

# MOBS, *SUCANCHIUOSTRU*, ANTI-COMMUNISTS. GLOBAL AND LOCAL ACTORS IN THE SACK OF PALERMO.

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## Introduction

The definition “Sack of Palermo” (*Sacco di Palermo*), refers to the massive transformation Palermo underwent to between 1950s and 1970s, and whose legacy still affects, negatively, the city. Between 1951 and 1991, 175,000 blocks of flats were built in Palermo (Lima, 2000). The *Conca d’Oro* (Golden Shell), the fertile citrus plain surrounding the city, was engulfed with 300 million m<sup>3</sup> of concrete, 4 m<sup>3</sup> per inhabitant (Gucciardo, 2002). This disproportionate development negatively affected not only the local territory, but also the local society. The Sack of Palermo marred any other chance of economic development. The consumption of territory destroyed agriculture, led to the decline of industry, choked trade and financial activities. Its consequence was a patronage oriented economic policy (Chubb, 1982), led by the Christian Democrat Party (DC), which based its consent on the control of public expenditure conveyed to Sicily from the central government (Chubb, 1983). The Sack of Palermo resulted into the decaying of the ancient city, which had been massively bombed in World War II. The political and economic choice to develop the semi-rural areas of the Conca d’Oro, marched hand in glove with the decision to abandon the historical and monumental area of the city, with its once thriving craftsman and marketing activities progressively decaying and most of the population transported to newly-built council flats, swelling the ranks of a new, wider, *lumpenproletariat*. Developers though it possible to ruin the ancient city, so as to justify at some point the demolition of the old buildings, as well as of the urban maze, dating back to the Arabs, to turn the city centre into a modern business district. This part of the plan, fortunately, was not successful, although the refurbishment of the ancient city is only recent and much relented. Finally, the Sack of Palermo allowed the notorious criminal organization *Cosa Nostra* to rise further as a prominent political and economic local actor, moulding the transformation of the city according to its own interests.

This work explores the global and local factors underpinning the processes that made the Sack possible. It will be shown how the interaction between local and global elements provided to develop the network of political and economic alliances that led to the victory of the *Sackers*, and to the marginalization of the *Opponents*. Local elements are the social and economic actors of 1950s Palermo: noblemen and absentee landlords, professional

bourgeoisie, local administrators, *sucanchiostru* (that is, the clerical petty bourgeoisie who migrated to Palermo from the rest of Sicily) and underclass rank among the sackers, whereas the entrepreneurial bourgeoisie, intellectuals, the working class are in the ranks of the opponents. Cosa Nostra is the connecting element among the Sackers, as its network of relations spanning across the social spectrum of Palermo, allows the criminal organization to wield an hegemonic role within those who advocated the massive development of the construction sector.

Global elements appear on stage, in 1940s, as far as the political context is concerned. Italy had a strong working class movement, whose influence had spread also in the South and in Sicily. In order to prevent an advancement of the left, landlords and Mafioso had created a political alliance whose aim was at the beginning the independence of Sicily (Minna, 2000). The concession of special autonomy to Sicily in 1946 oriented the centre and conservative political forces, which will later be the backbone of the Sackers, towards the support of Christian Democrats. Moreover, many Mafioso had strong connections with the Allied forces, whom they had helped to land in 1943, obtaining the appointment as local administrators soon after the liberation of the island (Gaja, 2000; Pantaleone, 1970). Despite the conservative-mafioso bloc's activism and connections, the left-wing *Blocco del Popolo* (People's Bloc), managed to win the first regional election of 1947. The massacre of Portella della Ginestra followed (Santino, 2000), a mass killing of 11 peasants celebrating the electoral victory on May Day. It was later found out, after the US State department de-secretized the files about the massacre, that a commando of Mafioso, American Military Service and Italian Secret Services were the perpetrators of the mass killings (Casarrubea, 2001). The anti-Communist role the Mafia played alongside with conservative forces, as well as its connection with its overseas "friends", were to secure Cosa Nostra not only a prominent role in the legal domain, but also a pivotal position in international drug trafficking since 1957 (Santino, 1994; Stancanelli, 2016).

