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STEFANO BECUCCI

OLD AND NEW ACTORS IN THE ITALIAN DRUG TRADE: ETHNIC SUCCESSION OR FUNCTIONAL SPECIALIZATION?

ABSTRACT. The article analyses Italian and foreign organized crime involved in the drug market from two perspectives. The first, called “criminal succession”, assumes that the great presence of foreign criminal groups into this illegal market would represent a menace to the traditional hegemony exercised by Mafia-type associations in Italy. From a different perspective, defined as “functional specialisation”, the involvement of foreign criminal groups in the drug market could also be seen in terms of criminal “labour force” tending to follow the same mechanisms occurring in the general market at large, where immigrants fill low-paying jobs not requested by the local population. Through the analysis of data provided by the Italian Central Antidrug Bureau and recent court records the article tests these two perspectives. In particular, the in-depth analysis of three case studies from northern, central and southern Italy – i.e. Milan, Florence and Naples – has allowed us to identify the main changes that occurred in the drug market since the early 1990s. In effect, in Milan and Florence, we register the emergence of foreign criminal actors in the high- and medium-level positions of the local drug trade, while in Naples, where Camorra clans hold very strong positions, it leaves small areas of autonomy to foreign criminal groups.

KEY WORDS: criminal opportunities, foreign criminal groups, kinship, Mafia-type associations, organization, violence

INTRODUCTION

For some years now, Italian law enforcement agencies have increasingly focused their attention on organized crime from foreign sources. Although official Italian Interior Ministry reports in the mid-1990s on the “state of organized crime” assigned only a secondary place to the problem, the growing importance of foreign criminal activity now leads it to occupy entire sections and chapters of these annual reports. In addition, criminal statistics since the early 1990s have shown significant involvement of foreigners in various types of organized crime.

This article concentrates on drug trafficking and sales. Based on the information from the *Direzione Centrale Servizi Antidroga* (Central Antidrug Bureau) and analysis of recent court records, changes in the drug trade have been outlined from the point of view of supply: the permanence of old criminal actors as well as new arrivals on the criminal scene. Finally, the study of three Italian cities – Milan, Florence and Naples – as case studies in northern, central and southern Italy will help show the different criminal positions held by foreigners in the local drug market.

Questions

The undeniable presence of foreigners in the drug trade leads to several basic questions. As the Italian context is characterized by the “historical” presence of traditional organizations such as the Cosa Nostra, Camorra, ‘Ndrangheta and Sacra Corona Unita, it should be asked whether or not the appearance of foreign organizations in the Italian underworld represents a threat to the traditional hegemony exercised by indigenous criminal groups or if it presages a real change in the hierarchical order to the advantage of groups from abroad. If this hypothesis can be verified then we find ourselves facing a process of change that could be defined in terms of “ethnic succession” in criminal activities.

But the involvement of foreign groups in major illegal markets can also be seen from a very different point of view: i.e., as a social-type contribution, in terms of a criminal “labour force” following the same logic and mechanisms that occur in the general labour market where immigrants fill low-paying jobs, disdained by the local population as undesirable and lacking in value. In this sense, foreign groups would take on secondary roles and tasks, functionally subordinate with respect to the indigenous organizations still firmly in control of major international trafficking. In this case, the internal balance of the Italian criminal landscape, although characterized by the presence of foreign groups, would nevertheless seem to remain unchanged.

Criminal Succession

The succession of criminal groups of different national origin has its reference point in the theory of “anomie” developed by Robert Merton (1957), a theory that has been frequently corroborated in American sociological literature. Based on the supposition that legal opportunities for advancement up the social ladder are blocked for immigrant populations because of discrimination, entrance into criminal activity is nothing more than an alternative to institutionally legitimate systems to acquire a better social condition. Once a certain status and comfortable social condition are reached, the immigrant community would tend to abandon the criminal environment and turn to legal activities instead. In this phase, the main aspiration would consist in overcoming the lifestyle and *modus operandi* typical of gangsters or professional criminals in order to begin a process of legitimisation and integration in line with models and criteria of values present in the greater society at large.

Various scholars have noted this type of phenomenon involving immigrant communities established in the United States in the early decades of the 20th century. Daniel Bell (1960) had no hesitation in calling crime a sort of “queer ladder” of social mobility. But it was Francis Ianni (1974) who

systematically developed the theoretical framework centred on the process of ethnic succession. In his analysis of the American underworld, he pointed out the progressive alternation of various criminal groups, differentiated by national origin, in illegal businesses such as drug trafficking and gambling. Although African-Americans managed these markets earlier in the 1940s, they were replaced by groups of Italian origin that were in turn gradually replaced, during the 1970s, by Cubans and Puerto Ricans.

Forms of ethnic succession characterizing the underworld tend to show themselves in terms of a framework based on “cyclical movement” related, on the one hand, to the process of integration into the host society of long established foreign communities and, on the other, to the arrival of new communities. First and foremost, immigrant communities involved in criminal activities redirect themselves toward legality parallel to the progressive recognition and legitimacy acquired in society at large. As the ethnic group overcomes a series of discriminatory socio-political barriers, its members tend to focus their attention on institutional ways and means designed to reach better positions on the social ladder. Tangible signs of this process of legitimisation in American society are found, for instance, in the possibility that police chiefs, judges and political representatives at various levels are chosen from members of their communities. But secondly, as there is no decrease in the demand for illegal good and services, new criminal actors come on the scene, filling the void left by the ethnic group present for a longer period in the new country. In this case, new groups from more recent immigrant communities quickly fill the space left by previous criminal groups.

Although this is, in broad terms, our theoretical reference point, we should nevertheless keep in mind that it can only partially be considered in the analysis of the Italian criminal context. The immigration phenomenon affecting Italy goes back only a few decades while the United States could be considered, from this point of view, a society that originated and grew thanks to the continuous arrival of foreign populations from an extremely wide variety of countries. The characterization in the ethnic sense of social as well as criminal phenomena – what Bell called “the warp of the American society” (1960, p. 11) – does not have the same importance in Italy as it has come to have in the American context. In dealing with a relatively recent immigration phenomenon, it is impossible to find empirical evidence in current data that would confirm the passage from illegal to legal activities of specific groups of immigrants, a passage that on the other hand seems to characterize many communities in their process of integration into American society.

In the Italian context, it is nevertheless possible to identify the involvement of foreign elements in the first phase of criminal succession,

related to their definitive incorporation into illegal activities. And further conclusions can be drawn from the theoretical framework outlined earlier, one that has proven to be a useful interpretative tool in analysing relationships between indigenous and foreign criminal groups.

