


There are too Many Christians Involved: Cosa Nostra and Professional Football in Palermo

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Abstract

This work will show the involvement of Cosa Nostra in the soccer business in Palermo. The importance of controlling the territory for Cosa Nostra will be the core of the article. The Palermo mafia works through the Intermediation for the, in order to pursue its interests, and the intermediation by the mafia, acting on behalf of legal actors. It will revolve around the aspects of the relation between legal and illegal world, showing how legal actors might find it useful to rely on the partnership of criminal organisations. Legal and illegal world are in a fluid relation, so that the border between the two might blur. Cosa Nostra enjoys the consent and the demand of legal actors.

Keywords

palermo, cosa nostra, soccer, territory, business

Introduction

The growing professionalization and transformation of soccer into a global business (Taylor, 1971; Liguori & Smargiasse, 2002) provides both legal and illegal opportunities to criminal organisations. For example, in the late 1980s, the Colombian soccer team Nacional Medellin was owned by the notorious narco-boss Pablo Escobar. The massive investment by its owner, allowed the *Nacional* to win the South American Copa Libertadores and to play the Italian AC Milan, winning the 1989 Intercontinental Cup. The soccer industry provides a wide range of opportunities in the illegal sector, such as touting, the counterfeiting of replica kits and illegal betting (Testa & Sergi, 2018). Another important soccer-related activity for criminal organizations relates to their role in mediation which allows criminal control of the Palermo territory (Block, 1983), in order both to prevent conflicts between fans and to gain advantages for the organization, such as the patrol of the spatial context and the making of profits. Such activities (Scalia, 2020) can be articulated in two different typologies: the mediation *for* the mafia refers to those activities that criminal organisations, in this case Cosa Nostra, carry on by using the mediation of legal actors on their behalf. The mediation by the mafia relates to those activities that members of organized crime perform on behalf of those legal actors who fall within their range of protection.

This work will analyze the case of Cosa Nostra as a criminal organisation mainly engaged in the activities of mediation. Unlike other Italian criminal organisations, such as the Neapolitan camorra and the Calabrian ‘Ndrangheta, the

Sicilian mafia – Cosa Nostra – appears to shun engagement in either the legal and the illegal soccer-related businesses. Its activities focus on the control of the territory on which legal soccer businesses operate. Acting as a power syndicate, that is a criminal organisation illegally wielding power on a territory, Cosa Nostra makes sure that conflicts are either prevented or solved. Conflicts might arise out of the need to control the distribution of contracts such as those related to the building of a new stadium, or because of the mediation related to the transfer of players. Other conflicts arise out of the struggle to control organized supporters via the ultras group. The term *ultra* indicates those fans who share the membership of a structured organization, allegedly characterized by the extreme support to the club. Football ultras spread across Europe since 1970s (Bromberger, 1993; Dal Lago, 1993; De Biasi, 1996; Giulianotti, 2015). Their soccer-based aggregation overlaps with such other dimensions as class background, political ideology, ethnic and local identities. Moreover, organization provides ultras with a paramilitary force that enables them to control the territory (Marsh et al., 1982). Conflicts between groups of ultra are frequent, both between supporters of different teams, and between organized

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supporters of the same club. These conflicts might arise out of culture, ideology and class differences, but also because of the paramilitary structure that might relate to political reasons, as well as to the involvement in illegal trafficking, like in the case of former Yugoslavia (Mills, 2009).

In the Palermo context, Cosa Nostra manages the governance of conflicts between ultra, both to make sure its power is not threatened, either by other organized groups such as the ultra themselves, or by the police, and to make sure to keep a firm grasp over the economic activities that take place in the Palermo territory. Ultra group are ethnically homogenous, and fight for the control of the stadium as a venue of their power. Organized crime usually prefers to intervene by seeking a mutual agreement between the actors involved, using violent methods only as an *extrema ratio*, because the maintenance of a peaceful context, as well as enhancing the consent towards the organization, is supposed to keep police away.

Such activities are enacted both on behalf of external actors who seek the support of Cosa Nostra, or in relation to the need of keeping a sort of mafioso peace, so as to avoid the intervention of police forces. Moreover, the control of territory, allows the Sicilian mafia to ensure its members the obtaining of contracts and free ticket for the stadium, to be delivered both to other mafioso and to friends and relatives. Touting is however a limited activity for Cosa Nostra, whose main activity consists of the control of the territory.