This work will draw on two main criminological interpretations of organized crime: the first is the *paradigm of complexity*, an analytical approach developed by Umberto Santino (2016). According to Santino, in order to achieve an in-depth analysis of organized crime, we must consider the interaction between economics, politics, culture and society. All these four elements play their own part in shaping the dynamics of criminal organization, as well as helping us understanding their interaction with the "licit world." In our view it is important, though, to outline the prominent role that relations of production play between these four

elements. Organized crime is not either an anomaly of modern society, opposed to the birth of modern State and capitalist economy (Gambetta, 1992) or a legacy of pre-modern age (Paoli, 2000), but, rather, a prominent actor in the social transformation of some areas, such as Sicily. Criminal organizations, as Ruggiero (1996) points out, account for an important part of capitalist economies in three ways: firstly, they provide the market with those illegal goods and services which cannot be purchased legally; secondly, their organization reflects the division of labour of legal enterprises; thirdly, the profits of illegal activities, such as drug trafficking, are invested in legal economy, thus making organized crime an important economic actor. This is the second theoretical standpoint of this work. Ruggiero provides an important theoretical lens, to the extent that he paves the way for an analysis of organized crime which shows how the transformation of illegal actors are specular to those of legal economics, politics and society.

Capitals, organization, identity, consent, turn organized crime, in this case the Sicilian Cosa Nostra, into a crucial actor of contemporary Palermo. This work will show how the interaction between the “legal” and the “illegal” parts of society can take place within the common interests of profits and power, such as those ones the mafia shared with the Palermo bourgeoisie, so as to engender a “Mafioso bourgeoisie” (Mineo, 1953). In particular, it will be emphasised how such local peculiarities as the articulations of Palermo society (such as the massive housing demand by the *sucanchioustru*), the political context of 1950s, the post-war economic context set the framework for the Sack of Palermo. The outcome is the osmosis between legality and illegality. The legal and illegal spheres of economy and politics, such as drug trafficking, money laundering, the construction sector, professionals, local governments and criminal organizations, moved in the same direction and blended together into a peculiar form of capitalist economy and society. A social polarization and an economic deprivation was the outcome in the long range, as the globalization following the fall of Berlin wall reduced the political importance of the mafia, as well as affecting the routes of illegal economies. Moreover, the repression strategies enacted since 1980s by the Central government have resulted into a change in the role played by Cosa Nostra in the local context (Scalia, 2016). Despite these changes, Palermo has not recovered yet from the consequences of the Sack, as its metropolitan area is characterized by high unemployment rate, and migration is still endemic ([www.istat.it](http://www.istat.it)).

This work will rely on the use of qualitative methodology, as it will draw on such sources as the judicial files of the big Anti-Mafia trial of 1986 (AA.VV., 1990), as well as on the dossier of the Anti-Mafia Committees of the Italian Parliament ([www.cameradeideputati.it](http://www.cameradeideputati.it)).

### **The Mafia and Palermo: a local peculiarity**

Different authors have analysed the dynamics of organized crime. Most of them have focused on the structure of criminal organizations (Block, 1980), on their businesses (Gambetta, cit.), on their relation with legal economy and politics (Ruggiero, cit: p. 32.; Sciarrone, 2011), on the movements of organized crime outside their “traditional areas” of settlement (Varese, 2011). Some of these interpretations, supply important tools to both to understand and to explain criminal organizations. Among these scholars, though, very few have considered the importance of spatial articulation as a key factor in the development of criminal organizations, except for those one who single out culture as a key element of the mafia (Paoli, cit.). In the case of the Sicilian mafia, the relationship between territory and organized crime development is a peculiar one, which allows understanding such phenomena as the sack of Palermo. Moreover, since the definition of organized crime is very general, as well as a blurring one (Levi, 2000), an analysis focused on local, spatial aspects could provide the necessary tools to demonstrate how every criminal organization has its own peculiarities, which interact differently with global or over-local elements. This outcome can be achieved by focusing on the internal social dynamics affecting the Sicilian society.