The most important indication comes from taking into consideration the organizational dynamics that mark each criminal group. As Ianni showed, Cuban criminal groups were able to acquire supremacy in the drug trade and illegal gambling over competitors such as African-Americans and Puerto Ricans, thanks to the availability of extra-criminal resources such as bonds of trust with others from their country and a system of recruiting new members based on kinship. This *modus operandi* could be seen as a sort of “natural” social capital that helped them compensate for the intrinsic mistrust that characterizes all illegal markets, thus giving them an additional resource compared to other illegal actors.

Therefore, we are dealing with an analysis aimed at discovering whether or not certain foreign groups that are involved more than others in criminal activities may have adopted an organizational structure that places them in the condition of establishing fairly stable, long-lasting relationships, based on reciprocal trust. Because of this structure and the use of criminal as well as non-criminal resources, they may be able to acquire top management positions in the drug trade.

Criminal Activity by Foreigners as Functional Specialization

Barriers to the definitive entrance of groups of foreign origin in particularly profitable markets, such as drug trafficking for example, combined with the relatively recent immigration phenomenon, make it plausible to consider an analysis from a different perspective. This hypothesis, based on the circumscribed and functionally specialized role of criminal activity by foreigners, gives rise to a scenario that is noticeably different from the previous one.

Keeping in mind the persistent power of indigenous criminal organizations, foreign elements would tend to be located on the lower rungs of the hierarchical ladder, performing jobs that, although low-level and unskilled, are clearly necessary if illegal operations are to be successful. In this sense, the significant involvement of certain immigrant groups in the drug trade should be considered; their members employed in the retail sales of drugs. Thus street dealing, well-known to be more dangerous because of the greater risk of identification by law enforcement, would be occupied by groups of immigrants exploited by very large Italian traffickers, still firmly established at the highest levels of the international drug trade. Foreign

groups involved in criminal activities would thus have a subordinate and secondary position within this market.

Thus, the organizational dimension and cultural background of these foreign actors should be reconsidered. Although foreigners may create associative-type criminal groups, they could hardly be compared to the Mafia structures that distinguish indigenous groups either in terms of criminal strength, the danger they present or their ability to firmly root themselves in the territory. The national origin of criminal actors should not, as a rule, be considered a useful interpretive element in explaining why certain groups instead of others are more involved in illegal activities. In fact, it can even be misleading as it shifts the centre of analysis from the deeper dynamics running through the overall economic system to the ethno-cultural characteristics of the actors, generating more or less stereotyped forms of labelling and simplification, closer to popular attitudes. Rather than speaking of foreign groups of an ethnic make-up, we should ask ourselves, on the one hand, what functional necessities are required by illegal markets and, on the other, what analogies characterize the latter with respect to the inclusion of the immigrants in the overall economic system. The involvement of foreigners in the production of illegal goods and services should be interpreted as the mirror image of what happens in the broader labour market. Just as immigrants present in Italy tend to perform tasks that are poorly paid, dangerous and undesired by the local population, foreigners operating in the underworld hold jobs that are just as risky and unprofitable.

Italian organized crime groups put foreigners in charge of managing drug dealing areas, using them as unskilled criminal labour. Analogously, the statistically significant presence of foreign subjects implicated in drug-related crimes should be attributed to their more exposed position with respect to law enforcement agencies as well as the tendency of the local population to report their activities. Foreigners employed on the street in a variety of illegal activities are heavily exposed to the intolerance of the local population and consequent suppression by law enforcement. Definitively speaking, the contribution represented by foreign criminal groups could be seen in many cases as a functional specialization determined by the demand for a criminal "labour force" that is not satisfied by associates from indigenous organizations as they prefer directing their interests toward more profitable activities or managing illegal international trafficking from a higher, supervisory position.

In light of new knowledge and empirical elements, both perspectives will be compared in order to show which seems more coherent in outlining the ongoing change in the Italian drug trade from the point of view of criminal actors.

ITALIAN AND FOREIGN CRIMINAL ORGANIZATIONS AND THE DRUG TRADE

Italian Mafia organizations have been involved for several decades in international drug trafficking. During the 1970s, the Cosa Nostra, 'Ndrangheta and Camorra definitively established themselves in the business of importing large quantities of heroin. Although earlier, in the 1950s and 1960s, this drug traffic was in the hands of French criminal groups, mostly from Corsica and Marseille, in the subsequent decade the Sicilian Cosa Nostra began managing a massive traffic in heroin toward the US market from Turkey and the Middle East. The important position of this organization can be traced back to their shifting to the preliminary phases of the production process of the drug, directly importing morphine base. With direct contacts with Turkish suppliers and the enlistment of French chemists, refining laboratories were established in Sicily. In 1980, four refining laboratories were discovered in Palermo, each capable of producing 50 kg of heroin per week (Arlacchi 1983, p. 232).

Through the development of trans-national networks built on bonds of trust with associates who had emigrated abroad, these organizations were able to establish a vast international drug trafficking network. Nevertheless, over the past few years, various important factors have intervened that may have damaged the advantageous position acquired by these groups in the drug trade. First, a series of law enforcement operations, brought on by the Mafia killings in the early 1990s in which Judges Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino lost their lives, led to the decapitation of the heads of the Cosa Nostra both in their traditionally established areas, such as Sicily, as well as northern-central Italy. In the second place, the arrival on the Italian drug market of foreign groups who gradually occupied fairly important positions in the mid-to-high as well as lower levels of the retail distribution chain. Long-term analysis shows major changes in the relation between the number of Italians and foreigners involved in drug crimes organized by type of crime, as seen in Tables I and II.

The number of Italians involved in drug sales fell from 22,813 (1991) to 18,774 (2002) while those accused of criminal conspiracy to traffic increased, respectively, from 1280 (1991) to 2184 (2002), and for the crime of production and trafficking from 1587 (1991) to 2347 (2002). On the other hand, foreigners accused of drug sales increased from 4238 (1991) to 7371 (2002). The frequently presented hypothesis that foreigners may have substituted Italians in retail distribution is somewhat confirmed from this point of view. Furthermore, the foreign component grows just as significantly for other types of crimes (production and trafficking, conspiracy to traffic). This fact leads us to believe that the substitution of Italians by foreigners in the lower levels of the distribution network is in reality just one of the changes the Italian drug market is experiencing. On the other hand,

TABLE I

Italians investigated for “production and trafficking”, “sale”, “conspiracy to traffic”,^a “other crimes under the law” (1991–2002).

