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Progress, employment and profit: The construction of the mafioso social capital and the Sack of Palermo

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Abstract

The Sack of Palermo that took place from the 1950s to the 1980s dramatically changed the Sicilian capital's economic and social landscape. Vast tracts of what was agricultural land, including the Conca d'Oro citrus plain, were destroyed as the city was engulfed by concrete. The Mafia played a principal role in this process. This paper will show how Cosa Nostra consolidated its business through social and local connections by granting employment to the members of lower classes such as craftsmen and construction workers and thus gaining consent. The building process of a mafioso social capital, bound together by the ideology of progress, will be analysed through a qualitative analysis.

1 | INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on the Sack of Palermo and the way it changed the Sicilian capital's society and geography. Scholars use this term to refer to the massive, unrestrained urban development the city of Palermo underwent from the 1950s to 1990s. In just a few decades over 170,000, new apartments were constructed across the suburbs (<https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/253856>). At the same time, the old city, with its baroque *palazzo* and its peculiar maze of alleyways dating back to the Arab period, was left decaying. As Schneider and Schneider (2006) pointed out, Palermo suffered the consequences of modernization more than other Italian cities, due to both the role the Mafioso played in the Sack and the unregulated and undercapitalized patterns of its modernization (p. 14). Other authors (Lupo, 1993) stress the importance of the Mafia's control of the territory, as well as its intermediation through the use of violence, as crucial factors for understanding the Sack. Santino and La Fiura (1990) pointed to the importance of the combination of legal and illegal aspects in understanding the Sack, as the political and entrepreneurial network that revolved around the Mafia involved a significant part of Palermo society. Amelia Crisantino (1990) situated the Sack within the so-called *sponge city* peculiarities of post-war Palermo. It was inevitable that a city that gave up its industrial and commercial potential to favour public administration and the illegal economy as its main economic sectors would foster an unchecked and harmful use of its land. This paper will look principally at these last two interpretations.

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The destruction wrought by the bombs of Second World War opened up the prospect of a new, more modern start for the city (Chubb, 1982). However, this project was not entirely successful; the ancient city has been revamped since the early 1990s but only very slowly. Just 30,000 people now live in the original part of the town compared with the 125,000 residents it had in 1951 (Cannarozzo & Regionali, 2000). Moreover, the old suburban citrus groves that surrounded the city until the late 1950s have been engulfed by a jungle of concrete.

This work will focus on the social capital the Mafia had at its disposal, that is, on the web of relations that made the Sack of Palermo possible. It will expose the role of Cosa Nostra, the Sicilian Mafia, as the central actor involved in the Sack of Palermo, with significant influence over the development of the political, economic and social relations that made the Sack possible. The paper will show how the Mafia, through its control of local territory, played a crucial role in the city's unrestrained urban development, not only because of its illegal use of violence but also in greater part because of its skill in building consent among the local population (Gramsci, 1971, p. 47). The Gramscian concept of hegemony refers to the efficacy of a dominating social group in preserving and extending its power, by combining the use of force with the construction of broad-based consent.

Cosa Nostra guaranteed huge profits to entrepreneurs and professionals, as well as granting employment, housing and benefits to the Palermo underclass and an upgrading in status to the petty bourgeoisie, particularly to those who migrated to Palermo in search of a job in the public sector. This was possible because of the long-standing presence of the Mafia groups (*cosche*) in the suburban areas of Palermo, representing an *industry of violence* (Franchetti & Sonnino, 1876) active since the early nineteenth century. Palermo's peculiar urban fabric, divided between urban districts and suburban *borgate* (La Duca, 2004; Guarrasi, 1981), facilitated the Mafia's ability to regulate and hegemonize the social and economic transformation Palermo underwent to after Second World War. The process of urbanization also made way for a new generation of Mafia members, unrelated to the old families, creating a new generation of gangsters.

This paper aims to illustrate and discuss the dynamics underpinning the Sack of Palermo, in order to gauge the social and political factors involved in urban development. Drawing on the documents of the Anti-Mafia Committee of the Italian Parliament (https://www.camera.it/leg18/99?shadow_organo_parlamentare=3014), our investigation will develop a discussion based on qualitative analysis, mainly drawing on interviews with key players in the Sack (professionals, workers, entrepreneurs, residents of the old borgate and political activists), in order to unpack the development of the Sack of Palermo over space and time. The conclusion will be that though the Sack was ultimately the outcome of a choice based on short-term objectives, with a long-term negative impact on the city's geography and society, it was paradoxically only made possible by the utilization of an idea of progress, backed-up through political support. Such a conclusion has consequences for approaches to combatting the Mafia; if the ideology of progress has been central to the Mafia's ability to consolidate itself, anti-Mafia initiatives would need to combine political action with economic development.

2 | HISTORICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK. SETTING THE CONTEXT OF THE SACK

