

Full Length Article

Streets of memory: Urban practices of civil antimafia resistance

Giuseppe Muti^{a,*}, Gianluigi Salvucci^b^a Department of Theoretical and Applied Sciences (DiSTA), University of Insubria, Varese, Italy^b Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat), Roma, Italy

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Street naming
Mafia violence
Social amnesia
Grassroots antimafia movement
Place of memory

ABSTRACT

In this article, we present data from the first dedicated census of commemorative antimafia street names in Italian cities, investigating streets named after innocent victims of the mafia as “lieux de memoire”. We introduce the concept of social amnesia surrounding the mafia to cast light on the impact of mafia violence on socio-spatial relationships and potential societal responses to this trauma. The practice of naming streets to commemorate the antimafia movement is a strategy for countering social amnesia. Antimafia street names are forms of urban resistance and civic education, and as such may be defined as a “common good”. Nonetheless, antimafia street naming can also be a primarily formal or acritical memory practice or – potentially – an expedient for legitimizing illegal relations. This kind of ambiguity is inherent in mafia studies and attests to the ongoing urban conflict between the mafia and the antimafia movement.

1. Introduction

In Italy, the influence of the mafia¹ primarily manifests itself in urban settings. This is because organized crime syndicates are most powerful in cities, where social relationships can be more readily manipulated by violent and covert means. Even the so-called “agrarian” or “rural” mafia (Dickie, 2008; Sales, 2015; Santino, 2009) was mainly active – until the 1950s – in the “agro-towns” where agricultural laborers resided and agricultural produce was traded (King, 1975). Still today, the physical and symbolic struggle between mafia and antimafia forces plays out in cities, where economic and political activity is concentrated, and spatial relations are tighter and more asymmetric.

Since the late 1990s, a growing number of Italian towns have dedicated streets to the memory of magistrates, police officers, journalists and trade unionists murdered by the mafia. Mafia victims have replaced the heroes of the Risorgimento (the “Italian Revolution”) within urban toponymy (Caffarelli, 2015). Research on the mafia has predominantly explored the historical, sociological and legal aspects of the phenomenon, largely overlooking commemorative street naming (Ravveduto, 2018). Yet, this practice can offer a valuable analytical lens on the conflict between mafia groups and the antimafia movement, as well as on Italian society more broadly.

In this article, we analyse the symbolic urban struggle between mafia and antimafia actors, opening a new line of inquiry based on the first-

ever census of Italian street names dedicated to mafia victims. More specifically, we investigate these toponyms as “lieux de memoire” (places of memory), understood as relational, physical and symbolic spaces created to socially legitimize particular representations of history (Nora, 1989).

As highlighted in critical toponymy studies (Berg & Vuolteenaho, 2009; Rose-Redwood et al., 2018), toponyms (street names) are a key feature of modern urban streetscapes that shape the spatial perceptions and practices of residents and visitors. In cities, street names “make sense” (De Certeau, 2002, p. 104), serving both to geographically orient and to make an identity statement. When adopted for commemorative purposes, toponyms carve an official version of history into urban space, embedding it in everyday social communications that otherwise appear distant from symbolism and power dynamics (Azaryahu, 1996). Street naming (and renaming) is an expression of power that perpetuates chosen memories within urban landscapes. It is an act of propaganda that signals control over symbolic infrastructures. Hence, the political act of street naming can serve both elites attempting symbolic erasure and marginalized groups seeking cultural acknowledgement (Rose-Redwood, 2008).

Within the broader context of studies on the production of space and critical toponymy, the questions driving this research were: How many antimafia memory streets exist in Italy, and where are they located? What events or personalities do they commemorate? How and when did

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: giuseppe.muti@uninsubria.it (G. Muti), salvucci@istat.it (G. Salvucci).¹ Three main mafia-type organizations have historically been in operation in Italy: *Cosa nostra* in Sicily, *Ndrangheta* in Calabria, *Camorra* in Campania.

these acts of commemoration arise? What role do they play within the urban conflict between mafia and antimafia actors (which goes beyond the symbolic)?

In the second section of the paper, we introduce the concepts of “social memory” and “social amnesia” as tools for studying the mafia and the antimafia movement. In the third section, we delve into the mafia’s “modus operandi” and its socio-spatial effects. In the fourth section, we explore the antimafia movement and processes of civic reterritorialization across urban landscapes. In the fifth section, we present data from the first census of antimafia street names in Italy,² in terms of their geographic distribution and the individuals they commemorate. In the sixth section, we examine urban antimafia street naming policies, distinguishing between institutional and grassroots initiatives and homing in on specific, real-world examples.

2. Social memory and social amnesia in relation to the mafia and antimafia

To grasp the importance of places of memory and the evolution of the antimafia movement, it can be helpful to view memory as both a spatial phenomenon and a cultural system. Social amnesia – viewed as a distinct concept with its own social and spatial implications, and not as merely the opposite of memory – can shed further light on how mafias influence urban life.

Halbwachs (2001) argued that social memory is primarily spatial in nature, given that space is the main medium through which it is transmitted. The social production of space generates images, connections, constraints and opportunities that activate memory and enable it to be crystallized in a spatialized image.

Schwartz defined social memory as a “cultural system” that rationalizes a particular historical experience, adapting it to the present in order to shape a certain type of society. It serves as both a “model of society”, with its current issues and mindset, and a “model for society” (Schwartz, 1996, p. 910) that articulates values and goals while offering an intellectual and moral compass for their realization. Schwartz’ treatment of social memory drew on Goffman’s concept of “primary framework”: an event that offers a symbolic backdrop against which to interpret the present, thus unifying society and informing its values (Schwartz, 1997, pp. 26–7). The primary framework reorganizes public discourse and transforms memory into a cultural system. This concept is key to understanding the emergence of the antimafia movement in Italy and the significance of certain figures who have been celebrated as heroes, including in place names.

Given the composite nature of society, collective memory operates as a plural and unstable system shaped by conflicts and compromises among different memories: “the place where this battle of wills plays out is the public sphere, the arena in which social groups compete for hegemony over the narratives to be viewed as plausible and salient within society” (Jedlowski, 2000, p. 33).

Urban toponymy is a “memory arena” of competition, debate and public negotiation concerning which memories should be commemorated within the urban landscape, and thus, which memories represent the dominant discourse and which counter it (Alderman, 2002). Accordingly, the study of street names as “lieux de mémoire” offers more insights into the society that chooses the names than into the past they commemorate (Milo, 1997; Tili, 2009).

The relationship between social memory and social amnesia is a core theme within mafia studies. However, oblivion has rarely been theorized and discussed other than as the antithesis of memory. To address this gap, we next offer a critical reading of the existing literature on social amnesia, as it relates to mafia organizations and their socio-spatial effects.

² The preliminary data for this research was collected to mark the 25th Day of Remembrance for the Innocent Victims of the Mafia (Palermo, 21 March 2020).

In the postwar period, Barnes (1947) used the term “structural amnesia” to describe the capacity of social groups to forget aspects of their history that could undermine their cohesiveness or threaten the interests of their dominant institutions. The concept was later revisited by Jacoby (1975), who drew on both psychoanalysis and historical materialism to define “social amnesia” as an intentional, collective loss of memory. To preserve a given status quo, a society will wilfully repress a particular awareness, producing in its place a fictitious narrative that ultimately comes to be perceived as natural. We propose that the mafia system engenders social amnesia surrounding itself within the society that hosts it, while promoting fictional narratives such as honour.

In the 1990s, Connerton defined “organised oblivion” (1989, p.14) as the mental enslavement of those living under a totalitarian regime, outlining different types of externally imposed or self-imposed forgetfulness caused by power imbalances (Connerton, 2008). Asymmetric relationships are an integral part of the mafia system, which functions similarly to a totalitarian regime (Siebert, 1996). The concept of “organized forgetting” can help to understand the mindset and reactions of those living under “mafia rule” (Santino, 1995; Salvio, 2017). Relatedly, Burke (1997) defined social amnesia as “the official erasure of memories of conflict in the interests of social cohesion” (Ibidem, p. 56–7). If we replace “social cohesion” with “individual survival”, this reading helps us to interpret the effects of mafia violence.

More recently, Zerubavel (2008) described a “conspiracy of silence”, whereby a group of people tacitly agrees to publicly ignore something of which everyone is aware. Silence is thus a collective effort that symbiotically unites those who transmit information and those who hide it, offering the latter the perception that they will be protected, even though they are the weaker party to the relationship. This is key to understanding the mafia system, which relies on violence and secrecy, and the extortion schemes whereby the mafia paradoxically offers protection from itself. Meanwhile, the metaphor of “the elephant in the room” aptly describes the behaviour of those (institutions or social actors) who continue to deny the mafia’s existence.