Year	Production and trafficking	Sale	Conspiracy to traffic	Other crimes	Total Italians
1991	1587	22,813	1280	60	25,740
1992	2488	27,644	2512	146	32,810
1993	2613	21,596	2288	203	26,700
1994	3335	21,567	2946	149	27,997
1995	2771	19,704	2333	183	25,174
1996	2699	20,223	2603	80	25,605
1997	2130	19,293	2273	27	23,723
1998	2132	18,214	2435	10	22,791
1999	2475	19,875	1949	36	24,335
2000	2652	19,461	2315	36	24,464
2001	2409	18,923	2227	27	23,586
2002	2347	18,774	2184	12	23,317

^aCurrent Italian law (l. 309/1990) defines conspiracy as occurring whenever at least three persons are involved in the same crime and there is a link between them to help conduct the illegal activity.

TABLE II

Foreigners investigated for “production and trafficking”, “sale”,^a “conspiracy to traffic” and “other crimes under the law” (1991–2002).

Year	Production and trafficking	Sale	Conspiracy traffic	Other crimes	Total foreigners
1991	593	4238	168	17	5022
1992	721	4646	206	1	5574
1993	557	5656	143	87	6443
1994	600	7334	193	1	8128
1995	685	6524	268	1	7478
1996	955	6046	377	2	7380
1997	1271	7437	560		9268
1998	1325	8745	506		10,576
1999	1439	8244	377	1	10,061
2000	1734	7723	438	2	9897
2001	1844	8120	581		10,545
2002	1954	7371	531	1	9857

^aFrom 1998 to 2002, the column related to “sale” also includes “conspiracy to sale” (in all years considered, this category does not reach more than 1% of total crimes committed by Italians and foreigners).

Source: 1991–1997, M. Barbagli, *Immigrazione e reati in Italia*, 2002, p. 77; for other years, personal calculations based on data from the *Direzione Centrale Servizi Antidroga*, 2003.

the significant presence of foreigners in organized traffic also indicates the existence of criminal networks capable of managing the introduction and commercialisation of drugs, either in agreement with Italian organizations or, alternatively, virtually autonomous from them. The presence of foreigners in the mid-to-top levels of the business would lead us to believe they are themselves capable of organizing the distribution chain from the import phase to retail sales.

The drug market presents an inflexible structure for illegal opportunities, a structure that only rarely permits those in lower levels to occupy higher positions. The segmentation of the market, connected to asymmetries in information available to the different illegal actors, and entrance barriers, made up of the use of violence and the availability of capital, represent obstacles that increase as one gets closer to the top of the distribution hierarchy (Lepri 1993, p. 348). In this sense, it would be very difficult for those performing “worker” functions, such as street dealing, to have the chance to hold more profitable positions.

The processes of upward mobility to the advantage of new illegal actors can be explained by mentioning two, frequently connected, major conditions: law enforcement operations that overthrow previously dominant criminal networks, and factors intrinsic to emerging criminal groups related to their own internal cohesion and the availability of limited resources such as the use of violence. Those who have obtained sufficient internal cohesion and a certain criminal clout find themselves in the position of imposing respect on other competitors, thus acquiring a high-ranking position in the management of illegal trafficking. On the other hand, those groups characterized by a lack of internal cohesion and meagre criminal resources find themselves performing secondary functions with a high risk of being identified by law enforcement.

In fact, if we cross-reference the different types of crime examined previously with the foreign nationalities most involved, several interesting aspects emerge. Tables III–V show a sort of “ethnic” stratification corresponding to the different position each national group occupies within the distribution hierarchy of the drug trade.

Foreigners from Northern Africa are particularly exposed to law enforcement operations, as they mainly occupy lower levels in the distribution network. Moroccans, Tunisians and Algerians are almost exclusively involved in street dealing activities. On the other hand, these same national groups are barely present in crimes indicating the existence of organizations such as large-scale drug trafficking and conspiracy to traffic. The same holds true for the French and Spanish.

Although less present in terms of absolute values, other nationalities show a notably different situation. Colombians are particularly involved in trafficking (2000), so much so that this criminal charge concerns almost

TABLE III

The top 10 nationalities organized by type of crime (production and trafficking, sales,^a conspiracy to traffic (2000)).

Nationality	Production and trafficking	%	Sales	%	Conspiracy to traffic	%	Total
Morocco	393	13	2622	86	46	2	3063
Tunisia	97	6	1512	93	20	1	1629
Algeria	35	3	1068	96	4	0	1107
Albania	430	46	317	34	184	20	931
Nigeria	104	29	217	60	42	12	363
Colombia	190	83	22	10	17	7	229
Senegal	17	8	200	89	7	3	224
France	10	5	177	92	4	2	192
Spain	17	9	167	88	5	3	189
Ghana	26	25	79	75	1	1	106

^aConspiracy to sell, corresponding to 0% in 2000 and values between 1 and 2% in other years has been included in the “sales” category. Since it shows even lower percentage values, the category “other crimes under the law” has been eliminated.

Source: Personal calculations based on data from the *Direzione Centrale Servizi Antidroga* (2000).

TABLE IV

The top 10 nationalities organized by type of crime (production and trafficking, sales and conspiracy to traffic (2001)).

Nationality	Production and trafficking	%	Sales	%	Conspiracy to traffic	%	Total
Morocco	332	10	2820	86	121	4	3273
Tunisia	128	9	1328	90	24	2	1480
Albania	577	46	422	33	268	21	1267
Algeria	37	3	1134	96	13	1	1184
Nigeria	166	42	221	55	13	3	400
Spain	25	7	324	91	6	2	355
France	15	7	176	87	12	6	203
Senegal	21	10	179	89	1	0	201
Palestine	2	1	132	99		0	134
Former Yugoslavia	34	29	69	58	15	13	118

Source: Personal calculations based on data from the *Direzione Centrale Servizi Antidroga* (2001).

TABLE V

Top 10 nationalities organized by type of crime (production and trafficking, sales and conspiracy to traffic (2002)).

Nationality	Production and trafficking	%	Sales	%	Conspiracy to traffic	%	Total
Morocco	430	14	2478	83	79	3	2987
Tunisia	154	11	1181	87	20	1	1355
Albania	567	45	485	39	202	16	1254
Algeria	53	6	903	94	2	0	958
Spain	18	5	353	93	10	3	381
Nigeria	138	38	226	62		0	364
France	10	5	171	93	2	1	184
Former Yugoslavia	45	25	75	41	61	34	181
Senegal	13	7	163	92	1	1	177
Palestine	3	2	119	98		0	122

Source: Personal calculations based on data from the *Direzione Centrale Servizi Antidroga* (2002).

all foreigners of this nationality. However, they have comparatively lower values for the crime of conspiracy to traffic, probably a sign that many of them are intercepted alone at the border with the intention of bringing drugs into Italy. Albanians, Nigerians and immigrants from the former Yugoslavia show a significant presence in conspiracy-type crimes. These groups are more involved in trafficking and conspiracy-type crimes than retail sales, and occupy an important position at the mid-to-high level of the drug trade.

