

### SESSION 3. INTERDISCIPLINARY ANALYSIS OF THE MAFIA.

**Little recap of the previous session.** Just to refresh our minds on some of the issues touched upon in the last session and introduce some of the topics we will be discussing in this one, here is a short video in which Roberto Saviano discusses the different associations mafiose in Italy. Here is the [link](#).

**Interdisciplinary analysis.** While this section will try and isolate the various disciplines that have tried to analyze the mafia, we will see that these are all in some way interconnected and that an interdisciplinary approach is hence the best way to get a more complete understanding of it. This section will also try and answer the following question of how understanding the mafia relates to the studies we are undertaking.

#### ANTHROPOLOGY.

**The discipline.** Anthropology is often referred to as “the science of humanity” and as professor Ulf Hannerz puts it, it is the study of “human beings in aspects ranging from the biology and evolutionary history of *Homo sapiens* to the features of society and culture that decisively distinguish humans from other animal species”. As to study humanity in its complexity the discipline takes many different forms and hence has branched off into various groups; physical anthropology, cultural anthropology or ethnology, social anthropology, linguistic anthropology and psychological anthropology (Hannerz).

- Can the mafia be looked through an anthropological perspective? In what ways?

**Cultural anthropology.** While all these branches can be very interesting to analyze, cultural anthropology, gives a quite complete analysis of the phenomenon mafioso. This is because, while undoubtedly all associations mafiosi are very different in their origins and organisation, we can talk about a common “culture of mafia” (Palermo 1). By culture we mean, as defined by anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor, in 1871, “the complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and say any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Hannerz). It’s a network of people that create relations with common objectives and a certain way of living (Ziliotto). The mafia, which was able to expand and “colonize” many other regions of Italy and the world, not only conquered the market, but also create a “culture of mafia” that encompasses a notion of belonging and identity that not only encompasses the affiliated individuals, but society as a whole, setting laws, customs and habits that must be respected by all (Palermo 2,5-6). The mafia was able to, first with its original “protective entity” and ritualistic organization, later using violent and terrorist tactics, create a culture composed of three values; 1) honor, 2) secrecy and 3) *omertà*, which dictate the codes and social norms one must follow to maintain an adequate behavior. This culture encompassed on one hand those that are affiliated with the mafia and are therefore men of honor, hence loyal by definition, and those that are not affiliated, that even though witness the many actions of the mafia, they do not denounce and remain silent, coexisting with the mafia, and in some ways becoming part of the mafia (Palermo 5-6, Ziliotto, Giannini 14-15, Maugeri). In fact, in an interview to the sicilian author Leonardo Sciascia, referring to the mafia, declared, in 1979, that “when I denounce the mafia, at the same time I suffer because within me, just like in any other sicilian, there is still the continuous presence and need of feeling mafioso. Hence, combatting the mafia, I fight also against myself; it’s like a laceration” (Palermo 6-7). All of this to conclude that, as stated in the maxiprocesso by Giovanni Falcone with the help of Tommaso Buscetta, the way to understand criminal mechanisms is to understand its culture and hence the internal, human, dynamics that form it. This is because it allows the creation of a parallel culture, just as strong but antagonistic. It is what we call in Italy today the *cultura della legalità*, culture or legality (Ziliotto).

- According to the criminologist Fabio Giannini, there are a few key factors allowing the associations mafiose to thrive: 1) absence of a strong identity, 2) lack of feeling of belonging to society or institutions, might be due to exploitative governative powers, as in Sicily, 3) lack of rights and established law of violence. To what extent do you agree? What do you think is the anthropological and cultural environment that allows associations mafiose to thrive (Giannini 42-43)?

## CRIMINOLOGY.

**The discipline.** Starting back in the 18th century, some individuals, such as Cesare Beccaria, started to question the justice system with its brutal tactics and its questionable efficiency. From there, various disciplines were combined to try and explain crime and delinquency, looking at its causes, its correction and its prevention. From there the discipline of criminology came about and in the last decades of the 20th century has evolved to include also victimology - the study “of the victims of crime, the relationships between victims and criminals, and the role of victims in the criminal events themselves” (Bernard and Mannheim).