The first aspect to be considered concerns the relationship between Cosa Nostra and the Sicilian ruling class: it would have been hard for the criminal organization to develop as a prominent social actor without the support of landlords, entrepreneurs and politicians (Renda, 2000). The second aspect relates to the relationships within Sicilian society: Anton Blok (1971) describes the Mafioso as mediators between the local, latifundia-based society, and the global, finance and politics based society. This analysis can be an important starting point if we accept both the existence of a Mafia organization (Blok denied it) and the connection between the development of Cosa Nostra and the capitalist transformation of Sicily.

Cosa Nostra developed as an informal power within the large estates of Sicily (Renda, cit: 92) managing the capitalist transformation of Sicilian economy: the administration of the latifundia by the recruitment of cheap labour, the control of agricultural production, salt and

sulphur, and the securing of safety through its para-military control of the territory (Santino, cit. : p. 74) account among the main activities of the Sicilian criminal organization. Despite its rural origin, Cosa Nostra could move to gain the control of the capital city of Sicily, turning some specific local peculiarities to its own advantage.

Firstly, Palermo had a very articulated urban structure: the city was surrounded by the Conca d'Oro, whose citrus groves grew in large land estates which were owned by the noblemen and absentee landlords (Lupo, 2011) and administered by the Mafiosi. As a consequence of this Cosa Nostra grew to be the main political and economic actor of the Palermo suburbs, developing that network of *violence industry* (Franchetti, 1876) around which the *middle-class mobs* became a powerful power syndicate (Block, cit. : p.131), engaged both in the maintenance of public order and in the production and commercialization of citruses. Every *borgata*, or suburban borough of the city, had its own *cosca*, or mafia family. The hierarchical organization of the *cosche* ensured Cosa Nostra a political and military control of the territory, as the Mafioso were the *de facto* leaders and administrators of the local units they were based in. It was though more important, though, the two networks of relationships the criminal organization developed in the territory: the top-bottom ones concerned the connections with the local landlords, politicians and entrepreneurs. Cosa Nostra grew to have an hegemonic position not only because of the use of violence, but especially because the Mafioso became part of a power network (Lupo, 1993; [www.cameradeideputati.it](http://www.cameradeideputati.it)) wherein all the actors involved had mutual advantage: the Mafioso had their political and economic hegemony, whereas entrepreneurs were satisfied with massive production at a cheap price, and the politicians were spared the efforts to maintain public order, as well as enjoying the Mafioso intermediation during the elections. The second network is the bottom-top one: the mafia members were usually born and brought up in the *borgata* their *cosca* was in. It was by this token possible for them to develop those family, kinship and friendly relationship known as *strong ties* (Granovetter, 1982), which ensured them a firm grasp of the territory, through the manipulation of such typical Sicilian institutions and values as family, friendship and honour. This double network became a crucial resource for the Sack of Palermo, as it enabled the Mafioso to deploy their ties both in the political domain, either when choosing their own candidates or when conveying the votes of the *borgata* they ruled to a party, and in the economic sphere

Secondly, the contiguity with the city made them develop close relationships with the enterprise syndicates of the urban districts of Palermo, such as smugglers, receivers, robbers

(Santino-La Fiura, 1982). The protagonists of the Sack of Palermo are *gabbelloti* (administrators) of the latifundia, such as Michele Greco, illegal traffickers such as the La Barbera brothers, as well as many other criminal actors. The outcome of these connections, eased up by the territorial proximity, was the hybridization of criminal organizational models, which resulted into the creation of a peculiar criminal organization. Cosa Nostra became thus an actor engaged both in legal and in illegal trafficking, combining politics with economy, through the manipulation of family, friendship and honours.

Unlike the Neapolitan *camorra*, which developed mainly as an organization regulating the illegal and informal trafficking in XVI century Naples (Sales, 1987), and the Calabrian *ndrangheta* (Ciconte, 1992; Violante, 1993), which was originally a family-based organization of territorial self - defence, Cosa Nostra is an hybrid organization, both because it encompasses a wide range of activities and because of its combination of legal and illegal activities. We are therefore facing a *local* element in the development of organized crime, which is not a uniform phenomenon.

