Ndrangheta and Gangster Politics in Calabria.

The local side of a global threat.

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Abstract

Academic attention to the phenomenon of the Calabrian Ndrangheta, the most powerful amongst the Italian Mafias, has recently attempted to analyse the criminal organisation either from the point of view of the criminal activities pursued or from the point of view of the apparent colonisation or transplantation of the organisation’s structures elsewhere in Italy and around the world. Mainstream research on the subject, especially outside Italy, seems to have neglected the local dimension of this powerful mafia that in Calabria still has its roots, its traditions and most of all its political power.

This paper aims at proposing a new vision on the study of the Ndrangheta by attempting an analysis of the political and economic events which have brought the City Council of the main city in Calabria, Reggio Calabria, to be investigated and eventually dissolved for mafia infiltration. The convergence of interests between local politicians and local mafia clans has created a thick network between the legal and the illegal through corruption, dishonesty and malpractices.

After assessing the relationship between politics and mafia in Calabria, this paper will therefore specifically focus on the city of Reggio Calabria whose recent historical events impose a very stringent reflection on the way politics and organised crime share the same space in the region. In order to proceed with this analysis the paper will question the networks of power, often overlapping, in Calabria. Finally, the paper will attempt a reflection on how both local politics and the ndrangheta share responsibilities for the financial crisis and the sleazy governance of the city of Reggio, which prompts questions on the actual power of the ndrangheta as governing actor.
1. Introduction

   a. Object of the Study

The criminal organisation known as ‘ndrangheta is allegedly the most powerful Italian mafia [1-3] and has its roots in Calabria, region of the extreme South of Italy, at the toe of the peninsula. The history of the ‘ndrangheta is essentially the history of an aware but silent region first and of an unaware and oblivious nation afterwards. The chameleonic ability of the organisation to transform, to exploit and follow financial trends and social needs has allowed a powerful oligarchy in one of the poorest region of Italy to become the smartest investor and the most feared enemy of democracy and transparency. As Ciconte [4:11] noticed the ‘ndrangheta is the mafia association which is ‘never the same and always the same’; the organisation has been for a long time neglected or underestimated, considered a second-rate mafia or an appendix of the close Sicilian Cosa Nostra. However, in the past twenty years the attention about this phenomenon - which is first and foremost a social phenomenon before being a criminal threat – has been mostly journalistic and historical in nature. Substantially, there is a gap between the official recognition of the ‘ndrangheta – in political and juridical terms – and its social representation. According to many [4-6] this is mostly due to the widespread perception that organised crime in Calabria was simply a group of uncivilised, uncultured shepherds interested only in their own profits and their own lands but essentially not dangerous beyond their own territories. Only in 2010 the organisation has been added to article 416bis of the Italian Criminal Code as mafia criminal organisation, and the Supreme Court has to confirm the sentence, which recognises the organisation as having a unified and precise structure. Social perception has been brutally overthrown after the events of the past twenty or thirty years once it has become clearer and clearer, thanks to prosecutions, trials and exposes, that the ‘ndrangheta – name that today identifies a specific and complex structure made of over 150 family clans – is not only powerful for its criminal status within and beyond national boundaries, but is also one of the prime engines of the political scene in Calabria - where its control is broadly undisputed – as well as nationally [7]. The ‘ndrangheta has many faces, which is why it is extremely difficult to describe without remaining at the superficial level.

A number of academic and divulging studies have focused on the ‘ndrangheta recently. Among them, many have been published in Italy and therefore for an Italian-speaking audience [1,3,8,2,9,10]. International scholarship has not neglected the phenomenon and has approached it from different angles. Interestingly, it seems easier to study the criminal
organisations in its manifestations outside of Calabria - in the rest of Italy and abroad - than to dig deeper in its roots and appearances in the territory of origin. The boom of news related to the criminal groups of the ‘ndrangheta in the North of Italy has been increasing in the past decades and well-advertised have been the investigations involving members of the Calabrian clans outside Calabria. Studies in this sense have followed and have mainly focused on the migration of this mafia in territories different from the ones of origin for criminal purposes [11-14] or on the chronicles of Calabria-style mafia groups emerging in other countries, such as Australia [15]. Even though many seminal texts have been exploring the phenomenon, from sociological and historical points of view [6,16,17], the unprecedented escalation of power rightfully attributed to the criminal organisation in and out of Italy for the most diverse criminal activities, has somehow shifted the attention from the local dimension to all that is beyond Calabrian boundaries, especially in the north of Italy. However, this paper, in line with the most important investigations carried out in the past years (for example, Operation ‘Crimine’, in 2010) and with studies on the local character of organised crime [18], argues that what happens down in Calabria is not only the epicentre of the criminal affairs of the ‘ndrangheta but essentially the reason, justification and rationale of the indomitable strength of this mafia association [19].

This study, after briefly providing background information about the ‘ndrangheta, its current threat assessment and its historical origin, aims at focusing most of all on what could be considered its most characterising element and the reason for its growing power, which is political infiltration, influence and control of public life in Calabria. As it will be explained, when talking about Calabria and the ‘ndrangheta, the case is more one of contiguity with local administrations, than mere infiltration of mafia into politics. Political institutions in the region have historically and sadly welcomed politicians who were also members (or close to members) of the ‘ndrangheta and/or members of local, powerful and elitarian (deviated) masonic lodges in complex relationships of clientelism and nepotism (Ciconte 2013). In order to explain the intricate field of power, made of mafiosi who are also politicians and politicians who are complacent with mafiosi, the study will focus most of all on the case of Reggio Calabria, capital city of Calabria, whose city council has been dissolved for mafia contiguity in September 2012¹, as disposed by the Minister of Interior after the results presented by an ad

¹ A town/city council can be dissolved for mafia infiltration or contiguity under article 143 of law 267/2000. The procedure has been firstly introduced in 1991 through law decree 164/1991. It essentially aims at restoring impartiality and good functioning of town/city administrations through an administrative procedure.


hoc Commission on the situation of the administrative institutions of the city. The case of Reggio Calabria is topical for understanding the managerial choices of the ‘ndrangheta in politics and also to assess how politics helps the ‘ndrangheta, for a number of reasons. First of all, Reggio Calabria is one of the three ‘mandamenti’ (clan agglomerations) in today’s structure of the criminal association, which means that whatever happens in Reggio affects the rest of the organisation. Second, Reggio Calabria is the largest city of Calabria and third, historically, Reggio Calabria has always been theatre of many events linked to both mafia and antimafia [4] and has been object of close scrutiny before the city council was dissolved.