The Sack of Palermo came about as a result of two main factors. First, a housing shortage due to the extensive bombing that took place during Second World War, which destroyed half of the town's housing stock (Inzerillo, 1980). The city's local administrators, rather than investing in a revamp of the old city, decided to turn surrounding agricultural land into development areas (Cancila, 1985). This choice was intimately tied up with political and economic interests bound together by Mafia intermediation. The second element is the wave of petty bourgeoisie immigration that arrived in Palermo from the rest of Sicily (Santino, 2003) around the same time. This was due in part to the poor living conditions of the countryside, combined with a mechanization of agriculture that displaced peasant labour (Schneider & Schneider, 2006, p. 14) but was also a result of the new administrative

status of Palermo. In 1946, Sicily gained special status as a semi-independent region with its own parliament and government. Regional autonomy provided the arena for the rise of a new generation of local politicians, as well as the opportunity of well-paid employment for bureaucrats working for the regional administration. The latter held either a secondary school diploma or university degree and sought a job and a newly built house as a means of climbing the social ladder. The *sucanchiuostri* (ink-suckers, as they are called in Palermo dialect; Scalia, 2017) have also been portrayed and analysed by such famous Sicilian novelists as Leonardo Sciascia (1970). They did not integrate in the old city but rather built a new town of their own in the suburbs, where they were able to construct their own clerical identity, symbolized by the long fingernails of their little finger, indicating unfamiliarity with manual labour. This immigration had a significant impact on the population of Palermo. Though the Sicilian capital lost a consistent number of residents to emigration, the population of the city leaped from 490,000 in 1951 to 643,000 in 1971 (<https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/253856>), excluding those who lived de facto in Palermo but maintained their legal residence in their native town.

The consequences of this massive development were manifold. First, the urban and monumental appearance of the semi-rural *borgate* (peripheral or suburban township) of the *Conca d'Oro* (i.e. Golden Shell; the name of the plain surrounding Palermo) was lost for good. Old rural houses now look more and more like decaying relics of the past. Most of the old eighteenth century villas around which the citrus groves developed were either razed to the ground or abandoned. Second, the Sack of Palermo had a negative impact on the social and economic make-up of the *borgate*: All the agricultural and fishing capacities were destroyed; the close-knit relations tying together the local community were wiped away as most locals themselves also moved into the new buildings; lastly, no amenities were built to improve the quality of life of the newly built areas (Masini, 1988). The massive edification represented by the Sack of Palermo resulted in the creation of places devoid of any economic or urban identity, genuine *non-places* (Augè, 1999). Following Augè, one can argue that the newly built districts of Palermo, as well as not having any architectural character of their own, were built purely for the sake of providing the new inhabitants with a residence. No attempt was made to foster the growth of a social community among the inhabitants. The new apartments were built beside the old rural buildings, or surrounding the ruins of an old villa, an unusual urban pattern that was complemented by council flats hosting the population evicted from the ancient city. These three contexts lived a parallel life, failing to form a homogeneous urban environment. Finally, the Sack of Palermo has dramatically reduced the city's opportunities for development. Nowadays, 80% of Palermo's land is occupied by apartments. Facilities such as schools, hospitals and civic centres are now often hosted in apartments which failed to find a buyer. There is no space left for building a business centre, a science and technology park, an industrial estate or any other amenities that would allow Palermo to play a role in the contemporary global economy. The harbour, the conference centre and the shipyard cannot be expanded due to space restrictions. Moreover, Palermo has experienced serious problems resulting from the lack of a public transportation network: The majority of population relies extensively on private cars. They are reluctant to pay the fares for public buses and are opposed to the construction of a tramway network as this would entail the reduction of private parking spaces (<https://www.blogsicilia.it/palermo/mobilita-a-palermo-ferrandelli-no-al-tram-in-via-liberta-si-ai-bus-elettrici/721940/>).

Our discussion will revolve around two concepts. First, we will make use of the concept of *social capital* (Bourdieu, 1980), or the cluster of relations individuals and social groups develop and use to their own advantage. Such relations are both functional and culture-oriented. In other words, they make up the *habitus* of Sicilian society, that is the way social actors make sense of reality and act accordingly. *Habitus* does not refer to a substantial aspect of Sicilian society, but, rather, to an array of practices and representation that underwent the process of social construction (Berger & Luckmann, 1978).

As kinship, neighbourhood, friendship and honour make up an important part of Sicilian *habitus* (Blok, 1974), the Sicilian Mafia was able to exploit these values highly effectively. On top of this, Cosa Nostra made best use of its functional relations with the administration of land estates belonging to the aristocracy (Lupo et al., 2011), an activity Cosa Nostra had been carrying out for centuries. Following

this initial analysis, we will then incorporate the concept of the *paradigm of complexity* proposed by Umberto Santino (Santino, 2017), a model conceived to shed light on the nature of the Sicilian Mafia in particular. Santino stresses the importance of undertaking a multidimensional analysis, focusing at the same time on politics, economic, culture and society, in order to understand the Mafia in greater depth. The accumulation of wealth and power by Cosa Nostra is based not only on the use of violence, but also, or perhaps especially, on the manipulation of values and social relations, as well as on the political connections the criminal organization was able to cement in the post-war period through its role in anti-communist repression (Casarrubea & Angeli, 1991). The deployment of Santino's paradigm will enable us to analyse the Sack of Palermo as the combination of a plurality of elements.

The Sack of Palermo was made possible through the creation of the structured coherence Harvey (1989, p. 132) referred to in his analysis of transformation within urban contexts. Harvey emphasizes how different political and social forces within an urban area can forge alliances in order to structure and reinforce consumption and production patterns. The Sack of Palermo, with its short-term creation of employment and mass consumption, evolved in the direction outlined by Harvey. The idea of *progress*, that is of the improvement of material conditions through urban development, for example, creating employment and providing inhabitants with housing, boosting the development of commercial and financial activities, appears to be the embodiment of structured coherence. It will be the thread binding this discussion.

3 | THE THEORETICAL CONTEXT: MAPPING THE RELATIONAL NETWORK OF THE SACK

Bourdieu (1980, pp. 110–121; 2015) defined social capital as ‘the sum of material and relational resources that individuals or social groups obtain from their participation to relational networks based on principles of mutuality and recognition’. This definition perfectly describes the Mafia's hegemony over Palermo during the co-called Sack of Palermo; Cosa Nostra's power over the city was derived both from their paramilitary organization and from their control of agricultural production (Catanzaro, 1987).