**Causes of crime.** Throughout the evolution of the discipline, the conclusion made for what causes an individual to commit a crime is a mix of factors that interact with each other, including, biological, psychological, sociocultural and environmental factors (Giannini 15). Criminality can hence be explained as a “function of the person with the environment, that under anthropological terms, is conceived as an external factor that influences on the character of the person” (Giannini 18).

## ECONOMICS.

**The discipline.** In broad terms, economics is the social science that seeks to “analyze and describe the production, distribution, and consumption of wealth”. In particular, as pointed out by the economist Lionel Robbins, it seeks to study the “human behavior as a relationship between given ends and scarce means” (Blaug).

**Mafia and profit.** According to a study carried out by the University of Reggio Calabria in 2013, the mafia was able to accumulate a profit equivalent to 15% of the GDP per capita of Italy. The association mafiosa that generates the most of the profits is the camorra, followed by the ‘ndrangheta and cosa nostra. Drugs, prostitution and extortion alone generate 20 billion euros annually (Mercadante). Over the years the mafia has become an entrepreneur accumulating capital in four summative processes; 1) the formation of financial resources through various criminal activities, 2) using the resources to produce new illegal activities, 3) money laundering and 4) reinvestment of that money in the legal circuits of the economy (Chiabrande 3).

- How can an accurate estimation of such profits be calculated as they are all hidden? How can we differentiate between the money that has been accumulated from legal and illegal sources when we know that the mafia reinvests clean money in the legal economic circuits?
- What do you think are the main activities or markets in which the mafia acts and gains profit?

**‘Borghesia mafiosa’ - the bourgeoisie mafiosa.** The academic Umberto Santino, by analysing the phenomenon mafioso brought about the concept of *borghesia mafiosa* which even though was present back in the late 1830s when the aristocratic classes had close contact with the mafia, further crystallizes in the 1970s when we see the expansion of

associations mafiose both on a national and international level, due to globalization, and the accumulation of illegal profits due to the triumph of capitalism and neoliberalism.

Globalization has many criminological effects; in the peripheries, where the marginalization induces individuals to recur to illegal methods to gain economic stability and social status, and in the urban centers, where financialization makes it hard to distinguish between the legal and illegal capitals. Because of this, Santino concludes that while the State tries to combat the mafia by incarcerating the presumed heads of the mafia, they are not touching the *borghesia mafiosa*, found within the State and the political and economic powers (“La psicologia”, Pezzino 196, Sulli, Santino).

- What are some of the factors that allowed the mafia to expand and “colonize”? Migration?

**Neoliberalism.** Neoliberalism seems to favor the mafia, “or at least act with its same objectives”. They both have at the basis, an ideology of enrichment, with the only difference that capitalism allegedly uses legal means while the mafia illegal ones (Sulli).

- Is there a type of market and economy that could counteract this one and maybe even contrast the mafia?

## HISTORY.

**The discipline.** It is the reconstruction of events in chronological order, explaining their causes, using primary and secondary sources (“History”). It is important as it allows us to understand how phenomena and events form, evolve and reoccur.

- How can we reconstruct the history of associations mafiose when the mafia is “a phenomenon that tries to be invisible but at the same time has the necessity to be perceived by society as present and powerful” (Giannini 6, Soraci, “Analisi criminologica”, Maugeri)? What legitimate sources can be used?

## LEGAL STUDIES.

**Legal response to crime in Italy.** The italian penal code, identifies different typologies of deviance that are dealt with differently in its retributive consequence. The typologies depend on; 1) the delinquent capacity of an individual (122 c.p.), 2) the criminal capacity of an individual, 3) whether an offender pleaded guilty or not, and 4) the extent to which the individual poses a threat to society (penal code art. 102,103, 105, 108, 133, 203) (Giannini 21-22). The delinquent and criminal capacity are judged based on three characteristics; 1) psychological state of offender, 2) a crime of passion, or 3) recurring criminal offense (Giannini 23).