This paper aims first and foremost at being informative about crystallised and stratified malpractices investing the first Calabrian city, but eventually aims at examining what can probably be considered the less known side of the ‘ndrangheta, the one side which is also more difficult to explain outside Calabria. For the purposes of this paper, considerations about the national political connections, the international criminal activities of the ‘ndrangheta and the debate around colonisation and migration of its cultural aspects, will be not considered in great length as they would exceed the purposes of the analysis.

The paper intuitively concludes by advancing the possibility to look at the Calabrian mafia as governing actor in the region and in Reggio, by reference to the concept of governance in political science and international relations. However, the idea of the ‘ndrangheta as governance actor will not be addressed in full details; in this sense the paper aims at setting the grounds and providing directions for further research in this sense.

b. Notes of methods

In terms of methodology, the paper will aim at proposing examples from the case of Reggio Calabria to discuss the strategies of political management of the Calabrian mafia and the contiguity with the political sphere. The paper will argue that the formal and informal actors are interlinked in terms of governance of the city of Reggio. In order to do so, the study will depart from literature on organised crime and mafia, as well as proposing preliminary approaches to the issues of governance in relation to mafia links with politics. Additionally, the analysis will be based on four main data sets. First, background information and studies about to the relationship between politics and the ‘ndrangheta have been gathered relying, amongst other things, on the latest reports published by the DNA (National Antimafia Prosecutor Agency), especially in terms of data related to town and city councils dissolved for mafia infiltration. Second, press news related to the case of Reggio in the past years have been
selected and interpreted to enrich the official documents and understand the social responses to this case. Third, the confidential report of the Investigative Commission - obtained through media connections - which brought to the dismissal of the city council of Reggio, has been read in concomitance with other sources, such as the official reports from the Italian Court of Accounts (or Court of Auditors) regarding the financial assessment of the city. Fourth, five semi-structured interviews with Calabrian Antimafia Prosecutors, already part of a larger research study, have been included in the study and analysed for its purposes. The data analysis, especially for the case study on Reggio, has been carried out first on the basis of historical narration of events and second, through content analysis both of the textual documents and of the interviews in order to be able to link the case study to the conceptual framework based on the relationship between mafia clans, politics and elitarian powers in Calabria.

In particular, interviewing prosecutors has given me the advantage to get insightful comments on political and social events in the region, and they have helped me in detecting adequate tools to interpret the relationship between politics and mafia in the area, which is the very essence and goal of qualitative data analysis (Ritchie and Spencer, 2002; Denzin, 2002). Being originally from the geographical area object of the study, I have the necessity to declare a bias and prejudice towards certain political figures involved in the narration. This study, far from willing to support political sides or to comment on political choices, will necessarily present data related to local politicians and will focus on the unethical or even criminal side of local politics in terms of mafia affairs, corruption practices and contiguity with criminal clans, as it is described in official documents and the other sources. The knowledge and the bias on the events on my side will hopefully help the analysis, but not influence it for the sake of impartiality in research.

2. One and triune: today’s ‘ndrangheta

At the beginning of 2013 it is still not judicially established whether the term ‘ndrangheta identifies a multitude of family clans unified under the same ‘brand’ or a integrated criminal association with one structure and one centre of power. However, according to the work done during Operation Crimine in 2010 under the lead of the DDA (District Antimafia Prosecutor Office) of Reggio Calabria, the ‘ndrangheta is now presented not only as ‘one’ but also well-structured and cohesive. After Operation Olimpia, in the mid-1990s, it was believed that the
structure of organised crime in Calabria was indeed of duplex nature: the family clans on one level and a structure of coordination on another, superior, level. This has supposedly changed in the recent years and a much more complex structure has emerged; the ‘ndrangheta is now considered to be one and unified even though not vertically structured as Cosa Nostra [2]. According to the Operation Crimine and Prosecutor Alessandra Cerreti [20,2] not only there is one ‘ndrangheta in Calabria, but this one organisation is also triune, divided in three ‘mandamenti’ (three sections) - which are respectively one for the city of Reggio Calabria (mandamento città), one for East (mandamento ionico) and one for West Calabria (mandamento tirrenico). The division of power is indeed horizontal, with every locale - at least 50 members affiliated to various ‘ndrine (family clan units) - sharing equal power. Inside and outside every locale there is a game of leadership with the Capo Provincia (the leader of the external collegial commission – Provincia or Crimine - formed by members of the area around Reggio) being considered primus inter pares (first among equals). The organisation maintains order among the various family clans, supervises the ‘dotti’ (the grades of power) and also provides support to locali outside Calabria, in Lombardia, in Liguria, in the rest of Italy, in Australia and in Canada [2], bearing in mind that the epicentre is always San Luca, a small village in the mountain of the Aspromonte where the spiritual core of the association still is. Even though the actual degree of autonomy of the clans (‘ndrine) and the locali is still not a certain fact, it is certainly the case that a unified ‘ndrangheta would respond better to the challenges of today’s world while acquiring weight and strength for the outside as well as credibility in the inside.

