

Understanding the Mafia

A project presented by Irene Segone, directed towards young people and the general public.

2020-2021



Figure 1. Diaz, Alejandro. "La Mafia è una sola". *Antimafia*, 2019.

Index.

Introduction.

I. Educating Ourselves.

Session 1.

Definitions.
Origins.

Session 2.

The role of women.
Evolutions.

Session 3.

Interdisciplinary analysis of the mafia.

Session 4.

The businesses of the mafia.

Session 5.

A global phenomenon,
with special focus on the Mediterranean.

Session 6.

The fight against the mafia.
Innocent victims of the mafia.

II. Educating others.

Resources

Works cited

INTRODUCTION.

Aim. This project aims at understanding the mafia, why it is important to talk about it and how it relates to our studies. To do so the project aims at establishing a reflective and formative path that allows a group of young people to first explore and educate themselves and then transmit the knowledge gained from this first part, to the others. It is aimed at setting one further building block in the formation of a culture of legality.

- Why is it important to talk about it?
- How does it relate with our studies?
- How can we communicate our knowledge to others?

Approaches. Before getting into the specifics of the setup of this project I would like to highlight the two approaches I will be using throughout this project. First of all it is a project in which we learn together and hence rather than having me teaching others it will be all us of discussing and looking at information to try and understand it together. This because I am not an expert in the field and I strongly believe that it is a much more efficient approach to learning, understanding and remembering the things that are being discussed. Secondly, while all Italians or people familiar with the Italy are welcome to join and are actually encouraged be part of this project, it is designed in such a way that it is mainly directed to those that do not know much about Italy and its culture. This because one of the fundamental aspects of this project is also to deconstruct stereotypes attributed to the mafia, which I more often hear from people that associate Italians to “pizza, mozzarella and mafia”.

The set up. To comply with the aims of this project, the project is set up in two parts. The first part, educating ourselves, will be carried out in six sessions that discuss the various thematics relating to the mafia. The second part, educating others, will be a more hands-on approach aiming at consolidating what we have learned and what we will take from it and transfer it to others. This part will focus on the creation of collages summarizing our take ons from the six previous sessions and will honor the victims of the mafia. This collages will

then be exhibited, preferably, in a public space where the residents and tourists of the city will be able to see and question and learn.

This booklet. This booklet is a means aimed at helping with the reflections and in the formation of the reflective path that you will take throughout this project. Use it to jot down thoughts, ideas, emotions at any point of the sessions or evolution of the project as a way to be able to go back and see how these evolved and formed your concluding understanding and takeaways of the mafia.

I. EDUCATING OURSELVES.

SESSION 1. DEFINITIONS. ORIGINS.

DEFINITIONS.

Brainstorm. What is the mafia? What does the term mean? Where does the term come from? What do you think of when you hear the word mafia? Write down as many words or drawings you can think of that relate or define the mafia.

Various definitions.

I. Its etymology: various theories

Tuscan word maffia meaning *misery* (Fioretti 65, Veltri, Ziliotto).

Luigi Capuana: “*mafiosa was the name given to a beautiful girl, mafioso to an object that the french would call chic*” (Fioretti 70).

Arabic language, deriving either from the arabic word Ma-Hias meaning *bravado (braggart)* or from Mu'afak meaning *protection of the weak* or from Maha meaning *a cave of rocks* (Veltri, Antilibano, Fioretti 69).

II. Its evolving definition: the written uses of the term

The first written use of the term mafia dates to Giuseppe Rizzotto and Gaetano Mosca's theatrical play “*I mafiusi di la Vicaria*”, published in 1863 (Fioretti 65, Antilibano, Ziliotto, Giannini 6).

Article 416-bis of the law Rognoni - La Torre, passed on 13 september 1982 - “*Anyone related to a mafia-related association is punishable under this law. Mafia related associations are composed of at least three people and which make use of intimidation and establish the principle omertà (the silence of those that do not denounce the crimes committed) within the population, as to commit their crimes. They are able to manage or control in an indirect or direct manner economic activities, grants, authorizations, contracts and public services either to gain profit or unjust advantages for oneself or others. If the association is found to be armed, defined by its ability to use weapons or explosive materials, the punishment augments. Lastly, all materials and means used to commit the crime will be confiscated*” (“LEGGE 13”, Ortega 24-25, Chiabrandi 1, Maugeri, Montante and Saso 144-145, Santino).

“Mafia is delusion of omnipotence” (Nicaso 12).

III. Its evolving definition: the media

In the American threology of 1972 entitled *The Godfather*, the term mafia comes to signify the respect for the family, being respected, vengeance as justice and a system of rules and discipline (Fioretti 73).

Let's analyze our thoughts. How many of the terms used to describe the mafia are historically or currently used to define the mafia? What does it say about our knowledge on the topic or the way in which society shapes this knowledge? How many of our thoughts are based on stereotypes?

- What do you think is the best definition to use when talking about the mafia?

ORIGINS.

Cosa nostra. The mafia started in Sicily, in 1812, with the abolition of the feudal system (Leone, Veltri, Fioretti 72, Giannini 10, Gribaudo 182, Sulli, Chiabrandi 2).

Omertà: the silence of those that do not denounce the crimes mafiose (Leone, Veltri, Maugeri).

- What do you think were the motivations that led Mussolini to become the first ‘politician’ to publicly acknowledge the mafia’s existence and start a fight against it?

Let's talk. It is interesting because within the pyramid-like structure, the system takes the appearance of a democracy, with a system of elections, but this is rather flawed and hence it takes the form of a dictatorship. Why do you think they nonetheless establish flawed elections? Is it because having a democratic facade is fundamental for their legitimacy of maintenance?

The structure of Cosa nostra.

The *cosca* or *famiglia*: the basic unit in the pyramid-like structure of cosa nostra.

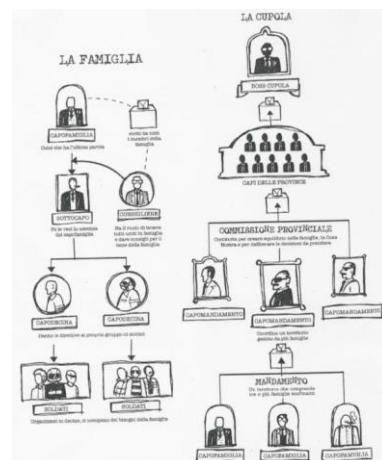


Figure 2. Mariani, Federico. “La mafia spiegata ai ragazzi”. Arnoldo Mondadori Editore S.p.A. 2010, pg. 144.

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