EXCERPT

Letizia Paoli, "The Political-Criminal Nexus in Italy." Paper presented at the Institute for Contemporary Studies and NSIC Conference, "Confronting the Challenge of the Political-Criminal Nexus," Mexico, March 1997: 1–8.

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A Long-Standing and Mutually Profitable Relationship

As is well known, Italy has a rooted problem of organized crime. But since 1984, when Tommaso Buscetta revealed the existence of a secret mafia association named Cosa Nostra to Judge Giovanni Falcone, much has been accomplished by the Italian law enforcement and the academic communities in furthering knowledge of its various manifestations. In particular, in addition to the Sicilian Cosa Nostra, the existence of three other major clusters of crime groups has been proved: the Calabrian *'ndrangheta*, the Neopolitan *camorra* and the Apulian *'Sacra Corona Unita'*. Whereas the last is quite a recent phenomenon that has developed only in the last fifteen years, the other three associations appear to have existed at least since the mid-19th century. The development of contacts and exchanges between members of these criminal coalitions—which may be collectively termed as mafia associations—and state representatives and politicians also dates back to the same period. In fact, since the Unification of Italy in 1860, Sicilian, Campanian and, to a minor extent, Calabrian mafias well inserted themselves into the web of clientelistic relationships through which the central government integrated Southern elites into the national political system and secured their invariable support to the government majorities.

It was, in particular, the extension of suffrage in 1882 which opened the season of a mutually profitable collaboration between politicians and *mafiosi*, a collaboration that, notwithstanding the turnover of regimes and parties, has lasted up to today. By lowering the census requirement and giving the vote to all literate men, the reform widened the electoral body, previously restricted to a selected group of aristocrats and high burgeois. Thus, the candidates were compelled to gain the votes of the lower and middle sections of the electorate. As the Sicilian political scientist Gaetano Mosca noted, "the *cosche* immediately understood the great advantage that they could draw from their participation in the political and administrative elections. This participation became more effective and active after the law widened the suffrage and gave the right to vote to the members of the *cosche* and to the classes in which they had greater influence and enjoyed prestige" ([1900] 1949: 243).

Since the 1880s the relationship between mafia and politics has always been so deep and intense that numerous scholars believe the mafia phenomenon to consist in the interaction between deliquent structures and political circuits (Pezzino, 1994; Romano, 1963). Given the information disclosed by former mafia members, these positions appear one-sided but it is, nonetheless, true that mafia groups owe much of their long-standing power and impunity to their intermingling with politicians.

In fact, in exchange for mobilizing their own clientele as well as for using violence to discourage opposing candidates or to convince uncertain electors, even a hundred years ago the *mafiosi* managed to obtain all kinds of favors. Moreover, since electoral competition was fierce, the latter were often in a position of advantage and could bargain the conditions to support this or that candidate. One of the first favors expected was protection from judicial investigations: if necessary the political patron was prepared to interfere with the competent police officer or judge, in order to guarantee a mild sentence, the revocation of a police restriction, the concession of an arms license, etc. In addition, *mafiosi* were granted substantial contracts for tax collection and for public works. Occassionally the *capomafia* himself or more frequently his political patron even obtained the control of the town council thanks to which they could further enlarge their following and consolidate their power. After the decline during the Fascist regime, *mafiosi* again succeeded in securing a crucial role in the post-war political competition.

The establishment of a democratic Republic, the rise of mass parties were not sufficient to destroy the clientelistic channels for the collection of political consensus in the South. There was indeed a transformation from the traditional vertical clientelism, founded on notables, to a horizontal or bureaucratic one, capable of gathering interest groups at the mass level through an organization of party officials (Tarrow, 1967; see also Fantozzi, 1993). But in such a system of mas patronage mafia families associates were able to secure a role at least as important as the one they had played *vis-à-vis* traditional notables. As a matter of fact, the concession of universal suffrage in 1948 and the ideological split of the electorate along the left-right cleavage made *mafiosi*'s intervention essential for the success of the moderate *Democrazia Cristiana* (DC), the majority party that backed all Cabinets from the end of the Second World War up to 1992. At the same time, the 'occupation' of government by the DC and the devolution of huge resources to the enhancement of the industrialization of the South multiplied the possibilities of clientelistic exchange (see Gribaudi, 1980 and Mastropaolo, 1993).