Finally, Misztal (2010) emphasized the tension between growing societal demand for remembrance and the potential usefulness of forgetting within reconciliation processes. She defined societal forgetting as “the outcome of society’s need to eliminate segments of its social memory which are interfering with the society’s present function” (Ibidem, p. 30). This prompts us to examine the characteristics of Italian society and inquire what “reconciliation” might mean with regard to mafia violence. Salvio (2017) has explored this problem in relation to “transitional justice” as a means of overcoming mafia-related social trauma, identifying a set of critical issues. Specifically, reconciliation can imply the depoliticization of memory, which means failing to acknowledge asymmetries within power relations; it disconnects the present from the past without acknowledging ethical obligations; it undermines the pedagogical function of transitional justice.

3. The mafia power system and its socio-spatial effects

Defining mafia-style organizations as forms of relational power based on violence (Dalla Chiesa, 2016; Santino, 1995; Sciarrone, 2014) leads us to scrutinize their method of intimidation (Fig. 1). Intimidation produces relations of subjugation and *omertà* (code of silence), allowing the criminal organization to accrue unfair economic and political advantages. Impunity – or the opportunity to evade punishment – is the most crucial of these advantages. In addition to making it less risky to commit crimes, impunity legitimises the operation of the mafia, enhancing its credibility and augmenting its power to intimidate.

The mafia system revolves around violence and secrecy. The violence is strategically “planned” (Chinnici & Santino, 1989), because beyond a certain point, the organization’s reputation renders direct violence superfluous, and intimidation and corruption suffice to achieve its purposes. Because it is based on coercion, the system could function without corruption. However, by dispensing unlawful favours, mafias can

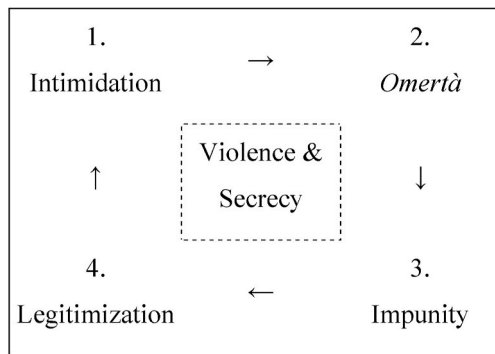


Fig. 1. The relational system of the mafia.

directly coopt and compromise a large segment of society. The mafia system is a form of “relational violence” (Ciconte et al., 2012) that establishes a network of relationships and shared interests with both the official authorities and the host community.

Secrecy is a tool that may be adapted to different strategies (Paoli, 2000). The mafia’s system is based on Foucault’s panopticon principle: seeing without being seen (Foucault, 2003). Mafia memberships are secret. Internally, this secrecy generates constant uncertainty and mutual suspicion. Externally, the organization modulates its visibility, making itself recognizable when required (as a threat), but not by the authorities (to avoid pushback from law enforcement) (Catino, 2014). Within urban space “the public memory of the victims must last as long as a funeral, but the memory of their blood must persist so as to project the power of the organization” (Dalla Chiesa, 2016, p. 139).

Two key points emerge from this interpretative framework. First, criminal systems are connected with the broader political, economic and social systems: the mafia is not a force that opposes the state, nor a state within the state, but rather a form of power that interacts and maintains both cooperative and conflictual relations with state and non-state actors through violence, corruption and the supply of illicit goods and services. Secondly, *omertà* is not an innate cultural trait, nor the result of civic or political-economic backwardness, but rather the outcome of violence and impunity. *Omertà* is an ideological construct whose purpose is to guarantee impunity, transforming terror and corruption into popular support and acceptance (Sales, 2015).

In this context, the concept of social amnesia can shed light on the socio-spatial consequences of mafia power. Indeed, the existence of the mafia in Italy has traditionally been shrouded in legend and conjecture and was widely denied until the 1980s–1990s. This situation persisted despite a long succession of reports, inquiries and trials since the Unification of Italy, all of which were consistently expunged from official history and collective memory (Dickie, 2008; Lupo, 2011; Sales, 2015; Santino, 2017).

In relation to the mafias’ “colonization” of Northern Italy, Dalla Chiesa (2016) has characterized the refusal to acknowledge their presence in the region as “the great erasure” (Id. p. 140). This process is driven by the rhetoric of politicians, mayors, magistrates, journalists and entrepreneurs seeking both to uphold a celebratory narrative of the North (as honest and productive) and to shield conflicting or unlawful associations and interests. This act of erasure prevents the community from recognizing the operation of mafia groups (and thus from taking action against it). The concept of “erasure” could also be usefully adapted to the regions with a traditional mafia presence, with a view to critically scrutinizing the role of local communities there.

If we reread the history of the mafia and the antimafia struggle in Italy through the prism of the social amnesia theories we have just reviewed, we may define amnesia surrounding the mafia as the intentional collective suppression of awareness about the violent and illegitimate nature of mafia-style relations, accompanied by the production and normalization of apologetic narratives. The main driver of this

amnesia is the highly effective cycle of “violence-impunity” that serves to legitimize mafia-style relations. Thus, social amnesia concerning the mafia affects (almost) all the social actors outside the system, who are either forced to or find it expedient to interact with the mafia.

Those who voluntarily interact with the mafia system, either to pursue mutually beneficial relationships (as in the case of politicians and entrepreneurs seeking votes, contracts or funding), or with a view to accessing the illicit services managed by mafia organizations (such as drugs, counterfeiting, betting, etc.), rely on social amnesia to rationalize or disavow their involvement. This strategy allows them to engage with the mafia network without perceiving themselves as integral components of a criminal system.

Those who are compelled to engage with the mafia system out of necessity or geographical proximity, experience mafia violence as a “cultural trauma” (Salvio, 2017) with enduring consequences for local community members, their welfare and their future aspirations. Anyone who is not in a position to relocate must come to terms with and endure the oppression and may draw on social amnesia to process the resulting trauma, enacting forms of organized oblivion (mental enslavement) or a conspiracy of silence (which conveys a sense of safety to those under the mafia’s thumb).

The third option is to stand up to the power of the criminal organization, but this possibility (which confirms that social amnesia is always a conscious choice) has historically been associated with social marginalization, violent reprisals and social oblivion. Those who did not comply were taken down and forgotten, at least until the emergence of the contemporary antimafia movement.

4. The antimafia movement and civic reterritorialization practices

The antimafia movement comprises both institutional and grassroots components, which emerged symbiotically during the 1980s/1990s. The movement’s institutional wing has legal and political underpinnings in the shape of special laws and dedicated bodies, which have led to the successful prosecution of mafia members and the seizure of their assets (Jamieson, 1999). This has marked a turning point in the struggle because it challenges the mafia’s impunity (which persists but is no longer a given) and delegitimizes its power (now officially brought out into the open).

The grassroots antimafia movement (Jamieson, 1999), which was initiated by relatives of innocent victims, swiftly expanded into a network of associations, committees and organizations (including public bodies such as schools) and active citizens. It is involved in prevention, education and the dissemination of information about mafia crime syndicates. It also provides support to antimafia institutions and to individuals facing oppression from mafia organizations (Schneider and Schneider, 2003; Santino, 2009; Salvio, 2017). The memory of victims and mafia violence is the connective tissue that holds this network together: an identity-shaping and programmatic “symbolic universe” (Berger and Luckmann, 1997) that explains the purpose of the movement and its endeavours. In 1992–1993, against a backdrop of mafia attacks and a corrupt political party system (Foote, 1999; Jamieson, 1999), the antimafia movement evolved into a “new resistance” (dalla Chiesa, 1993) against mafia violence and corruption.

In 1994, the NGO Libera³ was founded to provide the network with organizational and legal support, and to lend unity and continuity to its initiatives, beginning with the practice of commemoration. Libera continually updates the list of mafia victims (who now number over 1000) on a website aptly named “Vivi!” (Alive!).⁴ Since 1996, it has organized a Day of Remembrance for the Innocent Victims of the Mafia annually on 21 March, when activists, students and family members

³ https://www.libera.it/schede-1326-libera_inglese.

⁴ <https://vivi.libera.it/>.

gather in city squares to read the victims' names aloud and share their stories. Given the popularity of the event, the government made this date a national day of commemoration in 2017.

Mafia violence and the social amnesia surrounding it have negatively impacted the urban history of numerous Italian cities, from the point of view of both urban planning and socio-economic development. The most striking examples of criminal "de-territorialization" (Raffestin, 1984) processes include: the "sack of Palermo (1959–60)"; the unfinished Salerno-Reggio Calabria motorway, under construction since 1962; the large-scale fraud that undermined the rebuilding of cities following a major earthquake in Campania in 1980; the trafficking of hazardous waste and generation of severe environmental pollution, especially in Campania (Corona & Sciarrone, 2012); and last but not least, the endless succession of murders that has bloodied the history and geography of Italian cities.