Established Mafia Presence in Milan and its Greater Metropolitan Area

With its intense financial and commercial activity, the city of Milan has long exercised a great attraction for Italian organized crime groups. A series of related factors helped the first Mafia groups establish themselves there in the 1960s, in a territory that had been immune to particularly serious criminal phenomena until then.

The ease of camouflage within the largest-ever flow of immigrants from southern Italy to the north in search of work and the substantial underestimation of a phenomenon believed to be confined to its original areas allowed Mafia families to operate for many years in relative security and impunity; and we should also recall the unintentional contribution made by the numerous judicial measures from 1965 that required convicted Mafia members to reside outside their region of origin. Instead of severing connections with their areas of origin, the use of compulsory residence as a

prevention measure in reality helped expand criminal networks into northern Italy to the advantage of the various Mafia groups (Massari, 2001, p. 12).

Mafia presence in the Milan area was marked by several fundamental steps, corresponding to the phases of emergence, expansion and establishment in the territory. At first, the Mafia nuclei dedicated themselves to predatory-type activities such as employment rackets (exploiting the workforce from southern Italy), kidnapping for extortion, and robbery. From 1973–1974 to the mid-1980s, the statements of several *pentiti* (Mafia members turned witnesses for the state) showed groups from Calabria were mainly involved in robbery and kidnapping (*Tribunale Milano* 1997c, p. 276).

In a second phase, having acquired certain economic wealth, each of these Mafia associations started up its own contacts with foreign drug suppliers. Connections were made based either on more or less casual acquaintances made in prison or already established criminal networks such as, for example, those involved in cigarette smuggling (*Tribunale Milano* 1997a).

Both major and minor criminal groups tend to simultaneously activate many contacts with different suppliers in order to greater increase their business volume. In an extremely dynamic criminal context, the trend toward establishing potentially stable relationships with foreign suppliers is always associated with the opening of new lines of importation.

Drug trafficking reached a steady intensity around the beginning of the 1980s, concurrent with the installation of several laboratories for refining morphine base in the periphery of Milan. Members of gangs from Calabria managed around 150 kg per month of heroin and cocaine with individual profits ranging from 100 to 200 million Italian lire (50,000–100,000 euros) per month (*Tribunale Milano* 1997b, p. 869). The hierarchical structure of the distribution network and considerable volume of drugs trafficked meant Mafia families tended to control a broad section of the distribution network, in some cases down to organizing and directing street dealers. Under the control of organization associates, drug dealers had to respect their own “shifts” in order to guarantee a constant presence in areas where retail sales were made (*Tribunale Milano* 1994, pp. 32–33).

The phase of integration into general society began expanding in the mid-1980s. Creating construction and earthmoving firms, and buying real estate agencies and other commercial activities helped launder illegal profits. Mafia firms apparently performing legal activities served as logistical support for drug trafficking. Meetings to decide the cost of heroin consignments were held with buyers in bars run by members of criminal groups. Delivery was then entrusted to young people who received a salary of about 1500 euros a month from the trafficking organization. These “kids” moved around 10 kg of heroin per month and performed the most dangerous duties related

to selling drugs and collecting money from customers with sales prices set by the bosses. Although at first they perform “manual” criminal labour, the elements gravitating around criminal associations – a large percentage of them from the same regions as the associates – are socialized on Mafia models. So gangs have the chance to later select those among these workers considered the most valid and trustworthy from a criminal standpoint.

The power of Mafia groups lay in their ability to manage considerable criminal, economic and political resources. When needed, they had a large quantity of new recruits available to be drafted on site or from their territories of origin. They also benefited from the support of a vast network of accomplices and collaborators who, although not associates, guaranteed easy solutions to logistical and organizational problems related to managing illegal trafficking. When, for example, safe places had to be found where they could freely communicate without worrying about being overheard by strangers or when it was necessary to resort to cooperative front men to hide their earnings, Mafia organizations found support within the circle of people from their own regions and political collusion with various local city administrations in the greater metropolitan area of Milan (*Tribunale Milano* 1997c).

In the early 1990s, when criminal groups had most firmly rooted themselves in the area, a process of growing integration along commercial lines took place between the various Mafia structures. Top-level representatives from several organizations, each with their own share, participated in financing drug shipments that were then divided up according to spheres of territorial influence. The case of the Car Park in Via Salamone, run by a member of the Cursoti clan from Catania, symbolically represents the level of integration between groups from Sicily, Calabria and Campania. A parking lot built next to the Milan Fruit and Vegetable Market was actually a fictitious economic activity established as a front for the wholesale supply centre for heroin, cocaine and hashish for the major criminal organizations present in the area.¹

Recent Changes in the Milan Drug Trade

On examining major court proceedings regarding criminal activity from the early 1990s, the very small presence of foreigners out of the total number of defendants is immediately evident. Compared to the involvement of several hundred members of Mafia associations, the role of foreigners is of secondary importance not only from a quantitative point of view but probably also in a qualitative sense. If at first Italian consortia were based

¹A 1992 search of the Car Park in Via Salamone uncovered 17 pump shotguns, two sub-machine guns, a sawed-off shotgun, and five pistols along with more than a thousand cartridges, about 140 kg of hashish and 5 kg of heroin.

on connections with suppliers through foreign intermediaries present in Italy, later, when the market was well established, Italian organizations themselves established direct contacts with foreign producers. Mafia heads went to South American countries, Turkey or the Middle East with the aim of negotiating commercial agreements with producers (*Tribunale Milano* 1997a, p. 1500). The role of foreigners involved in judicial investigations from the early 1990s could be substantially traced back to two categories: they acted either as couriers for foreign suppliers or, if necessary, intermediaries between Mafia groups and Turkish or South American organizations. Regardless of their degree of connection to foreign organizations, they acted on the local market as *individuals* rather than components of *groups* operating on site. As they were mainly involved in large-scale international trafficking, they had little presence in mid-to-low levels of the distribution network. In fact, for low-level jobs, Mafia associations almost exclusively used Italian drug dealers and courier “mules”.

Since the mid-1990s, the drug trade in Milan, as in other cities in central northern Italy, has shown a significant involvement of foreigners in both retail distribution as well as the management of international trafficking.

A qualitative examination of recent judicial files closed in early 2000 shows how the local criminal context has changed significantly compared to the previous period. First of all, couriers and emissaries from Turkish criminal families seem to have substantially disappeared from the market.² Their place has been quickly taken over by importers and intermediaries from Eastern Europe, particularly Bosnia, Kosovo and Albania. Acting as go-betweens for Italian traffickers and foreign producers, they manage the most consistent flows of heroin on the scene. Foreign groups involved in importing hold a high position in the distribution network. Although they sell consignments of drugs both to foreign as well as Italian traffickers, the latter make up the principal contact for the most organized importers because of their outstanding operational capability and large amounts of available capital.