Whether or not the ‘ndrangheta is today one organisation or a brand name for a multitude of clans enjoying independency and autonomy from one another, today’s composition of Calabrian organised crime is very distant from the origins. Historians and reporters [21,3,22-24,17] have narrated the events that have brought the Calabrian way of intending organised crime to be so predominant in today’s panorama. The stories of the origin of the ‘honoured society of valorous men’ (which is the literal meaning of the etymology ανδραγαθία in greek) go back to the history of the country post-unification. There is no agreement on the first time the word was used; writer and journalist Antonio Nicaso dates it back to 1931, but it is in 1955 that Corrado Alvaro, originally from San Luca, uses it in an article in the Corriere della Sera [8]. The honoured society was for a long time hidden in the shadow cone of Cosa Nostra. When, in the 1990s, the state was fighting against the terror strategy of the Sicilian Mafia, the ‘ndrangheta was strengthening its army and building its money empire through ferocious
kidnappings, smart moves in business and finance and powerful alliances with the Gotha of Calabrian politics [3,9]. Recent investigations have ascertained the presence of the group in locations of classical migration for Calabrians: the north of Italy, European Countries, Australia, Canada, United States, but also Africa [9,7,12,25,1]. The National Antimafia Prosecutors analyse (DNA 2012) the way the ‘ndrangheta moves essentially differentiating between a) phenomena of colonisation and 2) a silent and non-structured presence in new territories. In particular, case a) has been happening in the north of Italy or everywhere the ‘ndrangheta has established its structures and methods systematically; case b) instead is the direct consequence of the Calabrian clans having the leadership in drug-trafficking in Europe which means that representatives of the organisation have to be present and in contact with the main illegal global markets [2]. Certainly, the reason why the ‘ndrangheta has grown so quickly also in territories far from the one of origin is due to the fact that in the territory of origin its strength is indeed so pervasive that it becomes part of a set of values, morals, judgements and behaviour, forming an exportable culture [21,7,2]. That the ‘ndrangheta has become a metastasis is clear by looking at the numbers of investigations and operations booming inside and outside Calabria. The complexity of the structure, both analysing the ‘parent company’ and in the established subsidiaries [26], the difficulty in following all the different criminal activities the clans pursue and certainly, the understatement of the problem for year are all factors, have helped the proliferation of the organisation and its growth in criminal markets around the world.

Whereas the main activity of the criminal group is certainly the leadership in drug-trafficking [3,14], the ‘ndrangheta, as a mafia organisation, is constantly preoccupied of maintaining the control over the territory through extortion practices and racket activities on one side and through penetration and conditioning of public apparatus. The strengths of this organisation have been identified mainly in its adaptability and in its expansive capacity [1]; indeed the organisation today, with its extensive reach, its money and its pervasiveness is triune as triune is believed to be the core of its structure. Today’s ‘ndrangheta is a model of governance [27] and a successful one: rooted in tradition and rituals in Calabria, business-oriented and innovative outside Calabria, dynamic and fluid in every activity, both criminal and non-criminal. This paper will focus mainly on traditional ‘ndrangheta in Calabria, firmly believing that without understanding and eradicating its power in the territory of origin, all the other efforts to combat the phenomenon elsewhere will always be incomplete [19].
3. No place like home: today’s ‘ndrangheta in Calabria

Calabria is one of the 20 regions of Italy, with a population of less than 2 million divided in five provinces and 409 municipalities of which 155 in Cosenza, 80 in Catanzaro, 97 in Reggio Calabria, 50 in Vibo Valentia, 27 in Crotone [28]. According to national statistics as elaborated by the Chamber of Commerce in Reggio Calabria [29], the region, in 2011, was behind the national average both in terms of average productivity rate (48.8% out of the national 62.2%) and in terms of unemployment rate (12.7% out of the national of 8.4%).

Where unemployment and underdevelopment have been characteristics of the territory for ages, they are also the main product of the presence of the Calabrian mafia, which, in Calabria acts as governing actor and is the main, sometimes the only, investor [30]. Thousands are the known members of the organisation in total, more than 150 family clans, the majority identified in the area of Reggio Calabria, more than 44 billion Euros is the estimated year profit only in 2008, equal to 2.7% of the Italian GDP [31]. The ‘ndrangheta is a giant of the criminal world not only in Italy, but certainly in Europe and beyond. As confirmation of its peculiar structure, relying mainly on family ties and on a shared culture rooted in Calabria, the DNA confirms how, from investigations and prosecutions, it still seems clear that the cement of the organisation still is the common feeling that the spiritual core is in the ‘Crimine di San Luca’ in the religious and symbolic location of the ‘Madonna di Polsi’ sanctuary [2]. Every member of every ‘ndrina recognises the supremacy of San Luca over every other clan while every attempt to dislocate power – for example in Lombardy - has been severely punished [7]. In fact, even if the lucrative criminal business develops mainly elsewhere, it is the main interest of the ‘ndrangheta to maintain Calabria subjected to its power and to maintain intact and absolute the control over the territory in the region.

As said before, the ‘ndrangheta has more than one face. In Calabria, where the executive centre is, power and social status come probably before money. According to Eurispes in the latest report on the ‘ndrangheta [31], of all the specialist activities contributing to the wealth of the organisation, certainly the principal, drug trafficking, happens mainly outside Calabria. However, other activities in Calabria – procurement of public contracts, extortion, usury and appropriation of public funding – are not only a way to increase the profits, but also a way to ensure that the spider-web on the territory is maintained. The ‘ndrangheta in Calabria is not only criminal, does not only engage in crime. It is a criminal force seeking power, a
governance drive, especially in terms of political and social order, strategic to increase prestige and maintain the criminal leadership also elsewhere.