Pickering-Iazzi explains that mafia violence disrupts the urban lexicon and alters our relationships with places and their meanings, carving itself into both geographical spaces and the psyche of community members. Given that spatial practices produce and identify space, mafia-style relations produce geographies of injustice and the "desertification" of urban landscapes. The outcome is dystopian cities lacking public services, whose socio-spatial dimension is characterized by deadly violence, anger, pain, revenge and fear (Pickering-Iazzi, 2015). Nevertheless, in their analysis of Palermo, Schneider (2003) argued that urban mafia history is a "reversible destiny". Institutional antimafia action and grassroots antimafia practices, together, can counter mafia violence and social amnesia concerning it, transforming geographies of injustice into geographies of justice.

The grassroots antimafia movement plays a key role in the civic "re-territorialization" (Raffestin, 1984) of urban landscapes marked by mafia violence, because the authorities tend to leave most of the non-repressive antimafia initiatives up to the community. Thus, the urban history of the mafia is gradually being transformed into the urban geography of the civic antimafia resistance, thanks to the creative practices of activists and associations fighting to democratically reappropriate urban spaces. The best-known example is the sea of white sheets hung on the balconies of Palermo in 1992: a simple gesture, yet disruptive at the political, cultural and urban levels, given that no previous protest had so blatantly challenged social amnesia surrounding the mafia.

Since then, the movement has established multiple social spaces and commemorative sites. It sets up outreach and hubs (offices, clinics, social centres) in vulnerable areas. It organizes gatherings as social spaces where activists can express their concerns and "emotional solidarity" with one another (Cayli, 2017). It convenes flash mobs during antimafia events (conferences, movie screenings, concerts, petition and fundraising campaigns, and study camps). It creates opportunities for nonviolent protest, such as the historic *Addiopizzo* campaign of 2004 (Salvio, 2017), when the urban landscape of Palermo was inundated with stickers reading "An entire community that pays protection money is a community without dignity". Finally, it is involved in managing the social redeployment of assets confiscated from the mafia (restaurants, farms, shops and apartments) and in practices of memory, both traditional (plaques, monuments, place naming or commemorations) and innovative (street art or toponymic guerrilla warfare).

Antimafia social memory practices are agents of "reversible destiny" that help to legitimize both the grassroots and the institutional antimafia movements (Schneider and Schneider, 2003). Naming streets to commemorate mafia victims creates networks of meaning, activates economic and cultural processes, and establishes new urban spaces that redefine the lives of a city's inhabitants (Pickering-Iazzi, 2015). Nonetheless, this pattern of change can never be taken for granted. Vigilance and periodic reaffirmation are required, because enduring economic inequalities mean that the mafia retains scope to condition the everyday life of communities (Schneider and Schneider, 2003). Antimafia memorials are the object of ongoing disputes and vandalism, confirming

the persistence of the urban conflict between mafia and antimafia forces.

5. The census of commemorative antimafia street names in Italy

In this section, we present the research and data collection methods we used to investigate the location of antimafia toponyms and the victims they commemorate.

We compared the names in the database of the innocent mafia victims compiled by Libera with databases of Italian street names. Libera's victims database is open access: it spans from 1861 to the present and includes each victim's full name, date and place of death, and occasionally a brief biography. Where possible, we also included information about the victim's occupation.

Finding a suitable database of street names was more complex given that the official roads archive in Italy is not accessible to the public for data confidentiality reasons. We therefore used geo-coding techniques to combine the main archives available on the internet: the National Archives of Municipal Roads, Open Street Map (compiled by Geofabrik), Api Bing Maps and Google Maps. However, this strategy yielded no information about when the individual street names had been approved or about the underlying decision-making process, thus limiting the scope of our analysis.

Overall, we compared the names of 965 mafia victims⁵ with the street names in around 8000 municipalities.⁶ The first, semi-automatic, step in the research drew on the "record linkage" method to identify all data strings containing the surname and first name of each victim. The selection began with the search for the victim's surname and was then refined by adding the first name or initials, when available, and any other available data (year of death, occupation). Despite official editing regulations, commemorative street names are chaotic. For example, we identified over 30 variations on "Carlo Alberto Dalla Chiesa". The second step in the research was conducted manually, with case-by-case comparison and verification of the data in order to exclude overlap and false positives. The resulting data set was further refined using a randomized, "broad mesh" verification method based on public databases. The final dataset was therefore partial but strongly representative. (For more detail: Muti & Salvucci, 2020).

5.1. Mapping the streets of antimafia memory

In February 2020, there were 6540 "antimafia streets" in Italy, spread across 2360 municipalities located in all provinces and regions (see Fig. 2). Notably, our bottom-up analysis showed that about 70 percent of Italian municipalities, accounting for one-third of the population, did not have any street names associated with the antimafia movement.

Sicily was the region with the highest number of antimafia street names – and specifically 1687 – accounting for over a quarter of the national total (25.8%). Next came Lombardy with 937 (14.3%), Emilia Romagna with 599 (9.1%), Puglia with 550 (8.4%), Campania with 407 (6.2%), Veneto with 394 (6%), Calabria with 395 (5.9%) and Tuscany with 335 (5.1%). Outside of Sicily, most antimafia street names were concentrated in the Northern Italian regions. However, the data reveals key disparities. For example, while antimafia street names were evenly distributed across Puglia and Emilia Romagna, coverage was patchy in Lombardy, Veneto, Piedmont and Lazio. Significantly, other regions with an entrenched mafia presence, such as Calabria and Campania, displayed a low concentration of antimafia street names, a finding that we return to later.

When the distribution of antimafia street names is broken down by

⁵ As we explain later, victims who had died during the ten years prior to the study were excluded from the analysis.

⁶ Given the ongoing process of amalgamation of municipalities, this number is subject to variation.

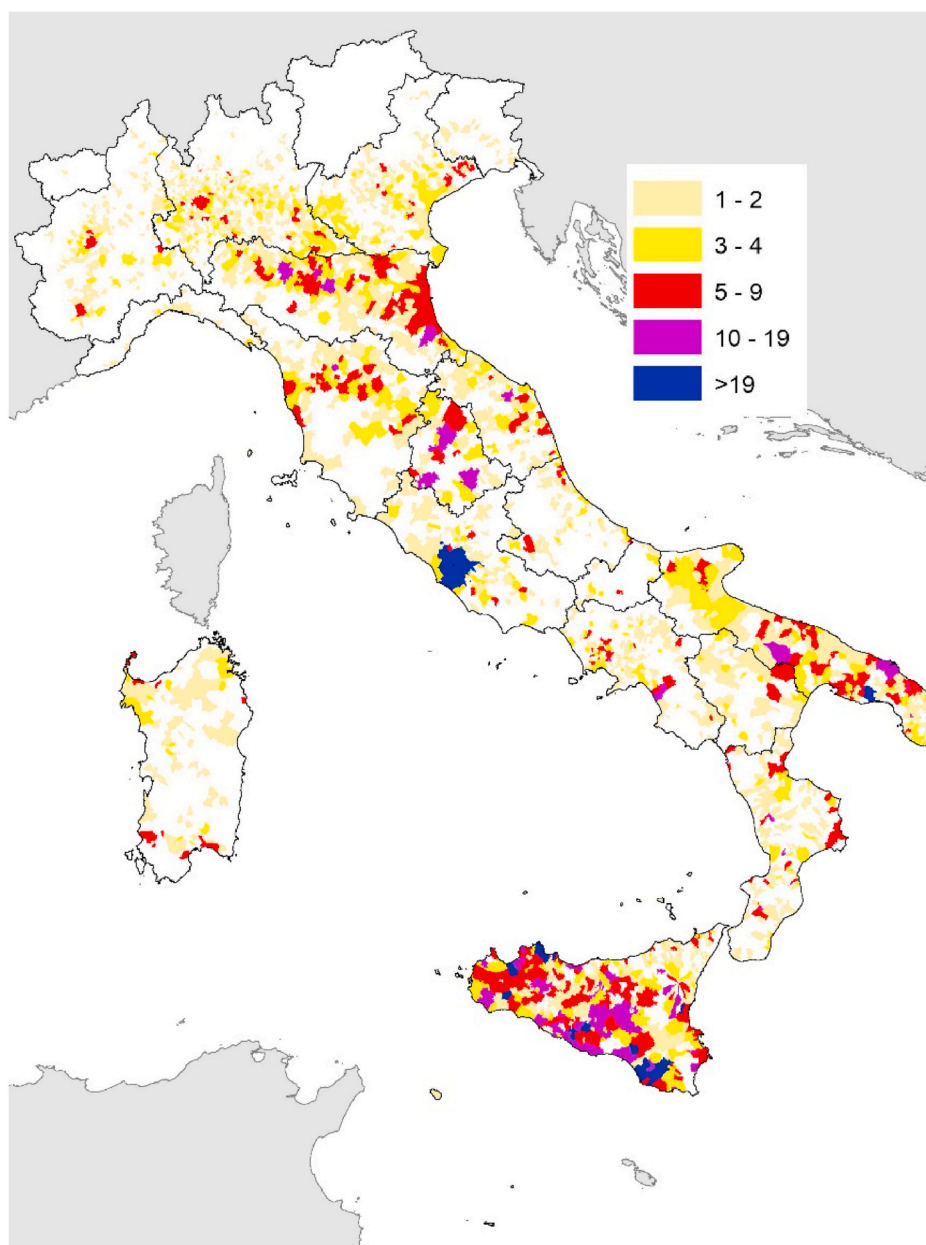


Fig. 2. Number of antimafia street names in Italy by municipality, 2020.

