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MAFIA AND PROSTITUTION IN CALABRIA, c. 1880-c.1940

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1) Introduction: 'a dirty business'

The rules operative in the two major oath-bound criminal brotherhoods or mafias in Italy today, Cosa Nostra (Sicily) and the 'ndrangheta (Calabria), are notoriously flexible.¹ Antonino Calderone, a Sicilian *mafioso* who gave evidence in the late 1980s, reflected frequently on these rules; appropriately, his views were themselves flexible. At times he states that the mafia's codes are 'a bit like the laws of a state'. At others, he emphasises the human factors that shape their interpretation:

It should not be forgotten that the mafia is, indeed, the Mafia: the organisation of all the men who have taken the oath; and it has precise rules. But it is still made up of men. And men have their preferences, dislikes, and animosities. Even when they have senior positions in the organisation.

¹ The name Cosa Nostra was adopted by the organisation in the mid-1960s. I have mostly used 'Sicilian mafia' to refer to the earlier period of its history discussed here. The name 'ndrangheta (meaning manhood in the Grecanico dialect of part of Calabria) begins to emerge from internal sources in trial documents of the late 1920s. From the mid-1950s it became the name most widely used by both affiliates and the general public. Before that time, the organisation had many names: Honoured Society, Calabrian mafia, camorra, *picciotteria*, Montalbano Family, etc. To avoid confusion, I have used 'ndrangheta or Calabrian mafia throughout this article.

Elsewhere, Calderone all but dismisses the rules: *'Mafiosi have a whole bunch of rules but then, in reality, they continually break them'*.² What Calderone exemplifies here, without quite being able to articulate it, is that rules can be important to his criminal network even when not universally obeyed: they can be tools of internal politics for bosses, and badges of shared identity for affiliates.

However, Cosa Nostra has one rule that is strictly observed. Calderone considers it axiomatic:

The [Sicilian] mafia doesn't run prostitution, because it's a dirty business. Can you imagine a Man of Honour living as a pimp, an exploiter of women? Maybe in America *mafiosi* have got involved in this business . . . But in Sicily the mafia just does not do it, full stop.⁴

The Sicilian mafia's aversion to the easy and constant profits of the sex industry is something of a puzzle. Prostitution is a market where there is a high demand for 'protection';⁵ and the risks and penalties are low compared to, say, narcotics.

A historical perspective shows the ban on prostitution to be even more intriguing. The Sicilian mafia today comprises many of the same families, is organised along the same lines, uses the same rituals, and adopts the same tactics as

² Antonino Calderone (with Pino Arlacchi), *Gli uomini del disonore* (Milan, 1992), 143, 29, 113.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵ Diego Gambetta, *The Sicilian Mafia: the business of private protection*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1993).

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the mafia groups brought to trial in the late nineteenth century.⁶ The taboo against pimping is another such continuity. In records that stretch back beyond Italian unification, there is nothing that suggests that, in their core territory in the Palermo hinterland, *mafiosi* have ever been involved in exploiting prostitution.⁷

The 'ndrangheta has been the poor relation of the Sicilian mafia in many senses--including the amount of scholarly attention it has attracted.⁸ These two mafias are similar in that both are quasi-Masonic criminal brotherhoods that have remained strikingly unchanged over the decades.⁹ There are continuities of many kinds between the 'ndrangheta of the 1880s and the 'ndrangheta of the 2010s.¹⁰

⁶ Salvatore Lupo, *Storia della mafia. Dalle origini ai nostri giorni*, 3rd edn, (Rome, 2004).

⁷ There were pimps in nineteenth-century Palermo. But the police of the day were very clear that these figures of the urban underworld were a distinct group from the *mafiosi* who reigned in the towns and villages of the Palermo hinterland. A. Cutrera, *I ricottari. La mala vita di Palermo* (Palermo, 1979 (1896)). The distinctiveness of the two groups did not preclude ties between them. Cutrera, a policeman-cum-sociologist, did refer to '*mafiosi*' who were pimps in Palermo (*La mafia e i mafiosi. Origini e manifestazioni*, (Palermo, 1900), 48-55). But it is clear that this is due to Cutrera's vague use of the term mafia rather than because he believes that the urban phenomenon is the same as what he himself calls 'the true mafia' of the Palermo hinterland (*ibid.*, 56).

⁸ Fabio Truzzolillo, 'The 'ndrangheta: the current state of historical research', *Modern Italy*, 16, 3 (2011).

⁹ For an illuminating comparative analysis, see Letizia Paoli, *Mafia Brotherhoods. Organized Crime Italian Style* (Oxford, 2003). For a good survey of recent judicial thinking on the structure of both Cosa Nostra and the 'ndrangheta, see G. Pignatone and M. Prestipino, 'Cosa Nostra e 'ndrangheta: due modelli criminali', in E. Ciconte, F. Forgione, I. Sales (eds), *Atlante delle mafie. Storia, economia, società, cultura*, vol. 2 (Soveria Mannelli, 2013).

¹⁰ Enzo Ciconte, *'Ndrangheta dall'Unità a oggi* (Rome-Bari, 1992).

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Like Cosa Nostra, the 'ndrangheta today considers pimping dishonourable.¹¹ This prohibition is so important as to have provoked the sending of a punitive expedition to the North in the 1980s. As one *'ndranghetista* explained:

In 1982 I took part in a meeting of all the Locals in Piedmont. About 700 people were there . . . The reason for the meeting was because in Turin at that time many Calabrians who were affiliated to the 'ndrangheta were pimping – an activity that the 'ndrangheta considers dishonourable . . . It was decided to order the affiliates to stop pimping. And if they did not obey the order, they would either be expelled from the 'ndrangheta or physically eliminated.¹²

Historically, however, the ban on pimping marks a striking difference between the *mafiosi* of Sicily and Calabria. Even the most cursory perusal of the evidence makes it clear that very many Calabrian crime bosses in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were pimps. Manifestly, at some point, the 'ndrangheta underwent a change.

¹¹ Letizia Paoli (*op. cit.*) identifies a taboo on exploiting prostitution as one of the similarities between Cosa Nostra and the 'ndrangheta (p. 7.)

¹² Quoted in Rocco Sciarrone, *Mafie vecchie, mafie nuove. Radicamento ed espansione* (Rome, 1998), 235. A Local is the basic territorial unit of the 'ndrangheta. 'Ndrangheta custom dictates that there should be at least 49 affiliated members present in order for a Local to be formed. For the most up-to-date judicial account of the 'ndrangheta's structure, see for example, Tribunale di Reggio Calabria, Sezione Gip Gup, Sentenza resa nell'Operazione "Crimine", capolista Agnelli Giovanni + 126, 8 March 2012. This and other documents from this history-making trial can be downloaded from: <http://www.stopndrangheta.it>

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This essay has four central aims. First, to understand the mechanics of early 'ndrangheta involvement in the sex trade. Second, to pinpoint the moment in time when pimping ceased to appear in trial records of Calabrian mafia activity. Third, to assess a range of possible explanations for that change, concluding that the most credible explanation lies in the development of an underworld marriage market and of strategic, dynastic marriages among the families of Calabrian *mafiosi*. The fourth aim, closely related to this conclusion, is to suggest a new hypothesis to explain the origins of the longstanding aversion to involvement in the sex industry among Sicilian *mafiosi*.

These central aims are accompanied by reflections deriving from an engagement with scholarly debate and the primary sources. My research stands at the meeting point of two strands in the scholarship on mafia crime in Italy. The first is a school of historical research that emerged following the example of the groundbreaking trials mounted against Cosa Nostra from 1986, and which sought to analyse mafia crime based on the copious sources that materialised once systematic archival work was undertaken.¹³ It was distinguished from previous work by its attempt to identify the presence of a collective criminal agent, the mafia, that could be isolated from the cloud of polemic and confusion that the term 'mafia' has always generated.

¹³ Lupo, *Storia della mafia*, op. cit. One of the very few non-Italian contributions to mafia history, Christopher Duggan's *Fascism and the Mafia* (New Haven, Conn., 1989), put forward the thesis--highly controversial even then--that Fascism invented the mafia as part of its efforts to establish political control over Sicily. While acknowledging the political motives behind Fascism's anti-mafia operations, Italian scholars have produced evidence aplenty to explode this interpretation. See particularly, Vittorio Coco and Manoela Patti, *Relazioni mafiose. La mafia ai tempi del fascismo* (Rome, 2010).

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Partly because of Italy's very locally rooted historiographical traditions, comparative research across the different criminal organisations of the South is rare. The same is not true in sociology and criminology. This essay is partly conceived as demonstration of what there is to gain from comparison: evidence from Sicily (and elsewhere) helps make sense of an important transformation in the nature and methods of Calabrian organised crime; in turn, the history of the 'ndrangheta's move away from pimping creates the opportunity for reflection on the Sicilian case.

The second strand of scholarship that informs my research is sociological and relates to women and gender. Since Renate Siebert's pioneering *Le donne. La mafia* (1994), sociologists have advanced our understanding of the roles women play in the mafias today.¹⁴ Their work dovetails in interesting ways with changes in strategy both by *mafiosi* and by state investigators. Faced with increasing pressure from the authorities over the last twenty-five years or so, *mafiosi* have tended to fall back on their female relatives: by placing illegally acquired property in women's names, for example; or, when they are imprisoned, by devolving power to women. Over the same period, police and magistrates have learned to see through the old portrayals of mafia woman as custodians of the hearth isolated from criminal activity--a stereotype frequently spread by *mafiosi* themselves, for obvious reasons. Mafia women are now routinely targeted in investigations along with their menfolk.