Coleman (1990, p. 47) has built on this definition of social capital by distinguishing between *strong ties*, or the family, friendship and identity-based connections, and *weak ties*, or functional relations inspired by specific purpose as in the case of economy. Sciarrone (2001) and La Spina (2005), in developing their own conceptual frame, have related social capital to the development of Mafia organizations in different contexts. Coleman shows how weak ties are a crucial element for the expansion of Southern Italian criminal organizations outside their territory. Sciarrone's work provides useful analytical tools. However, we will not draw on them extensively here as our focus is on the expansion of the Sicilian Mafia in its territory of origin. Moreover, Sciarrone's idea of *grey area* as a space where legal and illegal actors meet can be used only partly, because, as we are about to see, in the case of the Sack, the legal and the illegal spheres overlap, or even coincide. For example, the Masterplan that legitimized the Mafioso-led destruction of the Conca d'Oro was legally approved by the city council.

La Spina develops the concept of ‘weak legality’ by differentiating between public social capital, relying on civic virtues (Putnam, 1985) and private social capital, based on amoral familism (Banfield, 1982). According to La Spina, the development of Mafias is a consequence of a lack of civic life and of a prevalence of particular over public interests. Although it is possible to appreciate some of the peculiarities outlined by La Spina, our analysis differs. First, the massive urban expansion that occurred was made possible by legal approval, represented by the 1959 City Masterplan, as well as by broad-based consent in local society. This does not mean that consent was unanimous. Political parties, civil society, intellectuals (e.g. the local newspaper *L'Ora*) opposed the Sack, as they exposed the role of the Mafia behind it. They were, however, either scared into silence or marginalized, in some cases even forced to leave the city. Moreover, their isolation was exacerbated by the national and international context. The existence of the Mafia was only formally acknowledged in 1992, when the Italian

Supreme Court confirmed the sentences of the 1986 Antimafia trial. The crime of *associazione a delinquere di stampo Mafioso* (Mafioso Association) was not enforced until 1982; thus, the space in which an Antimafia movement could act was highly limited. Finally, the defeats suffered by the Antimafia movement in the late nineteenth century and soon after Second World War (Santino, 2017, p. 161), as well as the pervasive control of the territory by the Mafia, discouraged many Palermo citizens to speak out against Cosa Nostra. The idea of the necessity of large-scale urban development was taken up by large parts of the population who came to see it as the most important means for improving the city's social and economic conditions. The Sack of Palermo was launched by Salvo Lima, Palermo's Christian Democrat mayor in the late 1950s, with the slogan *Palermo è bella, facciamola più bella* (Palermo is a beautiful city: Let's make it even more beautiful). Lima was indicated by many Mafia turncoats as the politician who made Mafia intervention possible (Santino, 1995, cit.). Born into a petty bourgeoisie family, as a young man Lima became a prominent member of the Palermo Christian Democrats, becoming one of the 'Young Turks' that took over the party from the old patrons (Schneider & Schneider, 2006, pp. 52–55). After a long career in politics, Lima was eventually murdered in 1992.

Our use of the concept of social capital will thus need to be integrated within a theoretical framework that maps alliances among different social groups. To fulfil this purpose, we will combine Umberto Santino's theory of the paradigm of complexity with David Harvey's analysis of structural coherence. Both authors develop models with a broad scope, allowing for the incorporation of two important dynamics related to organized crime. The first of these is the idea of *consent*, which explains how and why a social actor operating through the use of violence, and against a plurality of social needs and expectations, can gain a widespread approval for its purposes. Structural coherence, emphasizing the convergence of different and conflicting social groups within the urban context, sheds light on the way alliances are formed around a shared perspective, and on how they are able to remain stable for long periods of time. The second dynamic is that of *multidimensionality*, which forms part of the conceptual framework of the paradigm of complexity. This approach allows us first to expose the multifaceted peculiarity of the Mafia, which has implications not only for the limited domain of the economy, as some authors would have it (Gambetta, 1992), but also for those of politics and culture. Indeed, the Sack of Palermo happened because it concerned all these three dimensions of Sicilian society. Second, the concept of multidimensionality allows us to grasp the fluidity of relations between the legal and illegal world (Block, 1983; Ruggiero, 1996). The Sack of Palermo did not happen because a criminal organization imposed it from the outside through the use of violence. It was, rather, a chosen, planned and enacted project involving most of the Palermo elite of professionals, entrepreneurs and politicians, cheered on by a new middle class looking to climb the social ladder, and accepted by the underclasses in need of jobs and housing.

Possession of economic power and paramilitary force enabled the Sicilian Mafia to establish three different connections, allowing them to play a key role in orienting the choices related to the urban and economic development of Palermo. The first of these is a *horizontal* connection concerning the relations among the different *cosche* (criminal groups) located in Palermo which allowed the Mafia to negotiate the organization both legal and illegal businesses, as well as to solve internal conflicts (Santino & Chinnici, 1989). The second is a *vertical* connection consisting of two elements: a *top–bottom* element referring to the Mafia's relations with the residents of the *borgate* and with professionals and entrepreneurs (organisation and force are the crucial resources that give the Sicilian Mafia a position of advantage), and a *bottom–top* element referring to the protection Cosa Nostra is granted by prominent politicians. In some cases, relations between the Mafia and politicians can also be top–bottom, as Cosa Nostra helps to secure votes for those parties who do not oppose its interests (Falcone & Padovani, 1991). Cosa Nostra, however, has also enjoyed political protection due both to its integration in the Sicilian relations of production and to its role in the anti-Communist alliance (Pantaleone, 1970). For this reason, it is possible to argue that the Mafia have benefitted from a bottom–top relation. The acquittal of Mafia members in trials (Ciconte, 2019), the cover up of police enquiries, the delayed enforcement of anti-Mafia legislation, all prove that Cosa Nostra enjoyed, from Italian Independence to the fall of the Berlin wall, a high degree of political protection 'from above'. The way these ties

developed by the Mafia were effective in the implementation of the Sack will be discussed in further depth using a qualitative analytical approach.