To picture the situation in Calabria and the gradient of mafia presence in the region it is useful to look at the procedures of dismissal of town councils. Data related to this specific aspect of Antimafia procedure have not always been available [32]. Law Decree 164/1991 has introduced the possibility to dismiss town and city councils following enquiries on mafia infiltration. As showed in table 1, since 1991 and until the end of 2012, 227 councils have been object of this procedure and of these the three main regions with a high presence of mafia organisations, rank as follow [33]: Campania 91, Calabria 64, Sicily 58. Interestingly though, even if prima facie the record is detained by Campania (and the Camorra) in proportion the ‘ndrangheta has been more active and has sensibly grown in the recent years. In fact, in 2012 Calabria has 11 dismissals, against the 6 of Campania and the 5 of Sicily (out of a total of 25 for the whole country). In 2011, Calabria 4, Campania 0, Sicily 1 (see table 1). Generally speaking, the peak of dismissals in Campania dates back in 1993 (17 cases), while the ‘ndrangheta's peak is so far 2012 especially if we consider also councils dismissed for ‘ndrangheta outside Calabria. Of the overall 64 cases in Calabria, some of them are related to the same towns dismissed more than once, among which crucial locations for the ‘ndrangheta (like Plati, Gioia Tauro, Rosarno, Taurianova, Lamezia Terme) but also places where the ‘ndrangheta did not seem to have roots (like Nicotera). Without the duplicates 56 is the effective number of proceedings of which 38 in the area of Reggio Calabria (out of 97 municipalities in the province). Considering the total number of 409 municipalities in the region [28], the 13.7% of public administrations have been found complacent to mafia influence through procedures of dissolution of town/city councils, with an increase of 175% only from 2011 to 2012 and with almost 70% of the cases in the area of Reggio only. It is clear that the phenomenon of mafia presence and influence of political institutions is growing in Calabria as well as attention to the ‘ndrangheta from the central government and the rest of society has increased. The motivations of proceedings for the dismissals are varied and the degree of infiltration and penetration found in the different councils is also very diverse. Generally speaking, and especially after modification of the law in 2009, the grounds for dismissal are now considered to be higher than they were at the beginning as more intrusive are the power of direct removal for employees and units of the council [34]. Reports of investigative commissions prior to dismissals have to show in details how mafia presence interferes with the democratic process, what kind of anomalies can be identified in the way
the council works, how altered, compromised and/or illegal are political procedures [34]. Where, on one side, this is a strong and important indicator of mafia influence in the area, at the same time, it is just an administrative formula, which often responds to a state of emergency of the governmental authority [32] and that cannot possibly change attitudes, mentality and practices employed for years in certain areas. This is well represented by the fact that some municipalities have been subject to prolonged periods of compulsory administration for complications in re-arranging legitimate governance procedures. Mafia presence in a territory like Calabria is so deeply embedded in the culture of the place that most of the time the criminal clans do not require infiltration, but rather a silent and unnoticed overlapping of roles and authority functions. In Calabria, where peaks of mafia penetration indexes can touch 50% of population (it is the case of Reggio Calabria) [31], contamination of politics with mafia does not need to have a criminal nature, but rather is a very visible and at times democratic process, embedded in local culture and accepted (or even wanted) in the area [35] as only actor of stability for the town/city or the whole region. The dissolution of the council of Reggio Calabria, for the peculiarity and the resonance of the case, represents a very good example of the combination of interests between politics and ‘ndrangheta in Calabria.

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Table 1: Lega Autonomie Calabria (2012), summary of dismissal procedure database

4. ‘Ndrangheta City: the hands of the clans on Reggio Calabria

According to the reconstructions of the ‘Operation Crimine’ [2,20,36], Reggio Calabria is a *mandamento* on its own, the so-called ‘mandamento città’, therefore the importance of the criminal clans in the city is extremely crucial. The history of Reggio is very complex, but it suffices to say that in the recent years the National Antimafia Directorate has confirmed the supremacy of four families in Reggio - De Stefano, Condello, Libri and Tegano - [2,36]. This mapping derives primarily from the latest judicial operations, such as ‘Operation Crimine’ and ‘Operation Meta’, which, since 2010, have followed and uncovered the criminal panorama in the city. It seems that in Reggio the four families act in a sort of Quadriumvirate, with shared risks and shared profits and with other clans - some of them very powerful as well - having limited space for independent movements. In particular, ‘Operation Meta’ in 2010-2011 had already showed how in the capital city - precisely because of the internal order between the four main families, especially for the extortion business - the clans are very close to professionals, entrepreneurs and the business class [2].

a. The establishment of the Investigation Commission in Reggio

On the 9th of October 2012, unanimous decision of the Council of Ministers following the proposal from the Italian Ministry of Interior Anna Maria Cancellieri based on the report of the Investigation Commission in Reggio Calabria, the City Council of the biggest Calabrian city
has been dissolved for mafia contiguity. The newspaper ‘La Repubblica’ titles an opinion article ‘Ndrangheta City’ on the 11 October 2012 [37] not because the news came as a shock to the population of the city, but mainly to notice the unreal scenario of calm and absolute indifference that followed the news of the dismissal. Even though it is not the first time that a large city is found in the hands of the local mafia (Lamezia Terme, dissolved twice, is the third city of Calabria and very strategic because of the international airport), the case of Reggio, city with more than 180,000 inhabitants, province city and administrative capital of the region, should raise more than one question. It is the first time that a city of the importance of Reggio Calabria becomes object of coercive administration and this is even more worrying precisely because the dissolution was not unexpected considering the work of antimafia prosecutors in Reggio Calabria and the event of the recent years.

Even with the consciousness of the limits that a brief narration of the events necessarily suffers, for the purposes of this work I shall now proceed in giving some historical background which brought the Council of Ministers to decide for the dissolution procedure which could also serve as a starting point to analyse the various ways the ‘ndrangheta and the political class in Reggio have been found contiguous.

On the 20th of January 2012 the Prefect Office of Reggio Calabria authorised the access of an Investigation Commission in the offices of the city council. This decision stemmed from very complex and very critical investigations during 2011 related to contacts and relations between individuals arrested or under investigation for mafia offences and representatives of private companies in which the city council detained majority shares. As the DNA [2] notices many investigations and prosecutions related to members of the administration board of the Council of Reggio in 2011. Among these operations, it is important to remember ‘Operation Archi’ in April 2011 [2] in which, alongside custody provisions for high calibre members of two major clans of Reggio (Tegano and Labate), provisional custody was asked for the executive director of the company Multiservizi s.p.a. (Giuseppe Rechichi) whom had been indicated by a justice witness as member of the clan Tegano; the Multiservizi s.p.a. was a company whose majority shares (51%) were owned by the Council and that was in charge of a number of outsourced activities for the public administration; it will be object of separate analysis in this paper. In November 2011, with ‘Operation Astrea’ [2] the investigation related to the Multiservizi s.p.a. involves accountants and lawyers suspiciously in contact with members of the Tegano clan but also of other clans in Reggio. In December 2011, with the ‘Operation Alta Tensione 2’ (High Tension 2) [2], members of the clan Borghetto – Caridi –
Zindato, working for the more powerful clan Libri were subjected to custody provisions alongside city counsellor Giuseppe Plutino, arrested for mafia membership and considered the political contact for the criminal clan. Lastly, in October 2012, when from the results of the Investigation Commission the Council of Ministers agreed on the dismissal of the council, yet another operation, ‘Leonia’ [2], started enquiring into the connections between the ‘ndrangheta clans and another main companies, the Leonia s.p.a. of which the Administration of Reggio detained 51% of shares and linked to the Condello clan, confirming how the events of the Multiservizi were not isolated problems.