The reasons why Cosa Nostra does not operate in soccer-related business might be different: its origins as an organization regulating the large-estate (*latifundia*) economy and society (Santino, 2017); the long-term activities in this domain by the Camorra and the 'Ndrangheta, who might have covered the structural hole (Coleman, 1988; Sciarone, 2001) in soccer-related business, leaving marginal room for Cosa Nostra; the alleged weakening of the Sicilian mafia after the 1990s, when State repression, civil society mobilization and inner conflicts resulting in a high number of supergrasses (*pentiti*). Moreover, the end of the Cold War protection the mafia had enjoyed (Santino, 2017), could have produced a decline of the Sicilian mafia. Finally, the need to maintain secrecy, could be another reason why Cosa Nostra does not want to be involved in such a mass phenomenon as sport, also considering the more and more attention by the media that soccer has been attracting in these late years. All these reasons will be discussed throughout this work, although the discussion will revolve around another explanation: judicial investigations show how Cosa Nostra was very active in soccer when the Palermo team, that is the US Palermo, played in Serie A (the Italian premier league), between 2004 and 2013, and between 2014 and 2017. There were chances of making profit by getting contracts, for example to build the new stadium, the training center and the shopping center on behalf of the then owner of US Palermo, Maurizio Zamparini. In other words, through this work, I will argue that Cosa Nostra, in its activity as a power syndicate, decides to engage in a business only if it is relevant for the maintenance of the

control of the territory, as well as profitable. Cosa Nostra, as Norberto Bobbio (1993) argues, is an *extralegal vicar power*, whose main interest is not that of making profit out of illegal activities, but rather to supervise and control both the legal and illegal activities in order for its lordship to be legitimized by the actors operating in the territory wherein Cosa Nostra operates. In the pursuit of power, organized crime operates in such a way as to grant public order, by keeping violence and conflicts down through its paramilitary organization. In other words, Cosa Nostra's aims are the same as that of legal authorities, that is why its power is *extra-legal* but not *illegal*. There is no formal legitimization of the mafia power, but its prerogatives are informally sought after and silently accepted by both the legal and the illegal actors involved. The control of labor, an agreement between competitor in the same market branch, working off conflicts between different paramilitary groups, are all activities which can benefit both legal and illegal actors, as well as "helping" the work of police forces.

Whereas other authors (Gambetta, 1992), argue that mafia is an industry of private protection, controlling all the economic activities that take place in a territory, the case I will discuss about will demonstrate this is not the attitude of Palermo Organized Crime. As a consequence of this it can be argued that Cosa Nostra operates in a *selective* way, so that actors and businesses are targeted only when a chance for either making profit or reinforcing power is envisaged. Thanks to its surveillance of the territory, as well as of its social capital of both functional and value-oriented relations (Coleman, 1988), Cosa Nostra can gather the information necessary to assess the opportunity for infiltrating a private business activity. Moreover, there is no such thing as a government of Cosa Nostra, as it is the "families" (i.e., the territory-based criminal groups) operating in a given territory to decide whether or not to become involved in an activity. This is a different trend from that which both judicial enquiries (Falcone & Padovani, 1991) and research (Lupo, 2016) had shown in the past, proving that until early 1990s the *Cupola* (Dome), that is the summit of the main Cosa Nostra bosses, regulated all the internal controversies of the organization, as well as planning all the business activities and allocating them to the different groups operating in the Palermo area. The other "families", will eventually ask the family controlling the territory to participate in the business, or to be involved. After a short methodological section, the work will go on to analyze some of the events relating to the early 2000s, when US Palermo was in Serie A. The final section will discuss the most recent events, related to the conflicts between supporters and the mediation by the mafia. A comparative approach through a diachronic analysis will be proposed.

Methodology

This work is based on the indictment RNGNR 17,403/2021. The indictment which this article relies upon is a very important source, for a number of reasons: firstly, it describes the

interests, the networks, and the rationale underpinning the behavior of the Mafioso. Secondly, it contains the declarations of supergrasses, who were members of Cosa Nostra and so provide a first-hand report of the dynamics inside the criminal organization. Thirdly, because the indictment contains the scripts of wire-tapped phone calls between the different actors involved in this case which are helpful to understand the interactions between the Mafioso and other members of the criminal organization.

Both ethics and reasons related to the danger of dealing with actors who engage in the use of violence, make it difficult to do field research on organized crime (Hosford et al., 2021). Moreover, other limitations such as the need of personal contacts and the knowledge and understanding of the cultural context can affect the research, as the participants need to trust the researcher and the latter needs to be sensitive enough not to ask inappropriate questions, as well as to give an accurate interpretation of the context. Other limitations might concern gender, race and ethnicity, as well the spatial issue related with investigating crimes who are nowadays more and more globalized. In the case of this work, limitations were related to a time issue. On the one hand, I was born and brought up in Palermo, and I used to be a member of the ultra Eagles group in my youth. I potentially had a thorough knowledge of my research field, as well as of the cultural context. On the other hand, since I left my hometown 30 years ago, I could rely on personal connection to enable me getting the judicial files, whereas I had lost all the connection I had with the organized supporters groups.