The scenario outlined earlier shows the succession of different nationalities in the roles of drug traffickers – from Turkish couriers and middlemen to Eastern European importers – and distributors – from mid-level Italian dealers recruited from Mafia gangs to foreign salesmen. But what factors have determined these changes? They seem to originate from the effect of two main convergent factors. On the one hand, effective law enforcement operations against Italian organizations and, on the other, the arrival on the scene in Milan of new actors able to provide illegal goods and services on an international scale.

² Interview with a magistrate from the *Direzione Distrettuale Antimafia* in Milan, 3 February 2003.

Since the early 1990s, numerous operations by judicial authorities have involved several thousand affiliates of southern Italian organizations operating in Milan and the greater metropolitan area.³ Major organizations from Calabria, Sicily and Campania suffered greatly from these operations that eliminated their top management and consistently dismantled networks of associates.⁴ One indicator of the diminished criminal capacity of these southern Italian groups can be seen in the significant reduction in Mafia homicides in Milan over the past few years. From 1996 to 2000, only one homicide can be traced back to activities of the Cosa Nostra, 'Ndrangheta or Camorra.⁵

The opening up of space for new criminal groups, unthinkable a few years ago, has not indiscriminately favoured new foreign actors but only those able to easily exploit these new opportunities thanks to greater organizational skills and trans-national connections. Since the fall of the Soviet regime, Balkan countries have become a nerve centre for large-scale illegal trafficking. Criminal organizations from this region have become a link between Turkey, the Middle East and Western Europe for drug trafficking (Strazzari and Dognini, 2000, p. 32). By acting as "service agencies" for a variety of buyers, criminal groups formed by Albanians and former Yugoslavs have been able to "intercept" the most profitable trafficking activities directed toward Italy to their own advantage.

ORGANIZED CRIME IN FLORENCE

The initial Mafia phenomenon started in the 1960s and was connected to the large number of court-ordered changes of residence that brought several Mafia bosses to various Tuscan Provinces. The areas most involved were: Florence, Prato and various smaller cities in the greater metropolitan area of Florence (Massari 1998, p. 32). Top-level Cosa Nostra bosses such as Gaspare Mutolo, Leonardo Messina and Giuseppe Madonia initially acted as "privileged observers" for the planning of illegal projects and the creation of new criminal networks (Minna 1993, p. 29).

Although certain aspects of the Mafia presence in Tuscany show analogous methods to those seen in Milan, there are also significant differences. While the transferral of Mafia groups to other regions in northern Italy

³From 1990 to 1999, several police operations led to the arrest of almost 3000 people, to large extent members of Mafia-type organizations (L'Europeo 1994, p. 27; Omicron 2001, pp. 184–185).

⁴These judicial operations broke up the internal chain of command of the Italian Mafia organizations, compromising, at times irreversibly, financial relationships established by bosses with foreign producers.

⁵Annuario Giudiziario, *Delitti denunciati all' Autorità Giudiziaria dalla Polizia di Stato, dall' Arma dei Carabinieri e dal Corpo della Guardia di Finanza*, ISTAT (1996–2000).

follows an evolutionary process summarized in the three phases of emergence, expansion and establishment in the territory, in Tuscany the criminal phenomenon tended to take on different connotations. Here there seem to be neither forms of real territorial control nor infiltration of local politics as, instead, has taken place in other cities in Lombardy and Piedmont.⁶ In the early 1990s, elements of the Musumeci clan carried out extortion attempts in several areas of Tuscany, such as Versilia, near Viareggio and Torre del Lago, and became involved in illegal gambling. However, major judicial operations during that period, along with the presence of a firmly established local democratic tradition and the willingness of the population to collaborate with law enforcement, kept Mafia associations from being successful in establishing themselves or their control over the area. But Tuscany still holds an important position because it offers opportunities, especially in major tourist areas, for laundering illegal profits. Instead of being subjected to actual Mafia settlement, the Tuscan area has become first and foremost a sort of “washing machine” for illegal profits (*Commissione Parlamentare* 1994, p. 206).⁷

According to magistrates from the Public Prosecutor’s Office, criminal phenomena traceable to Mafia organizations from southern Italy go back to the mid-1990s in the metropolitan area of Florence. With the exception of the Mafia terrorist attacks on the Uffizi in 1993, part of a mass destruction strategy adopted by the Sicilian Cosa Nostra, there have been no criminal events that could be attributed to Mafia associations.⁸ Since several celebrated trials in Florence in the early 1990s, no further judicial investigations have been held of Mafia elements.⁹ Statistical indicators such as Mafia homicides and dynamite attacks agree with evaluations submitted by investigating bodies. Between 1996 and 2000, no Mafia-type homicides took place that could be traced back to the Cosa Nostra, ‘Ndrangheta or Camorra. Dynamite and/or incendiary attacks also show very modest numbers: a total of 18 between 1996 and 2000.¹⁰

⁶The city council of Bardonecchia, a ski resort in Val di Susa, was disbanded in April 1995, because of Mafia infiltration (Caselli 2003, p. 2).

⁷In June 2003, the Prosecutor’s Office of Palermo ordered the seizure of a large country estate, purchased through a front by several Mafia families from Palermo, in the town of Montespertoli, 15 km from Florence.

⁸The attack on the Uffizi was carried with the participation of Vincenzo Ferro, a “Mafioso” from Alcamo (a town in the province of Trapani in Sicily), who had asked one of his relatives living in Florence to loan him his apartment as a logistical base for the Mafia group being transferred from Sicily (Chiari 1997).

⁹Interview with two magistrates from the Florence Public Prosecutor’s Office, 2 June 2003.

¹⁰Annuario Giudiziario, *Delitti denunciati all’Autorità Giudiziaria dalla Polizia di Stato, dall’Arma dei Carabinieri e dal Corpo della Guardia di Finanza*, ISTAT (1996–2000).

The Drug Trade and Foreign Criminal Activity in Florence

A series of variously structured foreign and Italian groups are present on the local drug scene. The peculiarity here, compared to other cities examined, lies in the fact that these structures seem to have no relationships with Mafia groups from traditional areas. With the exception of Neapolitan elements present in the trade until several years ago, no presence of Mafia-type associations has been registered. From this point of view, criminal organizations operating in the drug sector are free from dealing with more structured criminal organizations capable of exercising pervasive and total control over the underworld.

A series of aspects generally characterizes the drug trade in the area of Florence. Actors involved in legal proceedings regarding importation and bulk sales were almost all foreigners. Among these, Albanians occupy a dominant position in the local market. Other groups of foreigners from North African countries tend to work in mid-level distribution.¹¹ Italians now act as drug couriers from one Italian city to another and are involved in retail sales to select clientele.