As said before, the presence of mafia clans in the political life of Reggio Calabria is no news. The degree of this infiltration is probably of public dominion more than it is judicial truth. The events surrounding scandals like the one of the Multiservizi and the suspicious connections between the Administration of Reggio and the clans have been part of the political rumours of the city for a long time; the political life of Reggio has never been only about politics, but rather has always tended to include exponents of the *Reggio-bene*, the Reggio upper-class in dangerous alliances with men of the clans [4].

The Investigation Commission established in January 2012 in the report published and presented to the Government depicted a very gloomy picture of the political life of Reggio. Going beyond the prosecutorial events of the Multiservizi the Commission noticed that

> “during the months of work this Commission has found that, in many aspects of the administrative life of the Council of Reggio Calabria, there are grave irregularities, inefficiencies and incongruences, gross negligence, actions and misbehaviours, which certainly have made the Council more easily permeable to the interests of the local mafia clans”.

[38:4]

Such irregularities and malpractices are not only due to the presence of the ‘ndrangheta but can have worryingly more to do with local politics. This paper will proceed, therefore, with two interpretations of the Investigation Commission report and the current state of affairs: first, an attempt to understand the management strategies of the ‘ndrangheta clans and their chameleonic ability to pervade the political scene; second, an analysis of those practices of the political class which have made it easier for clans to penetrate into the administrative life of the institution.
Table 2: Summary of Investigations in Reggio Calabria

b. The 'ndrangheta in public administration: the case of the Multiservizi s.p.a.

The Commission has accessed every department of the institution and has analysed the connections - both in terms of kinship and in terms of judicially proven affiliation - of employees and professionals working in/for the council, both in the various departments and in companies whose capital is held by the Council at 51%. Amongst the findings, in particular it could be highlighted:

i. In the public works sector a large number of companies have been found having direct (family) or indirect relationships with clans’ members; in practice this has meant that conspicuous public works have been repeatedly allocated to companies with red flags for mafia and other contraindications.

ii. In the production activities sector, amongst other things, various economic operators, owners or leaseholders of properties and warehouses in areas of communal markets not only were linked to local clans, but they had also transferred from one communal market area to another without being authorized or controlled by the Council.

iii. In the treasury department, controls were omitted in assigning public housing and 75 of them had been assigned to mafia members [38:230]; also, in this department there
were cases of buildings confiscated in mafia proceedings still inhabited by members of the clan instead of being disposed differently by the Council.

iv. In the legal advisory service, the way legal cases have been assigned has been object of doubtful practice in itself. Also, the Commission has pointed out how cases had been repeatedly assigned to a lawyer (Giampiera Nocera) whose family ties have been ascertained being of mafia-type (close to the Condello clan).

v. In the social works sector, substantial amounts of money (around 2.5 million euros) have been supplied to companies and cooperatives with clear connection to the local clans.

To these examples many others can be added. In particular the case of the Multiservizi s.p.a. offers a very interesting example of the strategic planning of the ‘ndrangheta clans and their participation to the public affairs. As Table 3 shows, 51% of the company’s capital was held by the Reggio Council while 49% by a private company, Gestione Servizi Territoriali s.r.l (G.S.T. srl). The table shows the final organizational chart of the company but there have been many complex corporate changes in the years. The analysis of the various historical passages of the company and the scrutiny of the individuals who have been executive or directing members have shown contiguity to criminal groups and shared economic interests between local administrators and clan members. In particular, as for the reconstruction of the Investigation Commission, the Multiservizi had been established in 2004 and had, at the time, received the antimafia certification (administrative procedure for companies, over a certain capital, engaged in public works) being in charge of delivering services for the council and managing state assets since 2005.

It has to be noted how, after receiving assignments from the Council, a number of private companies have acquired shares of the private side of the G.S.T. srl. It is at this stage, and with the organogram of Table 3 which represents the state of the company from the end of 2007 onwards, that the suspicion of mafia vicinity starts to haunt the company. In fact, enquiries on the individuals involved revealed how many had been subjected to investigations for mafia membership (Pietro and Domenico Cozzupoli for example, see Table 3) or to assets confiscations or had family members suspected or proven in mafia affairs. But this is not all. The Tibing s.r.l., participating to Brick s.r.l. - one of the subsidiaries of the G.S.T. srl (see Table 3) - was sharing the same company address in Milan with other companies directed by individuals already under investigation in Reggio for mafia membership within the De Stefano clan. The Investigation Commission talks
about a ‘convergence of corporate interests in Milan, via Durini no.14’ [38:208]. Investigations in this direction have been supported by phone wiretappings, which have demonstrated the relationships between Michelangelo Tibaldi (of Tibing s.r.l) and Santo Crucitti, mafia boss, revealing the net of favours the Multiservizi had managed to secure for the interested clans. The same wiretappings have also showed the connections between these individuals and members of the council. When in April 2011 the District Antimafia Prosecutor office in Reggio (DDA) announced the arrest for Giuseppe Rechichi, Executive Director of the Multiservizi, indicated as the ‘entrepreneurial soul’ of the Tegano clan [38:187], the ability of a mafia boss to interfere with the choices of the company has been revealed. The operation of the DDA provoked actions from the Multiservizi and from the council of Reggio, and, after further investigations – which proved how the Multiservizi also never requested any antimafia certifications for its sub-contractors as well – the company has been dissolved with its antimafia certification obviously revoked by the Prefect in June 2012.
Table 3: Multiservizi RC S.p.A., the final organogram [38:186]

The case of the Multiservizi provides a very topical case study to notice the pervasive strength of some of the main clans in Reggio but also the widespread negligence of the public sector in choosing business partners. Even though many details of this case cannot be fully explained and reported they are part of the investigation leading to the dismissal of the city council. Furthermore, in consideration of all the other ‘scandals’ investing the city of Reggio and its political class, this case provides a good understanding of how easy it is for the ‘ndrangheta clans to participate to public affairs undetected. Finally, it must be noticed that it seems very unlikely to the investigating authorities that the pervasive interests of the mafia bosses controlling the events of the Multiservizi, were indeed unknown or went somehow unnoticed, to administrators of the Council in charge of checking the work of the private companies participated by the institution [39].