Judicial files constitute a relevant analytical source for the discussion and understanding of this social phenomenon. As Altheide (2018) points out, qualitative content analysis of a judicial file allows the generation of qualitatively relevant scientific knowledge, insofar as the research problem is defined to the point that the researcher can find suitable sources. This is the case here, as the judicial file, that is the indictment, is a context through which the production of scientific knowledge related to the connections between mafia and soccer can be achieved. Some authors (Windle & Silke, 2019) warn about the limitations of official documents, such as judicial files, insofar as they are fraught with official rhetoric and might contain those information aimed at emphasizing the successful activities of state agencies in enforcing organized crime. Another critique of this study could be that it is a single case, and can only shed a limited light on the relations between mafia and soccer. While I appreciate this critique, on the other hand this is the only case that is known to the public, and its analysis can be a first step into a field of research, that is the relation between the Sicilian Cosa Nostra, and soccer, as well as sports in general. More than this, this indictment, which I got through the Palermo-based judicial journalist Salvo Palazzolo, to whom my acknowledgements go, gives access to manifold information. This is because the indictment is made up by the declarations of supergrasses, as well as wiretapping of telephone conversations of the actors who were

investigated. While I appreciate that supergrasses might have told a limited, part of the story, and that their declarations might have been selected by the magistrates for judicial purpose, like the phone calls, it is true that, following Klaus Von Lampe's caveat of a well-researched and sober analysis (in Windle & Silke, 2019, cit, p. 189), it is possible to draw important research material.

Vulnerabilities of Soccer Businesses to Organized Crime

Criminologists have tackled the topic of infiltration of legitimate business by organized crime (Savona, 2013; Savona et al., 2016; Dugato et al., 2020). Savona (2016, cit, p. 2), focuses on the negative consequences of infiltration: distortion of competition, multiplier effect within the relational business network, as entrepreneurs, politicians and administrators end up developing connections with illegal actors, both consciously and unconsciously, thus legitimizing the activities of illegal actors. Moreover, Savona warns about the existence of such "sentinel crimes" as extortions, corruption and money laundering, that can help gauging the level of infiltration of organized crime within legal business. These criteria provide useful tools to analyze the infiltration of organized crime into soccer.

As soccer has increasingly turned into a profitable business (Taylor, 1971), the opportunities for infiltration by criminal organization have grown (Brooks et al., 2013; Groombridge, 2017). Recent scholarly works have both described and analyzed the corruption potentialities within the domain of football (Di Ronco & Lavorgna, 2015; Numerato, 2015; Sugden & Tomlinson, 2017). In the case of Italian soccer, three major corruption scandals about match fixing broke out in 1980, 1986, 2006 (Petrini, 1999; Ostellino, 2007; Bellinazzo, 2018). The first two scandals revolved around match fixing and corruption. Players, owners, managers and CEOs of some prominent clubs of Serie A and Serie B, that is the two main Italian soccer leagues, were involved in a scandal that ended up with the pre-trial arrest of some of them. The two scandals shocked Italian public opinion, as in 1980 (Carbone, 2003; Petrini, 1999, cit.), such prominent players as the former Italy international goalkeeper Enrico Albertosi and the future world champion Paolo Rossi were found guilty and given a long term suspension from the game. No prominent soccer stars were involved in the 1986 scandal (Beha, 1987), but the pattern was similar: illegal betting actors approached the players, who agreed to fix the match, as well as to involve some of their team mates, in exchange for money. In both cases, those involved in the scandals were only given a suspension from sport activities, as sports fraud is considered a minor crime in Italian penal law. In both cases, some evidence about the Neapolitan camorra manipulating and planning the match fixing emerged, but it was not enough for the magistrates to develop an accurate investigation.