Some criminal groups composed of foreigners have been able to reach important positions in virtue of the fact there are no entrance barriers to the local market from a criminal point of view. The substantial absence of Mafia-type criminal activity in this market has left foreign traffickers with room to manoeuvre that would be extremely difficult to obtain in other contexts. Foreign traffickers have not had to deal with “cumbersome” criminal intermediaries unwilling to accept competitors operating at a similar level in the same market.

ORGANIZED CRIME IN NAPLES AND THE GREATER METROPOLITAN AREA

Around 100 different Camorra “clans” involving thousands of members are found in the province of Naples (DDA 2002). The extremely broad and well-defined criminal activities of these organizations include extortion, loan-sharking, illegal gambling, cigarette smuggling, drug trafficking and even investment in the legal economy.

These clans exercise nearly total control over their areas of influence. In provincial towns like Torre Annunziata, Pompei, Torre del Greco, Ercolano and various neighbourhoods in Naples, protection rackets are so widespread that “all economic activities, even small ones, must submit to extortion” (DDA 2002, p. 11).

Although the numerous judicial operations in the early 1990s, instigated by the collaboration of several charismatic Camorra leaders, threw many

¹¹ Interview with a magistrate from the Public Prosecutor’s Office in Florence, 4 June 2003.

clans into disarray, their influence over the surrounding social fabric was only temporarily diminished. A 1997 report from the Public Prosecutor's Office in Naples to the Anti-Mafia Commission indicated there had been, over the previous three years, "a dramatic increase in homicides and attempted homicides due to the need to establish new arrangements between the various organizations now deprived of strong central points of reference; and in new recruits who, guns in hand, have forced their way into positions left empty by those arrested; and the progressive expansion of 'fugitives' and elusive 'historical fugitives' (. . .) and their organizations into territories no longer adequately 'governed'" (cit. in Barbagallo 1999, p. 182). Once organization heads were incarcerated, an internal power struggle began between those who, up till that point, had only held secondary positions. The disarray suffered by criminal organizations favoured the emergence of new groups in a mechanism of continuous re-ordering of previous alliances, producing new divisions in spheres of territorial influence. For instance, some areas of the city characterized by the historical presence of particular crime families, such as the Giuliano family in the Forcella neighbourhood, have seen neighbouring clans move in and establish their own control as a result of law enforcement operations.

Contrary to occurrences in other traditional Mafia areas, where damage incurred from law enforcement activities has led some criminal organizations, such as the Cosa Nostra, to significantly change their strategy, internal conflicts within the various clans in Campania have been constant over the last few years. While, after the terrorism of the early 1990s,¹² the Sicilian Mafia adopted a "lay low" strategy characterized by a low profile and limited use of violence, the Camorra is continually split by internal warfare connected to the conquest of power and control of criminal activities. Proof of this is seen in the number of homicides involving associates of local clans between 1996 and 2000 in the province of Naples compared to other southern Italian cities, such as Palermo and Reggio Calabria, also characterized by the traditional presence of Mafia-type organizations (Table VI).

As opposed to the Cosa Nostra and 'Ndrangheta, the Camorra represents a sort of gangster-type urban Mafia phenomenon characterized by horizontal structures, unwilling to accept ruling bodies established to regulate the use of violence, sanction respect for "rules" and decide political and criminal strategies for the entire "population" of associates. Various attempts to reproduce the unified model of other indigenous Mafia-type organizations have systematically failed.

Operations by the courts, although capable of inflicting severe damage on the various clans, have never actually been able to eliminate the cultural

¹²The terrorist-style attacks in Milan, Florence and Rome occurred the year after the murders of Judges Falcone and Borsellino in the summer of 1992.

TABLE VI
Mafia homicides in Naples, Palermo and Reggio Calabria (1996–2000).

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	Total
Naples	73	82	88	47	58	348
Palermo	10	5	5	7	3	30
Reggio Calabria	20	26	17	16	2	81

Source: Annuario Giudiziario, Delitti denunciati all’Autorità Giudiziaria dalla Polizia di Stato, dall’Arma dei Carabinieri e dal Corpo della Guardia di Finanza, ISTAT.

“stew” on which they feed. The widespread *omertà* existing in various areas of the city of Naples, close ties with the economy and local politics, and their incredible ability to recruit new associates from socially marginal areas all make the Camorra one of the toughest and most dangerous organizations on the Italian criminal scene.¹³

Criminal Actors and the Drug Trade in Naples

Almost all the clans operating in the province of Naples have been involved in drug trafficking since the end of the 1970s. Groups initially involved in smuggling cigarettes from the Balkans have subsequently revised their know-how and reworked their criminal networks for drug trafficking. Furthermore, they have for several years now opened up direct channels for importing massive quantities of cocaine from South America via containers. Contrary to what usually happens in other areas of the country, clans involved in the drug market also tend to control the retail market by enlisting low-level criminal labour. Judicial evidence of this was collected in the area of Torre Annunziata and Ercolano, two populous centres in the greater Neapolitan area. In 2001, a violent clash in Ercolano between different clans over the management of retail drug distribution led to dozens of attacks and numerous homicides (DDA 2002, pp. 51, 68). Testimonies collected in the field confirmed the determination of local organized crime to extend its control not only over large trafficking operations but also street dealing.

One street dealer from a town in the greater metropolitan area of Naples refers to the sales system of which he is a part (Ferrillo, M., *Spacciatore o spacciato?* Torino: Gruppo Abele (unpublished 2000, p. 39):

¹³In 2001 alone, four city government councils in the province of Naples were ordered dissolved by the Chief Magistrate because of Mafia infiltration: Pompei, San Gennaro Vesuviano, Santa Maria la Carità and Pignataro Maggiore (DDA 2002, p. 111).

In Ponticelli, where a big retail market exists, street dealers are called to meet in a large apartment where drugs are distributed along with instructions. Everybody is assigned a precise spot to stand and somebody warns the dealer right away in case of danger when the police are on the way.

The drug trade in Naples differs in several important aspects from those in Milan and Florence. First, local organized crime presence, divided into spheres of influence, maintains near total control over large trafficking operations. The long arm of these groups extends down to the retail level for which local criminal elements are recruited. In contrast to principal theories on the structure of drug markets based on the assumption that organized crime would have little desire to also control street dealing as costs would be greater than benefits (Arlacchi 1988, pp. 69–75; Ruggiero 1992, p. 194; Lepri 1993, p. 348), the tight control exercised by Camorra clans over street dealers is probably part of a wider strategy designed to produce, on the one hand, forms of social consent and, on the other, a kind of criminal conditioning. Along with protection rackets and political vote tampering, the control of drug dealing represents one of the tangible signs of a clan's dominance over their own territory. Direct management of drug dealers also creates an efficient distribution system and generally responds to a precise system of territorial borders with other clans.