It has been estimated that in small and medium-sized municipalities of Southern Calabria, the ruling mafia family—considering the extension of the economic activities and the network of interests and obligations owned by the chief of the *cosca*—could and still can control up to 40 per cent of the votes, while this percentage decreases to 15–20 per cent in the larger towns (Arlacchi, [1983] 1988: 137–40; Ciconte, 1992: 6). But even in Sicily where the incidence of mafia members over the total population has always been more limited, in certain areas the pool of votes controlled by Cosa Nostra is still relevant: "In Palermo there are 14 to 15 *mandamenti*, each of which has two or three families; every family has 40 or 50 men of honor. When a provincial representative of Palermo says that we have to vote for a certain name, the men of honor—I would not say 100 per cent but at least 80 per cent—vote for him and make their wife, brother-in-law, relatives do so too...It is easy to understand how many votes they can collect. When this large package of votes arrives where it was meant to arrive, it is of enormous weight" (CPM, 1992: 285; 319–20).

According to a recent estimate (based on the political figures mentioned by former mafia affiliates), a quota ranging from 40 per cent to three quarters of the Christian

Democrat deputies and about 40 per cent of all the deputies elected in Western Sicily between 1950 and 1992 were openly supported by Cosa Nostra (Arlacchi, 1995: 15–7).

In its turn, mafia leverage on the political world represents a key variable to explain the post-war growth of mafia members' power and wealth. Not only has the connection with politicians and state officials guaranteed high levels of judicial impunity. It has also allowed *mafiosi* to exert a heavy influence over the economic and therefore social life of their own communities (Paoli, 1997). In particular, thanks to the help of their political counterparts, members of mafia associations have asserted a growing control over the regional public works markets. Throughout the 1980s this sector has represented a privileged field of reinvestment of drug trafficking proceeds as well as a very profitable activity *per se*, so much so that the profits that *mafiosi* could extract through manipulation of public tenders has been judged "proportionately comparable to the illegal income from drug trafficking" (Ministero dell'Interno, 1994: 195).

Whereas the final report, which will be published in 1998, reconstructs the evolution of the relationships between "mafia and politics" from the mid-19th century up to the present day, our attention will now focus exclusively on two trends which have affected the "political-criminal nexus" in Italy in the last thirty years, producing consistent vulnerabilities for the preservation of such a relationship in the future.

Two Elements of Weakness

Notwithstanding the lasting influence exercised by mafia groups over the political arena during the last post-war period, the primary trend to be highlighted is the *process of delegitimation* undergone by mafia groups in the last three decades. In the 19th and early 20th centuries chiefs and members of mafia families fulfilled functions of social integration in the *Mezzogiorno* society and their power, based on widespread cultural codes, was largely perceived as legitimate within their local communities. Mafia power was also functional to the weakness of state institutions that did not succeed, at least up to the establishment of the Fascist regime, in effectively securing the monopoly of force in wide sections of the *Mezzogiorno* and in legitimizing themselves before the local population. A division of powers between the mafia and the state was *de facto* long at work.

After the 1960s, however, this equilibrium began to waver. In fact, the post-war "great transformation" (Ginsborg, 1990) progressively subtracted from *mafiosi* some of the functions of social integration they used to carry out and, at the same time, weakened the cultural codes on which the collective identity of mafia families and the justification of their political power was built. In order to cope with these changes and to avoid the loss of their pre-eminent position in the local communities, a growing number of associates has, since the 1950s, "bent" mafia brotherhood bonds to the pursuance of wealth accumulation. Such an adaptation process was greatly favoured by two larger trends, which provided mafia groups in Sicily and in Calabria with hitherto unforeseen chances of enrichment: a) the expansion of world illegal markets, most notably in tobacco and narcotics, and b) the growth of public spending in the *Mezzogiorno*.

The growing involvement in economic activities has also increased the power of mafia associations within local society. Not only have the financial and "military" resources grown but, thanks to the engagement in a plurality of businesses, mafia associations have tightened their "grip" on the local job market, both in its legal and illegal markets and, as a result, secured the control over consistent "packages of votes" to be used as an exchange commodity on occasion of elections. Nonetheless, even though significantly lowering its pace, the "entrepreneurial transformation" has not succeeded in stopping the delegitimation of mafia power. Such a process, in fact, is a direct by-product of the contradictory but evident process of economic and cultural modernization, that has overwhelmed the whole country in the post-war decades and reached even the most peripheral areas of the *Mezzogiorno*. This transformation has progressively, put in crisis the mafia "subsystem of meaning" (Berger and Luckmann, 1966) by which mafia chiefs had long legitimated their power both in respect of the local communities and their own acolytes. It is, foremost, the subculture of honour, by which mafia associates have long justified their use of private violence and their political authority, that has more and more come under attack. Likewise, the aristocratic ideal of life and the centrality of kinship (blood and fictive) relationships are challenged. As a result of the changes in the larger social system, mafia associations seem to be invested by a "system crisis" and to have increasing difficulties in justifying their existence. The complex "castle" of codes, prescriptions and rituals created by Cosa Nostra and *'ndrangheta* over a period of a hundred years to socialize their members and to secure their loyalty seems to be crumbling. While its obligations are increasingly considered as awkward or old-fashioned, more and more *mafiosi* are aware that the most powerful "brothers" exploit such a symbolic apparatus to promote collective action for the exclusive pursuance of their own private interests. Likewise, notwithstanding the fortunes that mafia chiefs have accumulated over the last thirty years and the military arsenals that they have, thus, been able to build up, the authority of the mafia has decreased *vis-à-vis* the larger public.