The *Calciopoli* scandal of 2006 revolved around the former Juventus FC CEO, Luciano Moggi, wielding his power over the players, forcing them to choose his son Alessandro's GEA company as their agent (Mensurati & Bartolozzi, 2007). Moggi was also convicted of exploiting his close knit relations with the Soccer League management and with the AIA, that is the Italian Referees Association, to create favorable conditions for Juve, as Juventus FC is commonly referred to, to be helped in winning the league. The case ended with the relegation of Juve to Serie B. Other teams involved were given a points penalty, whereas the referees and the administrators who were convicted were expelled from the Soccer League. These decisions were made by the Sport Court, which operates independently from Penal Courts. Penal Magistrates acquitted most of the actors, as similar behavior by such other clubs as Inter Milan emerged. Moggi just used his long-term close knit relations, as well as the prominent economic and political power of Juve, the most popular Italian team, to run his interests. There was no criminal organization behind him. The infiltration of the Calabrian 'ndrangheta among Juve ultras supporters, in the domain of replica kits and touting, emerged in a scandal of 2018 (Bellinazzo, 2018, cit.). Some middle rank employees of the club provided the ultras leaders with free tickets, as well as with the possibility of running the merchandising of replica kits, to prevent more serious extortion by the Calabrian criminal organisation.

The enforcement of soccer related criminal cases still relies on a double-standard penal system. The independent sport justice system deals with the cases which are related to sport, such as match fixing. This is also the reason why it is difficult to access football corruption related material. Sport magistrates are jealous about their independence, and not very keen on releasing or publishing materials about their investigations. The ordinary penal system copes with those cases such as bribery, threats, extortion, money laundering. Any infiltration by organized crime is therefore dealt with by penal magistrates. The Italian way of dealing with sport scandals has proved to be efficient up to now, and no changes in its structure are in sight. Enquiries about money laundering in soccer have not been very extensive, although it might be worth considering the need of developing them. In any case, the case we are discussing in this work proves that Cosa Nostra is far from developing a fully-fledged strategy of infiltration in soccer, although extortion and mediation can be considered as sentinel crimes.

Mafia and the Turf

The declarations of the supergrasses Marcello Trapani, former solicitor of the Lo Piccolo mafia group, and Manuel Pasta (Tribunale di Palermo, 2021), shed some light over the way Cosa Nostra dealt with US Palermo in the first decade of the 2000s. Maurizio Zamparini, a Northern Italian entrepreneur, active in the building of shopping malls, took over the ownership of the team in 2002. The takeover proved to be a

successful move for the Sicilian team, which gained promotion to Serie A after 32 years in 2004, and started a decade of successes in the most important soccer tournament of Italy. Cosa Nostra did not appear to take advantage of both the legal and the illegal business opportunities provided by a team playing in the elite of soccer tournaments. TV royalties, sponsorships, betting, replica kits were quite neglected by the criminal organization. Once again, the Sicilian mafia enhanced its engagement in the control of the territory: extortion, obtaining free tickets for its own members and their friends, mediation on behalf of soccer agents who are part of its network, pressure on the US Palermo to sign the sons of the mafioso in the youth squad, stand out as the main activities the mafia bosses engaged with in relation to soccer. Trapani explains how the contacts began:

Zamparini took over US Palermo from Sensi in 2002. Foschi, the general manager, approached me, as he was interested in Vasari, a player I was the agent of. Foschi is from Cesena, and wanted Vasari to move to the club of his hometown. I helped him in that...then we started hanging out together...he asked me what Palermo was like, and I started explaining to him...he told me he was friend with a Mr. BC, a person I didn't know...(Tribunale di Palermo, 2021, p. 18)

This declaration is relevant as it reveals the way the relation between organized crime and legal business is built. BC is a notorious prominent mafia boss. He had probably told Foschi that mafia is a crucial actor in business-related situations in Palermo. Foschi, as he develops his relation with Trapani, asks him about it, and he is given the appropriate information, as the solicitor is also part of the mafia network. This highlights the nature of the mafia-business relations. Rocco Sciarrone (2001), argues that there are three different typologies of such relations: the first is that of victimhood, when entrepreneurs are forced to accept the extortion of the mafia. The second kind is the case of collusion, an active collaboration between organized crime and legal actors. The last typology refers to the case of mafioso who are entrepreneurs themselves. In the case of US Palermo, one can argue it is a matter of collusion. Foschi *wants to know* how Palermo works. In other words, he is aware of the power of Cosa Nostra, thanks to his acquaintance with BC, but he does not know how things work in the domain of soccer. Trapani, both as a soccer agent and as the solicitor of the Lo Piccolo criminal group, leads Foschi through the way the Palermitan mafia runs its interests in soccer. Cosa Nostra does not aim at creating business partnerships, for example by laundering money into the club. At least, there is no evidence of this. Neither is it the case of the mafia interfering with the choices of the club, for example in choosing the team, or mediating with sponsors. Cosa Nostra is mainly interested in the recognition and legitimization of its control of the territory by the new owners. There is no such thing as a long term management strategy by the mafia. This attitude might be related to the origins of Cosa Nostra, whose development is a

consequence of the management of the latifundia on behalf of the Sicilian aristocracy (Franchetti, 1876; Santino, 2017). As another supergrass, Manuel Pasta, argued (Tribunale di Palermo, 2021):