¹⁴ Siebert's book was translated into English as *Secrets of Life and Death. Women and the Mafia* (London/New York, 1996). See also: Alessandra Dino and Teresa Principato, *Mafia donna. Le vestali del sacro e dell'onore* (Palermo, 1997); Alessandra Dino, *Mutazioni. Etnografia del mondo di Cosa Nostra* (Palermo, 2002); Ombretta Ingrasci, *Donne d'onore, Storie di mafia al femminile* (Milan, 2007).

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As a result, the courts, and subsequently sociologists and criminologists, have been able to make use of a large number of first-hand testimonies from mafia women.

A complex relationship of this kind between sociology and the reality of police work and criminality raises historical questions. However, there is as yet little in the way of scholarship that reaches back beyond the contemporary scenario. In other words, research that seeks to combine the two academic fields outlined above is in its very early stages.¹⁵ Studies on the history of mafia women in Calabria are particularly thin on the ground. As well as helping to fill that gap in our knowledge, the work presented here takes the findings of the current sociology of mafia women as its starting point, before going on to challenge some localised aspects of it.

One reason for the rarity of historical research into mafia women is that it is objectively difficult. Writing the history of criminal societies that are secretive by their very nature presents obvious challenges. Those challenges are multiplied when it comes to the women who live and operate within the orbit of those societies, because women are sometimes ignored by the state authorities that inevitably generate the bulk of the documentary record. For such reasons, it is worth dwelling at the outset on the body of evidence used here.

Calabria's archives are frequently in a poor state. The catastrophic earthquake of 1908, and some bad custodianship since, have created many gaps in the record. Moreover Calabria's politically marginality has meant that its mafia has attracted far less attention from government and the public than is the case with the

¹⁵ For a review of existing research, and some excellent examples of new historical work on this theme, see the special issue of *Meridiana*, 67 (2010), 'Donne di mafia', especially the introduction: Gabriella Gribaudo and Marcella Marmo, 'Che differenza fa'.

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Sicilian mafia and the Neapolitan camorra, which are based in and around the populous and politically pivotal cities of Palermo and Naples. This comparative invisibility creates many problems for historians. A case in point: to my knowledge, there are no sources from within the Italian state or public opinion that document or analyse the way the Calabrian mafia ceased its involvement in the sex industry.

Nevertheless, there is a rich seam of evidence because many trials were conducted against Calabrian *mafiosi* from the 1880s. In 1902, it was calculated that 1,854 people had successfully been convicted of mafia membership in southern Calabria in the last decade and a half of the nineteenth century. We have a representative sample of the documentation arising from these trials. We also have a great deal of trial documentation from the forty years that followed, which also saw moments of intense repressive activity by the state. Most of these documents are judges' rulings which summarise the case and give reasons for the verdict: they are the main source analysed here. All told, there are about one hundred of them covering some sixty years; many relate to trials where there were dozens, even hundreds, of defendants; they can vary greatly in size from a handful of pages to several hundred.¹⁶ Here and there, these trial documents can be supplemented with other sources.

Many of these trials pivoted on evidence provided by disaffected mafia affiliates--as was inevitable in the days before bugging and phone taps. Treated with due caution, such testimonies (or the trials they informed) can be very valuable to

¹⁶ All of the trial documents referenced in this article are rulings from trials conducted under Italy's criminal association laws between 1877 and 1940. The documents are now held in the state archives in Reggio Calabria and Catanzaro. Here I have only cited those quoted directly.

the historian. Three things argue in favour of their credibility: first, the absence of evidence--for example in the prefects' reports to the Ministry of the Interior in the 1880s--that suggest any campaign by the authorities to invent a mafia scare for political reasons; secondly, the fact that investigations conducted independently of one another, separated in time and space, reached similar conclusions; third, the mafia's persistent efforts to intimidate or kill such insider witnesses.

Regrettably, the judges' rulings survive in the archives much more frequently than does other legal paperwork. As a result, we have only brief quotations from the testimonies given by the women caught up in such cases, and nothing like the detailed autobiographical accounts available to today's sociologists. Reconstructing the women's perspective would thus be a speculative enterprise, which I have eschewed here.

The strengths and limits of the documentation have had an influence over the approach adopted in these pages. In the first half of the essay, after briefly summarising the kinds of role performed by mafia women today, I describe and contextualise the transformation in the 'ndrangheta's collective behaviour towards women as it emerges from the sources. The second half of the essay works cautiously towards an explanation for that transformation by evaluating three hypotheses and picking the best one. Together, these sources, this comparative historical method drawing critically on the lessons of contemporary sociology, and the elimination of alternative hypotheses, provide the basis for robust conclusions about the 'ndrangheta's changing relationship with the sex industry. There then

follows some informed speculation about the origins of the Sicilian mafia's own prohibition on pimping.

II) Women and the mafias today

Mafias remain male-dominated. Full membership of the sworn brotherhoods Cosa Nostra and 'ndrangheta is exclusively a male prerogative.¹⁷ However women perform a crucial and (by many accounts) increasingly broad and influential range of functions.

The figure of the female boss has captured both public and scholarly attention in recent years.¹⁸ However female bosses remain very much a minority, and they almost always act as avatars of a male relative who is either in prison or in hiding.¹⁹ Most women who participate actively in crime tend to do so in a very subordinate role: as drug mules, for example. On occasion, women have taken leading roles coordinating drug gangs.²⁰ But in such cases, to use the terms developed by Alan Block, their leadership function tends to be exercised as part of

¹⁷ The 'ndrangheta does award the status of *sorella d'omertà* (sister of *omertà*) to some women, but the little we know about this rank suggests that it is subordinate and separate from the main lines of the organisation's hierarchy. For a fuller discussion see Ingrasci, op. cit. 41-47.

¹⁸ For example the case of Giusy Vitale, the *mafiosa* from Partinico who became the first Sicilian woman charged under Italy's mafia association laws, is discussed in Alessandra Dino, 'Narrazioni al femminile di Cosa Nostra', *Meridiana*, 67 (2010).

¹⁹ In the camorra, where gangs tend to rely more heavily on family ties for their cohesion, women have been able to occupy prominent roles with greater frequency. In the 'ndrangheta and Cosa Nostra, by contrast, the fraternal structure means that there are more frequently male substitutes ready to replace bosses who cannot perform their leadership function for one reason or another.

²⁰ See Ingrasci', op. cit., *passim*.

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the mafias' 'enterprise syndicate' operations, rather than at the heart of the 'power syndicate' which deploys violence to dominate territory--the core job of the mafia organisation itself.²¹

Mafia women perform their most important functions within the family. Not coincidentally, it is also within the family that they are subjected to the harshest oppression. Indeed the control of female sexuality is a key aspect of the way mafias manage the relationship between kinship and organisational structure. Young women are pawns to be deployed on the chessboard of dynastic marriage that brings mafias bloodlines together. When an alliance is made, or a peace brokered, a marriage very frequently seals the deal. In the 'ndrangheta, young teenagers are often forced into politically important marriages--and they are expected immediately to begin breeding the next generation of criminal recruits and imparting the mafia value system to their offspring.

When necessary, *mafiosi* enforce norms of female behaviour with violence. High standards of marital fidelity are expected of 'ndrangheta women. In several recent cases the wives of *'ndranghetisti* have been murdered for infidelity. Even widows who endeavour to set up new romantic ties after their husbands' deaths have been targeted in honour killings.²²

²¹ Alan Block, *East Side-West Side: Organizing Crime in New York 1930-1950* (Cardiff, 1980).

²² See Siebert, Dino *et al* cited above. Journalist Lirio Abbate pulls together a great deal of trial evidence to give a useful portrait of contemporary sexual mores in the 'ndrangheta in *Fimmine ribelli. Come le donne salveranno il paese dalla 'ndrangheta* (Milan, 2013). Giusi Pesce, who gave evidence to the state after being arrested in 2010 for being part of the powerful Pesce clan of the 'ndrangheta, was in many ways typical of 'ndrangheta women. Her story is recounted by Alessandra Cerreti, the prosecutor to whom she gave evidence: 'Il coraggio della verità', in

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Despite this violence, mafia women can have an important influence even from within the domestic sphere. They may encourage their menfolk to take *vendetta* against their enemies, or convince *mafiosi* who are considering giving evidence to the police to return to the criminal fold.

Given the absence of historical research on Calabrian mafia women, when sociologists have been tempted to turn their gaze backwards in time, poorly grounded assumptions sometimes hold sway. For example, some well-informed observers have assumed that the domestic-familial roles of Calabrian mafia women are *traditional*, whereas their more actively criminal functions are *modern*. Siebert quotes investigating magistrate Salvo Boemi: 'Precisely the more traditional, the older the mafia is in mentality, the more women are kept on the fringes; whereas the more you move towards a real, modern mafia--for example, the one in Reggio Calabria--the more the presence of women counts.'²³

Ciconte, Forgione, Sales (eds), *Atlante delle mafie*, op. cit., A tragic recent case is that of Maria Concetta Cacciola, from the Bellocco clan of the 'ndrangheta, who was murdered by her family by being forced to drink hydrochloric acid after she had betrayed both her imprisoned husband (in a platonic relationship with another man) and the 'ndrangheta (by giving evidence to the authorities). See the court ruling issued on 13 July 2013, Tribunale di Palmi, Prima sezione di corte d'assise, Cacciola Giuseppe +2. It is significant that, in phone tap evidence submitted to the course, her family refer to her repeatedly as 'puttana' (whore) and 'troia' (tart). The insult applies to both types of betrayal: at one point, her father tells other members of the family that Maria Concetta has been 'acting the whore with the judge' (25). Siebert also cites examples from the 1970s and 1980s in which 'ndranghetisti have punished women with death for inappropriate romantic attachments: R. Siebert, 'Mafia women: the affirmation of a female pseudo-subject', in G. Fiandaca (ed.), *Women and the Mafia* (New York, 2007).