4 | METHODOLOGY

An evaluation of the Sack of Palermo, which combines a detailed description of how it unfolded with an in-depth analysis of its causes, can be achieved through the adoption of a qualitative approach. Although figures and photos can give an overall understanding of what happened in Palermo between the 1950s and 1970s, interviews conducted through the oral history method will shed a light on how the Sack was experienced and at the same time produced by the actors involved in it (Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979). This will be demonstrated through excerpts from 10 in-depth interviews (Cannell & Kahn, 1981) with 10 different residents of Palermo who lived through the Sack. Their ages range between 70 and 75, and they are of mixed social origin and sex, with 7 men and 3 women interviewed. Age was an important issue of my research, as memory of the Sack could be blurred by the long lapse of time. The outcomes proved this did not happen. The reason for a prevalence of men is related to the way sex differences affected social and political status in Palermo at that time. They are all now retired but their previous professions include bank clerk, public administration clerk, housewife, house maid, journalist, freelance anti-Mafia researcher, member of the Sicilian PCI Central Committee, bank senior officer and nobleman-cum-professional. The unionists, the journalist, the politician and the bank officer had been members of the anti-Mafia movement since the 1970s. The Sack concerned the whole city of Palermo, changing its urban, economic and social pattern for good. For this reason, I chose to interview residents of different social backgrounds with direct experience of events relating to the Sack, making for a varied range of source material and a plurality of points of view, allowing for the development of a comprehensive analysis. The identity of interviewees will be indicated by a number following the letter P to preserve their anonymity. Other criteria also inspired the choice of the interviewees. First, it was made sure that they had direct experience of the Sack, so that they could specify their opinion of the Sack and explain how it changed their life as well as the life of the city. This was necessary for exploring the role of elements such as progress, economic improvement and status. The second criterion was that of the origin of the interviewees: This research will show the articulation of the Palermo urban space across the city, the rural and the fishing villages or *borgate*, so residents were chosen from the ancient city, from the well-off residential area built in the late nineteenth century, from Uditore (a rural *borgata*) and from the Villaggio Ruffini (a housing project), because these places are among the areas of Palermo most dramatically affected by the Sack, as will be shown. These interviews were made possible through the author's personal connections, facilitated partly through the author's professional profile (in the case of journalists, politicians, clerks), and partly through family and friend-based contacts (in the case of the old residents of areas affected).

Pictures 1 and 2 show how the *Piana dei Colli* (Plan of the Hills), the most prestigious part of the Conca d'Oro, was transformed by the Sack. Picture 1 (Archivio Enzo Sellerio, Fondo Salvatore Corselli) shows the Plan in 1930s. Picture 2 (taken by the author) shows the same area as it is now.

5 | ENFORCING THE SACK: PROFIT

At the end of Second World War, Palermo faced the prospect of large-scale reconstruction as 50% of apartments and houses have been seriously damaged by bombing (Lima, 2000). At this time, one fifth of the population lived in the ancient city, with an average density of two people to a room. The situation was even worse for people living in the *catoi*, or ground floor flats. This is how a former resident of the Capo, one of the city's three historical neighbourhoods, remembers living conditions of the time:



PICTURE 1 The Piana dei Colli in 1930s. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]



PICTURE 2 The Piana dei Colli nowadays. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

I was only a little child after the war. We used to live 10 in a big room. There was no fridge or washing machine at that time, so you had enough space for bunks for us 8 children, sleeping 2 in a bed. Then you had my parents' bed, a table and 'u cumuni, the common room, a small room which was our toilet. There was another room, but you couldn't put beds in there ... that was my father's workshop, it smelled of raw leather. [W1].

Overcrowding affected 40,000 people, almost one third of the city's 125,000 residents. In effect, the war had exposed long-ranging problems in a city which had already once undergone, under the fascist regime, significant *sventramenti* (literally: gutting) in the form of the demolition of old apartments to be replaced by new ones. The Reconstruction Plan of 1947 foresaw the eviction of the inhabitants of the *catoi* to new council flats, as well further *sventramenti* to create new larger roads and build new offices in the historical centre. Despite the initial purpose of the plan to allow two thirds of Palermo's residents to stay inside the historical city-centre, the ground was already being laid for future development. First, because the planning of the new *sventramenti* forced both the owners and the lodgers of the flat whose demolition was planned to abandon the premises. Second, because the Reconstruction Plan only concerned with housing, neglecting the planning of amenities such as schools, libraries, community centres and GP clinics, vital for a modern city. Third, because the funds allocated either by the Italian government or by the new regional administration were only ever invested in the revamping of the old city. Investment was focused on the building of new council flats.