The Stadium of Palermo is located in the territory of Resuttana -a district of Palermo- So it befalls in the domain of the Resuttana “family”. I know, though, that the San Lorenzo-a district adjacent to Resuttana- family has also developed an interest in the Stadium. (Tribunale di Palermo, 2021, p. 32)

The word “stadium” (Scalia, 2020, cit.), refers to all the business related to the US Palermo. So, for example, the Resuttana-San Lorenzo family can claim their rights to gain the contract to refurbish the club’s training centre, that is located in Boccadifalco, on another side of Palermo. Moreover, as the then owner of the US Palermo, Zamparini, aimed at building a new stadium, a new training centre, and a shopping mall (the future “Conca d’Oro” centre), Cosa Nostra, or, better, the Lo Piccolo family, hegemonising the Resuttana-San Lorenzo side of the group, aims at making business out of it: thanks to its control of the territory, the mafia expects that the “friends”, that is entrepreneurs who are either mafioso or enjoy the support of the Cosa Nostra, will get the contracts to build these amenities. Or that the suppliers of the material will be from firms controlled by Cosa Nostra.

The principle of territoriality still prevails as an internal criterium by which Cosa Nostra organizes its activities. Despite this, other “families” might not respect this space-based rule, because they also have their own interests to pursue, thus provoking an internal disagreement within Cosa Nostra, that might degenerate into conflicts, as in the case that follows, which can be resolved.

Intermediations and Mutuality

Salvatore Milano (Tribunale di Palermo, 2021, p. 12), in the first decade of 2000, is the boss of the Palermo Centro family, that is the criminal group dominating the central area of the city. As well as being a soccer fan, he relies on a wide range of connections within the domain of local soccer: firstly, as his son is a player, he uses his friendship with Giuseppe Accardi, an ex-player, now, a prominent soccer agent, to make sure Giovanni Pecoraro, that is the coach of the youth squad, picks his sons for the line-up. Moreover, Milano has developed a long term friendship with Giuseppe Accardi, (Tribunale di Palermo, 2021, p. 22), as they grew up in the same district of Palermo, and it is through Accardi that he gets acquainted with Foschi. Things deteriorate when Pecoraro decides not to put the son of Milano in the line-up for a few matches:

Giovanni Pecoraro can’t dig Salvatore Milano...they are in bad terms, they fell out with each other because Milano wanted his son to be in the line-up regularly. He also had another younger son, and wanted him to play, but Pecoraro used to tell him: I must

choose the best ones, I must pick the best players. Your sons are not good players. Why should I pick them?..Milano, though, could not accept it. Milano, though, thanks to Accardi, had developed a close friendship with Foschi. So the latter suggested to him: if you want your sons to play, go and talk to Trapani. He is a lawyer, an agent and a very close friend of Pecoraro. He will work things out...(Tribunale di Palermo, 2021, p. 22)

This declaration of Trapani is important, because it sheds a light about how things work within the mafia network: firstly, the use of violence is not considered here, but rather there is a partnership relying on mutual acquaintance and respect. Pecoraro knows that Milano is a mafioso. Despite this, he refuses to pick the boss’ sons to make them play. The main reason behind the firm refusal by Pecoraro, lays in his relationship with Trapani, that is the solicitor of the Lo Piccolo family, so he is reassured that no reprisal will be taken against him. This is the mediation by the mafia, consisting in the protection Cosa Nostra gives to the members of its networks who are not part of the organization: legal relations, concerning the line-up of a soccer team or the signing of a player, are mediated by the assumed presence of a third actor, that is Cosa Nostra. A father can put pressure on the coach of the team, but, if he is a mafioso, the coach need some support from a third party. It is for this reason, that Milano decides to work through a legal, informal way, as he activates the mediation for the mafia. He knows that Pecoraro can refuse to pick his sons because there is Lo Piccolo behind him. So he chooses to talk to Foschi, who suggests him to talk to Trapani, a good friend of Pecoraro. The mafioso network, therefore, relies on a mutuality of relations. On the one hand, legal actors can ask the mafioso to intervene on their behalf, or can take for granted their protection, as in the case of Pecoraro. On the other hand, the mafioso search for the mediation of other legal actors on their own behalf, as they are aware of the fact that there are other mafioso interests behind them. The interesting thing in this case is that Milano does not go to meet Lo Piccolo, who is at the time the most powerful mafioso of Palermo, to promote his case. At the same time, it is important to highlight the awareness of various agents, such as Accardi (managers), Foschi, and coaches (Pecoraro) about the kind of network they are part of. Agents should only take care of the players they work for, a coach should be free to choose the best line up, and a manager should not allow organized crime to interfere with the choices of one of his employees. There is a mutual, fluid relation between the legal and the illegal world, like the one envisaged by Vincenzo Ruggiero (1996). This kind of attitude also concerns actors who are not originally from Sicily, like Foschi. As Trapani says, “he wanted to know what Palermo was like”. In other words, Foschi, as a businessman, chooses to run his activity through a strategy of adaptation to the local context, as illegal as this could be, since to adapt to the local context in Palermo means that you come to terms with Cosa Nostra. Following the scheme of Sciarrone (2001, cit.), this is a strategy of collusion with the mafia.