²³ Quoted on p. 32 of Renate Siebert's 'Mafia women: the affirmation of a female pseudo-subject', op. cit. Ingrascì describes as 'traditional' the roles of 'ndrangheta women that are exercised within the 'private sphere': 'giving male and female children an upbringing, incitement to vendetta, guaranteeing the masculine

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However, there is very little in the development of the mafias to suggest that they have undergone a simple transition from tradition to modernity. Indeed, one of the achievements of recent research has been to undermine some of the neater and more teleological narratives into which their history has been shoehorned. In response to Siebert's attempt to map the history of mafia women over the tradition-to-modernity schema, some scholars have cited archival evidence that constitutes an obvious challenge to it. Female names leap out now and again from among the defendants listed in early Calabrian trials. Concetta Muzzopapa (age 40) and Rosaria Testa (age 26) were found guilty at the Palmi assizes in 1892.²⁴ According to the judge, both took an oath to become mafia members 'by making blood come out of the little finger of their right hand as they promised to maintain secrecy'; both dressed as men to take part in robberies and attacks. These two women have been cited by sociologists eager to show that strong mafia women are not a novelty.²⁵ But as yet, such intriguing figures have not received the kind of contextualisation their stories merit. This article will endeavour to provide that contextualisation, of which a key component is the sex industry.

reputation and arranging marriages', p. 35 of 'Donne, 'ndrangheta, 'ndrine. Gli spazi femminili nelle fonti giudiziarie', *Meridiana*, 67 (2010).

²⁴ Archivio di Stato di Catanzaro, Corte d'appello delle Calabrie. Marino Francesco + 147, v. 336, 9 Sep. 1892.

²⁵ The case is cited by Ingrassi, 'Donne, 'ndrangheta, 'ndrine',

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III) Prostitution and the state in Italy, 1860-45

Between the Cavour law of 1860 and the Merlin law of 1958, Italy adopted a regulatory approach to the sex industry. The aim, driven by fears of social disorder, venereal disease, and racial degeneration, was to control prostitutes by obliging them to register with the authorities, undergo medical inspection, and work in state-approved brothels. Women who tried to dodge the regulatory system were liable to punishment: male clients and pimps were not.

Limited reforms in 1888, 1891 and 1905 aimed to take the repressive edge off the system and improve the functioning of the sanatoria and clinics. However, very soon after taking power, Mussolini reversed such reforms as part of a 'normalization of sexuality'.²⁶

The regulatory regime was dysfunctional. For the women, it meant police harassment, stigmatisation, and confinement in notorious state sanatoria. The state-approved brothels imposed price caps and taxes, and corralled the prostitutes in a way incompatible with working part-time and/or for a short period, as many women wanted to do.²⁷ Furthermore, police, brothel-keepers and medical staff were afforded ample opportunities to exploit women financially and sexually. Madams, for example, were notorious for loan sharking.²⁸

Women frequently tried to evade the system: the number of so-called 'clandestine prostitutes' was far higher than the number registered with the

²⁶ Victoria De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women. Italy, 1922-1945*, Berkeley, 1993, 42-5.

²⁷ L. Valenzi, *Donne, medici e poliziotti a Napoli nell'Ottocento. La prostituzione tra repressione e tolleranza* (Naples, 2000), 45-6.

²⁸ *Ibid*, Mary Gibson, *Prostitution and the state in Italy, 1860-1915* (New Brunswick, 1986), 153-5.

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police.²⁹ Clandestine prostitutes were extremely vulnerable to exploitation by pimps. To avoid arrest for soliciting on the street, for example, women had to remain indoors and recruit clients through male agents.³⁰

In the South, the regulation of prostitution ~~tended to be~~ even more dysfunctional than elsewhere, and the number of clandestine prostitutes higher. As a result, the figure of the male pimp was a southern speciality.³¹ Even the officially approved bordellos of Palermo or Naples offered many opportunities for organised criminals who were able to persuade the authorities to look the other way when the rules were transgressed, and thereby earn the right to extort protection money.

The whoremongers of nineteenth-century Naples have been the subject of recent attention in the context of research into organised crime in the city.³² The orthodox account of the history of the Neapolitan mafia or camorra that has emerged from the new historiography on organised crime makes it out to be at least as old as that of the other mafias, but with a more discontinuous pattern of development. It began life as an oath- and rule-bound brotherhood like the other mafias, and like them emerged from the milieu of political conspiracy during the process of Italian unification. But the Neapolitan 'Honoured Society', as it was

²⁹ Gibson, op. cit., 105.

³⁰ Valenzi, op. cit., 53.

³¹ 'Except in the South, where the Camorra and Mafia already controlled rings of prostitutes, it was primarily women who ran the closed houses and organised the subculture of clandestine prostitution' (Gibson, op. cit., p. 154).

³² ~~Marcella~~ Marmo, 'L'onore dei violenti, l'onore delle vittime. I linguaggi dell'estorsione', ~~in Marcella~~ Marmo, *Il coltello e il mercato. La camorra prima e dopo l'Unità d'Italia* (Rome-Naples, 2011).

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known, fell apart before the Great War.³³ Thereafter, more and less organised forms of crime alternated across space and time in Naples and Campania. Today, 'camorra' is used to mean a loose ensemble of gangs and criminal syndicates with little in the way of a formalised organisational culture.

The Neapolitan *camorristi* we encounter in the historical documents in the late nineteenth century were heavily involved in pimping. The discontinuity in camorra history, and the still open questions about how organised the camorra actually was, makes it much more complicated systematically to compare changing attitudes to the sex industry in the Neapolitan underworld with those in Calabria and Sicily.³⁴ It is not a task I can take on here, although on the specific issue of prostitution in the late nineteenth century, *camorristi* afford an instructive parallel with early *'ndranghetisti*.

Violence touched the lives of many women under camorra pimps. One of the most frequent, markedly gendered crimes of which women were the victims was the *sfregio*: a disfiguring wound created by a razor slash. Typically, a *sfregio* was

³³ The starting point for the early history of the camorra is Marcella Marmo's collection of essays, *Il coltello e il mercato*, op cit. On the Cuocolo trial that precipitated the end of the Neapolitan Honoured Society, see [her](#) "'Processi indiziari non se ne dovrebbero mai fare". Le manipolazioni del processo Cuocolo (1906–1930)', in [Marcella](#) Marmo and [Luigi](#) Musella (eds), *La costruzione della verità giudiziaria* (Naples, 2003). For a fascinating recent attempt to overturn the consensus about the camorra, see [Francesco](#) Benigno, *La mala setta. Alle origini di mafia e camorra. 1859-1878* (Turin, 2015).

³⁴ Inasmuch as one can generalise, while nineteenth-century *camorristi* seem to have been heavily involved in pimping, the camorra clans of the post-Second World War period tend to be based around kinship groups and not formal associative structures of a para-Masonic kind. Criminal inter-marriage is a common phenomenon in Naples and its hinterland. (See [Gabriella](#) Gribaudi, *Donne, uomini, famiglie. Napoli nel Novecento* (Naples, 1999).) That fact may well explain why *camorristi* do not have a substantial record of direct involvement in the sex industry.

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inflicted by a pimp who seems to have used it as a punishment, a mark of infamy, and a sign of 'ownership'. Among the most prominent crimes committed by women themselves were usury and incitement to prostitution--two activities that, as we have seen, frequently went together in the life of the brothel-keeper. However many of the women closely tied to the camorra were also arrested for violent crimes, including punishments inflicted on anyone reluctant to repay a loan. Camorra women also deployed violence to defend their menfolk, even from the police. Some of them also collected protection payments on behalf of their men.³⁵

While most prostitutes were victims of violence, a small number of madams were so close to the centres of criminal power as to have been awarded the title of *patrona annurata* (honoured patroness).³⁶ In other words, the heavily masculine language of honour was extended to female brothel-keepers whose loan-sharking and pandering provided significant revenue.³⁷

Manifestly this is all a long way from the supposedly 'traditional' domestic-familial role of mafia women. Of course, it is likely that the private dimensions of camorra women's lives (mothering, marriage, and so on) were not of interest to the police whose documentation we largely rely on. Nevertheless, it seems clear that if some of the camorra women of late-nineteenth-century Naples were wives and mothers, then those roles were made far from traditional by the fact that many such women were also lovers, prostitutes and madams.

³⁵ A. Migliaccio e I. Napolitano, 'Donne violente e donne criminali a Napoli nelle fonti di polizia giudiziaria (1888-94)', *Meridiana*, 67 (2010), p. 101-. On female usurers in Naples, see C. Castellano, 'La mercantessa e la mediatrice. Storia di un circuito usuraio nella Napoli di fine '800', *Quaderni Storici*, 83 (1993).

³⁶ A. De Blasio, *Nel paese della camorra (L'Imbrecciata)* (Naples, 1901), 39.

³⁷ See Marmo, 'L'onore dei violenti', op. cit., 177.

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Despite the very different, urban context in which *camorristi* operated, the Neapolitan example offers many useful parallels with Calabria. The *camorristi* of Naples bore a close resemblance to early *'ndranghetisti*. Both had strong roots in the prison system. Both were predominantly recruited from the lower end of the social scale. They seem to have had similar structures and organisational cultures. And they both exploited prostitutes.