New apartments were built according to a peculiar criterion. Rather than completing the development of areas adjacent to the city, small housing projects were scattered across the peripheral areas, at the very edges of the city. The apartments were built on cheap estates belonging to small landowners:

I remember when we were allocated the flat in Villaggio Ruffini. Pallavicino was like another city to us, past the stadium. You had to ride through the citrus groves to get there. We had a new, more spacious flat, ok ... but how were we supposed to get there? Having a car was still a status symbol in the early 1950s. [W2]

Uditore was not far away from Borgo Nuovo. For us it was like an adventure, to cycle and see the newly built apartments...it was like going to the cinema, really. Why? Have you ever watched a Western? Prefab houses, unpaved empty streets, no shops, the wind blowing the dust all around ... it made you feel like you were waiting for two cowboys to step onto the scene, guns in their hands, confronting each other-laugh-you really couldn't believe that was the new town. [W3]

The distance between the new projects and the city, and their absence of identity, stands out in these memories. This is essentially how these areas have remained (Mannoia & Pirrone, 2014), that is lacking in decent facilities and amenities, overpopulated, and with high rates of unemployment. The function of these new apartments was indeed that of pushing up the price of the estates that lay between them and the city. The public utility networks, and the roads which were built to connect the new areas, run through the large land estates belonging to the aristocracy and bourgeoisie and administered on their behalf by the Mafia. An old militant of the Communist Party remembers:

We were leading the peasants' fights for the redistribution of lands. After Portella della Ginestra, in 1947-when the Giuliano gang and the Mafia shot at a group of peasants celebrating May Day (Casarrubea, cit.)- the peasants' movement declined. The party slowly gave up the fight, also because they were aware, and we were told, that the latifundia surrounding the city of Palermo were soon to be converted into development areas, and we should brace ourselves to defend the construction workers [W4].

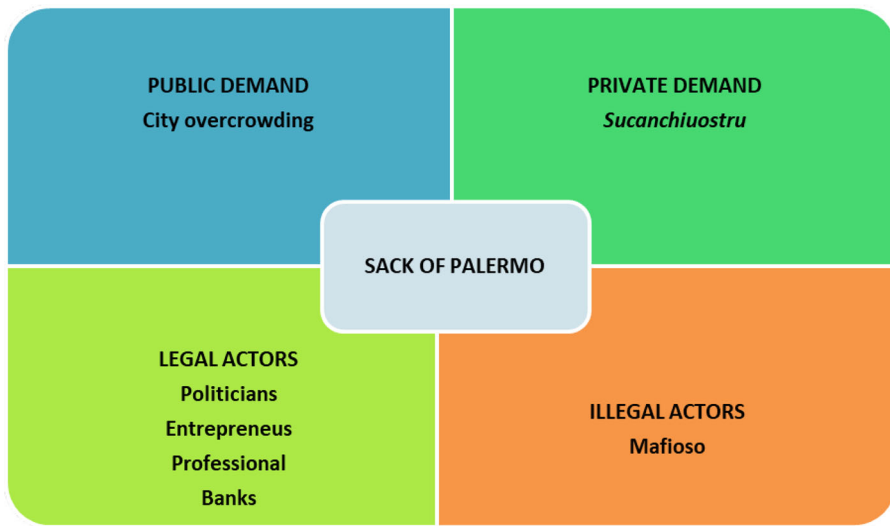


FIGURE 1 The actors and the factors Sack of Palermo. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

W5, a journalist, explains the process more in detail:

It was nearly impossible to restrain the urban development. Developers were dying to acquire new areas, and landowners were eager to sell them. Take Marqueses C., for example. Maybe you remember her. She owned hectares of land in the Piana dei Colli, but she loved bridge too much. So, when someone paid her cash for her land, and offered her a penthouse in a building built in the area, she did not refuse. Of course. A few years later, her husband was arrested. He worked for the city council. He took kickbacks for granting operating licenses to shops. He justified his actions by saying he needed to pay his wife's bridge debts...but this is another story. [W5]

Viewed from the perspective of the market, therefore, the Sack of Palermo would seem the perfect match between demand and supply. Entrepreneurs and the Mafia were eager to build, landowners were eager to sell, and purchasers were anxious to buy a flat. This latter aspect, the private demand for housing, was a significant causal factor in the Sack of Palermo. Figure 1 provides an explanatory scheme of this dynamic. Private demand was created mainly by the petty bourgeoisie (*sucanchiuostru*) who had come to Palermo, hired by politicians on patronage-based criteria (Chubb, 1982, cit.) to work in the public administration of the regional government. On the 15 May 1946, the Italian government, in order to stem the rise of the Sicilian separatist movement (Marino, 1971), recognized the right of Sicily to have an independent parliament and a constitution of its own (*statuto*), though remaining part of the Italian state. Regional autonomy, which many regarded as a chance for economic and social development, turned out to be another articulation of Sicily's patronage-oriented politics. Whatever the wider implications, for Palermo, its new administrative role meant a need to reshape its urban makeup in order to host tens of thousands of new residents.

Cosa Nostra proved to be a crucial actor, both in the planning and in the enforcement of the Sack. Its control of the local territory and its close-knit relations with institutional politics made it possible for the criminal organization to establish those connections necessary to achieve profits.

As far as profits are concerned, the regulation of the market by Cosa Nostra ranged from the size of the building to the laundering of money. Following the scheme proposed by Sciarrone (2001, cit.), we can say that there are three levels of Mafia infiltration in the economy. The first is *extortion*, aimed at entrepreneurs. As the Mafia were in control of the local area, the first activity was that of the

guardiania, that is forced surveillance of construction sites. Contrary to Gambetta's belief, this is not a private protection activity, that is it is not solely related to the economy but rather represents the recognition of the 'lordship' of the Mafia over a certain territory.