Un-Conflicting Families

The other interest of Milano in relation to US Palermo, related to the obtaining of free tickets for soccer matches, can make us think that the strategy of collusion was chosen by Foschi after direct and indirect threats, or after the suggestions of Capizzi and Trapani. The latter refers to some intimidatory phone calls received by Foschi soon after Zamparini took US Palermo over:

Well, Foschi, during his first months in Palermo, was sort of naive, or better, he was not really a naive guy, he just didn't know how things worked in Palermo. He wanted to meet Capizzi to straighten things up, but he kept receiving intimidatory calls, telling him things like: you'd better get the things right, or you won't last long in this city. So he started to understand...for example, he sort of kept me at distance at the beginning. Then he started talking to me. And he told that one morning, Accardi and Milano, went to the stadium to see him, and told him not to worry: next call, you just come and tell us, and we will get things right. He asked me if they were reliable people, I said they were all right. (Tribunale di Palermo, 2021, p. 21)

The way to get things right is soon discovered: as the US Palermo of the first decade of 2000s was a regular Serie A club, 5 times participating in the UEFA/Europa League Cup, most of the seats of the stadium were reserved by subscribers, who also had the option for the other matches. This caused a high demand for the few remaining tickets by the non-subscribers who wanted to attend the soccer in different ways: hiring of stewards who were trusted by Cosa Nostra, who can admit people of their acquaintance into the stands; distribution of free tickets to friends; organization of touting, by selling free tickets. All these activities, as well as preventing any retaliation by Cosa Nostra, ensure the criminal organization a degree of popular consent, both because of the free entry ensured by the stewards, and as a consequence of the distribution of free tickets. Moreover, the setting up of a touting business, provided employment to some underclass people. All these activities are planned in specific meetings. Trapani's declarations to the magistrates are quite accurate:

US Palermo gave free tickets to three main supporter clubs. The Filiciuzza Club had been founded by Milano himself, and its leader was Maurizio La Blasca. Then there were the Brigate Rosanero, led by Johnny Giordano, and the Warriors, led by Sesto Terrazzini. Johnny and Sesto are employed as janitors by the US Palermo. After Foschi undertook he had to get things right, a meeting was held at the stadium. Foschi, Johnny, Sesto, Milano, Accardi and Ingarao—a mafia boss of the Porta Nuova family, in the centre of Palermo—took part to the meeting, and agreed that Milano would have been in charge to collect the free entrance tickets from Foschi, and then distribute them to the other supporter clubs, the same amount for each club...(Tribunale di Palermo, 2021, p. 24)

Trapani describes a sophisticated system working in relation to the distribution of free tickets. Foschi has hired two of the most prominent ultras leaders, that is Giordano and Terrazzini, to settle down the relations between the soccer club and the supporters. Milano, as a member of Cosa Nostra, mediates between the two sides. In order to justify his role, he also founds a supporters club, which is led by a person he trusts. Accardi, as a soccer agent and friend of Milano, facilitates the contact between Cosa Nostra and US Palermo. His mediation ensures both that tickets will be distributed fairly and that no conflict will break out between the ultras and the soccer club. Figure 1 illustrates this typology of relation.