**Law n.646.** As previously seen, with the establishment of the law n. 646, or law Rognoni - La Torre, passed on 13 september 1982 we not only have a clear, legal definition of the mafia and its associations, but also a measure of holding such actors accountable and punishable.

- According to the criminologist Fabio Giannini, in his studies on mafiosi incarcerated before the art. 41 bis, he notes that within prisons mafiosi exert a dominant power and influence on the rest of the incarcerated and that incarceration is actually used to elevate one’s prestige and operates as a place for new encounters and recruitment (Giannini 33). Is incarceration an efficient method of holding mafiosi accountable and putting a stop to the mafia? What other methods of justice (restorative, re-investment) and accountability could be used?

## POLITICAL SCIENCE.

**The discipline.** It is the study of governance through the perspective of power - the ability to get the wanted outcomes. Initially studying purely the state, its organs and its institutions, has evolved to broaden the study to also include the “societal, cultural, and psychological factors that mutually influence the operation of government and the body politic” (Roskin).

**Power and legitimacy.** When looking at the sociocultural background in which the mafia evolved we see there is a common thread; the lack of a functioning State. This is because there seems to be an unfulfilled social contract, in which the State does not guarantee the protection of its people. Hence, we see the creation of the mafia that provides an alternative to the inefficiency of the State (Palermo 3, Ziliotto, “La psicologia”, Gribaudo 183, Catanzaro 185, Sulli).

- “Where the State does not arrive, the mafia does” (Melissari 70). Can the mafia be considered a State within the State? Where does it derive its legitimacy? From the services and protection it provides at first?

**Power.** When analyzing its source of power, we see that they monopolize the use of violence and intimidations in exchange for peace (Ziliotto, Gribaudo 183, Chiabrando 1, Maugeri). Another tactic used by the mafia is corruption (“La psicologia”, Sulli). They therefore mainly use what Joseph Nye refers to as ‘hard power’ - the use or threat of use of force or coercion, determined by military and economic outcomes (Nye).

- If we define terrorism as the use of violence to achieve a political agenda, can the mafia’s use of violence and intimidations be considered terrorism? Do terrorist organizations give some sort of protection in exchange for soldiers?

**Organization or regime.** An in depth analysis on the various structures of the associations mafiosi should be needed, but from the previously mentioned organizational methods, we can see that different approaches are used. While in cosa nostra there is a hierarchical type of structure, the camorra has a much more flexible structure that does not have a clear head.

- What regimes can be associated with these structures?

**International Relations.** If we consider the mafia to be a State within a State we can then analyze its relations with all of the associations mafiose within the world.