The second level is that of *collusion*, when the Mafia becomes a business partner, and the last level of infiltration is when *mafioso* themselves are directly involved in the business. In the case of the Sack of Palermo, all these three levels were present. As regards extortion, the Mafia is not necessarily motivated purely by profit. They might require real estate for themselves, for personal use or to sell on, as was the case in this incident recounted by an old architect:

I had designed a seven-storey building. One day I was at the building site when the owner called me. He introduced me to zu Fifiddu- an imaginary name for a Mafia man- then asked me if it would be possible to add two more storeys. I replied: it's impossible! We would have to get rid of the penthouse. And it's already been sold. Then zu Fifiddu intervened: you are a young guy, I am sure you have a long career ahead of you. I am sure your experience and training will lead you to the right conclusion on the matter. I ended up designing two super-penthouses above the first penthouse! Zu Fifiddu had a daughter who was soon to be married, but he also did not want to disappoint his son. [W7]

This episode, quaint as it may seem, sheds light on the extent of the Mafia's control over the construction market through the violent imposition of its will. Other important aspects are the regulation of the labour market, a topic that will be covered in the next subchapter, and the regulation of the suppliers' market. W7 remembers the case of a building site he was working at which was constantly damaged:

Mr L. could not understand why. He had accepted the *guardiania*. But one day he would find the crane damaged, the next day the scaffolding, and so on... So he sent people out to work out what was going on. Eventually, he was advised that he must choose a certain supplier for the tiles. At that point he remembered a question he had been asked about his tile supplier, and decided he would do better to take up the advice. [W7]

Another strategy Cosa Nostra adopted in the context of the Sack of Palermo is that of partnership or collusion. Many entrepreneurs welcomed the fresh capital of Mafia origin, as this allowed them not only to dispose of more resources for investment in their activities but also to benefit from Mafia intermediation in order to obtain 'permission' to build in areas controlled by rival Mafia groups (<http://www.senato.it/service/PDF/PDFServer/DF/285883.pdf>). Moreover, some young entrepreneurs who needed capital to start their business were not averse to acting as bogus directors for companies whose capital was provided entirely by the Mafia.

The participant W4, in the following excerpt, mentions Francesco 'Ciccio' Vassallo (Schneider & Schneider, 2006, pp. 261–262), along with the La Barbera brothers (Angelo and Salvatore), two key characters of the Sack (Schneider & Schneider, 2006, pp. 63–66). Vassallo managed to shake off his lower class roots to become one of the main land developers in Palermo. The La Barbera brothers also climbed the social ladder and played a prominent role both in the construction sector and in the Mafia, before being killed (Salvatore died in unclear circumstances; Angelo was killed 10 years later, while in jail). Their stories are worth recounting to understand the speed at which change took place during the Sack:

Think of Vassallo and the La Barberas. They started as cart drivers. But they had enough initiative to set up a partnership with the Mafia and gain political protection. The La Barberas were later killed, they were mainly *mafioso*. The sons of GS, another *mafioso* entrepreneur who had helped the La Barberas in the business, drank a toast to celebrate

the death of those who “betrayed” their father. ...Vassallo died in his bed in the early 1990s after building a good chunk of the new Palermo. [W4]

RA was a country boy, ambitious, with good connections and no money. The G. family helped him to become a prominent developer. He built large chunks of Resuttana, and then luxury residences outside Palermo. Of course, the G. family commanded another side of Palermo, so they needed a frontman to build on their behalf. RA was a respected businessman until he was arrested in the early 1990s after the Mafia bombings and the new wave of pentiti (supergrasses) lifting the lid. [W5]

Thanks to its hegemony over the local territory, the Mafia was able to develop a comprehensive network allowing for the development of the construction sector and triggering an apparently virtuous circle. Money circulated across Palermo, financing the construction market, propping up demand for private housing and encouraging supply. Both the illegal capital laundered by Cosa Nostra and the money allocated to Sicily by the central government to promote the development of depressed areas in Southern Italy (https://www.camera.it/leg18/99?shadow_organoparlamentare=3014) provided the financial base for the Sack of Palermo. Banco di Sicilia and Cassa di Risparmio, the two main local banks of the time, were able to take advantage of the financial autonomy Sicily enjoyed as a semi-independent region to provide their customers with profitable mortgages. As a former bank director remembers:

You cannot imagine how many mortgages we gave out at that time, with ridiculous interest rates like 0,1%! You had a job, you wanted a house, so you could get a 30-35-year mortgage if necessary. We supported the city's economy for 20 years, it seemed the most obvious thing to do...factories were closing, there were no utilities or amenities for industries to develop here in Sicily. Construction was thriving. What were we supposed to do?[W8]

The participant's comment reflects the mood prevailing at that time. Though Palermo's manufacturing sector had until the 1950s employed one fourth of its total population (Cancila, 1985), and some sectors like mechanics were showing real potential, politicians, entrepreneurs and bankers preferred to invest in construction, and the Mafia played a decisive role in orienting this choice. Its interest in land estates, its relations with landowners, politicians and bankers, played a crucial role in orienting the economic destiny of post-war Palermo. The illusion of development was conveyed by the construction of high-rise buildings and by the employment this created:

Everybody who wanted a job got it: not only architects, engineers and surveyors. Think of the masons. Or the activities which developed in the new areas: shopkeepers, assistants, bars, restaurants... You just had to choose what to do [W7].

Huge profits were made both in the legal and illegal economies, thanks to thriving illegal activities such as cigarette smuggling and drug trafficking, despite the high death toll resulting from the Mafia wars (Santino, 2000). The ideology of progress and development, in Palermo, wore the mask of the Sack. The following subchapter lays out how this was made possible.