The widespread social tolerance toward broad illegal sectors existing in various city neighbourhoods makes the identification of a clear line between legal and illegal more difficult from this standpoint. Drug sales, cigarette smuggling and the flourishing counterfeit consumer goods industry either directly or indirectly support a large share of the local population, equivalent to several thousand people.

During field research, we became aware of a series of facts that show the existence of a social climate reluctant to discourage forms of illegality. For instance, the elderly woman who sells smuggled cigarettes in her apartment may also supply hashish to consumers in the neighbourhood, or the owners of vacation houses along the Neapolitan Riviera may be forced to pay imaginary private "security guards" for protection from theft and vandalism. As these guards are often members of Camorra clans, these houses can be used, during the winter season, as hideouts for fugitive gangsters. A prosecutor from the *Direzione Distrettuale Antimafia* in Naples reported another case that symbolizes the powerful conditioning exercised by the Camorra over the social fabric. A florist with a kiosk near the court house in Naples decided to report to the local magistrate the pressure he had suffered from several *camorristi* who forced him to buy a certain amount of flowers at increased prices every week. The magistrate began the investigation and the florist was called to testify regarding his report. Having received repeated threats in the meantime, he declared he had never received any requests for

extortion from the *camorristi*. Before the public prosecutor could accuse him of false testimony and aiding and abetting the defendants, lawyers for the *camorristi* went to work to keep the florist from going on trial. So the florist confirmed his accusations only after having been assured by these lawyers their clients would carry out no retaliation against him. Addressing the public prosecutor in private, the lawyers explained the motivation for their behaviour in the following terms: “This florist is kind of an ‘institution’ for us. We buy flowers from him every Sunday. We just could not let him have any problems with the law.”¹⁴

Relationships Between Italian and Foreign Organized Crime in Naples

As local criminal gangs are so powerfully rooted and tend to be pervasive in this area, what room for activity could possibly be left for foreign dealers and traffickers?

In this sense, the case in Naples is very different from those previously examined in Milan and Florence. First, the arrival on the scene of new foreign criminal actors is not helped by law enforcement operations as it is in Milan. Although operations by the Public Prosecutor open up new room for activity, either this space is quickly filled by gangs not under investigation at the moment or bitter internal warfare starts up for supremacy between members of the same gang.

Recently, the presence of foreign criminal groups involved in the drug business has emerged in sections of the greater metropolitan area and along the coast between Naples and Salerno. According to the *Direzione Distrettuale Antimafia*, over the past few years there has been “a new phenomenon; in many cases the retail drug dealing phase is entrusted by clans to non-European immigrants, mostly Albanians and North Africans, who require less pay for their activities and so allow these organizations to put drugs on the market at significantly lower prices than in other areas, attracting buyers from other provinces as well” (DDA 2002, p. 85). Some foreign organizations, particularly from Albania, North Africa and Nigeria, have actually risen from the role of subordinate dealers to managers of their own trafficking operations.

Although the Casalesi clan, operating along the coast between Naples and Salerno, had since the 1980s firmly opposed the presence of non-European immigrants who moved to the area as seasonal agricultural labour, lately it has changed its attitude. The many fires set at immigrant shelters by the Casalesi between 1985 and 1990 and the increase in street crime

¹⁴ Interview with a Prosecutor from the *Direzione Distrettuale Antimafia*, Naples, 17 February 2003.

in the area caused many tourists to abandon their vacation homes along the coast. This probably had a negative effect on the criminal income the Casalesi received from “caretaking” for the vacation homes, along with illegal hook-ups to the local water supply system, and led them to making agreements with foreign criminal groups involved in prostitution and drug dealing. Although at first undesired, these various foreign organizations now represented a chance for new illegal profits. According to recent investigations, the Casalesi clan may impose monthly payments of 5000 euros each for non-European immigrants involved in prostitution and drug dealing in the area.¹⁵

In general, Camorra groups maintain control of the local market, leaving foreign organizations relatively autonomous. But even if both have their own channels for importing cocaine from South America, Camorra groups are distinguished by their operation ability, trusted contacts with Columbian producers and various types of collusion with Italian authorities. One group of Italians at the head of the Forcella gang organized the transport of 512 kg of cocaine from Venezuela via container. A member of the organization, having immigrated to Venezuela years before, acted as intermediary between the Neapolitan buyers and South American producers. The cocaine, seized in Hamburg on orders from the Italian magistrate’s office, was hidden inside a load of gloves. The cover consignment of gloves had been organized by a company in Caracas that belonged to the Italian contact abroad and sent to an import–export firm linked via front men to members of the Forcella group. Neapolitan traffickers contributed, according to their needs, to purchasing this large quantity of cocaine (*Tribunale Napoli* 2001).

A group of Nigerian traffickers operating in the area between Naples, Salerno and Caserta, managed a channel for importing cocaine from South America through direct connections with Colombian producers or middlemen, bringing in little more than 1 kg at a time via air couriers of various nationalities. Once in Caserta, drugs were then distributed through internal channels to a circuit of their countrymen operating in several cities in Liguria, Lombardy and Veneto. In the province of Caserta, traffickers sold the drug to mid-level Moroccan distributors, Italians and other Nigerians, who then cut the drug and sold it to other buyers (*Tribunale Napoli* 2002).

In the end, the criminal strength of foreign actors involved in drug trafficking in the area of Naples is largely inferior to that of Camorra organizations. While the latter maintain substantial control of large trafficking operations and, in most cases, street dealing, foreigners – even some small workers operating in virtual autonomy – tend to occupy very restricted

¹⁵ Interview with a prosecutor from the *Direzione Distrettuale Antimafia*, Naples, 18 February 2003.

market areas. Furthermore, they have neither the size, nor the political, economic or criminal resources of indigenous clans.

CONCLUSION: CRIMINAL SUCCESSION OR FUNCTIONAL SPECIALIZATION?

At the beginning of the paper, we asked whether or not the emphasis placed by law enforcement agencies and the Italian media over the last few years on foreign organized crime might be the prelude to actual ethnic succession within the Italian drug trade or if, on the contrary, the increasing involvement of foreigners should be seen more as functional and substantially secondary with respect to the much more frightening indigenous Mafia-type organizations already existing in Italy.

The analysis of the drug trade has allowed us to consider both hypotheses and identify a series of relevant characteristics.