province, the largest number is found in Palermo (502 representing 7.6% of the national total) and Agrigento (289 or 4.4%). Twenty provinces had over 100 odonyms: seven of these were in Sicily (Palermo, Agrigento, Catania, Trapani, Caltanissetta, Messina, Ragusa), five in Lombardy (Milan, Brescia, Mantua, Bergamo, Pavia), two each in Apulia (Lecce, Bari) and Campania (Naples, Caserta), and one each in Calabria (Cosenza), Emilia-Romagna (Reggio Emilia), Lazio (Rome) and Piedmont (Turin). Antimafia street names were widely and evenly spread across all the Sicilian provinces. However, they were rare in provinces of Campania and Calabria where other mafia groups, namely the Camorra and *'ndrangheta*, wield their greatest power.

At the municipal level, Palermo had the highest number of antimafia street names: 85 (1.3% of the national total). Thirteen municipalities had over 20 antimafia odonyms and these were mainly located in Sicily:

Favara (Ag,⁷ 33), Vittoria (Rg, 31), Niscemi (Cl, 30), Manduria (Ta, 26), Alcamo (Pa, 24), Canicattì (Ag, 22), Partanna (Tp, 22), Ragusa (22), Bagheria (Pa, 21), Belmonte Mezzagno (Pa, 21), Misterbianco (Ct, 21) and Rome (20). A further 56 municipalities had between 10 and 19 antimafia odonyms, including Central-Northern Italian cities such as Parma (18), Cesena (18), Perugia (13) and Modena (11). These were followed by: 259 municipalities with between five and nine odonyms, including the Northern and Central provincial capitals of Reggio Emilia (9), Mantua (8), Forlì and Cuneo (7), Florence and Turin (6) and Milan (5); 532 municipalities with three or four antimafia odonyms; and 1500 municipalities with one (953) or two (547).

The top twenty municipalities with the most antimafia street names included the metropolitan areas of Palermo and Rome, five provincial capitals with 50,000–200,000 inhabitants (Agrigento, Cesena, Cosenza,

⁷ The acronym refers to the province to which it belongs. The complete list is available on: <http://en.comuni-italiani.it/>.

Parma and Ragusa), and medium, small and very small towns of various rank. In Lombardy, the municipalities with the highest number of odonyms were medium or small: Corbetta (Mi, 9), Piadena (Cr, 8), Almenno San Bartolomeo (Bg, 7), Suzzara (Mn, 7), Orsenigo (Co, 6) and Treviolo (Bg, 6). However, the overall distribution of antimafia odonyms in Lombardy was fragmented: 124 municipalities had between three and five odonyms and 329 municipalities only one or two. Despite their national importance, the provincial capitals of Milan, Bergamo and Brescia played a marginal role (Milan had 5, Bergamo 2 and Brescia 1).

What factors underpin the street naming policies of municipalities? Why is commemorative toponymy so widespread in Northern Italy? Why does the Lombard village of Piadena, with 3000 inhabitants, have twice as many antimafia odonyms as Milan? Indeed, we found no discernible link between the number of antimafia street names and municipalities' size, population or density of road network. To explain the evident, yet highly uneven, tendency to dedicate streets to mafia victims, we next examine how street-naming practices are implemented and regulated on the ground, before extending our analysis – in the following sub-sections – to embrace qualitative and political perspectives.

Usually, urban toponymy reflects the local context, such that the history embedded in urban landscapes is local history (Azaryahu, 1996; Milo, 1997). However, when it comes to antimafia toponymy, the influence of local history on the naming process demands scrutiny. The activity of the Sicilian mafia in the post-World War II period is well-documented, and indeed, Sicily is the region with the highest number of commemorative street names. Nevertheless, local history only partly explains Sicilian toponymy and sheds little light on the relationship between antimafia odonyms in Sicily and those in the rest of Italy.

In Italy, the authority to name streets rests with the municipalities, which issue their own street-naming regulations and may set up a place-names commission. Both municipal councils and citizen committees have the legal right to propose new street names. The naming process is subject to the oversight of the Prefect, the directives of the National Institute of Statistics, and the approval of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage. This framework preserves the local character of toponymy while enabling governmental supervision. As a rule, commemorated individuals must have been deceased for at least 10 years, though exceptions may be granted.

5.2. The heroes (and martyrs) of antimafia street names

Of the 965 victims listed in our database, only 268 had been

individually commemorated in street names. Three odonyms paid tribute to groups of victims (Portella della Ginestra; Victims of the Mafia; Victims of Rapido 904). Most notably, around 70 percent of innocent victims had no streets at all named after them.

In terms of concentration, the names of three victims recurred far more frequently than the others, with over 1000 odonyms each throughout Italy: this implies that they had a street named after them in more than one municipality out of every 10 and ranked among the top 100 persons/events honoured in Italian toponymy. Overall, 11 victims were commemorated by over 100 toponyms. The top 20 antimafia toponyms by occurrence (Table 1) constitute 85 percent of all antimafia commemorations. Thus, the commemoration of victims is also unevenly distributed, with 60 percent of the commemorated victims (166) having only one or two streets dedicated to their memory.

The most widespread antimafia odonym is that of Carlo Alberto Dalla Chiesa. This famous Carabinieri general (and Prefect of Palermo), who was killed in the Via Carini attack of 1982 had 1049 streets named after him. This was the only odonym present in all twenty regions of Italy. It recurred 202 times in Lombardy, 139 in Sicily and 98 in Emilia Romagna. Comparison with earlier national street censuses conducted in 1997 and 2014 (Caffarelli, 1998, 2015) suggests that the number of streets dedicated to Dalla Chiesa increased by 110 percent between 1997 and 2020 (see Fig. 4).

The assassination of Dalla Chiesa provided the initial “primary framework” for antimafia memory. For Jamieson (1999), the modern antimafia movement was born at that time, both at the institutional level and within civil society. Dalla Chiesa's name underwent a process of “onomopoesis” and, thanks to a series of multimedia and transmedia narratives outlining his “heroic biography”, became a “name-icon”: that is to say, a “sign of high semiotic intensity” that transforms a personage into a symbol and hero, while simultaneously promoting a broader system of beliefs and ideals (Makolkin, 1992).

The figure of General Dalla Chiesa shaped the new antimafia discourse, simultaneously serving as a metaphor for tragic events, a symbol of democratic values, a virtuous model for society, and a representation of sacrificial heroism. Naming streets after him has spatialized his “heroic biography” in the urban landscape, thereby: 1) strengthening his credibility; 2) expanding his influence; and 3) fostering opportunities for “semantic wandering” (de Certeau, 2002, p. 141). Indeed, the public's initial response to Dalla Chiesa's assassination took the form of an impromptu geographical sign. A poster appeared on a wall, proclaiming in large letters to the impassive urban surroundings: “Here perished the hopes of decent Palermitans” (Fig. 3).

The second and third most frequently honoured victims in antimafia

Table 1
The top 20 antimafia odonyms by number of occurrences.

Surname	Name	Region of death	Year of death	Occupation	Gender	Number of Occurrences
Dalla Chiesa	Carlo Alberto	Sicilia	1982	Law enforcement	M	1049
Falcone	Giovanni	Sicilia	1992	Magistrate	M	994
Borsellino	Paolo	Sicilia	1992	Magistrate	M	830
Mattei	Enrico	Lombardia	1962	Entrepreneur	M	508
La Torre	Pio	Sicilia	1982	Trade unionist	M	339
Falcone & Borsellino						300
Mattarella	Piersanti	Sicilia	1980	Politician	M	278
Livatino	Rosario	Sicilia	1990	Magistrate	M	218
Impastato	Peppino	Sicilia	1978	Journalist	M	187
Puglisi	Pino	Sicilia	1993	Priest	M	119
Alpi	Ilaria	Somalia	1994	Journalist	F	110
Grassi	Libero	Sicilia	1991	Entrepreneur	M	107
Chinnici	Rocco	Sicilia	1983	Magistrate	M	103
Ambrosoli	Giorgio	Lombardia	1979	Lawyer	M	78
Terranova	Cesare	Sicilia	1979	Magistrate	M	74
Loi	Emanuela	Sicilia	1992	Law enforcement	F	69
Green	Nicholas	Sicilia	1994	Accidental victim	M	51
Carnevale	Salvatore	Sicilia	1955	Trade unionist	M	49
Morvillo	Francesca	Sicilia	1992	Magistrate	F	44
Fava	Pippo	Sicilia	1984	Journalist	M	41



Fig. 3. A spontaneous sign of civil protest following the mafia attack in Via Carini of 1982.