Thirdly, Palermo was the main trade place of western Sicily, where all the products of the land were bought and sold. It was by this token possible both for the rural and for the suburban and urban Mafioso to establish *horizontal networks* between the same criminal actors, and *vertical networks* with legal economic actors. The para-military organization of Cosa Nostra, as well as its network of close-knit relations on the territory, provided a capital tool to gain hegemony in economic relationships. Once again, we are facing a double articulation of networks out of which Cosa Nostra could draw advantage, as it was possible, both to engage in illegal activities, such as cattle smuggling, and to force the other legal actors to accept the informal “mediation” provided by the Mafioso in the trade of agricultural products and lands, as well as to develop favourable relationship with the landlords. This aspect proved to be of crucial when the land estates had to be commercialized to trigger the development of the construction sector.

Finally, Palermo has been for centuries the political terminal of Sicily. Most noblemen, who were the absentee rural landlords whose latifundia were administered by the Mafioso, resided there. Moreover, such institutions as the Bank of Sicily, as well as, from 1947 on, the Sicilian Parliament, were based in Palermo. It was by this token possible for Cosa Nostra to reinforce its strong connections with the local elite, who formally owned the land they administered

and managed. It was within these widely-articulated networks that the conditions for the Sack of Palermo develop.

After World War II, the noblemen had turned into a class of passive rentiers who had wasted most of their financial possession in leisure activities (Cancila, cit: 253). They needed to sell their lands to pay their debts. Their Mafioso administrators wanted to boost urban development in order to increase their power and wealth. Their aims matched the expectations both of professional bourgeoisie and of construction entrepreneurs, who cherished the possibility of massive profits. It was this convergence of interests between such economic and social actors to trigger the Sack of Palermo.

Politics also played a capital role. In 1946 Sicily was granted by the Italian government a “special status” autonomy, following the growth of a nationalist movement in the previous three years (Di Lello, 1997; Minna, cit.). Autonomy provided Sicily with its own Parliament, a regional bureaucracy, an autonomous legal status. Sicilian politicians took the chance of regional autonomy to launch a patronage-oriented policy, aimed at building a mass consent (Santino, cit: p.89). The mass hiring of petty bourgeois clerks as local government bureaucrats, the financial support to enterprises owned by businessmen who were sympathetic to the government majority, a massive program of “modernizing public works (motorways, dykes, council flats) through an unconventional use of public expenditure, were the backbone of the “Reconstruction” policies. The structure of Palermo population massively changed in those years, by making the clerical petty bourgeoisie, or *sucanchiuostru* (inksuckers, as the old Palermo people called them) a central element of the local social landscape (Santino, cit: p.99). Mass patronage was possible because of the massive resources the Italian government conveyed to Sicily, in order to quench the growth of the peasant movement, who had been fighting for the redistribution of the land, and to prevent a leftward shift of Sicilian electors which could have changed the political orientation of Italy in the cold war context (Casarrubea, cit: p.114).

### **Ideology and practice of the Sack of Palermo**

The Sack of Palermo drew its ideological and practical legitimization from three elements: the first one was the reconstruction that is the necessity to do away with the World War II consequences (3 persons per room, Cannarozzo, 2000) and to grant a flat to every family. The