6 | PEOPLE NEEDED HOUSES AND JOB: POWER AND IDEOLOGY OF THE SACK

The killing of the Mafia boss Stefano Bontade on the 23 April 1981 marked the beginning of the so-called *second mafia war* (Schneider & Schneider, 2006, pp. 100–101). As Western Sicily had become

a major international hub of heroin production and exportation, the *Corleonesi* led by Totò Riina triggered a cruel war against the old Mafia bosses, such as Bontade himself and Totuccio Inzerillo. More than 500 people were killed in 3 years. The consequence of this ruthless massacre was that some prominent figures of the *perdenti* (losers) Mafia clans, such as Tommaso Buscetta (Biagi, 1986), decided to become turncoats and reveal the secrets of Cosa Nostra. Buscetta, nicknamed *the boss of the two worlds* because of his extensive criminal connections stretching between Italy and the Americas, paved the way for the trial against Cosa Nostra that began in February 1986. In November 1984, after his declaration had led to the arrest of the ex-mayor of Palermo Vito Ciancimino, one of the main protagonists of the Sack (Lodato, 2000), unemployed construction workers took to the streets in Palermo. Public opinion was shocked by their pro-Mafia banners and boards, as well as by their slogan: Cries such as *Viva la Mafia* (long live the Mafia); *Ciancimino sindaco* (Ciancimino for mayor) and *Con la Mafia si campa* (the Mafia gives us a living) revealed a gulf between reality and perception, between the criminal activities of Cosa Nostra and how such activities were viewed by sections of the public. The prevailing idea of the Mafia was related more to public security than to the infiltration of the politics and the economy to run illegal affairs. The following quote from a former housemaid from the old city centre captures this well:

I don't know why they sentenced zu'Totò for life ... he only did good to me. My parents didn't want me to marry my husband, not even after the fujitina (elopement) ... zu Totò persuaded them I should get married, then found me a job as housemaid in the house of DR X, you know him ... and sent us to a politician to get a council flat ... Now they say he's a ruthless murderer ... he was a father to me [W10].

This perception was typical not only of the underclasses but also concerned the petty bourgeoisie of the *sucanchiuostu*. As one such figure still maintained at the time of our interview:

Terrorist attacks were frequent in Rome and Milan. Bombs were exploding in Bologna and in other cities. But public opinion pointed the finger at Sicily. Isn't there a bit of racism here? The Mafia?! C'mon, the Mafia is everywhere ... corruption, bribery, street crimes ... and they made a fuss of what happened in Palermo ...? There is something I don't understand here ... or that I understand too well ...[W8]

This mindset, which is still popular among some residents of Palermo, combining indifference and conspiracy theory, allowed the Mafia to thrive for more than 40 years in Palermo (Schneider & Schneider, 2006, p. 269). The existence of Cosa Nostra was denied, and its criminal deeds were downplayed, including in relation to the consent the organization built for itself through the *creation* of employment and allocation of benefits, in alliance with institutional politics:

The Mafia ruining Sicily ...? C'mon! I can't believe there still is this old Communist rhetoric around ...! Listen: I had just finished secondary school. My parents, in the village, had saved money to allow me to study. Dad talked to someone who introduced us to a local politician ... Now you would say the "someone" was a Mafia man. He was arrested, his son became a supergrass. I know he helped me find a job...that's all I know [W8]

W8 is certain of his opinions, as is his friend, also retired:

I started helping BN, a local politician. He found me a job at the bank, I could buy myself a flat ... it was cheap, according to the Masterplan it should have been agricultural land ... so we stole utilities from the others. Fortunately, the building was built on a former citrus grove, so we had enough water [W9].

Like his friend, W9 staunchly rejects the Mafia connection:

Mafia?! Sack? Oh, please, get out of here! We should call it progress, jobs, not Mafia! What have the Communists done?! The Communist major of my village sanctioned the demolition of all the summer residences which were built without license, including mine. That is Mafia! You know how much money I lost because of it? You know how many tourists we lost because of this? Call it legality, but he just ruined the economy! [W9]

Such declarations as these would seem to support Edward Banfield's framework of *amoral familism* (1982, cit.), or the alleged tendency of Southern Italians to put personal interest before all else. We argue, however, that the opposite is in fact the case, with the Mafia acting in line with the *culture of abundance* paradigm set out by Vincenzo Ruggiero (2015). What the two quotes above reveal is an idea of progress held by the interviewees. The participants interviewed were not justifying the Mafia because they benefitted personally, as they argued that the Sack, regardless of who enforced it, brought economic and social progress to the whole community. Consequently, Mafia-led patronage was not a particularized phenomenon aimed at survival but rather a mass, generalized push towards better living conditions.

The idea that the Sack brought about progress and development is also shared by the old residents of the *borgate*, who found in their indirect participation in the construction market a chance for social emancipation. As a housewife in Uditore explains:

My family had been farming the land for ages ... while the world was travelling to the moon ... do you want to cultivate the land ...? My dad sold the land, he got my brother through university and bought new flats for us all ... yes. It was a different environment when there were citrus groves all around us, but, you can't eat the scent of orange blossoms ...[W11]

Her friend, who moved to the newly built council flats in Uditore from the Capo, in the old city centre, voices a similar opinion:

People needed housing ... did we have to live in hovels to maintain orange blossoms and old villas ...? Everybody has the right to a better life ... Mafia. I wasn't there when the homicides happened. I just know we got a new, more comfortable flat. [W12]

The general mood was that of radical change; an improvement in living conditions (Pedone, 2020). Cosa Nostra, local entrepreneurs and young ambitious politicians were able to turn this mood into an entire outlook, based on a combination of violence and consent, on the deliberate destruction of the city's citrus groves and ancient monuments, and on the suppression of all alternative models of development.