Source: Sicily Region Central Library

street-naming practices are the judges Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino. Falcone, who was killed in the Capaci bombing of 1992, had 994 streets individually dedicated to him; Borsellino, who was also killed in 1992 in the Via Amelio attack, had 830. In 300 cases, streets were jointly named after both Falcone and Borsellino. There were 200 streets commemorating Falcone in Lombardy, 107 in Sicily and 98 in Emilia Romagna; there were 153 streets named after Borsellino in Lombardy, 99 in Sicily and 87 in Emilia Romagna; finally, there were 69 streets honouring both in Lombardy, 41 in Sicily and 32 in Apulia. Street names honouring either Falcone and Borsellino individually had increased by 700 percent between 1997 and 2020, while the number of streets commemorating both had risen by 200 percent (Fig. 4).

Falcone and Borsellino played a decisive part in reinvigorating the primary framework underpinning grassroots antimafia efforts, then in a period of decline (Schneider, 2003; Salvio, 2017). Their assassinations coincided with the first-ever convictions of Sicilian mafia leaders in Italian history, leading to a partial but definitive disruption of the “violence-secrecy” mechanism. Following their deaths, Falcone and Borsellino were instantly heroized. The magnolia tree outside Falcone’s house (Puccio Den, 2008; Salvio, 2017) and the sites of the two terror attacks became “spontaneous sanctuaries” (Salvio, 2017), places of performative memory that altered the urban landscape by drawing pilgrimages along with votive offerings, plaques and graffiti.

Heroic narratives and commemorations of Falcone and Borsellino have proliferated at both the institutional and popular levels. The

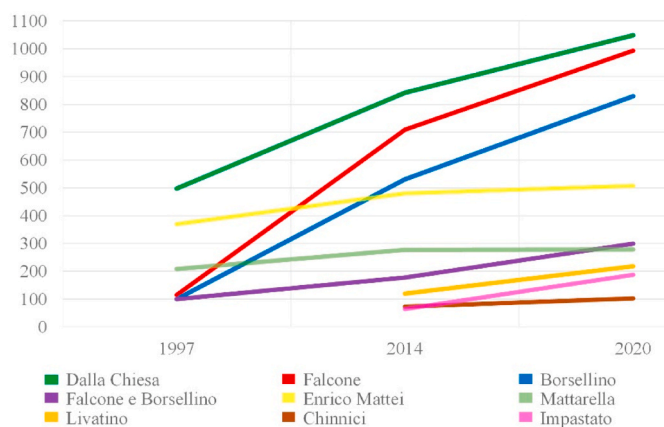


Fig. 4. The increase in the number of antimafia street names in Italy: comparing the general censuses of 1997 and 2014 with the present research findings.

Source: Caffarelli (1998), 2015.

celebration of these judges is akin to a civic religion, in continuity with the traditions of the Risorgimento and the Resistance to nazi-fascism (Ravveduto, 2017). The cult of the hero-martyr emulates religious spirituality and materializes at spontaneous or official sites of remembrance. The commemoration of victims is cathartic for the community, fostering a sense of shared identity and secular devotion (Puccio Den, 2008; Ravveduto, 2017).

However, the political hagiography that elevates Falcone and Borsellino (and Dalla Chiesa) to the status of martyrs for justice also bears risks and ambiguities. First, it implies that the struggle against the mafia is exceptional rather than an ongoing daily effort. Furthermore, focusing primarily on the martyrdom of memorable sacrificial figures can have counterproductive effects such as suggesting that the battle is only fought by solitary heroes (Salvio, 2017).

The next most prevalent antimafia street names in Italy commemorated Enrico Mattei, Pio La Torre and Piersanti Mattarella. In the case of Mattei, an industrialist who died in a plane crash in 1962, the mafia’s involvement only came to light recently and remains relatively unknown among the public. It is thus plausible to assume that the streets named after him were not originally part of the contemporary antimafia narrative. In the case of La Torre and Mattarella, two Sicilian politicians assassinated in Palermo in the early 1980s, the geographical distribution of commemorative street names varied. Streets dedicated to La Torre, a trade unionist and member of parliament who played a key part in drafting antimafia legislation, were located all over the country, with only 34% in Sicily. Conversely, most of the streets – over 60 percent – commemorating President of the Sicily Region, Piersanti Mattarella, were located in Sicily, making this one of the most regionally-specific street name categories in Italy (Caffarelli, 2015).

Of the antimafia street names with over 100 occurrences, those honouring the magistrate Rosario Livatino, the priest Pino Puglisi and the magistrate Rocco Chinnici were predominantly concentrated in Sicily (over 50%). In contrast, the antimafia activist Peppino Impastato, the journalist Ilaria Alpi, and the anti-racketeering entrepreneur Libero Grassi were more widely commemorated across the country. Notably, the memory of all these figures has been reinforced by “heroic biographies”, conveyed via a range of media, including films, TV series, comics, books, documentaries, and investigative reports, that elevate these victims to iconic status. Street-naming policies, and urban commemoration efforts more broadly, often focus on celebrated figures due to their higher media profile, thereby eclipsing the other victims within social memory as well as reinforcing counterproductive effects as earlier outlined.

Of the 268 victims commemorated, eighteen were female and 20 were children (with five falling under both categories). In total, there were 300 streets named after women. Along with Ilaria Alpi, the most frequently honoured women victims (see Table 1) included Emanuela Loi, the first female police officer to die while on duty, and consequently commemorated more frequently than her male colleagues who were killed in the same attack; Francesca Morvillo, the wife of Giovanni Falcone, who was killed in the same bombing as her husband; and Emanuela Setti Carraro, the wife of General Dalla Chiesa, who also died alongside her spouse. In general, women remained under-commemorated and some of the street names dedicated to them are sexist, framing them as the subordinate partner in a couple. Salvio (2017, p. 53) asks: “What are the public pedagogical implications of an “antimafia religion” that places a high value on self-sacrifice and martyrdom for the good of the nation and commemorates primarily male martyrs?”

There are two main instances of child victims. The first is Nicholas Green, who was accidentally killed during an armed robbery in Sicily. Widespread coverage of the tragic incident led to the portrayal of the young American tourist as a national hero, an image reinforced by movies, comics, and educational materials. This explains why he is commemorated so frequently. However, it is difficult to understand why all the other Italian children who were victimized by the mafia have so

few streets (21 in total) named after them, and none whatsoever outside of Sicily.

The second instance concerns the young Sicilian, Rita Atria, who stood up to her mafia family and took her own life following the death of Judge Borsellino who had arranged protection for her. She swiftly became the object of onomopoesis, thanks to multiple biographies portraying her as a heroine that came out shortly after her passing (Pickering-Iazzi, 2010, 2015). Atria thus emerged as an iconic figure, symbolizing rebellion and the potential for women in mafia families to lead change. She also illustrated how women who speak out (and rebel against the patriarchal system) tend to be transformed from witnesses into the accused, a process that Pickering-Iazzi has linked to gender bias (2010). This is likely why Rita Atria does not have as many streets named after her as others (despite her media prominence) and is primarily commemorated outside of Sicily (15 out of 17 streets).

Finally, almost all the commemorated victims died in Sicily at the hands of the Sicilian mafia. The numerous innocent victims of the Camorra in Campania and the *'ndrangheta* in Calabria had few streets named after them. Those most frequently honoured (with over 10 occurrences) but almost exclusively in their home regions were: Giancarlo Siani (18) and Giuseppe Diana (14) in Campania and Antonino Scopelitti (16) in Calabria. It is surprising that in regions with a well-embedded mafia presence and a history of hundreds of victims, there are so few antimafia street names based on local history. This may reflect both the ongoing conflict between mafia and antimafia forces at the law enforcement level and the persistence of social amnesia surrounding the mafia at the socio-cultural level. Even in Campania and Calabria, street names frequently commemorate the victims of the Sicilian mafia: this reflects stereotypes surrounding organized crime and serves to absolve other regions of responsibility.

6. Street-naming policies and antimafia memory

As mentioned in the introduction, commemorative street names are a key feature of modern urban landscapes. They act to territorialize “public history” (Ravveduto, 2018) by establishing an official version of historical events and incorporating it into urban space and social communications. As explained by Milo (1997, p. 1899), during the French Revolution, toponymy became a political and pedagogical tool aimed at “re-educating through language”.