IV) Marina Lemma and the *mafosi* of the plain of Gioia Tauro

In 1901, the Catanzaro Appeal Court ruled on the case of a gang active since at least 1895 on the plain of Gioia Tauro, on Calabria's Tyrrhenian coast.³⁸ There were 230 defendants in the trial known as 'Auteri Felice + 229', making this a large case, but not exceptionally so. One Francesco Albanese, known as 'Tarra' by the other affiliates, committed two murders on his boss's orders. Faced with a life sentence, he talked.

The gang strongly resembled those portrayed in other trials across southern Calabria. All members underwent an initiation ritual and had to pay a fee on joining. Junior affiliates, known as *picciotti* ('lads') were grouped into a Minor Society.

(Hence the name of *picciotteria* by which the Calabrian mafia was often known in

³⁸ Archivio di Stato di Catanzaro, Corte di Appello delle Calabrie in Catanzaro, Auteri Felice + 229, 25 February, 1901. See also an earlier stage in the same trial: Archivio di Stato di Catanzaro, Corte di Appello delle Calabrie, Sezione accusa, Auteri Felice + 316, 7 Dec. 1899. When it passed through the Palmi Assizes, this trial was also covered in the press in Calabria (see *Cronaca di Calabria*, 27 July 1900, 'Il gran processo di Palmi. 248 affiliati alla mala vita' and 30 Sep. 1900, 'Il colossale processo di Palmi') as well as beyond it (see the Neapolitan daily *Il Mattino*, 11 Sep. 1900--an article reproduced on pp. 92- of De Blasio, *Nel paese della camorra* (*op. cit.*)).

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this period.) The *picciotti* owed a duty of obedience to the senior members, known as *camorristi*, who belonged to the Major Society. (This double structure, designed to limit access to information and thus shield the bosses, can also be found in many accounts of the camorra; 'ndrangheta Locals today still have a Major and a Minor Society.)

Many of the accused in Auteri Felice + 229 were former convicts. Most were employed at a low level in the rural economy (carters, shepherds, peasant labourers). One or two had become rich through crime--notably the boss, a 39-year-old peasant called Carmine Ricevuto. Moreover, in a period when Italy had comparatively restricted suffrage, one or two were important enough to blame their enemies in the factional politics of local government for their judicial plight.

The gang's local cells were based in towns and villages across the Plain of Gioia Tauro and up into the foothills of the Aspromonte massif that overlooks it: places like Palmi, Rosarno, Polistena and Cittanova that are still notorious today. However the judge was clear that these cells were part of a single network, brought together by business (notably cattle rustling--animals stolen in one locality were sold elsewhere), by homologous structures and rituals, and by the boss's authority: the judge colourfully called Ricevuto 'the grand master, the supreme boss, the Pontifex Maximus of the criminal association'. Ricevuto's followers engaged mainly in robbery and extortion.³⁹ The association had its own disciplinary code and internal trials. Disputes would sometimes be resolved by ritualised dagger duels.

³⁹ The agriculture here was largely export-orientated crops such as olives, vines and citrus fruit, making it one of the wealthier areas of this part of Calabria. It bears many similarities to the so-called Conca d'Oro around Palermo which was the cradle of the Sicilian mafia.

Many of the affiliates in these early trials had gang tattoos and a flamboyant dress code (flared trousers and a butterfly-shaped quiff). Again, these are aspects also found in many accounts of the camorra.

Carmine Ricevuto and his men were also typical of their peers brought to trial elsewhere in that they were pimps. Profiting from prostitution was integral to the life of the early 'ndrangheta. There were frequent cases where the affiliates used a brothel as a headquarters.

The judge's ruling in the case of Auteri Felice + 229 is particularly insightful because it devotes space to the relationships between the affiliates and their women. (Information that helps make a bewildering skein of sexual entanglements a little clearer is inserted in square brackets in this excerpt):

Woman contributed in important ways to reinforcing the ties that united this shadowy society and brought her own contribution to crime. Thus we see that Giuseppe Raso forced Francesco Magnoli to marry his sister. When she refused, Magnoli got involved in an underworld duel that Angelo Chiaro [the underboss of Cittanova], Francesco Ascone Francesco and Giuseppe Ricevuto were drawn into. Thus we also see that Domenico Mazzullo did not think himself above getting engaged to Vincenzo Giovinazzo's daughter, and Francesco Guerrisi married Giuseppe 'the Monk' Cutri's daughter. [Giuseppe] Nunnari married the prostitute Stella Belcaro [who also had a lover called Giuseppe Barone]; and [Alfredo] Cannizzaro was obliged to marry Parisi [a prostitute] who was lavish in her caresses and kisses with Angelo Chiaro [the

underboss, who had recently slashed her face with a razor]. Rosa Monteleone dispensed her favours to [Domenico] Belcastro and [Giuseppe] Cutri. Both Francesco Giancotta [probably the underboss of Polistena] and Domenico Giuliano were entwined in the arms of Marina Lemma [on whom, more below]; while Vincenzo Ursida's wife shared the nuptial bed with the other affiliate Antonio Paonni—as she once did with Domenico Scullari who was subsequently murdered. [Vincenzo Ursida was, it seems, driven insane by his wife's infidelities, and by his own complicity in them.]

.....

Nor did the association deny its affiliates orgiastic indulgence with vulgar streetwalkers--indulgence of a kind that is wholly appropriate to the dishonest. Such women, impelled by poverty, hunger, cold, deprivation and abandonment, are certainly not the objects of public indignation but are, instead, pitied as the wretched victims of the abuse and tyranny they undergo at the abject hands of unmentionable people. The trial found that, despite being repeatedly beaten and slashed with razors, the women in question had not allowed themselves to become accomplices in any crime at all.

Here 'ndrangheta pimps used access to the sexual favours of prostitutes and other women as a way of recruiting men to the association and maintaining their loyalty. The affiliates regarded sex as a perk of the job. They married prostitutes, and pimped their spouses and female relatives. When fighting broke out between

affiliates over women or 'honour', as it frequently did, it was difficult to disentangle sexual jealousy and business rivalry in their motives.⁴⁰

Violence was frequent. On one occasion, the boss Carmine Ricevuto ordered one of his underlings to rape the daughter of a landowner who had become so fed up with the mafia's racketeering that he sold his flock.⁴¹ But the women within the gang's orbit were even more likely to suffer rapes, forced marriages and beatings. The most characteristic violent gesture was the *sfregio*.

Nevertheless, not all women were victims. Among the main rhetorical targets of the judge's ruling was the woman at the centre of the gang's sexual entanglements and 'the symbol of this social union': Marina Lemma, a 41-year-old spinner from Rizziconi. 'The slut Marina Lemma' was 'a true criminal prostitute', 'a woman risen from the putrefying slums' whose 'sinful habits had corrupted her to the marrow'. Her brothel was a gang meeting place. She recruited young girls as prostitutes, and 'habituated young men to a life of dissipation'. Occasionally she dressed in men's clothing to go along on armed robberies.

Marina Lemma thus occupied a strategic role in the gang's finances and relational fabric. She was seemingly rewarded with formal status: the judge describes her as 'in every respect a partner (*consociata*)' in the criminal organisation. The fact that she was allowed to participate in robberies dressed as a man may also have symbolised her exceptional status.

⁴⁰ In their study of Naples, Migliaccio and Napolitano (op. cit.) point out that, in many cases, the police used 'lover' as a synonym of 'protector of prostitutes' when it came to recording episodes of violence against women (99, note 10).

⁴¹ One newspaper report says that the landowner in question was also an affiliate of the *picciotteria*. See *Il Mattino*, 11 Sep, 1900 as reproduced on 92- of De Blasio, *Nel paese della camorra* (op. cit.).

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Marina Lemma was not an isolated case. The experienced prosecutor who led the case spoke to the press shortly after the Appeal Court had confirmed most of the guilty verdicts. In response to the question, 'Are women part of [the mafia] too?'

Lucio Barbieri replied:

The women in brothels are only the victims: but other, free women are highly active affiliates. ... Various hearings have shown that these women, who are true criminal prostitutes, are the associates of the bullies rather than their victims. They are not the inert elements or passive instruments of the *picciotti*; rather they spend all their evil energy pushing other women into debauchery so that they can serve the pleasures of the men and join in their orgies, or corrupting young men in order to habituate them to vice, or in planning and facilitating crimes--or indeed in carrying them out together with the affiliates. Some women, like a certain Marina Lemma, even take pleasure in shedding their skirts to put on male clothing for such occasions.⁴²

Although we do not have the same quantity of information about them, it seems likely that the two cross-dressing female affiliates mentioned earlier, Concetta Muzzopapa and Rosaria Testa, were representatives of the same type of mafia woman: prostitute / brothel-keepers who were recognised gang members. There are other cases in other trials.⁴³

⁴² Adolfo Rossi, 'Nel Regno di Musolino XII', *L'Adriatico*, 26 Mar. 1901,

⁴³ See the brief survey in Ciconte, *'Ndrangheta dall'Unità a oggi (op. cit.)*,

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It is evident that, as in Naples, the supposedly 'traditional' domestic-familial role of Calabrian mafia women is nowhere to be seen, and such marriage ties as are contracted between affiliates and their women have a very different meaning when they are interwoven with the ties uniting pimps and their girls.⁴⁴

V) Pimping fades from the records

The 'ndrangheta distanced itself from prostitution during the first half of the Fascist era. In the 1920s, there are some cases in which pimping appears among gang activities--albeit not as many as in earlier decades. The last trial in which 'ndrangheta pimps are brought to justice dates from 1933, and concerns criminal activity that carried on until the early weeks of 1932.⁴⁵ The trial in question, Spanò Demetrio + 106, which gives a detailed description of cells operative in Reggio Calabria, contained the usual grim tales of rape and other forms of violence. After it, prostitution disappears from the trial records.