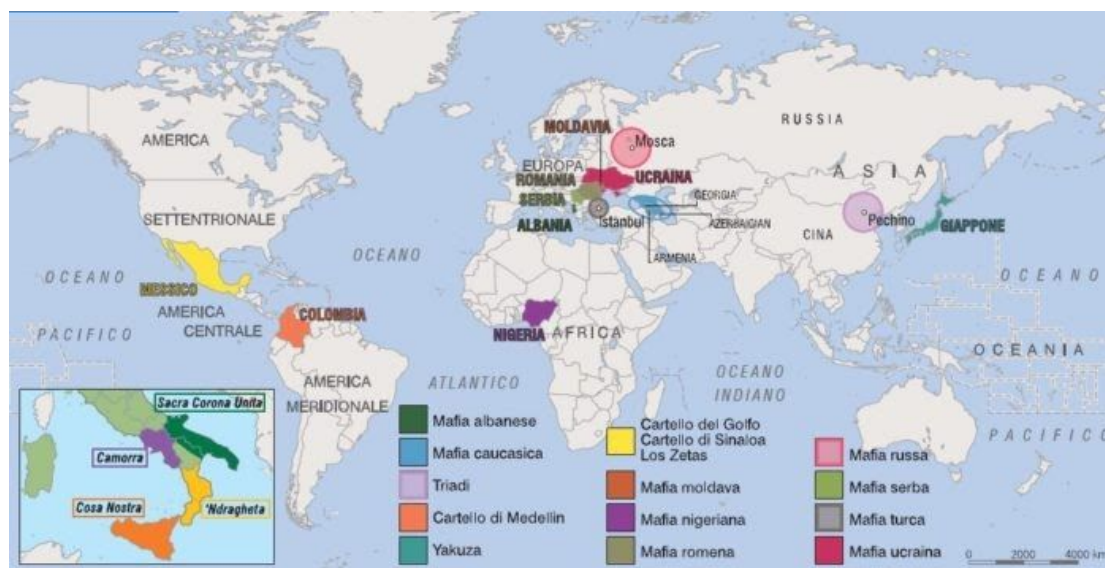


Figure . “Le mafie in Italia e nel mondo”. Studia Rapido.

## PSYCHOLOGY.

**The discipline.** Simply put, it is the study of “mental states and process and behaviour in humans and other animals” (Mischel).

**“Il pensiero mafioso”, the thought mafioso.** In psychology there are two fundamental forces that contribute to the process of determining one’s *pensiero* - thought. The first is egocentrism and relies on one’s thoughts centered around oneself, and the second is sociocentrism, relying one’s thoughts on the social group one belongs to. When analyzing the psychology of the mafia, in particular the associations mafiose in Sicily, the psychologist Innocenzo Fiore identified what he called the *pensiero mafioso*, based on the concept of family. The family, being the only institution in Sicily that has been stable over time, has become the only source of belonging within the society and hence the biological family coincides with the societal family. This makes it so that the individual within a family is not able to make any independent and autonomous decisions and allows for *cosa nostra* to remain strong, as explained in figure 14 (“La psicologia”, Giannini 8, 17, Soraci, Maugeri). On top of that, solidarity is created between the different families mafiose that create alliances (Giannini 33-35, Soraci). This analysis of the concept of family can further be analysed with its subdivision of three categories; 1) the maternal culture, 2) the paternal culture, and 3) the fraternal culture. The maternal culture, in which there is an exchange between the protection/care of the mother and the total obedience from the child, is the dominant culture within the family mafiosa. As previously mentioned when examining women’s role within the mafia, we see here, once again, that the mother has a fundamental role in the socialization process and transmission of values mafiosi (Giannini 16). Another important concept that is a fundamental component of the *pensiero mafioso* is the concept of *uomo d’onore*, man of honor, which reinforces the notion of belonging and of solidarity (Soraci, Veltri).

- Because the *pensiero mafioso* is so ingrained within an individual mafioso, and that studies conducted by Bursten in 1973 show that there is a lack of guilt and moral conscious in the personality of the mafioso (Soraci), to what extent are the *pentiti* -collaborators of justice - actually *pentiti* - repented - for their actions and willing to change mentality and have everyone against them? Could it be a tactic for personal gains? What can bring about repentance and the willingness to collaborate with justice?