Italian street-naming policies (and thus the primary frameworks of national memory and identity) can be traced back to three foundational periods. The first of these is the Risorgimento, which drove patriotic and nationalistic narratives from Italian Unification up to World War I. The second is the fascist era, which saw the introduction of an aggressive street-naming policy that celebrated the monarchy, *Il Duce* and the colonial empire (Raffaelli, 2010). The third is the republican era, which, however, has struggled to produce a new toponymy, given that the resistance to Nazi-fascism (termed the “second Risorgimento”) failed to become a shared national symbol (Ridolfi, 2005).

Divisions came to a head during the political crisis of the early 1990s and the emergence of revisionist theories about fascism and the Risorgimento (which paved the way for neo-fascist and separatist parties to enter the government coalition). Amid this climate of uncertainty, the antimafia movement – spurred by the terror attacks that had recently traumatized the nation – offered ethical and educational models in keeping with national and democratic ideals.

In this section, we analyse antimafia street-naming policies from both the institutional and the civic perspectives. Subsequently, we examine three specific cases: municipal councils dissolved due to mafia infiltration, the City of Milan and the City of Palermo.

6.1. Institutional street-naming policies

The power to name streets lies with the municipalities. Municipal councils (which remain in office for five years) approve new names and

purposefully oversee their material display at a chosen site. It is thus significant that under a third of municipalities have named a street in commemoration of the antimafia movement, despite ongoing urban expansion and the process of amalgamation between municipalities.

In general, municipal councils select from among 1) a national pantheon of personages and events; 2) current events that have caused public outrage; 3) events and famous people from local history; 4) names that reflect the ideological leanings and identities of the political groups on the sitting council (Ravveduto, 2018). Furthermore, during the republican era, it has gradually become the norm for different council factions to agree to take turns at naming streets (Pivato, 2007). Within this factionalized setting, antimafia commemoration is most frequently sponsored by centre-left groups, in line with the dual identity – both Catholic and progressive – of the antimafia movement. Factionalization has a doubly negative effect: the “depoliticization” of memory described earlier (Salvio, 2017); and the over-politicization of the memory of individuals or events who in reality stand above particular ideologies. This phenomenon explains, for example, the joint dedications to Falcone (defined as left-wing) and Borsellino (a hero of the right).

Historically, municipalities have always dedicated streets to mafia victims, even when – prior to the emergence of the antimafia movement – they commemorated them as victims of ordinary crime. Historical maps confirm that in 1930, there was already a street in Palermo – Via Emanuele Notarbartolo – dedicated to a mayor and member of parliament killed in 1893, and one in Milan – Via Bernardino Verro – commemorating a socialist trade unionist killed in Corleone in 1915. However, the mafia terror attacks and the emergence of the modern antimafia movement changed antimafia street-naming practices both quantitatively and qualitatively.

A historical reconstruction by Ravveduto (2018) illustrates how quickly this change got under way after the terror attacks. On 30 May 1992, the municipality of Trezzano sul Naviglio (a known mafia stronghold in the Greater Milan area) named a square in a particularly crime-infested neighbourhood after Giovanni Falcone. This served to symbolically counter the mafia system at the local level. An article in the newspaper *La Repubblica* (8 August 1992), “Streets and squares in memory of the murdered magistrates”, explained that the government had waived the standard 10-year waiting period. In the municipality of Buonabitacolo (Sa), the council changed existing plans in order to dedicate streets in newly constructed areas to Falcone, Borsellino and the members of their police escorts. These commemorative gestures were informed by a newly-felt need to defend the rule of law and the antimafia movement (Buonabitacolo had not named a street after Dalla Chiesa).

However, such commendable practices are not the only course of action open to local authorities. Based on the case studies presented here, we propose that municipal authorities’ approach to commemorating the antimafia memory movement can fall into three theoretical categories.

First, antimafia commemoration may be seen as generating a “counter-memory” (Foucault, 1980, p. 160) that challenges the dominant discourse (social amnesia surrounding the mafia) with non-discursive forms of language, producing spatial instances of urban resistance and civic education. In this case, antimafia street names are a “common good” (Salvio, 2017; Ravveduto, 2018) that can be inspired both by the need to process trauma (in communities directly affected by loss, where the antimafia movement is part of local history) and by the desire to uphold constitutional principles.

Second, commemoration can be a formal rather than a truly critical practice, in terms of its content and aims. Concerning content, institutional forms of commemoration often draw on consolatory and redemptive narratives that depoliticize and therefore undermine the civic meaning of the practice and its educational functions (Salvio, 2017). Regarding aims, dedicating public spaces to the memory of the antimafia movement can be a form of “political marketing” used by municipal councils to publicly signal their commitment to fighting

organized crime (Ravveduto, 2018).

Third, commemorative street naming can still be leveraged to reinforce the dominant discourse by bolstering the political and moral legitimacy of actors who in reality are part of the mafia's relational system. Such "mafia-washing" consolidates social amnesia while pretending to combat it. On the other hand, a lack of commemorative street names also serves the dominant discourse; it demonstrates that, in the absence of political will (and political advantage), even in areas where law enforcement is particularly active (for example, where municipal councils are dissolved due to mafia infiltration), forms of social amnesia surrounding the mafia continue to dominate, including the "elephant in the room" in towns that believe themselves to be immune to mafia infiltration (especially in the North).

6.2. Grassroots street-naming policies

By engaging in participatory practices and active forms of citizenship, the local community can significantly influence the street-naming process. It can exert pressure on the local authority by endorsing the proposals of council groups or – as provided for under the law – by putting forward street names of its own. Nevertheless, the antimafia movement has never organized nationwide campaigns to encourage street-naming practices. Let us next examine a few representative grassroots projects, although the role of the antimafia movement is difficult to reconstruct due to the rapid turnover of associations (and activists). An association may be set up to advocate for a particular street name and be disbanded once that goal has been attained, leaving no record of its activity.

In 2005, the "Peppino Impastato" Cultural Association launched "A street for Peppino", a petition urging Italian municipalities to name a street after the young activist.⁸ In 2009, the association "daSud" devoted its annual congress to the theme of antimafia street naming and encouraged activists to engage in "toponymic guerrilla warfare" in a tutorial on how to cover official street-name plaques with temporary plaques honouring mafia victims.⁹ In 2017, Piazzale Mauro Rostagno was inaugurated in Turin¹⁰, after 10 years of campaigning by associations that had launched a petition (2008) and implemented toponymic guerrilla warfare including symbolically renaming a bridge (2013).¹¹ In 2017, the film director and TV presenter Pierfrancesco Diliberto, a prominent antimafia activist, led a media campaign that resulted in the town of Vaiano Partenora (Ce) replacing an odonym commemorating the fascist minister Giuseppe Bottai with one honouring Giancarlo Siani, a journalist killed by the Camorra.¹²

These grassroots antimafia projects are forms of "counter-memory", practices of urban resistance against mafia violence and strategies for democratic community education. However, the movement itself is characterized by internal variability and diversity. As observed by Salvio (2017), some of its actors and practices are inspired by the principles of "transitional justice", while others follow a more conventional approach focused on consolatory and redemptive commemorations of sacrifice, which increases the chances of "depoliticization".

Relative to Rose-Redwood's position (2008) that the political act of naming can serve either an elitist agenda of symbolic erasure or the goals of marginalized groups, antimafia street-naming practices occupy an interesting intermediate position. Indeed, the antimafia movement is both pro-establishment, as it strives to ensure the preservation of fundamental democratic, and anti-establishment "because it opposes the socio-political framework that has historically developed, and strongly

supports the expulsion of criminal forces from state institutions" (Dalla Chiesa, 1983, p. 58).

6.3. Municipal councils dissolved due to mafia infiltration

In municipalities placed under government control due to mafia infiltration – the first of our case studies – antimafia street names bear even greater significant symbolic value than elsewhere. However, this can make the street-naming process correspondingly more vulnerable to manipulation. Between 1991 and 2020, a total of 254 municipal councils were dissolved. Among these, in 2020, 108 had no commemorative street names, 74 had one or two, 48 had between three and nine, and 22 had between 10 and 30. How should we interpret this data?

Let us first focus on the virtuous municipalities. Ten out of the top 20 towns with the highest number of antimafia street names previously had their local authorities dissolved. Such communities display heightened critical awareness of mafia violence. This does not mean they are now immune to organized crime or that their elected officials are honest. Rather, it suggests that, at a particular point in their history, they developed a social memory surrounding the mafia, successfully integrating it into the urban landscape, and thereby publicly preserving it.

