values.

The work of the voluntary sector is extraordinary, it is difficult to know how they keep going week after week, always with astonishing energy, and sometimes within a hostile climate. Moreover it is not that they are underfunded, but they are not funded at all which, given their acknowledged importance in the struggle by representatives of the State, must be discouraging. I have said that it is difficult to assess their over-all effect as yet, but there are instances which do give us an occasional glimpse of what may be going on in term of the humus changing.

During the local election in Castellammare the PDL (Berlusconi), a party that was traditionally supported by the Mafia, was - as expected - strongly in the lead. A senior politician, D'Ali, representative of the province of Trapani and a senator in parliament, supported the local PDL party in its campaign, even though this man was being tried for Mafia association at the time.

Libera, which is politically neutral, organised a public meeting in which the different mayoral candidates would answer questions put to them by the convenor. The problem of the PDL being associated with Senator D'Ali came
up, and all the mayoral candidates turned on PDL candidate Russo, but his
defence was unconvincing. The large hall was surprisingly but tellingly full,
and bedlam broke out. Russo was seriously wounded through this
confrontation, and the PDL dropped back, only coming third at the elections,
after the young activist politicians. This must be indicative of a shift,
however small, in the town's attitude towards the Mafia.

Ultimately, however, the root cause of the difficult situation in Western
Sicily is not so much the Mafia in itself as a State that is insufficiently strong
in places, with corrupt elements that provides sufficient space and
opportunity for the Mafia to operate. It is in this sense that the State, for
all its undoubted efforts and its many successes in the struggle against the
Mafia, remains - if only in part - none the less complicit with it too.

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Naor Ben-Yehoyada for reading this paper and making a number of useful
suggestions. And also Jane and Peter Schneider who generously gave their
time to view the films and give me feed-back.
All mistakes, however, are entirely mine.

1 For Lo Verso there are only three real mafia associations, Cosa Nostra, the 'ndrangheta, and the Albanian Casalesi. Others, for instance the Camorra, is ordinary criminality of mafia stamp. (Giorgi 2019:19)
2 When I am specifically referring to the Sicilian Cosa Nostra, I use Mafia with a capital. When I use the term generically, I write mafia with the small m.
3 For a discussion on associations in Sicily see G. Notari Cultura in (s)vendita. L’associazionismo culturale palermitano tra innovazione e frammentazione. FrancoAngeli  2010
iv For a discussion on honour and shame see the classic work by Peristiany J. G. Honour and Shame: the Values of Mediterranean Society 1966. University of Chicago Press. For a critique of any attempt to generalise systems of honour throughout the Mediterranean see Herzfield 1980.
5 For a reliable description of the Mafia, its structure and its rules, see Falcone and Padovani, Men of Honour, 1991.
vi I have met foreigners in the province of Palermo who happily pay the pizzo, and find the collectors charming.
vii Augusto Cavadi private conversation
viii Vincenzo Desiderio  2020 Libera leader in Castellammare del Golfo. Private conversation
ix de Bromhead 1998 Ph.D. thesis Masculinity and Sexual Identity amongst a Small Group of Petty-Criminals in a Florentine Street
a This situation of social change is described by Lampedusa in his novel The Leopard.
xii Santini U in Mafia 2015, and Cavadi A. 2009. However according to Ben-Yehoyada N. this may now be changing. (Private correspondence)
xii For a readable introduction to the history of the Sicilian Mafia, see Dickie J, Cosa Nostra, 2004.
xiiii Vincenzo Desiderio 2020 Private conversation
xv Domenico Raccuglia, considered the second most prominent figure in Cosa Nostra, was wanted for multiple charges of kidnapping and murder, and had been on the run for 15 years.
xix Vincenzo Desiderio 2020. Private conversation
xvii Vincenzo Desiderio 2020. Private conversation
xvii The Manchester Guardian Friday 10 April, 2020
xvi Salvatore Ingui. 2020. Private correspondence
xv For a description of an important anti-mafia initiative in Palermo, read Schneider & Schneider 2003 Reversible Destiny.
xvii Antonino Giorgi, Università Catolica Brescia
xv For a discussion on omertà, read Di Bella Dire o tacere in Sicilia
xxii In the sixties the education in these areas was poor, and they left school aged fourteen. Today school leaving age is sixteen, and if they leave illiterate it is because they have not studied, often because they are not supported in the family.
xxiii Brøgger 1968 (Montevarese)
xxiv Man of Respect is written anonymously by a Sicilian mafioso.
xxv de Bromhead 1998
xxvi In Cortile Cascine, a film about a Palermo slum in the sixties, shows unemployed men, and so failures in terms of providing for their families. As such one woman says "they are left empty inside".
xxviii According to Ben-Yehoyada, some say it’s changing now and money is becoming more important. That you can offend mafiosi but don’t touch their money
xxviii Whenever there is a sirocco wind blowing, there are many destructive fires.

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**FILMOGRAPHY**

Toni de Bromhead [www.tonidebromhead.uk](http://www.tonidebromhead.uk)

**The Kids of the Piagge**
Shows the difficulties in educating disadvantaged kids in a disadvantaged suburb of Florence where there is a large population of Sicilians.

**Pawns in a Game**
A study of masculinity as played out by Sicilian criminals in a Florentine street.

**The Scream of Telejato.**
Pino Maniaci is a television journalist who runs his own community television station, and uses it to speak out against the Mafia.

**A Town in Sicily**
A group of young people decide to contest their local elections because they are sick of the corrupt or indifferent political situation in their home town.

**Casa Nostra**
A group of young people in Castelammare take over a small property confiscated from the Mafia and put it to social use.

**Scorched Earth**
Four men tell us why they decided to pull out of paying the *pizzo*, and describe what they had to go through as a result.
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