We are facing a network of legal and illegal actors, sharing a mutual cooperation for sake of their interests. Every soccer club has an amount of tickets to distribute for special reasons, like admitting schools, residential units, or other guests into the stadium. Cosa Nostra, in Palermo, wants its regime of control and consent to prevail over the others, and the soccer club accept it in exchange for peaceful living. Moreover, as Accardi is also a soccer agent, Cosa Nostra can be helpful for other purposes. And the other way round. For example, as Trapani states (Tribunale di Palermo, 2021, p. 21), Accardi is the agent of Milano's son. This makes easier for the boss to persuade Foschi to sell them to AS Roma, although the two sons of the mafioso won't develop a glorious soccer career in the future. The racket of free tickets, though, needs a closer look, for its consequences are the development of touting and of illegal admittances. The Act of the Italian Parliament n.155/2005, or *Pisanu Law*, as it is commonly named after the Minister of Interior who drafted it, makes it compulsory for supporters who want to be admitted to the stadium to provide their names in order for a ticket to be issued. Stewards must eventually check the supporters' ID, to make sure that their

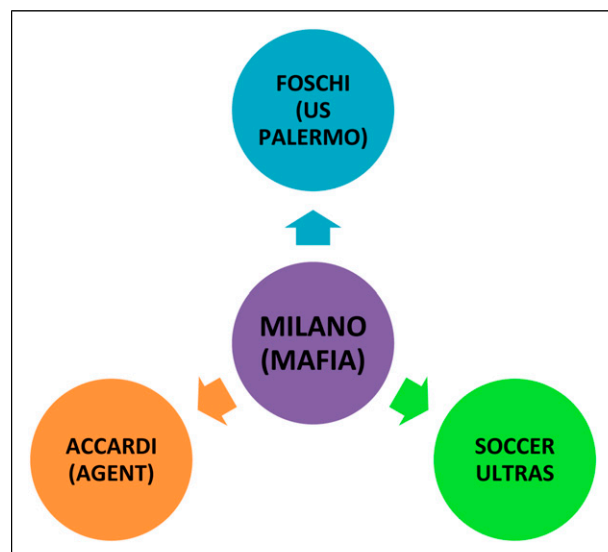


Figure 1. The mafioso mediation in soccer.

name is the same as the one in the ticket. Cosa Nostra had found its way to overcome this problem:

Many youngsters were required to provide their names to be written in the tickets. Then they were allowed for free by the stewards, who had their names. Tickets are given to touts, who sell them at very expensive prices...Stewards hold the list of the names of free ticket holders, so, when they see an adult carrying a ticket with the name and the date of birth of a teenager, they realise those are touted tickets...Cosa Nostra maintains a firm grasp on touting...(Tribunale di Palermo, 2021, pp. 24–26).

This stage of free ticket distribution sheds a light over the role of stewards: most of them were hired through the intermediation of Cosa Nostra, so they were instructed about how it works, and willingly turn a blind eye on touting. They are in exchange given the chance of admitting their friends, as well as enjoying working for US Palermo:

A few years ago there was a steward and hostess agency, belonging to Sagamola, Foschi's deputy. Then someone complained, so a new agency took over, and it was ruled by a mister Di Maria, a friend of Milano...(Tribunale di Palermo, 2021, p. 41)

The declarations of Trapani depict a regulated world, with minimal conflicts, without any violent conflict. A positive sum game, with mutual satisfaction for all the actors, denoting though a major flaw: Cosa Nostra relies on the control of the territory, which is wielded by the “families” entitled to rule over a specific part of the city of Palermo. We know since the outset that, since the stadium falls in the territory of Resuttana, the “families” of Resuttana and San Lorenzo are the mafioso actors vested with the authority of taking care of soccer related business. Moreover, at the time of the events, the Lo Piccolo “family” was quite hegemonic within Cosa Nostra. As a consequence of this, Salvatore Lo Piccolo, becomes concerned about a trade going on in his territory without his involvement. He decides to set things straight, by involving Trapani: through his brother Calogero:

Lo Piccolo complained about him not being involved in the distribution of free tickets...one day his brother, Calogero, approached me and told me: I want to talk to Milano. We must get this thing of free tickets right...Go to see Manno—a tyre seller in a residential area of Palermo—tell him I want to see Milano... I don't know why he involved Manno. I knew he was a tyre seller, nothing more. Anyway, I did what I was told. I knew Manno because he has his shop near where my old office is...a few days later, at the stadium, I came across Calogero lo Piccolo, who told me things had been put right about the tickets...(Tribunale di Palermo, 2021, p. 27)

This final excerpt tells of a positive solution of a controversy between two mafia “families”. The row does not degenerate into a violent conflict, probably because of the hegemonic role

of the Lo Piccolo family at the time. Moreover, the arrest of Lo Piccolo in 2007 and of Milano in 2008, might have weakened the two families, thus encouraging the relenting the pursuit of their interests. What matters here is to outline the complete lack of a synergic, shared strategies within Cosa Nostra. Every family operates independently, following its own aims, risking to “invade” the territory controlled by other “families”. When problems rise, they are set by a sort of internal extortion: the Lo Piccolo group does not forbid Milano from running his businesses in the domain of soccer. They just want their *sovereignty* over the territory to be recognized through the levying on a certain amount of tickets. These dynamics show that Cosa Nostra is far from being the powerful and dangerous organization that once led the heroin trafficking worldwide, negotiated with prominent politicians, and was active in international finance (Falcone & Padovani, 1991).