⁴⁴ Nor is it convincing to interpret the evidence of Auteri Felice +229 as an indication that the early 'ndrangheta engaged in a policy of dynastic marriages as it does today. For Ciconte's explanation of the women affiliated to the *picciotteria* as a symptom of the organisation's putative family culture, see, 80-7 of *'Ndrangheta dall'Unità a oggi* (op. cit.). This seems to me to be a back-projection of the organisation's current characteristics. For one thing, there is no sign of the grand ceremony and displays of wealth that inevitably accompany today's 'ndrangheta weddings. It seems likely that the marriages (sometimes forced) described in this case had three functions: first, to create bonds between affiliates; second, to establish a 'pecking order' among affiliates; and third, to help protect prostitutes from the police because unmarried girls were much more vulnerable to charges of soliciting.

⁴⁵ Archivio di Stato di Reggio Calabria, Tribunale di Reggio Calabria, Spanò Demetrio + 106, Sent. 6 aprile 1933 n. 174, vol. senza numero "Anno 1933 - dal 15 gennaio al 30 aprile".

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There is no evidence that this trial was itself a cause of change. What we see during the 1920s and 1930s is an emerging *absence* of prostitution in trials. Indeed, in the 1930s in particular, women of all kinds appear less frequently in the narratives sketched out by judges. Female roles mostly have to be deduced from passing mentions. Where women *are* listed among the accused after 1933, they tend to be charged with complicity in theft or receiving stolen goods--crimes which themselves suggest that a change has already happened.⁴⁶ Schematically, we could say that by the 1930s most women in the orbit of the 'ndrangheta had become passive beneficiaries of thefts carried out by their men, rather than the passive victims of pimping as in the past.

The following three sections evaluate three possible explanations for the 'ndrangheta's move away from pimping: 1) the effects of broad social change; 2) state action; 3) transformations related to kinship within the 'ndrangheta itself.

1) Social mores and social change

The period bookended by the two trials analysed above (1901-33) saw tumultuous changes in Southern Italy: the advent of universal male suffrage; the Great War; the lawlessness and unrest of the post-war years; Fascism. Mass transatlantic migration was the biggest single transformative agent in southern Calabria--where the 1908

⁴⁶ For a typical case of this kind, see Archivio di Stato di Reggio Calabria Tribunale di Reggio Calabria, Sentenze: 1927. Sent. 7-5-1927 n. 153, De Gaetano Andrea + 28, vol. 218.

earthquake added a major 'push' factor.⁴⁷ So did the 'ndrangheta's move away from prostitution somehow reflect these changes?

Recent research has taught us to be sceptical about deducing anything about the mafias too directly from the society that hosts them. Indeed contemporary thinking on the mafias emerged in part from a critique of the way in which American and Northern European anthropology of the 1960s and '70s brushed aside the idea that the Sicilian mafia might actually be an organisation, and instead argued that 'mafia behaviour' derived from supposedly underlying features of Sicilian culture such as a cult of masculinity and a suspicion of state authority.⁴⁸

We now know that, in the area of sexual codes and behaviour as in other spheres, there is no straightforward match between the ways *mafiosi* behave and the mores of the society they live in. For example, the fanaticism about sexual honour among *ndranghetisti* today is not widespread in Calabria. Rather, it is specific to very particular circumstances. Firstly, it is located at the interface between kin groups close to mafia organisations and the organisations themselves: a family used to supplying mafia affiliates has a reputation to uphold. Secondly, it is located at the interface between kin groups close to the mafia and the community around them. Given that mafias tend to legitimate themselves as a spuriously traditional form of authority, their 'traditional' discourse of sexual honour also

⁴⁷ F. Balletta, 'Emigrazione e struttura demografica in Calabria nei primi cinquanta anni di unità nazionale', in P. Borzomati (ed.), *L'emigrazione calabrese dall'unità ad oggi* (Rome, 1980).

⁴⁸ See for example, Henner Hess, *Mafia and Mafiosi. Origin, Power and Myth* (New York, 1998 (1973)).

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involves broader reputational considerations.⁴⁹ Put another way, *mafiosi* are trying to proclaim their 'right to rule' by claiming to adhere to values more rigid and venerable than those of the society around them.

One further *caveat*: the 'ndrangheta emerged in a very wide variety of social environments: from the city of Reggio Calabria, to the towns and villages of the plain of Gioia Tauro with its commercial agriculture and fragmented pattern of property ownership, to the remoter corners of the Aspromonte massif, with its pastoral economy and larger-scale property holdings. In these different territories, the 'ndrangheta underwent the same transformation in its relationship to prostitution. So any explanation for that transformation in terms of social trends needs to apply very widely.

Amid all the upheavals of the early twentieth century, and all the varying types of community that hosted 'ndrangheta cells, it is not likely that we will identify any broader changes in family life or sexual mores that might explain the transformation that is at issue here. Certainly nothing in the primary sources or secondary literature hints at such an explanation or offers viable prompts for further research. A brief survey of what we know about peasant mores in the period concerned gives some idea of why I believe this to be the case. (For the sake of exposition, I shall leave aside the fact that not all 'ndranghetisti could be described as peasants.)

With its lurid accounts of promiscuity and violence, Auteri Felice +229 of 1901 describes a milieu that was very different to the mores that typified

⁴⁹ See Salvatore Lupo, 'La mafia: definizione e uso di un modello virilista', *Genesis*, 2, 2 (2003).

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substantial parts of the peasantry. In Calabria the peasant family was primarily an economic unit: the labour of women and children was a fundamental support to the seasonal or otherwise precarious earning capacity of men--increasingly so as the nineteenth century wore on. Hence the growing incidence of marrying young and producing children quickly. Many landowners regarded bachelors as unreliable and only rented plots to 'good family fathers'--as many contracts stipulated. Morality and economic viability were profoundly linked.⁵⁰ Viewed from within this family culture, the sex lives of the *picciotti* would surely have seemed like anarchy. (Which perhaps explains why Marina Lemma so horrified the judge who sentenced her.)

However, this cult of family unity was not universal. Across Southern Italy and Sicily there were men in the rural economy, particularly itinerant, semi-indigent day-labourers and herdsmen, whose behaviour was subject to no such controls. Figures like these were over-represented among the *'ndranghetisti* who first came to trial in the 1880s--although by no means all of them conformed to the type. Women involved in seasonal work, such as olive-picking, probably had some sexual freedom too.⁵¹

Mass emigration worked important changes on Calabrian rural life. Emigrants were men of working age, and their departure had a very disruptive short-term effect on many families. In the medium term, as emigrants sent home some of their earnings and the shortage of labour drove up peasant wages and

⁵⁰ Piero Bevilacqua, 'Uomini, terre, economie', in Piero Bevilacqua e Augusto Placanica (eds), *La Calabria, Storia d'Italia. Le regioni dall'Unità a oggi* (Turin, 1985), especially 295-315.

⁵¹ For a consideration of these themes that reaches far beyond the specificities of mafia groups, see Ida Fazio, 'The family, honour and gender in Sicily: models and new research', *Modern Italy*, 9, 2 (2004).

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incentivised investment in machinery, many families saw their prospects improve. Migration increased literacy, improved diet, and even changed peasant dress.⁵²

However, nothing either in the trial evidence or in this changing picture of peasant life suggests a causal link to the shift in the 'ndrangheta's attitude to prostitution. The disruption of family life by transatlantic migration, for example, does not seem likely to have created a generalised aversion to the sex industry. If the departure of large numbers of men made prostitution less profitable, that does not explain why gangsters should have so completely and irreversibly shunned the business.

Moreover, any attempt to account for the transformation in the 'ndrangheta's relationship to women through patterns of social change needs also to keep in mind that what is at stake is not the mafia's morality, but its business interests. Calabrian gangsters did not become more uxorious or start treating women better. They continued to be found guilty of rape even in cases where prostitutes were no longer involved, and they continued to use rape as a tool of intimidation directed at the surrounding community. In the 'ndrangheta today, the formidable control of female sexuality is accompanied by a predictable hypocrisy about male promiscuity. So rather than moral issues, the real substance of the issue is that many Calabrian *mafiosi* occupied a strategic position as protectors of prostitutes before the Fascist era, and ceased to do so during it.

⁵² F. Cordova, *Il fascismo nel Mezzogiorno: le Calabrie* (Soveria Mannelli, 2003). Piero Bevilacqua, 'Emigrazione transoceanica e mutamenti dell'alimentazione contadina calabrese fra Otto e Novecento', in Borzomati *L'emigrazione calabrese* (op. cit.). On other cultural changes see Francesco Arcà, *Calabria vera. Appunti statistici ed economici sulla provincia di Reggio*, Morello (Reggio Calabria, 1907).

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The 'ndrangheta was certainly affected by mass migration; its North American colonies date back to the peak years of the exodus before the Great War. Could the new international networking among Calabrian gangsters have discouraged pimping? We do not yet have enough research on the 'ndrangheta's international spread to reach firm conclusions. However, there are good grounds for thinking that, if anything, the links with the new world of criminal opportunity in North America discouraged pimping rather less than whatever was happening back home: *mafiosi* in the USA have the same taboo as their Old World cousins, but are traditionally much more lax about observing it.⁵³

The Great War was another great motor of social change in the region. But here again there is no hint of a reason for the 'ndrangheta's move away from the sex industry. There are no organised crime trials that date from the years of the conflict itself because mass conscription led to a suspension of 'ndrangheta activity.⁵⁴ A rapid criminal resurgence in the immediate postwar years is evident from trials and other sources. But amid all the extortion and violence, pimping carried on as before. One case is emblematic: Domenico Noto, who came to trial in 1923, had a spotless wartime record as a pilot before returning home in 1919 and rapidly rising to become the mafia boss of Antonimina; he was a panderer and convened gang meetings in a prostitute's house.⁵⁵

⁵³ Paoli, *Mafia Brotherhoods*, op. cit., loc. cit.