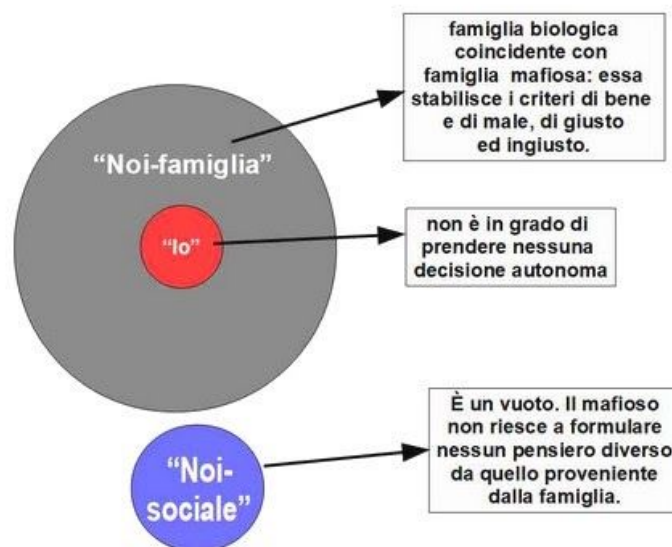


Figure 14. “L’universo psichico del mafioso”,

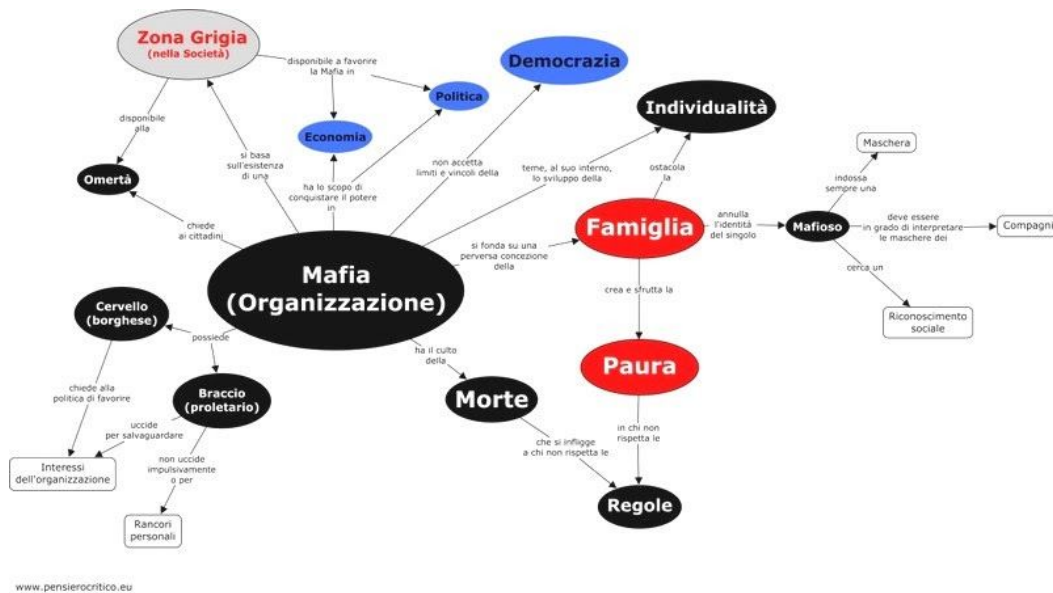


Figure 15. "Mappa concettuale della Mafia",

**The experiment "Lucifer effect".** In 1971 the psychologist Philip Zimbardo carried out a study to conclude that violence is primarily dependent on the environment and not the nature of the individual ("La psicologia"). And this is a clear example of how important it is to take a multidisciplinary approach.

**Communication.** "Communication is an essential condition of life and social arrangement as it contributes to the creation of a sense of belonging and allows for the transmission of information within the members of society" (Giannini 40, Maugeri). While we might think that most of the communication is verbal, verbal communication is only a small portion of communication, heavenly outlawed by nonverbal communication (Giannini 40, Maugeri). As the mafia is "a phenomenon that tries to be invisible but at the same time has the necessity to be perceived by society as present and powerful" (Giannini 6, Soraci, "Analisi criminologica", Maugeri), it has created a whole new set of codified, nonverbal ways to communicate with each other. In the psychological analysis of communication, nonverbal communication is found to have many diverse and important functions in the social behavior of humans, such as creating relationships, creating an image of oneself, completing verbal communication, and substituting verbal communication. The way in which nonverbal communication occurs is based on cultural, socio-emotional and physical environmental factors (Giannini 40). This way of communicating is crucial to decode within prisons as it allows for the transmission of messages from within to the outside (Giannini 41).

- How can we decode the nonverbal communication of the mafia?

## SOCIOLOGY.

**The discipline.** It is a social science that studies human societies. It looks at collective aspects of human behavior related to the institutions, communities, populations (gender, racial or age groups) (Form and Faris).

- Is there a typical model of a mafioso (Giannini 43)?