The aim of this section has mainly been to produce an example of some of the choices of the ‘ndrangheta in entering the political ground undisturbed; considerations on how political and economic conditions of the public institution may actually facilitate this infiltration and thus result in contiguity between mafia and politics will be object of the following sections.

5. Mafia in politics or politics in mafia? Contiguity and malpractice

Alongside the turmoil in the political life of the City Council, Reggio Calabria has also been subjected to very close scrutiny from the Court of Accounts, which in December 2012 has published a review of the books of the municipal administration and has severely painted a very gloom portrait of the financial situation of the council. In fact, by the end of 2012 the Council of Reggio is not only in total financial difficulty, but it is nearly bankrupt. If fact, Reggio owes obligations for an amount of euro 679,244,753.17 in 2010 and with reference to the previous 5 years only [40:26], which emphasizes how the situation of financial strain has been affecting political decisions for a while. As the Court notices ‘the consistency and the oldness of the passive balance (...) highlight a condition of delay in payment and in the realisation of investments’ [40:26]. The Court is therefore very critical towards the financial management of the council in the way it has been carried out in the latest years. Furthermore it seems to be quite usual for the council to have off-balance debts (i.e. not justified in terms of expenses) for a total of almost 3,5 million euros (for 2010 only). Abnormal expenses (around
215 million euros) have been accumulated in terms of judiciary action: the Council has been involved in more than 30,000 judicial cases since 2008. The Court is brutal in the analysis: Reggio suffers for a ‘situation already stratified, of substantial insolvency, quasi vis cui resisti non potest’ (almost like a force which cannot be resisted), with reference to previous documents already analysing the financial situation of the City [40:42]. However, the Court says, the normative setting governing the council would in theory allow a good management by a honest political class. Clearly, the way forward for the Court was to declare bankruptcy and reboot, because of the advantages that the bankruptcy procedure would bring and the substantial impossibility to reinstate the correct functioning of the system. However, even though the Court at first suggested to declare bankruptcy to finally exit the dramatic financial situation, in January 2013 declared that it is not in its mandate to impose such procedure [41] and that instead the Council will act in different directions. At this date (April 2013) a declaration of bankruptcy seems unlikely to happen especially because, in case of bankruptcy all the politicians officially held responsible for the financial crisis would be banned from any other political role for a period of 10 years. According to national and regional newspapers, this would be highly ostracized by the Calabrian ruling class and in particular - according to local media [42,43]– by Governor of Calabria Giuseppe Scopelliti, former mayor of Reggio until 2010 already facing a trial for abuse of power and forgery in public documents, as a result of another scandal within the Treasury Department of the Council. In practice, having being subjected to the dissolution for mafia infiltration, Reggio can also benefit from different types of funding to re-establish its financial situation with the risk of reproducing once again the same dynamics. As the Court of Accounts noticed, there is in Reggio a

‘vicious circle regarding management and finance (overestimated incomes, scarce collections, (...), followed by a substantial alteration of the reliability of outcomes and administration), which has characterised the past political governance and has contributed to determine today’s deficit and the grave financial crisis of the council’

[40:10].

In practice, says the Court, the Council has been systematically and repeatedly eluded legitimacy checks, which have caused significant damage both to the finances and to other procedures of the public administration.

It seems therefore that the criminal presence in the public life and the managerial class of Reggio share the same interests; they both consume resources without a proper plan for
growth and allowing a careless accumulation of debts. Whereas it might seem logical that a financially shaky council is more available to welcome illicit funds of dubious origin, it is not necessarily logical that a mafia infiltrated council is a financially shaky council. Indeed, it seems that mafia presence in Reggio goes beyond infiltration, indeed towards contiguity and shared interests between the criminal and the political class, because they both essentially employ very similar levels of sleaze and malpractices.

Whether it comes first mafia or bad governance would be an impossible question to answer in this case. Certainly, the scandals at the political level, which have prompted the central government to start the investigation, are more than red flags of a worrying connivance of interests within the walls of Palazzo San Giorgio (Town Hall in Reggio).

As the Minister of Interior Cancellieri writes in the decree for the dismissal of the council of Reggio [39], the fact that at the end of 2011 city councillor Giuseppe Plutino (council member and Assessor for the Environment in the past three legislatures) has been arrested for mafia membership as the deputy person to serve the interests of the clans Libri and to ensure their satisfaction through practices of cronyism and nepotism from inside the public institution, is not only a proof of the contiguity of mafia with politics, but is primarily the sign of the strength of the criminal organisation in the territory. The decree mentions vicinity among council members and individuals close to mafia clans as demonstrated by their attendance to weddings, ceremonies, dinners and even funeral [39:2]. The density of the mafia presence in Reggio is so thick that every contact, personal or professional, counts. The Commission does not spare anyone; the current mayor, Demetrio Arena, who was shareholder of a company whose main investor was an individual suspected of mafia offences in a case regarding another company; three councillors in Reggio and a conspicuous number of employees who have familiar relations with mafia members; one of the councillors repeatedly assigning very lucrative law cases of the council to his partner who happens to be involved in various dubious situations of mafia ties; a substantial number of public works allocated to companies directly or indirectly connected to mafia business. In total, since the elections of the 15-16 May 2011, 41 councillors (newly elected or migrating from the precedent political formation) formed the political administration, either as council members and/or as assessors; 10 of them have been found very close to mafia interests or mafia families. This demonstrates, at the very least, how the political class is willing to ‘close an eye’ on the presence of politicians connected to the ‘ndrangheta; it also demonstrates that if the ration of mafia infiltration in the political administration was roughly of 1 to 4, those who have not been found in direct or
indirect contact with the criminal clans still carry responsibility for the bad management of
the institution, especially considered how many of them had been elected in previous
elections as well. Furthermore, three other events are significant to expose the malpractices
of the political governance of Reggio, which indeed helped mafia interests to flourish in the
public sphere.