⁵⁴ In his inaugural address for the judicial year, given on 10 January 1919, the Chief Prosecutor of Catanzaro said that crime had fallen because of mass recruitment, and expressed concerns about what would happen when the troops returned to Calabria: his fears proved to be justified. See Rodolfo Loffredo, *Discorso inaugurale nella Corte d'Appello di Catanzaro. 10 gennaio 1919* (Cagliari, 1919), 45-6.

⁵⁵ Archivio di Stato di Catanzaro, Corte di Appello di Catanzaro, Sentenze,

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2) State action

Fascist measures, particularly on prostitution and sexuality, offer another set of potential reasons why the 'ndrangheta may have changed strategy.

As already outlined, the regime's policy on prostitution remained consistent with that adopted since 1860: the regulatory approach, with all its failings, remained in place. However Fascism did introduce one important reform. Article 534 of the 'Rocco code'--a major authoritarian redrafting of criminal law in July 1931--criminalised living off immoral earnings for the first time in the history of the Italian state.⁵⁶ So did the Rocco code have any role in inducing the 'ndrangheta to distance itself from pimping? As well as being the last trial in which prostitution appears as an 'ndrangheta activity, Spanò Demetrio + 106 of 1933 is also a good place to begin answering that question because it is the first and only trial where article 534 of the Rocco code was deployed against the 'ndrangheta: five affiliates were charged with living off a prostitute's income. However the judge's ruling strongly indicates that the new law's impact was negligible. Article 534 was impractical to apply: it was difficult to prove that the money the accused had taken from prostitutes actually derived from sexual activity rather than other sources. As a result, the judge changed the charges to extortion--long a typical mafia crime--which

8 Aug. 1923, Noto Domenico + 46, vol. 489.

⁵⁶ Articles 531-533 also proscribed activities, such as forcing women, minors, or relatives into prostitution, that the early 'ndrangheta, as described in trial documents from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, had also indulged in. The full text of the Rocco code is available online at: <http://www.uwm.edu.pl/kpkm/uploads/files/codice-penale.pdf>

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carried heavier penalties in any case.⁵⁷ Thus Fascism's prostitution policy was substantially that adopted during the Liberal period (and indeed after 1945), and Article 534 does not seem to have changed mafia behaviour.

However, it is still possible that the regime's other actions on sex and sexuality had an impact. In the mid-1920s, a crackdown on public manifestations of immorality, including prostitution, began. After 1927, pro-natalist policies combined stick (a ban on abortion, the bachelor tax) and carrot (welfare, career incentives for prolific fathers) in an attempt to increase the population.⁵⁸ This raises the question of whether the period of moralistic and pro-natalist activism had any influence on organised crime.

Pro-natalist policies failed even in the urban centres of the North and Centre. It would be profoundly surprising if they worked any better in Calabria, with its notoriously faction-ridden state and party machinery.⁵⁹ As far as the specific issue of prostitution is concerned, there is some documentation that allows us a glimpse of what was happening on the ground because the police, who were at the forefront of the implementation drive, were subject to inspections by the Ministry of the Interior.

⁵⁷ In Spanò Demetrio + 106, several women were listed among the accused. All were acquitted of the charge of membership of a criminal organisation. Only one, a prostitute called Teresa Provenzano whose house was used as a meeting-place by the gang, was convicted on any other charge, and she had her two-year sentence for theft waived because of the time she had spent on remand. This outcome was typical of the many 'ndrangheta trials hitherto that prostitutes had been caught up in: most were deemed to be acting under duress--a conclusion that seems likely to be an accurate reflection of the relationship such women had with organised crime.

⁵⁸ De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women*, op. cit., 41-76.

⁵⁹ On Fascism in Calabria, see: [Vittorio Cappelli](#), *Il fascismo in periferia. La Calabria durante il Ventennio* (Lungro di Cosenza, 1998); [Jonathan Steinberg](#), 'Fascism in the Italian South: the case of Calabria', in [David Forgacs](#) (ed.), *Rethinking Italian Fascism. Capitalism, Populism and Culture* (London, 1986).

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There are records of two major waves of ministerial inspections of police stations in Calabria: the first in the mid-1920s, when Fascism was still a fragile edifice; the second in the mid-late 1930s, when the regime was at its strongest.⁶⁰

The first wave revealed very ramshackle policing structures in the most 'ndrangheta-infested zones in the years after the Great War. In the port township of Villa San Giovanni and in Palmi on the plain of Gioia Tauro the police still operated from temporary shacks erected following the 1908 earthquake. Few, if any, police stations kept the required registers of brothels, prostitutes and pimps.⁶¹

By 1926, in Reggio Calabria at least, the picture may have improved: the inspector states that brothels were being monitored appropriately.⁶² But if this inspection indicates that the state was now better at controlling the sex industry (leaving aside the clandestine part of it), other documents point to very different conclusions. Remarkably, in 1929, an inquiry into the conduct of Reggio Calabria's Chief of Police found that his wife had successfully lobbied for a city brothel to extend its opening hours. She also helped get a firearms licence for a butcher who was, mysteriously, spotted several times slaughtering goats at her house. The inspector concluded she had also taken a bribe to get a man with a criminal record exempted from a police caution. The man in question, Giuseppe Barone, may have

⁶⁰ All of the inspection reports are contained in Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero Interno – Dir. Gen. P.S. – Divisione Personale PS (1890-1966) – Versamento 1963 (hereafter ACS Divisione Personale).

⁶¹ ACS Divisione Personale, b.184: reports on Reggio Calabria dated 16 [June](#) 1923, 19 [Dec.](#) 1924; reports on Palmi dated 23 [Sep.](#) 1923, 16 [Mar.](#) 1925; reports on Gerace Marina dated 16 [July](#) 1923, 19 [Dec.](#) 1924; reports on Villa San Giovanni dated 19 [Dec.](#) 1924. ACS Divisione Personale, b.194: report on Nicastro dated 19 [Dec.](#) 1924.

⁶² ACS Divisione Personale, b.184: report dated 30 [June](#) 1926.

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been the *'ndranghetista* of the same name who was later identified as a lieutenant of the dominant crime boss Michele Campolo.⁶³

The second wave of Interior Ministry inspections between 1935 and 1938 suggests that the police had become more systematic in their control over houses of ill repute. An inspection conducted in Reggio Calabria in September 1937 counted four brothels and eighteen prostitutes in the city, and concluded 'that there are no exploiters living off the backs of these wretched women'.⁶⁴ Seven weeks later another inspection reached the same conclusion, and attributed the healthy panorama to tight police controls; it also found that clandestine prostitution was not at all widespread.⁶⁵

We should be cautious about accepting these findings at face value. Eighteen prostitutes is a suspiciously small total for Reggio Calabria. In 1936, the police in the province of Reggio Calabria lacked the manpower to keep stations open in the key centres of Palmi and Locri.⁶⁶ Moreover, pro-natalism was a higher priority than 'moralizing' Italian society: the police seemed more concerned to combat abortion than they did to keep a tight rein on the sex industry. Inasmuch as they took an interest in public morality, they took an attitude of resigned distaste--for example to the spectacle of peasants coupling in the fields.⁶⁷ More significantly still, sources

⁶³ ACS Divisione Personale, b. 170 bis - Inchiesta D'Orazi su Hyerace Aurelio. On Michele Campolo and Giuseppe Barone, see Fabio Truzzolillo, *Fascismo e criminalità organizzata in Calabria*, University of Pisa, Dottorato di ricerca, 2014, *passim*.

⁶⁴ ACS Divisione Personale, b.184: inspection dated 30 Sep. 1937.

⁶⁵ Inspection of 16 Nov. 1937 (*ibid.*).

⁶⁶ ACS Divisione Personale, b.174: inspection dated 10 July 1936.

⁶⁷ ACS, Divisione Personale, b.184: report dated 16 Nov. 1937.

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other than the reports I have focused on here tell us that the police were susceptible to 'ndrangheta infiltration at a high level.⁶⁸

Of course police control over prostitution can be unofficial as well as official: corrupt officers can become panderers. However, the evidence of the police inspections probably rules out the possibility that systematic unofficial police control over the sex industry replaced mafia control. No inspection from the 1920s or 1930s reported policemen acting as pimps. It should be born in mind that, as had been the case since the foundation of Italy's *Pubblica Sicurezza* after [national unification](#), the private lives of officers were subject to tight controls.⁶⁹

A contrasting hypothesis about the disappearance of prostitution from 'ndrangheta trials after 1933 is that the state simply began to ignore this dimension of the mafia's activities. But the evidence of earlier trials weighs against this explanation: prostitutes were just too valuable to the prosecution. For nigh-on half a century before Spanò Demetrio + 106 of 1933, judges had adopted a consistent attitude to the prostitutes caught up in Calabrian organised crime. On the one hand, madams were subjected to the full force of the law. On the other hand, the majority of women in the sex industry were regarded, with paternalistic sympathy, as victims. In August 1930, one judge ruled on a case involving 'ndrangheta cells operative in

⁶⁸ See the allegations about the prefecture and *questura* of Reggio Calabria in 1933 reported in Cappelli, *Il fascismo in periferia* (op. cit.), 147-50.