second element was that of “Progress”, that is both the economic development and the adoption of modern architectural criteria, such as building high rise tower blocks with lift and the massive private use of cars. A flat, a car and a job were regarded more as a status symbol than as means to run an ordinary life. The third element concerned the necessity to give a job to the mass of unemployed people whose life conditions had worsened as a consequence of the war. The definition of “ideological” refers to the existence of different ways to approach the post-war problems of Palermo: as far as the “reconstruction” is concerned, the term itself suggest that it was the ancient city to be reconstructed, because of the massive war bombing. All the master plans approved by the Palermo administration, from 1947 to 1959, focused on the urban development in the large land estates surrounding the city. The ancient part of the town was regarded like a huge debris to be removed, in order to leave areas for new urban redevelopment (Gimdalchà, 1982). The idea of progress underpinning the urban redevelopment of Palermo was radically different from that of other European cities: high rise and high density building prevailed, leaving marginal space to public utilities, as well to the protection of both the environmental and the monumental peculiarities of the Conca d’Oro. This rigid, one-faceted idea of progress, ruled out any other possibility of economic development. Until 1951, one fourth of the Palermo population was employed in manufacturing (Cancila, cit.). The city had a reputation for its harbour and its shipyard, and an International Trade Fair, the *Fiera del Mediterraneo*, had been created in 1946. The safeguard of both the territory and the monuments, combined with the boosting of manufacturing and trade activities, could have been a chance for both the economic development and the urban regeneration of Palermo, as well as for its modernization. The ruling groups of Palermo decided to make a different choice: firstly, construction entrepreneurs envisaged an immediate chance of making massive profits through urban development; secondly, an enhancement of the construction sector matched different needs, as the landlords could pay their debts by selling the land, the Mafioso could increase their economic power, as well as the control of the territory; thirdly, a stagnant economy, based on construction and bureaucracy, could provide the politicians who ruled Palermo with the chance to boost a patronage oriented policy, as mass unemployment forced the Palermo underclass to find the protection of politicians, whereas the *sucanchiuostru* were hired on the basis of their political affiliation to the ruling parties (Cristantino, 1987). The creation of a passive, *sponge city*, depending on bureaucracy, patronage and illegal economy, served the purpose not only of discouraging independent entrepreneurship, but also the reproduction of economic, political and cultural subjugation to organized crime, which, at the end of the day,

left the social balance of power and status intact, and avoided any shift on the left of Palermo society.

Cosa Nostra was a crucial actor of this transformation: firstly, by providing its services to the construction market, such as regulating the competition between constructors, ensuring private protection, orienting the construction-related market (tiles, concrete, ecc.). Secondly, by giving an outspoken support to the ruling centre rights coalitions: either legally, that is by providing votes, or illegally. Thirdly, by intimidating or killing the political opponents. Finally, Cosa Nostra laundered its illegal profits in the construction sector, as well as employing people from the lower classes in illegal activities, thus ensuring an income to thousand of families and reducing the social tensions (Fiandaca-Costantino, 1992). The Sack of Palermo shows how the mafia was not an external element in the socio-economic dynamics of the city, but rather a driving force of the radical transformation of the social and urban fabric Palermo underwent to. The interest of Cosa Nostra matched the aims of an important part of local politicians, entrepreneurs and noblemen, creating an osmosis wherein the licit and the illicit blur.

Reconstruction, progress and employment inspired the building of the first council flats in 1950s. The new dwelling places were built in estates which were 5-6 km away from the city, on estates belonging to small landlords, with a cheap price (Cannarozzo, cit.: 173). It became in this way possible for the City Council to draw the consent of public opinion, by claiming they were tackling and solving the housing problems of the city. The Opponents-related public opinion, such as the newspaper *L'Ora* and some politicians opposed to the political majority in the City Council, noticed that the consequence of this choice was that the Council had to provide the newly built areas with such facilities as roads, heating, gas, light, water, sewers, which passed in the middle of those estates belonging to the noblemen and administered by the Mafioso ([www.cameradeideputati.it](http://www.cameradeideputati.it)). The price of the land suddenly soared, making those areas valuable for urban development. The *Banco di Sicilia* (Bank of Sicily, one of the oldest banks in Italy) funded both the developers and the *sucanchiustru* who searched for a profitable mortgage. The City Council declared the targeted areas as developable, by approving several *varianti* (changes) to the 1947 Reconstruction Master Plan, which tried to contain, to a certain extent, the engulfment of the Conca d'Oro, as it focused, mainly, on the need to satisfied the need of housing by the inhabitants whose dwelling places had been damaged by the war bombings. As the pressure towards a boost in the building of private apartments increased, the aim to provide homeless people with public