The weakening legitimacy of mafia members affected the evolution of their relationship with politicians. "Before 1963," noted the first Parliamentary Anti-Mafia Commission, "many *mafiosi* paraded their relationship with politicians and local administrators—and vice versa. At polling-stations, *mafiosi*'s presence was impudent and aggressive. It is rare nowadays to see links between *mafiosi* and politicians openly manifested" (CPMS, 1976: 581). Although the transition was by no means clear-cut, from the early 1960s onwards the mafia began to be talked of and condemned and open relationships with *mafiosi* became a handicap for a man in politics. Consequently, the relationships between *mafiosi* and politicians have become more and more subterranean.

Second, as a consequence of the nation-wide processes of social and cultural transformation, *the relationships* between mafia and political power *have lost their rooting in a shared subcultural sub-stratum*. Before the "great transformation," the exchange of favors between *mafiosi* and politicians was inserted in a long-term relationship which, being based on friendship and mutual respect, went far beyond the utilitarian moment. In the last thirty years, however, these long-term, unconditional relationships have become rarer and rarer. On the one hand, the representa-

tives of the political class share the subcultural values that are at the core mafia legitimation apparatus. On the other hand, the consolidation of mafia leverage on political competition has been accompanied by a growing distrust and lack of respect towards the political class.

To compensate the weakening strength of subcultural values, the relationships between *mafiosi* and politicians, even long-term ones, are more frequently than in the past cemented by monetary rewards. Depending on the occasion, money flows in both directions. *Mafiosi* pay in order to obtain a favor, the adjudication of a tender or the adjustment of a trial; politicians, on the other hand, occasionally pay money in order to secure the support of a mafia family during electoral campaigns. Betrayals and double acts are then discouraged by the threat and use of violence by mafia families: "We obviously give votes to politicians of our choice," states a Sicilian former mafia affiliate, now cooperating with the Judiciary, "after a previous agreement with them, but they have to do what we say, 'otherwise we break their horns'" (PrPA, 1995, II: 66). Another strategy adopted by Sicilian and Calabrian mafia bosses in order to offset the loss of a common subcultural stratum has been the entrance into the Freemasonry. From the mid-1970s a growing number of Sicilian and Calabrian mafia chiefs have become affiliated with Masonic lodges and the Freemasonry has become for the Sicilian Cosa Nostra and the Calabrian *'ndrangheta* a privileged "locus" in which to establish or strengthen relationships with politicians and state officials. Indeed, in both cases, the Masonry has come to represent a powerful means to stabilize relationships between mafia and politics and, at the same time, to protect them from public view as a result of their lower degree of legitimation.

The Situation Today

By increasing the "invisibility" of the political criminal nexus, the entrance into the Freemasonry has long successfully helped *mafiosi* and collaborating politicians to balance out the vulnerabilities that have emerged since the 1960s. Nonetheless, it has not proved sufficient to keep these last completely under control. These weaknesses are, in fact, primarily dependent on the long-term process of delegitimation undergone by mafia associations since the end of the last World War. As a matter of fact, this process received a sudden acceleration in 1992 and 1993 following the terrorist campaign staged by Sicilian Cosa Nostra. The shocking murders committed in rapid succession of the magistrates Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino and the explosion carried out in the following year in some major Italian cities moved large strata of the Sicilian civil society and of the entire country.

State institutions also reacted to these events with a determined counterattack, which produced the highest peak of anti-mafia activities of the last 30 years. In summer of 1992 a new anti-mafia act was passed, according to which most mafia chiefs were restricted in special high security prisons, 7,000 soldiers were sent to Sicily to help civil police forces and anti-mafia investigations were substantially facilitated. The enactment of a law to protect judicial collaborators and their families, the wide range of provisions foreseen by the law of August 1992 as well as the successes of law enforcement forces have favored the growth of the phenomenon of *pentitismo*, powerfully intensifying the internal tensions and contradictions of

mafia organizations. As of June 30, 1996, former organized crime members now co-operating with the Judiciary (popularly called *pentiti* in Italy) numbered 1,777 (Ministero dell'Interno, 1996). The declarations made by these collaborators have widened and updated the investigators' body of knowledge on the different facets of Italian organized crime and led to the localization of fugitives, some of whom had been on the hide for decades, and to the enhancement of investigations.