First, the events surrounding the suicide of Orsola Fallara in December 2010 are worth
mentioning. Mrs Fallara was the director of the Treasury Department and she had been
appointed directly from the former mayor, Giuseppe Scopelliti, in violation of the procedure
regarding the appointment of externals in such roles. After an internal investigation, Mrs
Fallara had been suspended while very serious alterations of the accounts have been found.
As the Investigation Commission declared, the documents provided by the Treasury were not
considered reliable because of ‘artifices to disguise the real financial situation of the institution’
[38:52]. Following this enquiry, Orsola Fallara committed suicide and, amongst other things,
former mayor Giuseppe Scopelliti, now Governor of Calabria, has been sent to trial for abuse
of power and forgery of public act.

Second, both the Investigation Commission and the decree for the dismissal note how there
were very clear irregularities in the way the unit managers had been appointed directly by the
mayor and not, as provided by national regulations (law decree 267/2000), by the sector
managers in order to ensure separation between administration duties and political roles.
Such irregularities had been already pointed out to the previous political regime but no action
had been taken to correct the illegal practices [39]. Afterwards, the current regime has shifted
the nomination power to the sector managers but with previous consultation of the political
power, de facto allowing interference, which is still in contrast with the national regulation.

Last but not least, another example of the scarce efficiency of the city administration could be
detected in the management of the assets confiscated in mafia proceedings. The confiscation
of assets to mafia members is crucial because it attempts to partially restore the harm mafia
groups cause to communities by giving the assets back to those communities for social use
(Lex 109/1996). In Reggio, it is emblematic the case of the building confiscated to a well-
known boss in 2004 and assigned to the previous city administration for management and
social use in 2007. In 2010, according to the records of the council, the building was supposed
to be under maintenance work, when the police found out that the family of the boss was still
living there and no engineering work was indeed planned. Furthermore, in 2012, the council
informed the National Agency for the Management and Destination of the Confiscated Assets (established in 2010) that finally the building was free from people or things, but even in that occasion it was not true as the family of the boss was still living there [38].

The gravity of such mismanagements is not only worrying, but also shows a condoning approach to mafia presence while subjugation to mafia powers becomes normality for the life of the city of Reggio, recalling the gloomy picture of indifference described in the article titled ‘Ndrangheta City at the dawn of the dissolution of the Council (Bolzoni 2012). In all the cases explained so far it seems that, even before being criminal and/or financially deregulated, some members of the administration are indeed both actively and passively accepting and helping mafia power to expand. It is through the acquiescence, laziness and/or aware support of mafia traditions and business that mafia powers is fed and nourished in Reggio.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relevant Information</th>
<th>Council Dissolutions 2012 – (Italy) 25 out of 227 since 1991 (Calabria) 11 out of 64 since 1991</th>
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<td></td>
<td>38 cases in the province of RC (for a total of 97 municipalities in the province)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Reggio - Debts 679,244,753.17 Euros</td>
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<td>Reggio - 1 out of 4 counsellors with direct/indirect mafia links</td>
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Table 4: Relevant Data about Calabria and Reggio Calabria

6. Beyond contiguity towards governance

From the events of the past couple of years it seems evident that Reggio Calabria suffers for more than only one plague. Reckless governance on one side and the ‘ndrangheta on the other have created a lethal grip of corruption, sleaze and crime, which has compromised the
performance and the impartiality of the public administration and brought the city on its knees. From the findings of the Investigation Commission it emerges that even when the administration has not voluntarily supported or acted in favour of individuals close to the mafia clans, nevertheless, the public activities have been altered and in fact have seconded organised crime activities and interests [38]. As the Minister of Interior pointed out in the Decree [39:6],

‘an administration aware of the risks to which it is exposed, in a territory with an historically strong tradition of organised criminality, with visible influence on public administration and socio-economic relations, cannot avoid implementing every suitable measure in order to prevent and remove every risk of mafia infiltration’.

The laziness, the acquiescence of the political and professional classes is what authors discuss as the peril of the grey zone, a ‘structural and not transitory status quo’ of society in Calabria, which functions as ‘cover and protection for the ‘ndrangheta’ [4:204]. The grey zone is the pre-criminal area where acquiescence, favours and simple vicinity to mafia are important factors impacting the longevity of the phenomenon. It is in this relationship with professionals, entrepreneurs, managers, local, regional and even national politicians, that the ‘ndrangheta finds its strength and feeds its power [2]. It is also in the games of power with criminal fringes of the masonic lodges, historically linked or even overlapping with individuals also affiliated to the clans [30,5,4]. It is because of the convergence of interests between the mafia and the ruling class – the so-called Reggio-bene - that cities like Reggio become national scandals. Attention to the events in Reggio has been paid in various ways. In particular, the media have described the professed ‘Reggio Model’ as symbol of denial of any existent problem and careless management. The Reggio Model - which was the slogan of the right-wing administration of Former Mayor Giuseppe Scopelliti since 2002 - had been presented as a strategy to restore Reggio’s lost glories, through policies for development, modernisation and entertainment; this strategy has apparently ended up being yet another way to originate debts [44]. Apart from the catchy rhetoric of the media around the ‘Reggio Model’, it seems that an element of denial has characterised politicians’ comments on the mafia infiltrations and even the findings of the Investigation Commission [4]. Similarly, newspapers have diffused interesting intercepted materials, released after investigations of the most powerful clans of the West side of Calabria, the Mancuso clans [45]. The boss Pantaleone Mancuso had been heard revealing that the ‘ndrangheta does not exist anymore and that is now an appendix of local masonic lodges, who are indeed detaining governance powers in Calabria.
The investigations on the Mancuso clans until March 2013 are a goldmine of information about politics, masonic lodges, powerful individuals and the ‘ndrangheta, as a manifestation that the grey zone is what really makes the criminal organisation that strong power feared outside Calabria. Whichever results the prosecutors and the criminal justice system might achieve through these latest information, certainly the dinners, the not so secret meetings, the weddings and the ceremonies where professionals, politicians, men of power and mafiosi co-exist are the manifestations of a society which has repeatedly accepted and has allowed shared spaces with criminality to the point of social, political and economical identity. On a final note, the relationship between local mafia clans and Masonic lodges, in terms of elitarian and oligarchic power, seems to be a recurrent theme not only in the words of mafia bosses, but also for institutions. Vincenzo Macrì, former Vice-President of the DNA and current General Antimafia Prosecutor in Ancona, Marche (Macri 2012), has effectively declared:

‘We always talk about relationships and connivance between mafia and politics, mafia and the State, as if they were completely separated entities, which occasionally meet, while no one really talks about the politics of the mafia, as political actor. Apart from the known and unknown relationships that mafia has with everyone in power, without preference for political sides, is there a politics of the mafia itself? What would the mafia prefer for their population?