housing was gradually overshadowed. The Master Plans of 1956 and 1959, drafted by the most prominent architects of Palermo (Inzerillo, 1980; Lima, 2000), endorsed the trend towards an unrestrained private building, focused on the construction of high rise tower blocks, the demolition of some historical villas and boroughs, high density (360 inhabitants per hectare), marginalization of productive activities, massive reduction of agricultural lands, small spaces for public facilities and green areas. As a consequence of this, many baroque and liberty villas were demolished to make room for modern blocks of flats, while the ancient area of the city kept decaying. The degradation of the historical part of Palermo, the only European city still keeping the ruins of World War II, justified the building of new council flats on the outskirts of the city, thus triggering the vicious circle of massive buildings (Chubb, cit.). The final aim was to demolish the most ancient parts so as to promote the building of a modern business district, a project which went unaccomplished because of the mid 1970s economic crises.

The construction boom started in late 1950s, with more than 4,320 building licences released from 1957 to 1963 ([www.cameradeideputati.it](http://www.cameradeideputati.it)). It would not be possible both to describe and to analyse the Sack of Palermo without considering the capital role the Mafioso played within its dynamics. Cosa Nostra performed multifaceted tasks, which enhanced its role as a local actor and increased its wealth and power. Firstly, the *cosche* imposed the *guardiania*, or the “surveillance” of the building sites, extorting a price for the protection they allegedly. The *guardiania* was not the supply of a private protection service. Its meaning is symbolic, and it reaches beyond the real needs to prevent troubles in the building sites. Construction entrepreneurs were either *advised* to accept the private protection service, or forced to request it after an attack to their building sites, consisting of a theft, a broken crane, an accident to some of the workers. When a developer accepted the *guardiania*, he recognized the command of the Mafioso over the area he was working in. Stories of accidents, robberies, killings were accurately circulated, so that it was the entrepreneur itself to search for the *capomafia* of the area and require his protection ([www.archiviopiolatorre.it](http://www.archiviopiolatorre.it)). The construction sector did not oppose to the presence of the Mafioso, not only because it would have required an adequate military organization, or, at least, an intervention by the State (the Italian State will recognize the existence of organized crime only in 1992). The control of the territory by the men of honour was regarded positively to extent that it regulated competition for the estates and reduced the risks of crime (Santino, 2016, cit.: p. 123).

Secondly, the Mafioso were themselves prominent construction entrepreneurs either directly or as partners of other entrepreneurs, as such cases as those ones of the La Barbera brothers and Moncada prove. There were two ways for Cosa Nostra to infiltrate the construction sector: the first one, more straightforward, consisted of operating as a construction entrepreneur (Santino-La Fiura, 1982). In this first case the Mafioso draw advantage both of their reputation and of the lack of an accurate anti-Mafia legislation, which will be passed only in 1982. The second way is related to the money laundering. In this case entrepreneurs, could use the, either partly, or entirely, the gains of illegal activities as capitals to employ in the construction market. These monies could be a “loan” by the Mafioso, the share of a partnership, or the entire capital of a mob actor which were invested by a society run by a fake owner. Between 1957 and 1963, the 90 per cent of the 4,000 construction licences released by the City of Palermo belonged to a very small number (4!) of persons (Pantaleone, cit.). In any case, the construction market, as well as the Palermo economy, positively regarded the investment of capitals operated by the Mafioso, as it provided fresh money which were employed also in other economic sectors, such as trade and finance.

Thirdly, the Mafioso regulated the construction-related market, as they “suggested” developers where to buy tiles, concrete, cranes and all the material necessary to build, as well as suggesting, in some cases, the names of professionals to be employed in the planning and building stage. It became by this token possible both to keep the prices of materials under control and to regulate competition, by favouring all those companies who put themselves under the patronizing influence of the Mafioso. The companies who refused this approach were excluded from business, either because no entrepreneurs worked with them or because of threats. As Rocco Sciarrone (2011) points out, there is a range of relationship between the Mafioso and the economic actors: the *victims* are the ones who do not accept the mafia rules, the *colluded* are those who legitimize the power of the crime syndicates, and, finally, the Mafioso themselves acting as entrepreneurs. During the Sack of Palermo, most of the entrepreneurs ranked among the two latter typologies.