⁶⁹ The personal files on policemen in the Liberal period contain many reports on marital infidelities and other sexual misdemeanors. See for example the career of a future Chief of Police, Ermanno Sangiorgi, in John Dickie, 'Ritratto di questore con mafia', in Salvatore Lupo (ed.), *Il tenebroso sodalizio. Il primo rapporto di polizia sulla mafia siciliana* (Rome, 2011). For the Fascist period in Calabria, see ACS, Divisione Personale, b.179: report on Reggio Calabria dated 15 [Mar.](#), 1935; b. 184: report on Reggio Calabria dated 8 [July](#), 1938.

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villages north of Reggio Calabria.⁷⁰ A young woman called Santa Giglietta was violently raped for refusing the advances of one of the boss's henchmen. The judge made a point of rejecting any attempt by the defence to play down the value of her evidence on the grounds that she was a prostitute:

There is no reason to dwell on Miss Giglietta's moral record so as to be indulgent toward those guilty of the carnal violence perpetrated against her. As far as the trial was able to ascertain, she is a half-stupid wretch of a girl. But even the most lowly of prostitutes very much has the right to say no.

Thus there seems no plausible reason why the state would suddenly begin to ignore this category of women as witnesses during the large anti-mafia operations of the 1930s.

To conclude: although the regime's police in Calabria did not regard controlling prostitution as a major priority, it may be just be that they became more efficient at it as the *ventennio* wore on. The indications to support the hypothesis that state protection supplanted 'ndrangheta protection in the sex industry in the 1930s are not very strong, but they cannot be entirely discounted.

This body of evidence also suggests we evaluate a variant of the same hypothesis: that is, that the gangsters themselves came to appreciate the risks inherent in the sex industry. The relationship between a pimp and his women

⁷⁰ Archivio di Stato di Reggio Calabria. Tribunale di Reggio Calabria. Sentenze: 1923, 1924, 1926, 1927, 1928, 1930. Sent. 14-8-1930, Passalacqua Giuseppe + 19, vol. 234.

tended to be both sexually intimate and violently oppressive: thus prostitutes had access to a great deal of information about criminal activity, and at the same time they were likely to seek refuge with the law sooner or later. The fact that Fascism stepped up police and judicial action against prostitution from 1923, and against Calabrian organised crime from 1927, may plausibly have tipped the balance in criminals' assessment of the costs and benefits of pimping.⁷¹

However plausible this last argument may be *prima facie*, there are some facts that suggest that the actions of the Fascist police do not, *on their own*, constitute a sufficiently strong explanation for the 'ndrangheta's abandonment of prostitution. For one thing, the Interior Ministry inspections cited here come from a chronologically restricted sample, which begins with the period immediately following the Great War. This was a time when the rule of law was notoriously weak--not just in Calabria, but nationally, and not just in relation to prostitution. By then *'ndranghetisti* had been pimping since the 1880s--a period which was not always characterised by the same lawlessness as 1919-23. Moreover, in Calabria, the regime's drive against organised crime in the late 1920s was neither vastly bigger nor markedly more rigorous than the roundups of the 1880s and '90s. Early *'ndranghetisti* exploited prostitutes when the police were strong as well as when

⁷¹ The well-known assault on the mafia in Sicily, the 'Mori Operation', began in late 1925 as part of the regime's efforts to establish itself and win the favour of international opinion after the Matteotti crisis of late 1924. The Fascist repression of the Calabrian mafia began in 1927, with considerably less publicity. In Calabria as in Sicily, there was a further repressive wave in the 1930s by which time Fascism could draw on the resources of well-rooted authoritarian state and entirely ban any press coverage of operations against a problem like the mafia which regime propaganda had already declared 'solved'. On the chronology of Fascist repression in Calabria, see Truzzolillo *Fascismo e criminalità organizzata in Calabria* (op. cit.).

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they were weak. What is more, the chronological match between increased police efficiency and the 'ndrangheta's abandonment of pimping is not exact: if the trial documents are at all representative of the reality of criminal behaviour, then it is clear that the move away from prostitution was a gradual process that had already begun *before* major Fascist anti-mafia operations were launched in Calabria. The Sicilian comparison is also illuminating: the fact that the Sicilian *mafiosi* we know had no involvement with prostitution in the 1860s--a decade *before* they were subject to any targeted repression--indicates that we also need to consider other reasons for the 'ndrangheta's change of behaviour.

3) Kinship and organised crime in Fascist Calabria

The trial documentation shows that it was during the 1920s that *'ndranghetisti* began to engage in dynastic marriages as they do today. It seems likely that the 'ndrangheta moved away from pimping mainly because daily contact with prostitutes was incompatible with maintaining women's value within an emerging criminal marriage market.

On this count, the chronological match is close. In the 1920s and 1930s, just as mafia pimping ceased to leave archival traces, kinship groups also began to act as collective agents within the Calabrian criminal milieu for the first time. Domenico De Gaetano was the boss of an 'ndrangheta gang operating in Palmi and San Roberto that came to trial in 1931 after some members, who were relatives of the defendants in an earlier trial, embarked on a campaign of revenge against witnesses. One

passage of the judge's ruling demonstrates, in passing, just how closely superimposed marriage and organisational ties had now become:

[Domenico] Bova had a personal motive for taking revenge for the arrest of his loved ones by acting against those whom he suspected of being responsible. He was the nephew of Raffaele Bova--the dangerous member of the criminal association who is now behind bars--and was engaged to be married to Fortunata Morena, who is herself the sister of three men who have also been charged with membership of a criminal association [...]. She is also the sister-in-law of *both* Giuseppe Oliveri, the former underworld boss of San Roberto, *and* of his underboss Luigi Brizzo.

Another judge, in a 1934 trial in Reggio Calabria, highlighted the close intertwining of kinship ties and the mafia's structure: 'The associative bond linking the various members of the criminal society (...) was reinforced by the spirit of solidarity and cohesion deriving from links based on kinship and affinity.'⁷² There are no observations of this kind in earlier rulings.

In such circumstances, where the 'ndrangheta was beginning to draw strength from family ties to a much greater extent than before, marriages became newly significant. On 14 October 1927, a *carabiniere* was shot dead in Calimera near Vibo Valentia. The background to the case concerned two families, both well

⁷² Sentenza istruttoria contro Cama Quinto + 28, 25 Feb. 1934, contained in Archivio di Stato di Reggio Calabria, CAssRC, Processo Cama Quinto + 28 (Associazione a delinquere di Armo di Gallina), 1934, b. 327.

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embedded in the local Fascist state.⁷³ The most likely cause of the *carabiniere's* murder was his attempts to stop a marriage between the daughter of a boss from one village and a leading affiliate from another. This kind of strategic mafia endogamy was new to Calabria.

It also seems that there was, at the same time, a change in sexual norms among *'ndranghetisti*. In the 1929 trial of a mafia network based in the notorious Aspromonte village of San Luca, the key witness for the prosecution was a former affiliate who had been expelled in 1922 for failing to protect his sister's honour.⁷⁴ One cannot imagine that, a generation earlier, any affiliate of the gang gravitating around 'the slut Marina Lemma' would have been punished for any such thing. In 1933, the Siderno boss Francescantonio Commisso had a man's throat cut on the grounds (mistaken, it turned out) that he had spread the false rumour that Commisso's intended bride was pregnant.⁷⁵ Within the *'ndrangheta*, besmirching a woman's sexual honour had apparently come to have very serious consequences.

The development of mafia marriage obviously entailed a role for women as objects of exchange. Pimping was incompatible with dynastic marriages because the associated promiscuity would make guarantees about a girl's virginity, or for that matter about any child's paternity, unsustainable. Prostitution now brought with it the risk of exclusion from the growing web of dynastic marriages.

⁷³ Archivio di Stato di Catanzaro, Corte di Assise di Catanzaro. Sentenze 1931, 1932. Sent. 21-5-1932 Rosello Francesco + 2, vol. 63.

⁷⁴ Archivio di Stato di Catanzaro. Corte di Appello di Catanzaro. Sentenze 1929. Sent. 26-9-1929 Romeo Stefano + 75, vol. 508

⁷⁵ Archivio di Stato di Catanzaro, Corte di Assise di Locri, Sent. 19-7-1937 Commisso Francescantonio + 56, b. 3

As a result of the 'ndrangheta's turn towards dynastic marriage, strong women married to powerful bosses could carve out a new role for themselves by steering their offspring through the politics of marriage. One such case came to light in a Cirella, near Plati, where Maria Marvelli, the wife of a murdered *'ndranghetista*, gave evidence against her husband's associates in a 1939 trial. Marvelli was not a brothel-keeper, but she was a 'cunning woman, well used to the affiliates' customs', and her testimony made clear her role in guiding the early stages of her son's criminal development, including his marriage. She also took charge of defending her husband when a death sentence was issued against him by his underworld enemies.⁷⁶ Maria Marvelli, in short, was a very different kind of 'strong' mafia woman to the 'criminal prostitute' Marina Lemma--one that resembles some 'ndrangheta matriarchs of today.

Thus there is considerable evidence that, by the 1930s, the most powerful *'ndranghetisti* were making decisions based, not just on their exigencies as the leaders of criminal bands, but also on their needs as the heads of criminal households. As part of that process, a new type of mafia woman began to emerge: one whose concerns were shaped by the domestic-dynastic sphere rather than by the milieu of prostitution.