Though it was up to few years ago a sort of "national taboo," the existence of permanent pacts between *mafiosi* and state representatives has also begun to be unveiled. Such a turn is clearly exemplified by the indictment of Giulio Andreotti, one of the main characters of Italy's post-war history, for the crimes of mafia association and murder (PrPA, 1993). Though the attention of the national and international public opinion has been focued on this case, several other investigations are going on the account of national as well as local politicians and state officials. Furthermore, since the approval of the Law n. 221/91, "concerning the dismissal of the councils of communes, provinces and other local institutions following phenomena of mafia infiltration and conditioning," more than 80 communal councils have been dismissed in Campania, Calabria and Sicily (Ministero dell'Interno, 1994). As a result of these events, the space for mediation open to corrupt representatives of the state has consistently diminished. Thanks to the greater sensitivity demonstrated by police forces and magistrates in the prosecution of the crimes against the public administration as well as the increased reactivity of the public opinion towards corruption and embezzlement episodes, today the costs and the risks of the mediation and protection of mafia interests in political and institutional seats have grown considerably. Moreover, the number of politicians willing to come to terms with the mafia has also decreased. As a consequence, over the last few years *capimafia* find it increasingly costly to condition state action and decision-making and, nonetheless, their chances of obtaining what they want have rapidly diminished, thus further weakening the chiefs' legitimation *vis-à-vis* their own subordinates.

Nonetheless, though endangered, the political-criminal nexus is far from disbanded. Irrespective of the fact that mafia consortia's net of political and institutional connections has begun to be targeted by judicial inquiries, a considerable number of politicians and state officials is still today ready to advocate mafia interests. The bulk of this group is represented by members of the political and institutional establishment who have recycled themselves in the so-called "Second Republic" and who have become completely subjugated to mafia interests. Their political survival depends, in fact, on the hiding of their past and present collusive agreements from judicial investigations, whereas their physical well-being depends on the ability to confute accusations of betrayal on part of mafia members. Beyond monetary rewards, the identification with mafia interests has become for these actors almost complete.

This web of contacts and alliances was to be exploited in 1993 to launch a separatist project that, by creating an independent state in Southern Italy or at least in Sicily, would have enabled mafia associations to exert a tight influence over its political and judicial decision-making. This project went through the first implementation stages and even obtained some promising success. At the election for the renewal of the Catania provincial council in January 1994, a separatist list *Sicilia*

Libera, created by Tullio Cannella acting on the orders of the *Corleonesi*, gained about 9 per cent of the consensus. Initiatives to support such a plan were also taken by the bosses of the Calabrian mafia association. The plan, however, came to a sudden halt, as Cosa Nostra and *'ndrangheta* bosses thought their interests could be represented at the national level by the alliance of center-right and right parties that took shape in late 1993 under the leadership of TV tycoon Silvio Berlusconi and that won the March 1994 national elections. As the Calabrian *pentito* Cesare Polifroni state right after the elections, "In this moment waiting for the politicsl of the new government is the prevalent attitude. I may say in this respect that there was the order of all the organizations in Sicily, Calabria and Campania to vote either for Berlusconi or for Pannella, with the certainty that they were going to be the winning group. We believe that the new government will dismantle all the repressive legislation and go back to the 'free state'" (PrRC, 1995: 5071).

Despite repeated attempts to discredit *pentiti* and to reform the anti-mafia legislation, the Berlusconi government, lasting only a few months, did not succeed in satisfying mafia expectations. Such a failure, however, has certainly not brought to a halt in the relationship between members of mafia organizations and the representatives of the State. Although this relationship appears today much more fragile than in the past, since it no longer stand on a shared subcultural background and has to be carefully hidden from the public views, it is perpetuated by the mutual rewards that both sides may extract from it. Notwithstanding the growing distrust towards the political class, mafia bosses can certainly not afford to loosen the contacts with politicians and indeed, are compelled, more than ever, to try to influence the political and judicial decision-making process. Likewise, for some politicians and state officials, the risks of coming to terms with the mafia still appear lower than the monetary and electoral rewards they may obtain and their moral restraints are not high enough to prevent them from entering such a deal. Although the basin of mafia supporters in the political and institutional establishment is shrinking, the investigations concerning the last general elections (1996) clearly demonstrate that there are still politicians willing to make a "pact with the devil" in order to foster their political career as well as state officials ready to face the increased risks of mafia cooperation so as to integrate their income with occult rewards and gifts.

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Major Crime Coalitions in Southern Italy