Even communities with few antimafia street names have likely undergone this challenging process. However, given the financial costs associated with street naming amongst other factors, it is also plausible that commemorative street names are sometimes instrumentalized for personal political gain and in the service of the dominant discourse. Uncertainty surrounding motives stems from the "violence-secrecy" system and is consistently observed in studies on mafia organizations.

In any event, the municipalities dissolved due to mafia infiltration and without antimafia street names suggested that local territories and memories remained contested, and that the grassroots antimafia movement was still struggling to counteract deeply ingrained social amnesia. Nonetheless, even in such cases, change can come swiftly, as exemplified by Reggio Calabria, a notorious stronghold of the *'ndrangheta* that had no antimafia street names in 2020. Its council had been dissolved between 2012 and 2014. The city remained without any antimafia odonyms until 2022, when the Council named two main thoroughfares after Giovanni Falcone and Francesca Morvillo¹³ respectively, endorsing a proposal submitted by the Scopelliti Foundation and supported by the local antimafia movement.

Cases of municipal councils being dissolved due to mafia infiltration (as well as the two-thirds of Italian municipalities without antimafia street names) show that in the absence of political will, commemorative antimafia street naming struggles to prosper. On the other hand, despite widespread yet elusive instrumentalization, antimafia street names also provide a measure of communities' awareness of mafia-related crime. To paraphrase Dalla Chiesa (2011, p. 102), the act of naming streets after mafia victims seems to reflect less about local history and the objective morphology of the mafia phenomenon, and more about sensitivity to the issue of organized crime on the part of municipal authorities (even when they engage in political marketing) and the broader public.

6.4. Milan

Our second case study is Milan, stereotypically regarded as the "country's moral capital". In reality, it harbours a well-established mafia presence, currently dominated by the *'ndrangheta* (dalla Chiesa, 2016), a fact historically overlooked by both the municipal and regional authorities.

The city of Milan boasts five antimafia street names: Bernardino Verro (dating to the 1920s/30s); Enrico Mattei (1973); Carlo Alberto Dalla Chiesa and Giorgio Ambrosoli (1991); and Peppino Impastato

¹³ Commemorated using the inclusive wording "(woman) magistrate killed by the mafia".

⁸ <http://www.peppinoimpastato.com/visualizza.asp?val=205>.

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tNCKI-GCQY>.

¹⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V10aRyZto3Y>.

¹¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VRo0k5g9s0o>.

¹² <https://www.facebook.com/fondazionegiancarloisianionlus/videos/169571501899585>.

(2006). The streets in question are located on the outskirts of city and bear generic inscriptions that do not explicitly reference mafia violence. The only centrally located one is Piazza Giorgio Ambrosoli, who is commemorated as an “attorney”. Via Peppino Impastato is the most recent dedication and the only one that explicitly acknowledges the honoured individual as a “victim of the mafia”. In 2021, the sitting left-wing council inaugurated Piazza Piersanti Mattarella. This gesture received significant media attention yet commemorating the “president of the Sicily region” would appear to have nothing to do with the local history of Milan.

Milan offers an example of formal and acritical antimafia commemoration, driven by redemptive institutional narratives and political choices more focused on upholding the city’s image as a leading centre of production than on supporting the antimafia efforts of law enforcement and civil society. The tribute to Verro was demanded by the socialist movement. The commemoration of Mattei celebrates the entrepreneur. Regarding the streets named after Dalla Chiesa and Ambrosoli, Nando Dalla Chiesa told us: “It may seem incredible, but the Council did everything almost in secret. For example, I was not even informed, let alone invited to the inauguration of the square. The ceremony for Ambrosoli was perfunctory, as though he were just a distinguished citizen of Milan who died of old age.” Via Impastato, whose naming was decided by a right-wing Council, seems to have been the only truly reflective act of commemoration.

The park called after Falcone and Borsellino is of interest, both as a spontaneous place of memory and as a form of political marketing. It originated in 1993, when a neighbourhood committee and students from a nearby high school planted a commemorative magnolia in the public gardens at Via Benedetto Marcello (see Fig. 5). The new location soon became Milan’s antimafia “lieu de mémoire”. Every year, activists gather here spontaneously on the anniversaries of the mafia attacks.

In 2002, the Council decided to officially name the park after the two magistrates, but the highly contested unveiling of the plaque only took place in 2010, following the first major crackdown on the *‘ndrangheta* in Lombardy.¹⁴ This was a political marketing strategy, given that the Council in office had previously denied the presence of the mafia in Milan. Dedicating green spaces is a policy often leveraged by Milan councils because it yields a high return in terms of image but requires less political effort and is inexpensive, because park names are not



Fig. 5. The Falcone and Borsellino gardens in Milan, 2020.

associated with street numbers.

Milan’s approach to antimafia street naming does not shine for initiative and vigour. It reflects the typical stance of local authorities vis-à-vis organized crime: peripheral, casual and sometimes opportunistic. In Milan, the urban landscape is both a space of performance and a contested cultural arena, where different narratives can compete as long as they do not get in the way of economic and business interest. Indeed, the ‘elephant in the room’ in Milan continues to be the persistent and widespread social amnesia surrounding the mafia.

6.5. Palermo

Our third case study is Palermo, the Italian city with the highest number of antimafia odonyms, and a “virtuous” and flourishing commemorative street-naming policy that nonetheless bears its contradictions. For example, there are no streets dedicated to Falcone and Borsellino. Palermo airport, a place of enormous symbolic value, is named after them. However, even this gesture was contested by a candidate running for the office of regional president because “it reminds us of the mafia”, presenting incoming tourists with a negative image of Sicily.¹⁵

A technical advisor to the city council’s place-names commission explained that, beginning with the so-called “Palermo Spring” (Schneider, 2003; Salvio, 2017), the councils chaired by Mayor Orlando, and subsequently others, have prioritized antimafia street-naming policies, working closely with city administrators, the families of victims and grassroots antimafia associations to implement them.

Indeed, street name plaques in Palermo often explicitly commemorate individuals as a “victim of the mafia”. They are located both in the centre and on the outskirts of the city and often form true networks of meaning around functional city spaces. The streets surrounding the police barracks are dedicated to Falcone’s and Borsellino’s police escorts. The naming of an avenue and railway station after Emanuele Notarbartolo, killed on a train in 1893, has influenced the entire surrounding neighbourhood, which also encompasses a prestigious park named after Piersanti Mattarella and two connecting streets dedicated to Mattarella and Dalla Chiesa, respectively.

In 2019, a street was named “Giornale L’Ora” to commemorate a leading antimafia newspaper. The street is where the newspaper’s historic headquarters were located and where the 1958 mafia attack took place. The commemoration ceremony was held on the 100th anniversary of the birth of legendary editor Vittorio Nisticò (see Fig. 6). A plaque honours the newspaper’s commitment to opposing the violence of Cosa Nostra, the Sicilian-based mafia group, and commemorates the journalists killed by the mafia. This is a virtuous example of commemorative street-naming practices.

The fruit of civic and cultural antimafia campaigns, the dense network of antimafia commemorative place names in Palermo has prompted further initiatives, including celebratory gatherings, coverage in movies and on TV shows, and organized “memory walks” (Salvio, 2017). Palermo’s toponymy of memory attests to the city’s profound civic consciousness and critical remembrance of mafia violence, and to ongoing cultural change at the societal level. It does not imply that the mafia has been completely vanquished; rather, it highlights that effective resistance is possible, as shown in the past and as the urban landscape continues to remind us.

7. Conclusions

The critical study of urban toponymy helps to analyse the symbolic confrontation between the mafia and the antimafia movement and, indirectly, to explore Italian society and the state of its republican

¹⁴ Operation “Crimine infinito”: 154 arrests in Lombardy, 156 simultaneous arrests in Calabria.

¹⁵ <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2012/09/18/micchiche-aeroporto-falcone-borsellino-errore/356563/>.



Fig. 6. Inauguration of “via Giornale L’Orà”, Palermo, 29 September 2019.

system. Grassroots antimafia activism – now one of the leading collective movements in Italy – has demonstrated the capability to generate novel socio-spatial relationships that are in some respects “revolutionary”. The movement is key to fighting the mafia, which – because it is more than a public order issue – cannot be vanquished solely via law enforcement measures. The antimafia movement drives cultural change at the societal level by fostering collective memory and action.

Place-naming policies serve as an effective local commemorative strategy that both institutional and community-led antimafia actors could invest more in. Coordinated national-level action might enable grassroots antimafia projects to optimize their impact locally, leading to more and better commemorative street-naming practices. While political manoeuvring cannot be ruled out, toponyms nevertheless significantly impact the urban landscape and the “city-text” understood as a “spatialized configuration of commemorated historical figures and events, which is the result of a political selection process” (Azaryahu, 1996).