In areas with a traditional Mafia presence such as Naples, Italian and foreign criminal actors involved in high-level trafficking are clearly distinguished in terms of operational abilities and the extension of criminal networks available to both groups. While in Naples the Camorra clans hold positions of absolute power, leaving small areas of autonomy to foreign criminal groups, other cities such as Milan and Florence show a progressive predominance of foreigners. The incisiveness of law enforcement operations in the Milan area has *de facto* offered new criminal opportunities to the latter. In Florence, on the other hand, the absence of competitors from Mafia crime families has significantly facilitated the inclusion of new actors in the local market. In both cities, several foreign criminal groups hold important positions in the international drug trade, often supplying Mafia groups and potentially negotiating with them on an equal footing. Nevertheless, the shift from Italians to foreigners has not progressed homogeneously across Italy, but is affected by the presence or absence of local criminal organizations capable of exercising pervasive forms of control over the local context. In southern Italy, Mafia-type organizations hold top positions in the market while in various areas of central and northern Italy foreign trafficking groups manage the drug supply with substantial autonomy (CSM 2001).

Street-level dealing has seen significant addition of foreign elements that have progressively taken over sales points once occupied by Italians. Nevertheless, the lower positions of the distribution chain have experienced only a partial substitution process as sales methods, especially for Italian dealers, have significantly changed compared to methods used in the past. Italian retailers seldom go to typical sales points and usually prefer to supply a fixed clientele. Although less profitable, this method involves less risk of being intercepted by law enforcement. On this point, the considerable involvement of foreigners in drug-related crimes suggested by criminal

statistics only partially reflects a phenomenon of shifting from Italians to foreigners in the lower positions of the distribution network. What is most interesting is that a sort of “ethnic stratification” seems possible, related to positions occupied within the drug trade. While immigrants from North African countries are involved to a great extent in street-level distribution, other national groups show comparatively higher numbers in drug trafficking. We could say that “illegal opportunities” are distributed differently, in terms of criminal careers and chances for higher profits, in relation to the position each criminal actor holds in the market (Cloward and Ohlin 1960).

These different positions respond in large part to criminal opportunities revolving around relationships linked to the circle of ethnic origin. Nevertheless, the ethno-linguistic characteristics of the criminal actors alone neither tell us very much, nor adequately help to explain the different distribution of illegal opportunities. There is a risk here of falling into tautological-type explanations that would be of little help in showing why a certain correspondence exists between national origin and positions held within the market of criminal actors. In other words, why do North Africans tend to occupy lower levels in the sales network while Albanians show a strong inclination toward top positions in the distribution structure? Factors influencing this should be sought in the organizational capacity shown by the criminal groups, the type of relationships existing within their group and, finally, the willingness to resort to particular methods such as violence.

In analysing the judicial material gathered, the existence frequently emerges among members of Albanian criminal groups of kinship bonds or relationships based on common territorial origin; these often involve brothers, cousins or friends who either met in Albania and decided to immigrate together or met subsequently in Italy. The existence of bonds beyond mere business relationships gives them access to extra-criminal resources that give rise to special forms of internal cohesion. Considering that trust is an extremely rare commodity in the illegal business environment, the ability to count on common bonds reinforced over time helps compensate for the problem of intrinsic insecurity that governs the underworld. One example of the importance of family ties comes from organizations in the ‘Ndrangheta that survived unscathed from a period when many Mafia members became witnesses for the state. According to one prosecutor in the Judicial District of Reggio Calabria for 15 years, only one high-level member of the local *cosche* ever decided to collaborate with the courts.¹⁶ The assignment of command positions based on kinship or marriages between Mafia families makes it extremely difficult for prosecutors to identify the top bosses of Calabrian organizations. If collaborating with the authorities

¹⁶ Interview with a prosecutor from the *Direzione Distrettuale Antimafia*, Reggio Calabria, 27 March 2003.

means accusing brothers, fathers and nephews, this type of choice meets with great resistance. One element supporting this is the number of former members who decided to collaborate with judicial authorities: from 1995 to the first quarter of 1999, 1928 collaborators belonged to the Cosa Nostra, 1014 to the Camorra and just 772 to the 'Ndrangheta (Vigna 2000). Because of their large network of contacts abroad and the fact that their top management are very protected from law enforcement operations, the 'Ndrangheta has currently reached a position of supremacy in international drug trafficking. Recent investigations have in fact determined the Calabrian *cosche* actually supply drugs to the Cosa Nostra (DIA 2002, p. 36).

The second element capable of explaining the important position Albanian groups have reached compared to other foreign competitors on the illegal market involves the organizational aspect. Although they have less organizational ability than Mafia-type associations, they act according to a group logic, are internally organized by type of function and tend to create alliances with other organizations composed of their fellow countrymen both in Italy and Albania.¹⁷ Above all, their systematic recourse to violence seems to be important as the main means of resolving controversies with other Albanians or competitors. A certain propensity to solve conflicts through the use of violence and the availability of a steady supply of weapons and explosives from the Balkan area make these groups one of the most feared foreign criminal actors presently operating in Italy.

However, foreign criminal groups are much less able than indigenous Mafia associations to establish fixed roots in Italy. Although some foreign groups manage significant criminal and economic resources, they still lack the capacity to establish close relationships with the legal sphere of society. For the moment, foreign organizations are far from displaying "political" resources such as connections with corrupt police officers, entrepreneurs or the use of bank directors to launder illegal proceeds. By contrast, as judicial files show, indigenous criminal groups involved in drug trafficking do have connections with individuals from the legal sphere. Foreigners still must refer to Italian distributors who provide them with secondary services such as making places available to stash drugs or acting as front men to rent apartments under their name that are actually occupied by foreign traffickers. From this point of view, foreign actors involved in the drug trade are particularly vulnerable to law enforcement activities, much more so than Mafia organizations who instead have broad access to contacts in the legal sphere. Access to this type of resource likely constitutes the essential condition that allows indigenous criminal associations to endure over time, enjoy a certain social consent in the territory where they are established and minimize damage from law enforcement operations.

¹⁷Interview with a member of the Public Prosecutor's Office in Florence, 4 June 2003.

In conclusion, whether or not any of the foreign criminal groups presently operating in Italy are able to make a big enough breakthrough to considerably threaten the criminal hegemony of Mafia organizations in the future remains to be seen. If this were to happen, illegal profits from the most profitable markets, such as drug trafficking, would constitute a sort of springboard toward inclusion in the more general economic and social fabric (as happened with the American Cosa Nostra during Prohibition). At that point, the effects of such "integration" would probably be double-edged and contradictory: on the one hand, we could have more dangerous and well-established foreign criminal groups than those operating at present; on the other, a process might occur, especially for younger generations, of gradually leaving illegal activities through a mechanism of social promotion via legitimately accepted means. From this point of view, criminal activities would no longer constitute, as Daniel Bell said in the 1960s regarding American society, the "queer ladder of social mobility" taken on by immigrant communities subject to discrimination from the broader social context.

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