Fourthly, Cosa Nostra regulated the labour market in a broader sense: only those workers who accepted flexible working hours and were not members of trade unions could be hired in the construction sector. Their recruitment was filtered by the patronage network: either workers were resident in the *borgata* wherein urban development took place, thus being tied to the Mafioso by obligation and gratitude, or they were friends and relatives of those *reliable* workers already hired. In both cases, the outcome was that of a peaceful and cheap

working process, with no strikes and reduced labour prices. Finally, the Mafioso enhanced their role as mediators: they were the crucial knot of this legal-illegal network, as they could ask politician to change the master plans in change of votes, or they could ensure constructors a land estates in change of flats, and ask for loans to the banks in change of laundering and investing money, as well as lending money to entrepreneurs or become their partners, so that illegal money was laundered. The *grey area* between licit and illicit world (Sciarrone, 2013), was quite explicit during the Sack of Palermo, and this connection between legal and illegal world grew rapidly without any fear of judicial repression. The reason for this is twofold: on the one hand, there are judicial reasons behind it, because the crime of Mafioso association was not enforced and prosecuted until 1982, by the Rognoni-La Torre Act, which implied a change of the 416 bis article of the Italian penal law. It was because of this change the Mafia bosses were tried in 1986 and sentenced in 1992. During the years of the Sack of Palermo, when those law opportunities did not exist, most of the Mafioso carried on with their business, and it was easy for politicians, professionals, bureaucrats, ordinary citizens, claim that the Mafia did not exist, and justify the relationship with the members of criminalization. On the other hand, it was not possible to prosecute either for illicit or criminal behaviours people who enjoyed the consent of vast part of the population, as well as being mutually tied by a web of obligations, gratitude, partnerships and social status. Those who opposed the hegemonic dynamics were either marginalized or forced to leave the city, before being threatened or even killed (Pantaleone, cit.; Stancanelli, cit.). Moreover, the social bloc who carried out the Sack of Palermo, could enjoy the advantages of the international political context, wherein all those legal and illegal actors and practices which used the shield of anti-Communism, were tolerated and appreciated.

Cosa Nostra gained its hegemony in Palermo society, as its members both provided an occupation to unemployed and dispossessed people, and ensured a harmonic competition in the construction market, giving a chance to all the professional and entrepreneurs who abided by its rules. Politicians gained the consent of large strata of the Palermo population, as they were the official promoters of the construction-centred development (Chubb, cit.: 132). Many lower-class people were employed in the construction sector, many others became shop assistants in the new areas or worked as housemaids for the residents of the new flats, or they found jobs in the low ranks of public sector thanks to the intermediation both of politicians and of the Mafioso.

For more than 20 years Palermo appeared to be a booming city: new buildings, new jobs, new shops, plenty of cars, made most people believe that the city had been modernized, neglecting the decay of the ancient city, the decline of manufacturing industries, the mass immigration, the lack of basic amenities, such as schools and public parks. The mainstream Palermo public opinion denied the existence of a criminal organization, either by calling the mafia wars “residual pre-modern vendetta”, or, as the Bishop Ernesto Ruffini did, by calling it “an invention of the communist propaganda (Cannarozzo, cit: 182).

The sack of Palermo is the outcome of a contamination between legal and illegal economy and politics. The border between legality and illegality is quite blurring, to the extent that legal behaviours were performed by illegal actors (all the Mafioso-led enterprises were legal, and the master plan had been approved by the City Council) and the other way round: politicians, entrepreneurs, professional knew they were working with a criminal organization, but accepted to launder money and were actively engaged in promoting patronage-oriented policies, as well as in blocking the enforcement of an Anti-Mafia law by the Italian Parliament. A widespread consent, based on “progress” and “employment”, ensured the necessary impunity which allowed this multifaceted alliance of noblemen, professionals, developers, bankers, bureaucrats, politicians, Mafiosi, *sucanchiuostru*, underclass to hegemonize the social and political spectrums of Palermo.