In the domain of local politics, Cosa Nostra was able to mobilize voters to elect specific candidates inclined to further its interests:

A scene that took place in front of the Extrabar-a famous bar in the centre of Palermo-has become a local legend. The mayor had forgotten to change the Master Plan, something he had promised to do as a favour to a "friend of friends" ... PB, the most prominent boss at that time, approached him rudely in front of a crowd, and slapped him in the face ...[W5]

This case, still remembered in Palermo, is exemplary of the kind of top-bottom relation the Mafia develops with local politicians. Though Cosa Nostra enjoyed political protection from above because

of its role in the anti-Communist alliance, it was also able to create a network of power relations with local political forces, either by supporting specific candidates or by launching someone from within their relational network into politics. W6, a long-time anti-Mafia activist and researcher, explains:

Young politicians swelled the ranks of Christian Democrats (DC), thus replacing the monarchists as the prominent party. Achille Lauro-famous monarchist and entrepreneur-held sway in Naples until the late 1960s. Here in Palermo, after the Young Turks, that is Lima, Gioia, Ciancimino, won the congress in 1952, the DC reached up to 40–45% ... The Mafia was good at approaching those ambitious youths who wanted to make rapid advances in their political career ... someone from the same district or borgata as theirs ... or someone who would never use a gun. But who acknowledged the importance for his career of supporting the Mafia-led urban development ...[W6]

The Sack was therefore regarded by both sides as a chance to obtain political and economic gains. They were mainly functional relations; in many cases, there was no personal connection between politicians and the Mafia. There were, though, often elements of candidates' origins that made them favourable to the Mafia. This aspect was more important for the *sucanchiuostru* than for the old residents, as it consisted of a radical change in the recruitment of local politicians:

In 1980, 60 out of 80 of city councillors were not born in Palermo. Which means they were not familiar with the city as it was before. They thought of the Conca d'Oro as a big development area, like many of their voters, who came from the rest of Sicily and just wanted a newly-built flat. Of course this was functional to the interests of both the Mafia and of the urban development-related actors. [W5]

The manipulation of political relations was a crucial resource for the Mafia. Electoral consent was easily created in the *borgate*, as well as in the new settlements:

Every election was a feast! On the Fridays before the elections, in the square, you had singers, stalls selling food and drink, then, at the end of the concert, Zu Pippinu – imaginary name of the boss-came on stage, and reminded us to vote for Mr. X. who had organized the event, though actually it was Zu Pippinu who had arranged everything. [W3]

The Mafia was a central actor in the Sack, controlling it both directly and indirectly. Its manipulation of values and expectations allowed it to develop a political network based on patronage, from which it constructed a broad-based consensus among the population. From the organization of village festivals to the allocation of developments area, Cosa Nostra wielded limitless power, masked by the widespread desire for massive economic and social change. The Sack of Palermo represented a historical crossroad, in which the rise of the criminal organization married the expectations for better living conditions by large sections of the local society. Environmental and monumental destruction, mass emigration, mass killings, unemployment, the development of ghettos, continued to be overshadowed until the early 1980s by the apparent *progress* being made. In the 1980s, a new wave of mass killings resulting from the Second Mafia War captured the attention of international public opinion. The murder of General Carlo Alberto Dalla Chiesa, *prefetto* (Chief Constable) of Palermo and of his wife, Emanuela Setti Carraro, on the 3 September 1982 (Schneider & Schneider, 2006, pp. 174–175), marked a watershed, as the local Antimafia movement now felt less isolated. Local activists felt supported by both national and international activists and politicians. Although the Mafia is still today a long way from being definitively defeated, the changes that began in the early 1980s brought about some positive outcomes. Nevertheless, the negative consequences of the Sack still haunt Palermo.

7 | CONCLUSION

This paper has illustrated and analysed the dynamics underpinning the urban transformation of Palermo after Second World War. The demand for new housing, as well as the quest for social status and progress, facilitated by the mediation of the Mafia, resulted in the Sack of Palermo. It was thus possible for Cosa Nostra to reach its aims by manipulating demands for a better urban environment. Widespread social consent, conveyed through an extensive network of relations, made the Sack possible.

The consequences of the Sack of Palermo still determine living conditions in the Sicilian capital today. The old part of the city has been slowly revamped, but large parts of it have been left to ruin, and half of the buildings are empty. This is due to a variety of reasons. First, public expenditure cuts have reduced the flow of economic resources into the city, limiting the possibilities for undertaking a massive restructuration. Second, as many residents have moved elsewhere, many craftsmanship- and trade-related activities have been disappearing, so interest in renovating the ancient heart of Palermo has dwindled. Some tourism-oriented activities have been created, but, once again, in an ad hoc manner and without a long-term vision of development.

The research that made this paper possible has allowed the author to reconstruct the social mood of the time, as well as to understand that the development of a city is never simply the outcome of abstract planning. Cities grow in relation to complex social and political dynamics. Power relations and political conflicts between the social groups living in the city are the main elements to consider when analysing urban development. In the case of the Sack of Palermo, the next step should be research into the movements that opposed it to investigate the extent to which it is possible to oppose criminal-oriented urban development so as to improve the urban quality of life. This research could involve a comparative element, so as to analyse the role of organized crime in urban development in other contexts.

Another important aspect concerns anti-Mafia activism. The fall of the Berlin wall has created a more favourable climate for prosecutions against Cosa Nostra, and the demands of the anti-Mafia movement are finally being paid heed to. The criminal organization, in more recent years, has shrunk in power, both internationally, where a plurality of different criminal actors, from Mexico to Russia, has come to prominence, and locally, where anti-Mafia consciousness is rising. An anti-Mafia conscience could be the starting point for reverting the disasters caused by the Sack, and for the creation of a new, lively, environment-friendly, city. Let us hope it is possible.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article [and/or] its supplementary materials.

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