

Universities in the fight against mafias

Research, teaching and training

Edited by Stefano D'Alfonso and Gaetano Manfredi

Federico II University Press



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Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II

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As indicated in the forthcoming pages, this research was conducted in partnership with the CRUI, the anti-mafia parliamentary committee and the ministry of University and Research when this was led by ministry and Professor Gaetano Manfredi.

The person in charge of this research project is Professor Stefano D'Alfonso and the activity has been developed within the operations of the interdisciplinary research lab on mafias and corruption (Lirmac) of the Department of Social Sciences of the University of Naples Federico II in partnership with numerous professors of other Italian universities.

The book cover shows a section of the fresco of the Federico II University Board Room from the early 1900s. The artist is Gaetano D'Agostino. The subject depicted is the great historical ride of 1615, with the University's move from the convent of San Domenico Maggiore to the Palace of Studies. The city enters the Academy.

The photograph on the cover is by Professor Isabella Valente, published in the cultural heritage portal (porbec.it), in the Federico II section – Università dell'arte.

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We would like to dedicate this work to the memory of a prosecutor and a scholar who showed great commitment in providing an open and inclusive contribution to the understanding, prevention and repression of organised crime.

*To Filippo Beatrice,
for his kindness as a human, his professionalism as a prosecutor and his attention to detail as a scholar. He was always open to dialogue and cooperation with the academic world.*

This book is dedicated to his commitment, both on the job and in society, and to his deep sensibility.

*To Amato Lamberti,
for his academic, political and institutional effort, always driven by great attention to students whom he considered as the flashes of a new dawn for the rebirth of society and territories.*

expertise and skills, that the intention is to provide a further stimulus to reflections, practices and training paths, by opening a new season of awareness and responsibility which, starting from research, will impact the development of the necessary technical skills.

11. *Geography**

Less than 1% of the total research products on mafia can be ascribed to geographic disciplines. If indeed ‘geography is what geographers do’, as geographers themselves often repeat with veiled sarcasm, the data are compelling: mafia is not a subject of interest from the point of view of geography. And it is not inconceivable that some PhD students or young researchers may have diverted their research interests elsewhere after being told ‘this is not geography’, as has happened in the past. But things have changed somewhat, and the current situation is, thankfully, different.

On the one hand, in fact, geography is turning increasing attention to studies on mafia, as indicated by the data collected in this census, and as shown by the XXXII National Geographical Congress (Rome, 7-10 June 2017), which presented a work session meaningfully dedicated to: ‘Culture, legality, territory: the contribution of geography and socio-historical disciplines to studies on organised crime’¹¹⁴. On the other hand, as emerged from the aforementioned session, for over a decade methods, concepts and techniques typical of geographic disciplines have been an integral and inescapable part of academic studies on organised crime and mafias, as well as of operational and institutional analyses related to investigations and trials.

One example is the concept of ‘territory’: territorial control is the defining feature of mafia according to a widespread and well-established interdisciplinary paradigm, shared and interpreted by political and judicial institutions as well. Another example is represented by the methods and techniques of crime-mapping and georeferencing crime statistics, which have made allowed us to draw up ever more precise and detailed cartographic analyses. Not to mention that any researcher working in the field, perhaps in community studies, is not only forced

* This paper has been written by Giuseppe Muti.

¹¹⁴ Session proceedings available online here: www.ageiweb.it

to deal directly with the geographical space experienced daily, but is also an explorer and narrator of the world and its variations, and therefore, etymologically, a geographer.

The results of the survey on geography are analysed, organised functionally by content and contextualised in a diachronic perspective with respect to recent developments in mapping studies and geography itself. The low numbers actually allow us to refine the analysis, bringing out interesting perspectives, which could perhaps be shared with other disciplinary fields. The geographic research products on mafia included in this registry are just over twenty (25), rising to about 30 with the inclusion of the most recent contributions, which will be mentioned later, and of those that elude the careful scrutiny of this registry for temporal or lexical reasons: a short monograph devoted to the relationship between crime and globalisation, a couple of articles on the relationship between crime and the environment, and a few doctoral theses devoted to confiscated assets and environmental crimes. On the whole, two facts emerge clearly: the first concerns the academic position of the authors and the second the fragmentary nature of the contents.

One-sixth of the geographic research products on mafia was written by staff permanently employed in a university at the time of writing; three contributions were made by professors, two full professors and one associate professor. Doctoral students and external personnel (research fellows, post-docs, etc.) play a key role in geographic research on mafia crime and illegal activities. So much so that the results of this registry could be interpreted as a map of PhDs in Geography (Turin, Padua, Rome, Sannio, Messina), as well as of the sensitivity of PhD boards towards the issue of mafia. Some of these young authors are able to enter the academic world on a permanent basis and converge into more conventional research fields, bringing with them the sensitivity and critical spirit they have developed towards the issues of legality.

Almost half of the contributions collected can be attributed to two authors and to the universities where they were employed at the time, the Statale in Milan and the Sapienza in Rome. Nearly half of the contributions originated in Rome universities, especially the Sapienza in its various scientific sections. This prevalence is also linked to the substantial and varied offer of PhDs in geography in Roman universities. Universities located in Naples, especially L'Orientale, are those with the highest number of permanent professors who deal or have dealt with mafia crimes, and who have participated in structured national research networks.

Consistently with this fragmented context, the themes addressed by geographic research on mafia cannot be described as pertaining to recognised and recognisable study lines. On the contrary, they denote a certain occasional nature, due not only to the absence of a common and shared project, but also to the weakness, if not lack, of a geographical theoretical framework that can serve as a reference tool within the discipline and as a chance for discussion with the other disciplines involved in studies on mafia.