This research offers a limited spatial analysis of antimafia memorial streets, in terms of their urban location, land registry data, and position within the road network. According to Azaryahu (1996), the position and characteristics of a street are key to evaluating the status accorded to commemorated subjects and the implicit/explicit intentions of political decision-makers. We have shown here that the location of antimafia streets is never random, but a field study on the national scale is required. As observed by Cayli (2012), the study of the mafia and antimafia demands both theoretical and participant observation. This is particularly true when studying places of memory, given that the perceived meaning of places cannot be accessed using virtual technologies. While research on antimafia street names continued during the recent public health emergency, further field studies remain pending. This is why the only empirical cases presented here are Milan and

Palermo.

The insights offered by our initial census raise new questions about the construction of a public antimafia memory in urban settings. How do antimafia street names impact the resident community? What issues and controversies do they trigger? This study suggests that the investigation should be extended to all places where the antimafia movement is commemorated. The urban history of the mafias cannot be separated from the urban history of antimafia resistance. However, by focusing on commemorative street-naming efforts, future studies can unpack this complexity by tracing meaningful connections between urban spaces where the mafia has left its mark and urban spaces to be liberated from the burden of a difficult past through the development of new ethical values based on citizenship and justice.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

References

- Alderman, D. (2002). Street names as memorial arenas: The reputational politics of commemorating martin luther king Jr. in a Georgia county. *Historical Geography*, 30, 99–120.
- Azaryahu, M. (1996). The power of commemorative street names. *Environment and Planning D. Society and Space*, 14, 311–330. <https://doi.org/10.1068/d140311>.
- Barnes, J. (1947). The collection of genealogies. *Rhodes Livingstone Institute Journal*, 5, 48–55.
- Berg, L., & Vuolteenaho, J. (2009). *Critical toponymies. The contested politics of place naming*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1997). *La realtà come costruzione sociale*. Milano: Il Mulino.
- Burke, P. (1997). *Varieties of cultural history*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Caffarelli, E. (1998). Gli odonimi più ricorrenti. *Rion*, 2, 625–661.
- Caffarelli, E. (2015). Frequenze onomastiche. *Rion*, 1, 379–422.
- Catino, M. (2014). L’organizzazione del segreto nelle associazioni mafiose. *Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia*, 55, 259–301. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1423/77305>.
- Cayli, B. (2012). Resistance against the mafia. A civic struggle to defy an uncontested power. *Anthropological Journal on European Cultures*, 21, 103–125. <https://doi.org/10.3167/ajec.2012.210107>.
- Cayli, B. (2017). Victims and protest in a social space. *Emotion Space and Society*, 22, 61–70. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2017.01.001>.
- Chinnici, G., & Santino, U. (1989). *La violenza programmata*. Milano: Franco Angeli.
- Ciconte, E., Forgiione, F., & Sales, I. (2012). *Atlante delle mafie 1, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino*.
- Connerton, P. (1989). *How societies remember*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Connerton, P. (2008). Seven types of forgetting. *Memory Studies*, 1, 59–71.
- Corona, G., & Sciarone, R. (2012). Il paesaggio delle ecocamorre. *Meridiana*, 73–74, 13–35.
- dalla Chiesa, N. (1983). *Gli studenti contro la mafia. Quaderni piacentini*, 11 pp. 39–60.
- dalla Chiesa, N. (1993). *Milano Palermo: la nuova Resistenza. Milano, Baldini e Castoldi*.
- dalla Chiesa, N. (2011). *Le mafie al Nord. La fine dei luoghi comuni. Narcomafia*, 12 pp. 102–112.
- dalla Chiesa, N. (2016). *Passaggio a nord. La colonizzazione mafiosa. Torino, Gruppo Abele*.
- De Certeau, M. (2002). *The practice of everyday life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Dickie, J. (2008). *Cosa nostra. Storia della Mafia siciliana*. Bari: Laterza.
- Foote, J. (1999). From boomtown to bribesville: The images of the city, milan, 1980–97. *Urban History*, 26, 393–412. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0963926899000346>
- Foucault, M. (1980). *Language, counter-memory, practice*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980.
- Foucault, M. (2003). *Sorvegliare e punire. Torino, Einaudi*.
- Halbwachs, M. (2001). *La memoria collettiva. Milano, Unicopli*.
- Jacoby, R. (1975). *Social amnesia*. Boston: Beacon.
- Jamieson, A. (1999). *The antimafia Italy’s fight against organized crime*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Jedlowski, P. (2000). *Memoria. Bologna: Clueb, 2000*.
- King, R. (1975). Geographical perspectives on the evolution of the Sicilian mafia. *Tesq*, 66, 21–34.
- Lupo, S. (2011). *Il tenebroso sodalizio. La mafia nel Rapporto Sangiorgi. Menfi, XL*.
- Makolkina, A. (1992). *Name Hero Icon*. Berlin: de Gruyter.
- Milo, D. (1997). Le nom des rues. In P. Nora (Ed.), *Les Lieux de Mémoire* (pp. 1887–1918). Paris: Gallimard.

- Misztal, B. A. (2010). Collective memory in a global age. *Current Sociology*, 58, 24–44.
- Muti, G., & Salvucci, G. (2020). Odonomastica e vittime innocenti: una geografia della memoria antimafia in Italia. *Cross. Rivista di Studi e Ricerche sulla criminalità organizzata*, 6(1), 22–56. <https://doi.org/10.13130/cross-13615>
- Nora, P. (1989). Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire. *Representations*, 26, 7–24.
- Paoli, L. (2000). *Fratelli di mafia*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Pickering-Iazzi, R. (2010). (En)gendering testimonial bodies of evidence and Italian antimafia culture: Rita Atria. *Italian Culture*, 28, 21–37.
- Pickering-Iazzi, R. (2015). *The mafia in Italian lives and literature: Life sentences and their geographies*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Pivato, S. (2007). *Vuoti di memoria*. Roma: Laterza.
- Puccio-Den, D. (2008). The anti-mafia movement as religion? The pilgrimage to the Falcone tree. In P. J. Mangry (Ed.), *Shrines and pilgrimage in the modern world* (pp. 49–70). Amsterdam University Press.
- Raffestin, C. (1984). Territorializzazione, deterritorializzazione, riterritorializzazione e informazione. In A. Turco (Ed.), *Regione e regionalizzazione*. Milano, F. Angeli (pp. 69–82).
- Ravveduto, M. (2017). Ritualità e immaginario civile del movimento antimafia. In T. Calì, & L. Ceci (Eds.), *L'immaginario devoto tra mafie e antimafia* (pp. 169–193). Roma: Viella.
- Ravveduto, M. (2018). La toponomastica della seconda Repubblica. Falcone e Borsellino, vittime della mafia. *Memoria e ricerca*, 1, 157–174. <https://doi.org/10.14647/88861>
- Ridolfi, M. (2005). Il nuovo volto delle città. La toponomastica negli anni della transizione democratica e della nascita della Repubblica. *Memoria e Ricerca*, 20, 147–168.
- Rose-Redwood, R. (2008). From number to name: Symbolic capital. Places of memory and the politics of street naming in New York city. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 9, 431–452. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649360802032702>
- Rose-Redwood, R., Alderman, D., & Azaryahu, M. (2018). *The political life of urban streetscapes naming, politics, and place*. London: Routledge.
- Sales, I. (2015). *Storia dell'Italia mafiosa*. Rubbettino: Soveria Mannelli.
- Salvio, P. M. (2017). *The story-takers: Public pedagogy, transitional justice, and Italy's non-violent protest against the mafia*. University of Toronto Press.
- Santino, U. (1995). *La mafia interpretata*. Rubbettino: Soveria Mannelli.
- Santino, U. (2009). *Storia del movimento antimafia*. Roma, Editori Riuniti.
- Santino, U. (2017). *La mafia dimenticata*. Milano, Melampo.
- Schneider, J., & Schneider, P. T. (2003). *Reversible destiny: Mafia, antimafia, and the struggle for Palermo*. University of California Press.
- Schwartz, B. (1996). Memory as a cultural system: Abraham lincoln in world war II. *American Sociological Review*, 61, 908–927.
- Schwartz, B. (1997). Memory as a cultural system: Abraham lincoln in world war I. *International Journal of Sociology & Social Policy*, 17, 22–58. <https://doi.org/10.1108/eb013311>
- Sciarrone, R. (Ed.). (2014). *Mafie del nord*. Roma, Donzelli: Strategie criminali e contesti locali.
- Siebert, R. (1996). *Mafia e quotidianità*. Milano: Il Saggiatore.
- Till, K. (2009). Places of memory. In J. Agnew, K. Mitchell, & G. Toal (Eds.), *Companion to political geography* (pp. 289–301). Hoboken: Blackwell.
- Zerubavel, E. (2008). *The elephant in the room: Silence and denial in everyday life*. Oxford University Press.