⁷⁶ Archivio di Stato di Catanzaro, Corte di Assise di Locri, Sent. 6-9-1939 Macri Francesco + 141, b. 4

VI) Conclusions

The 'southern Italian family' (recent scholarship has in fact undermined the idea that there is any such thing) has been blamed for a great deal over the years, such as the weakness of civic values and, of course, the mafia.⁷⁷ The figure of the traditional mafia woman is perhaps the last remnant of that stereotype. It is abundantly clear that, in Calabria, the supposedly traditional, family-oriented mafia woman is, in reality, a recent invention. Such features of the 'ndrangheta's internal culture as female honour, the disapproval of divorce and (flagrant) adultery, the love of big weddings, and the taboo on pimping, are not 'archaic codes'.⁷⁸ Rather they are old instruments deployed in a modern context, by a distinctly modern organisation.

However the mechanics of the 'ndrangheta's move away from pimping remain obscure. It may be that there was a Darwinian process: perhaps groups involved in prostitution declined as prostitutes testified to the authorities, and as rival factions reinforced by a network of marriage-based alliances were able to out-fight and out-manoeuvre the pimps. Nor do we know whether this transformation was influenced by centrally enforced rules. The 'ndrangheta probably had a dispute-resolving body called the Gran Criminale in this period, and one of its roles was to intervene in disagreements over betrothals. But there is no record of its intervening over pimping.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Fazio, 'The family, honour and gender in Sicily' (*op. cit.*),

⁷⁸ Paul Ginsborg, *Italy and its Discontents, 1980-2001* (London, 2001), 199.

⁷⁹ On the 'ndrangheta's highest body, see Fabio Truzzolillo, 'Criminale e Gran Criminale. La struttura unitaria e verticistica della 'ndrangheta delle origini', *Meridiana*, 77 (2013),

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It would be interesting to use trial evidence to trace the evolution of 'ndrangheta attitudes to women between the end of the Second World War and the 1970s. However, historians must wait until the seventy-year limit has passed and the documentation is released.⁸⁰

To date, neither historians nor sociologists have made systematic efforts to explain the mafia taboo on prostitution. Research on contemporary mafia women has tended to address it only in passing, as a subordinate part of a more general analysis of mafia gender norms. Siebert, [writing about the 'ndrangheta](#), considers that income from prostitution is sacrificed in return for 'the appearance of conservative decency' that sustains the myth of the good *mafioso*.⁸¹ Pizzini-Gambetta, [referring to Cosa Nostra](#), argues that the ban on exploiting prostitutes results from a *mafioso's* desire to sustain his reputation for reliability and toughness in the 'business of private protection' by adopting 'proper' behaviour towards women.⁸² My research suggests that neither of these explanations is adequate, at least on its own, because the taboo on pimping, as a *sine qua non* for mafia endogamy, is more important to the dynamics of mafia life than has hitherto been supposed.

Further comparison with the Sicilian case can help make more sense of the change the 'ndrangheta went through. The evidence we have about individual *mafiosi* in the province of Palermo shows that they were already engaging in

⁸⁰ For practical reasons (staff shortages, for example) the trial documentation often languishes in court archives for much longer than seventy years.

⁸¹ Truzzolillo, op. cit. p. 49.

⁸² V. Pizzini-Gambetta, 'Gender norms in the Sicilian mafia, 1945-86', in M.L. Arnot and C. Osborne (eds), *Gender and Crime in Modern Europe*, (London, 1999).

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reciprocal marriage pacts in the 1860s; these pacts sealed political or military alliances among factions.⁸³ As I have already stated, there is no evidence that *mafiosi* were protectors of prostitutes at the same time.

The biographies of individual mafia bosses who first achieved notoriety in the 1870s can take us even further back in time, and show that it is highly unlikely that *mafiosi* made a move away from pimping analogous to the one made by *'ndranghetisti* much later: none of these men has anything in their record to suggest an involvement with pimping.⁸⁴

However, one thing that they did all share, and that may well take us deeper into the question of why Sicilian *mafiosi* have never been pimps, was an involvement in the 1848 revolution and subsequent upheavals [including national unification in 1860](#). Revolution provided opportunities for violent men eager to leverage money, property and power. One example must serve for many here: according to the police, Pietro De Michele, the boss of Burgio (Agrigento province), took advantage of the 1848 revolution to forcibly marry a landowner's daughter (whom he had raped in 1847). After [unification](#), De Michele went on to claim the title of 'Baron' to which he had no legal entitlement, and to grow rich on the profits of rustled cattle, which he

⁸³ For an account of mafia marriage politics in the notorious Piana dei Colli in the 1860s and '70s, see the long memorandum of 11 December 1877 in Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero dell'Interno, Direzione Generale Affari Generale e del Personale, Fascicoli del personale del Ministero (1861–1952) Ila Serie, B. 256. Sangiorgi Ermanno, Questore.

⁸⁴ For biographies of individual early *mafiosi*, see for example N. Giordano, 'Turi Miceli. Il brigante-eroe monrealese nei moti del 1848, 1860 e 1866', *Il Risorgimento in Sicilia*, 1, 1 (1965); and the case of Antonino Giammona in Lupo, *Storia della mafia*, 53-7 and passim.

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smuggled to his mafia friends near Palermo. His son would become a Member of Parliament.⁸⁵

Early Italian observers of the Sicilian mafia in the 1870s were puzzled to find that its affiliates were not all members of the 'dangerous classes'. Like the Risorgimento secret societies whose organisational model it borrowed, the Sicilian mafia cut across class divisions. Hence Leopoldo Franchetti's famous description of mafia bosses as 'middle-class criminals' who owned and/or managed property.⁸⁶

Sicily's revolutions gave leading *mafiosi* the chance to climb the social ladder very quickly. What this suggests is that, while they certainly wove dynastic marriage alliances for short-term tactical reasons deriving from the endemic competition with other men of violence, they also did so for long-term reasons deriving from the need to use marriage to turn their already substantial stocks of property and non-material capital into patrimonies. Thus pimping was incompatible with being a Sicilian *mafioso* from the revolutionary get-go.

The deep historical roots of Sicilian mafia familism are evinced by the fact that the island's oldest criminal dynasties, such as the Grecos of Ciaculli, date back well into the nineteenth century.⁸⁷ By contrast, hegemonic 'ndrangheta dynasties like the Pesces, the Piromallis and the De Stefanos, emerged only in the 1950s or

⁸⁵ On De Michele, see Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero di Grazia e Giustizia, Dir. Gen. Aff. Penali, Miscellanea, b. 46, fasc. 589.

⁸⁶ [Leopoldo Franchetti](#), *Condizioni politiche e amministrative della Sicilia*, Donzelli (Rome, 2011 (1877)), 89-

⁸⁷ On the Grecos see 'Relazione sull'indagine sui casi di singoli mafiosi', in vol. 1 of *Testo integrale della Relazione della Commissione Parlamentare d'inchiesta sul fenomeno della mafia*, 3 vols (Rome, 1973).

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'60s.⁸⁸ One reason for this is probably that they were slower to acquire wealth and influence than their Sicilian cousins, and therefore slower to engage in patrimonial strategizing through marriage. Whereas the Sicilian mafia originated in a revolutionary conspiratorial alliance between patriotic gentlemen and thugs, the Calabrian mafia emerged from the prison system a generation later, and initially recruited from among criminals. Nevertheless, judges were soon reporting that some *picciotti* were growing wealthy, that they were involved in local politics, and that members of the social and political élite were supporting them. Over the coming decades, the accumulation of wealth and influence continued. In Calabria, as in Sicily, the ultimate failure of Fascist repression was due to the extent to which organised crime had infiltrated the state apparatus and influenced the judiciary and PNF.⁸⁹ As a corollary, more and more Calabrian *mafiosi*, like their Sicilian counterparts, acquired assets that they then began to turn into patrimonies through strategic marriage. At that point, the transformation of *'ndranghetisti* into 'middle-

⁸⁸ On the De Stefanos, see L. Barone, 'L'ascesa della *'ndrangheta* negli ultimi due decenni', *Meridiana*, 7-8 (1989-90). On the Piromallis, F. Silvestri, 'Dynasty della Piana', *Narcomafie*, Feb. 1999. For the Pesce clan, I draw on extensive conversations with Captain Giuseppe Lumia of the ROS of the Carabinieri who conducted several major investigations into the Pesces of Rosarno. Genealogical research into *'ndrangheta* families may provide evidence to confirm or qualify the conclusions reached here. It would be very interesting to see whether *'ndrangheta* affiliation became more closely entwined with belonging to given kinship groups on the same chronology as the abandonment of prostitution. However, the difficulties of such research should not be underestimated, given the state of the Calabrian archives and the fact that the families themselves are (to put it mildly) unlikely to cooperate. The tangled webs of inter-marriage among some of the communities where the *'ndrangheta* took hold would also make it difficult to separate out the specific effects of any change within the criminal organisation as opposed to the broader community.

⁸⁹ See Truzzolillo, *Fascismo e criminalità organizzata in Calabria*, op. cit.

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class criminals' entailed rejecting a source of income, pimping, that had hitherto
been a staple.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ I would like to thank the following for their input on earlier drafts of this article, and other contributions: Vittorio Coco, Jonathan Dunnage, Ida Fazio, Mary Gibson, Salvatore Lupo. Fabio Truzzolillo. The research on which this article is based was carried out with the help of funding from the Leverhulme Trust. The issue addressed here was briefly treated in my popularizing work, *Mafia Brotherhoods. Camorra, mafia, 'ndrangheta: the rise of the Honoured Societies* (London, 2011), 320-2 and *passim*.

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