In a continuum of scientifically contiguous subjects, the environment (dealing with topics such as illegal constructions, energy, waste, ecomafia) has drawn the most attention. Several contributions have been produced in collaboration with environmentalist NGOs (especially, but not exclusively, Legambiente) with which some universities enjoy an intensive and productive collaboration and exchange of data, tools, even personnel. A second area of special interest is related to transnational criminal networks and their specific activities; a theme straddling a fuzzy disciplinary field, linked to political science and internationalism, which until the 1990s was associated with international relations, whereas today it is increasingly represented as a domain of 'geopolitics'. Confiscated assets and the media representations of mafia are also among the most recent research subjects.

The geographic research products on mafia can be grouped into three main historical periods. The first, which could be described as a 'precursor' period, began in the second half of the 1990s. It featured an integrated series of internationalist articles on Russian mafias during the difficult post-Soviet transition. It was also in those years that a number of non-governmental research centres such as the Observatoire Géopolitique des Drogues (Ogd, Paris) and the Observatoire Géopolitique de la Criminalité Internationale (Ogci, Liège) began to operate and cooperate in Europe. In addition to generating original research, these centres managed to establish international research networks involving academia, institutions and associations¹¹⁵.

The second period, which could be defined as 'exploratory' spans the first decade of the 2000s and runs until 2013, with both doctoral theses and publications. During this period, several contributions regarding the environment and

¹¹⁵ These initiatives have seen the active participation of the following Italian entities: the Document Centre Impastato from Palermo, which was a stable partner of Paris' ODG, the Abele Group from Turin and the Milan Observatory on Organised Crime in Northern Italy (Omicron).

environmental crime were published, while a departmental research project at the University of Bari studied and assessed the criminal presence on the territory. In the same period, an interdisciplinary research group from universities located in Naples published a number of original articles offering a preliminary proposal for a geographic analysis of mafias, questioning certain key concepts such as boundaries, scales and territorial relations.

The third period covers recent years, starting in 2016, and seems to be marked by an increasing attention to mafia, in terms of intensity and continuity of research. This is confirmed by the increase in the number of essays in volumes and articles in peer-reviewed journals published. In 2017, the aforementioned session of the XXXII National Geographical Congress was held. Various specialists in spatial studies (urban planners, spatial sociologists, internationalists, cartographers) participated in even greater numbers than the geographers themselves.

Geography as an academic field in Italy opens up to the interdisciplinary study of mafia, and the most recent research products seem to focus mainly on three themes. First, the precarious but crucial system of assets confiscation, which interests geography both from a statistical-cartographic point of view and from the perspective of practical and symbolic territorial relations. Second, the representations of mafia and mafia relations, starting with the most widespread and visible ones, i.e., those provided by cinema and television, reinterpreted through the lens of critical geography. Third, social memory, which, as explained almost a century ago by its first and most prominent analyst, Maurice Halbwachs, is an eminently spatial fact, insofar as its transmission is guaranteed by the very process of social construction of space.

In the last two decades, the social sciences in general and the field of mafia studies in particular have undergone a 'spatial shift', through which increasing importance has been attached to the spatial dimension of social relations and to the social production of space; this trend has made it possible to look at the territory with new eyes (and new tools), and has constituted a formidable instrument for dialogue between disciplines. In the same period, geography gradually opened up to a 'cultural shift' that centred attention on individuals and the social relations that shape the territory; the geography of things was finally joined by the 'geography of values' that had been advocated by Lucio Gambi since the 1970s.

The gateway between the disciplines is open and the point of contact consists of their lowest common denominator: the territory. Not the geographical map, which is merely a reduced, approximate and symbolic representation of

experienced space, but the territory, with the non-Euclidean elusiveness of the relationships that create it, in everyday life and over the long periods of history. The common objective must be to overcome the more visible and measurable aspects, which are distributive in nature and restrict interpretation to the topographical dimension, and to seek an understanding of real and therefore multidimensional phenomena, such as territoriality, the process of territorialisation and the construction of the meaning of places, in order to push research towards a new topological dimension.

12. *Demology, Ethnology and Anthropology**

An analysis of the Iris database used for this research (see ch. I above) shows that in the last two decades researchers working in Italian universities in the M-DEA discipline have published about fifteen scholarly works on the subject of mafia. This represents 0.4% of the scientific output of the academic disciplines analysed, and just 11 of the 508 total authors obtained by a keyword search¹¹⁶. The data concerning 'related' disciplines are quite different: a few hundred works from the field of History (6.5%), and almost a thousand from disciplines pertaining to Sociology (32.8%). Of course, this discrepancy must be considered in light of the different size of the aforementioned fields: the M-DEA discipline has a significantly lower number of teachers, researchers, PhD and PhD students, despite the considerable number of students enrolled in anthropology degree courses. Nonetheless, this alone does not suffice to explain the discrepancy. Even taking into account the limited number of scholars involved, Italian anthropology writings on mafias are clearly few.

A search by keyword clearly shows a situation that is well known to those who conduct anthropological research on these subjects. The same can be ascertained through a quick review of the issues published between 2000 and 2020 by the main Italian anthropology journals. Furthermore, although the Iris database primarily includes works by researchers that are permanently employed

* This paper has been written by Antonio Vesco.

¹¹⁶ Although the database exploration stops in early 2019, this paper also takes into account works published in the second half of 2019 and in 2020. This choice is based on the observation of a recent (relative) growth in anthropological contributions on the mafias, thus the need to consider any transformations currently underway in this field of study.