There is no common, shared strategy about how to profit out of soccer, there is no understanding of the potentiality of soccer business. Whereas the Calabrian ‘ndrangheta and the Neapolitan camorra are active in the domain of illegal betting, false replica kits, ticket touting, and money laundering is concerning more and more the domain of soccer clubs, Cosa Nostra does not seem to appropriately gauge the growing potentialities of soccer as a business, showing a peculiar lack of know-how.

The control of the territory, the prevention of conflicts, looks like being the main concern of Cosa Nostra even in recent years. On the one hand, the collapse of US Palermo in 2019, with a new club, Palermo FC, playing first in the amateurs league and currently in third division, might have reduced the interest of the Sicilian mafia in soccer, as there is not much one can get from a third division club. In 2019, while US Palermo is still playing in Serie B, conflicts broke out between the ultras. Giordano and Terrazzini have been ousted in the leadership by other youngsters. Giordano, as the wiretapping reveals, asks for the intervention of Jari Ingarao, a young mafia boss of central Palermo, to restore his leadership:

-I told the guys...I can soften the situation down, make things easier...but you must do as I tell you, because otherwise, once we get where we get...(Tribunale di Palermo, 2021, p. 58).

Things look straightened out, but degenerate once again in the new season, when Palermo FC has replaced the collapsed US Palermo. Giordano has a row with the younger generation of ultra's leaders, and is forced to leave the stands. He seeks for Ingarao's help once again, The young boss asks his deputy, Angelo Mangano, to look after the matter, also telling him off for not being assertive enough:

It is your task. You are in charge of it. Why haven't you solved it yet? (Tribunale di Palermo, 2021, p. 65).

As things go on, the row between ultras degenerates into an open conflict. Johnny Giordano asks again for help, and threatens his rivals, who refuse to hold a meeting with him:

The matter is growing heavy, there are many Christians¹-mafiosi-involved. We'd be better off finding an agreement. (*Tribunale di Palermo*, 2021, p. 85).

Giordano's threat proved to be successful, as a meeting is arranged by Ingarao, in a pub in central Palermo, and the conflict inside the ultras is resolved. Cosa Nostra proved to be a successful actor in the government of territory, but doesn't look to be involved in other soccer-related businesses. This aspect must be reflected upon.

Conclusion

This work has tried to shed a light on the activities carried out by the Sicilian Mafia in the domain of soccer in Palermo. We saw how a process of mediation through the control of the territory still account for being the main activities of the Sicily-based criminal organization. Many different elements might be behind this: the constant repressive actions by the police, also thanks to the high number of super-grasses, might have deprived the Sicilian mafia of a leadership able to develop an updating of the organization's interests. Another reason might lay in the aggressive approach of new organisations such as the 'ndrangheta (*Sergi & Lavorgna*, 2016), the Camorra (*Brancaccio & Castellano*, 2015) and the Russian Solncevskaja bratva (*Varese*, 2011). More likely, the peculiarity of Cosa Nostra is that the control of the territory is considered as the main activity, such as discussed in the past by Raimondo Catanzaro (1987). The Sicilian mafia started as an industry of violent protection, imposing its sovereignty on the territory. But, as other authors have outlined² (*Gramsci*, 1971), sovereignty relies on consent as well as force. For this reason the use of violence is reduced to an *extrema ratio* standard, and such policies as those of admitting friends and youths for free to the stadium are pursued. Moreover, the value of consent makes Cosa Nostra looks for mediation from the legal world, so as to create a shared governance of business and a mutual satisfaction for the different actors. This creates the social capital that makes the survival of the organization possible. Despite this, Cosa Nostra looks as if it underestimated the changes brought about by globalisation, and is still linked to a nineteenth-century idea of illegal business. The eventual collapse of US Palermo, now playing in Third Division under the name of Palermo FC, might have contributed to halt the interests of the Sicilian mafia in developing interests in the soccer business. Maybe, if Palermo FC ever returns to Serie A, we will face a change of attitude by the mafia. While we hope for the former, we do not hope for the latter.

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Notes

1. The term "Christians, I also use in the title, is one of the jargon terms used in Palermo to refer to the mafioso. It has no religious meaning.
2. I am not using Gramsci to discuss about football ultras. I am referring to his concept of hegemony in the stricter political sense. As far as the former is concerned, see *Bar-On* (2017).

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