The enormous amount of money they get from drug trafficking allows them to be an active political power because with such money they are able to influence legislative, judicial, political decisions. I do not know whether elsewhere, let’s say in England, the Masonry has a political status, or what kind of political power it has, but in Calabria, in Italy, it is possibly the principal actor of today’s political scene and moreover it is contaminated with mafia’.

Investigations in this sense are currently preoccupations of the antimafia authorities; a research in this direction would require a much more profound socio-political analysis of the historical role of masonic lodges in the territory, their overlapping with mafia affiliations and their shared interests with political actors (Ciconte 2013).

Affirming that the 'ndrangheta is a political actor and shares power and interests with other urban actors both in Reggio and in Calabria in general, means that the whole governance setting in the region needs to be re-assessed, borrowing concepts from political science and international relations theories. By governance we generally indicate an emergence of
informal actors alongside formal ones, with different purposes and objectives, developing 'governing styles in which boundaries between public and private have become blurred' (Stoker, 1998 p.17). Whereas the concept and definition of governance is very difficult to agree upon (Peters, 2002; Pierre, 2000; Rhodes, 1996), it seems safe to say that governance is the result of interaction of different actors, beyond the institutional ones, performing collective actions. According to Stoker (1998) these networks of actors are autonomous and able to get things done without resorting to the authority of the government. This is not only intuitively applicable to the analysis of Reggio Calabria, but essentially helps in considering the consequences of such a consideration further. In fact, the existence of different networks of power makes the process of decision-making not only very complex, but with very blurred responsibilities and difficult accountability (Stoker, 1998). Further research should look at the relationship of power between formal and informal actors in Reggio or indeed in Calabria. This paper has attempted to intuitively address the concept of governance to describe the situation emerging from the analysis of the latest political affairs in Reggio by proposing a critical outlook at the relations between elected politicians (at the local, provincial, regional level) and the urban elite where informal actors - the 'ndrangheta, the Reggio-bene, the masonic lodges - tend to overlap, both physically and in terms of interests, with formal networks. Indeed, political science and international relations have fully explored the issues behind governance; also there are a few studies attempting to link governance with organised crime studies. These studies mainly insist on (transnational) organised crime groups acting as enterprises and therefore influencing governance settings through interrelations with law enforcement and the economic sector (Edwards and Gill, 2002; Van Dijk, 2007; Anderson, 1995) or, especially in Italian literature, they have looked at mafia as political subject (Santino, 2006, Fiandaca, 1995). However, it seems that the case of Calabria and Reggio could present hypothesis of alternative and/or concurrent governance, also, but not exclusively, by endorsing views that governance actors 'from below' are not only meant to fill the vacuum of power left by the governing actors 'from above' (Aresu and Gasparri, 2012; Lea and Stanson, 2007) but rather they complement this power and share the same political space.

7. Conclusion

This paper has attempted to present the ‘ndrangheta from what could be considered the most visible and yet the most neglected of its sides, which is the Calabrian side. The ‘ndrangheta is a
powerful and fearful transnational criminal organisation, recognised abroad and that recently has been in the spotlight also for academic studies beyond Italy. It has been object of study and research because of its criminal strategies, its power to colonise new territories and to expand its business areas [12,13] and its growing ability to penetrate legal sectors and politics even in non-traditional mafia places, such as the North of Italy [7].

This paper has attempted to shift academic attention to the local side of the criminal organisation, which in Calabria still has its roots, its lymph and its vital organs. Without the control of power and the influence on local institutions that the clans can enjoy in Calabria, the organisation would not be the powerful group that it is. The analysis proposed has therefore wished to explain and inform about the situation in Calabria, where ‘ndrangheta means a lot more than simply organised crime, where infiltration is rather contiguity, where corruption is an endemic characteristics of certain fringes of public life. The examples proposed in the paper have touched the relationship between mafia and politics most of all, and, through the recent examples of the events surrounding Reggio Calabria, capital city of Calabria, and crucial point for the Calabrian mafia for the detention of power over the local community.

By analysing some of the current situations and by trying to structure a wider analysis on the relationships between mafias and politics in the region, the paper has ultimately aimed at proposing another window to look at a phenomenon. The motivations to propose such an analysis are various. First, the strength and the structure of the Calabrian mafia are still undoubtedly rooted in Calabria; as affirmed before, the organisation would not be the same without the power and influence enjoyed in Calabria. Second, in Calabria the ‘ndrangheta is necessarily different than in Central or Northern Italy or abroad, where it might lose some of its characteristics or has to adjust to other structures and opportunities. Third, the space of politics and the space of criminality have tended to overlap in Calabria more than anywhere else recently; this suggests that the criminal organisation has been able to share and/or conquer the spaces of politics or that politics has been complacent with criminal organisation doing so.

At this point, however, it needs to be noticed that, however gloomy and however complex the Calabrian scenario might look like, it is not everything that Calabria is. Out of the difficulties of a land always neglected and poorly equipped, the ‘ndrangheta is certainly a product and a plague of a vast portion of the region, but hopefully - to cite a famous saying attributed to
Giovanni Falcone - Italian Magistrate killed by Sicilian Cosa Nostra in 1992 - mafia is a human fact and, as such, it has a beginning and it will have an end. The day this end comes Calabria will only be known as the very beautiful region than it actually is.
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