**Social class.** It is very important to note that unlike the common perception that criminality and the mafia only recruits those from the lower socioeconomic classes, it is not so. Many mafiosi, on the contrary, are educated and highly qualified. Oftentimes, it is



precisely because the mafia manages to infiltrate all social classes that it is analyzed as a rather cultural anthropological phenomenon (“Analisi criminologica”).

- How and why does an individual choose to enter and become part of an association mafiosa (Giannini 43)? What pushes people to interpret criminal deviance as a cultural value, social prestige and economic success (Giannini 4)?

**Recruitment.** As previously discussed, the media plays a fundamental role in the perception one has on the mafia and has created a heroic image for some, incentivizing them to join. The hate one can have for the State and inefficient institutions can also be another incentivizer to join the mafia. According to the labeling theory, once an individual has been incarcerated and labeled as a criminal, the chances are higher that the individual will get stigmatized and end up believing the label and potentially joining the mafia (“Analisi criminologica”). In fact, in Giannini’s study he concluded that prisons were a strategic location for the recruitment of new members (Giannini 33). The mafia, among those in need of economic stability or economic success can provide employment, appealing to the whole range of society. Once a person decides to join, the individual will have to undertake many tests and examinations to make sure the individual is not an undercover agent and will be loyal to the mafia (Veltri, “Analisi criminologica”). Once the initial tests are passed there will be the phase of manipulation in which the mafia will rigidly control the individual’s life, limit the ability to think independently, intimidate and isolate the individual. Once that phase has achieved its scope the individual will be given a function and will be persuaded that they play a fundamental role in the organization. This creates a great sense of belonging, devotion and loyalty. Oftentimes, the individual will have the conviction that only death will part him from the mafia (“Analisi criminologica”). This, of course, is a very generalized recruitment process that is not fully applicable to all associations mafiose, for instance, cosa nostra which heavily relies on bloodline (Maugeri).

- Where the State is not present and there is high unemployment to what extent is working for the mafia a decision?

THEOLOGY.

**The discipline.** It is a philosophically oriented discipline that explores religious themes such as God, humanity, the world, and salvation. It is traditionally restricted because it mainly focuses on Christianity (Louth and Thielicke).

**A distorted religion.** What is very interesting and fundamental to look into is the religious or spiritual aspect that is ingrained in the functioning or original ideology of the mafia. When looking at the various boss mafiosi we see that while they are crude and brutal, in some cases they are also able to gain what Max Weber would refer to as charismatic authority. This not only within the most religious mafia associations such as cosa nostra, ‘ndrangheta and the sacra corona unita, but also within the camorra. Saviano in fact points out that the boss Francesco Schiavone alias “Sandokan”, made many portraits representing Jesus, which instead of the face usually associated with Jesus, he would have his own face (Saviano 279, Soraci). They do not, however, only idolize their leaders and actions by associating them with the notions of sacrifice and martyr, but they also strictly follow the rituals and practices of the Catholic Church (Soraci, Giannini 45). They are educated from a young age on Catholicism and have received all the religion’s sacraments such as baptism and first communion. When it comes to the theme of God, God is for the mafioso, the justice of the mafia and hence why their killings are justified as a sacrifice (Giannini 45).

- To what extent can we talk about religion? Could it be called, rather an epic story, as the legend of how the three associations mafiosi were created?

**The Catholic Church and the mafia.** It is only recently that the Catholic Church has condemned the mafia. This because it had previously had an ambivalent and in some cases collaborative relation with it. While, under the Archbishop of Palermo Cardinale Pappalardo, the Catholic Church started to publicly denounce the mafia, there are still some questionable actions brought by the Church. There have been cases, for instance, in which priests help boss mafiosi with their *latitanza* - hiding as they are wanted from the State. Friar Mario Frittitta, for example, was arrested in the 90s, accused of helping the boss Pietro Aglieri. While he never denied this, the friar justified himself by saying that the cleric has to purify people, especially boss mafiosi (Esposito, Melloni 254). On the other hand however, many actions to counter the mafia have been brought by the Church, such as the foundation of the association Libera, in 1995 by the priest Luigi Ciotti (Melloni 253).

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