The crisis of the Mafioso hegemony started in early 1980s and reached its peak 15 years later, because of various reasons. Firstly, because of the reaction of the Italian government after the so called *delitti eccellenti* (excellent homicides), such as the killing of prominent politicians, judges, police officers and journalists like Michele Reina, Piersanti Mattarella, Pio La Torre, Cesare Terranova, Pippo Fava, Emanuele Basile. The crime of mafia was enforced by the 416 bis law in 1982 (Rognoni-La Torre Act), whose approval by the Italian Parliament was triggered by the reaction of civil society (La Spina, 2005). Secondly, the repressive policies were helped by an inner war (Deaglio, 1993) between the *Corleonesi* group and the so-called *perdenti* (losers). Some prominent members of the latter faction, such as Tommaso Buscetta and Totuccio Contorno, became supergrasses, helping the judicial enquiries against the mafia, whose main outcome was the 1986-1987 trial of 474 alleged Cosa Nostra members. In 1992, the Italian Supreme Court, confirmed the validity of the sentences, thus making a breakthrough move: for the first time, after 132 years of its existence, the Italian state declared that organized crime existed. Thirdly, the fall of the Berlin wall deprived Cosa Nostra of that political protection the criminal organization had enjoyed because of Cold War

(Violante, cit.). On the one hand, the change of the political scenario triggered a violent reaction by the Mafioso, as the 1992-1993 attacks prove (Santino, 2015). On the other hand, it became possible both for police forces and magistrates to prosecute, arrest and sentence more and more mafia members. Fourthly, after 1989, new criminal actors emerged, both in Italy and abroad (Varese, cit.: 42), exploiting the new opportunities provided both by the opening of Eastern European borders and by globalization. Finally, the expansion of the global markets re-shapes the forms and the contents of criminal activities, thus making the line between legal and illegal activities more and more blurring.

In the case of Palermo, the city is facing a deep social and economic crisis, due both to the transformation of criminal organizations, which reduces the amounts of illegal money (DIA, 2014), and to the past exploitation of the territory. All the areas have been exploited during the sack. Nowadays there is not much room left to build a central business district, a biotechnological park, a container terminal in the harbour. International competition makes things even more difficult for Palermo. The public expenditure cuts make it difficult to support a new massive development of public sector, so that also the *sucanchiuostru* feel unsafe. Maybe this is the new beginning...

## CONCLUSIONS

This work used the *paradigm of complexity* and the *dirty economies* approach to analyse under a criminological lens the case of the sack of Palermo. We had the chance to see how organized crime is neither an external actor of social dynamics, nor the product of some anomaly. The Sicilian mafia could gain a hegemonic position within the Palermo society because it had been for two centuries a prominent economic and political actor, building a network of relationships with politicians, entrepreneurs and ordinary citizens, gaining consent both through the manipulation of the most important Sicilian values, and through the satisfaction of such basic needs as employment and housing. Cosa Nostra managed to exploit both the local peculiarities of Palermo, such as the administrative role of the city and the presence of latifundial, and the global opportunity of becoming part of the anti-Communist alliance. The Mafioso hegemony was hardly thwarted by the Palermo leading classes, who found in the intermediation of organized crime an opportunity to make profits, as well as to gain prominent positions in politics and society. The underclass and the clerical petty bourgeoisie of the *sucanchiuostru* actively supported this alliance, to the extent they could

draw advantage from the patronage policies, as well as from the range of legal and illegal activities which were either promoted or controlled by organized crime.

The sack of Palermo is a relevant case for social sciences because of its multifaceted implications: firstly, because it proves that the borders between legality and illegality are never so clear. Secondly, because it shows how important the gain of consent is for criminal organizations. Thirdly, because through the sack of Palermo proves how there is not a unique model to explain the dynamics of organized crime, but, rather, that the combination between local and global peculiarities can provide the scholars with a wide-ranging analytical lens. Finally, in a more and more globalized world, this combination is far from declining, because the social peculiarities of a local context remain an element to consider, as every territory faces changes differently. The dialectic between local and global, combined with that between licit and illicit, remain crucial analytical elements to understand organized crime, in particular in a post-fordist society (Ash, 1994; Scalia, cit: p.78), wherein delocalization draws advantage from the local peculiarities of a territory.

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