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Francesco Sidoti

Department of life, health and environmental sciences,
L'Aquila University, Italy

PALERMO AND MOSCOW - A MAFIA STEREOTYPE

Abstract

In this paper the author research a mafia stereotype, regarding Palermo and Moscow. Organized crime is a huge presence in the global economy. Mafia is intrinsically controversial because its protagonists necessarily do their business in secrecy and silence. The true antimafia account should be about international collaboration, partnership, mutual friendship, and common values. A sincere antimafia endeavor should point to the importance of alliances in an increasingly complicated and interconnected world. In Italy and in Russia, the glamorized Hollywood mafia is the past narrative, which can be completely understood in a general perspective about simplistic fictional accounts.

Key words: Mafia, sociology, Italy, Russia, democracy, Palermo, violence.

1. A STEREOTYPE

Western views on contemporary Russia can be divided into two broad groups. The mainstream school asserts that the post-communist transition is over and that the country has failed to establish the rudiments of an acceptable democracy. Other observers say that the Russian system remains fluid and dynamic and that the undoubted shortcomings in the quality of post-communist regime must be resolved within the framework of the existing constitutional order, without undue external intervention in Russian business.

In order to obtain the best answers from a very intricate question, I shall follow the indications (regarding realism, geopolitics, and mafia) provided by Zbigniew Brzezinski, Henry Kissinger, and Edward Luttwak. In different times and in different ways, Kissinger and Brzezinski warned against improper US interventionism. Brzezinski publicly opposed the Gulf War, arguing that the United States would squander the international support previously accumulated. Kissinger wrote that an East-West confrontation would scuttle for decades any prospect of bringing Russia and the West — especially Russia and Europe — into a cooperative international system. Luttwak scorned the mainstream literature on the Sicilian mafia and offered unusual views on Russian organized crime (offering at times praise in compliance with a type of reasoning which is totally different from the reasoning in these pages). Zbigniew Brzezinski, Henry Kissinger, and Edward Luttwak belong to the generation of European émigrés whose personal lives were torn asunder by the failure to assure security in Europe in the 1930s-1940s. While every vision is conditioned by personal experiences and idiosyncrasies, we will try to find the best.

In order to understand the specificity of Russian transformation, innumerable scholars have extrapolated from Italy's experience on mafia crimes. The friendship between Berlusconi and Putin has been quoted innumerable occasions. The expressions "mafia State" or "mafia Republic" have frequently been used, creating an interpretative frame which is very hazardous, because it puts an infamous and provoking label on the Russian ruling class and on an entire nation.

At the origin of this intellectual stereotype there is a complicate legend. I take on the spot a highly influential book. Robert Putnam said that "The fate of *Mezzogiorno* is an object lesson for the Third World today and the former Communist lands of Eurasia tomorrow, moving uncertainly toward self-government. ... Many of the formerly Communist societies had weak civic traditions before the advent of Communism ... Palermo may represent the future of Moscow"¹, in reference to the opportunities for organized crime in post-communist States. Organized crime and mafia are not synonymous concepts². There are huge differences among predators, delinquents, crooks, lawbreakers, criminals, bandits, gangsters, mafiosi.

1 Putnam Robert, *Making Democracy works*, Princeton U. P., Princeton, 1994, p. 183.

2 Cretin T., Qu'est-ce qu'une mafia? Essais de définition des mafias, *Revue de science criminelle et de droit pénal comparé*, avril-juin 1995, pp. 281-299; on the *mafia trademark*, "in reality Cosa Nostra... Only cops and newspapers call it Mafia", see Gambetta D., *Codes of the Underworld: How Criminals Communicate*, Princeton U. P., Princeton, 2009, p.212.

There is an extensive dissertation on the differences within the original Sicilian mafia, which is very different from McMafia while organized crime is very different from seriously organized crime, and so on. Mafia and mafia states are two very different conceptual domains.

Robert Putnam is a case in point because he popularized the concept of civic community and the concept of social capital³. Putnam's work attracted the attention of President Clinton who was looking to reorganize foreign aid in the mid-1990s. After the fall of Berlin Wall, supranational institutions adopted the mission of fortifying civil society as a priority in the inaugurated international democracy. The United States Agency for International Development (AID) and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) boosted the development of groups thought to comprise the heart of civil society: grass-roots social movements, unions, a free media, and a wide range of nongovernmental organizations involved in promoting such causes as human rights, governmental transparency, and protection of the environment. The National Endowment for Democracy (NED) has been very active in countries such as Ukraine. In different ways, Putnam's works was consistent with the large picture described in authors as Robert Bellah and Francis Fukuyama. Social capital theory was a good motivation for external intervention of non-governmental organizations in other countries affair. Even in eastern Europe, in order to avoid mafia and boost civil society.

This old-fashioned picture is today outdated. Palermo represents Moscow's past not its future. Mafia-type groups thrive in places where there is a power vacuum, while now, in Russia, Putin has filled the vacuum left by the vertical collapse of a state-controlled economy. Moscow is now very different from the past. Even Palermo is now very different from the past. Today, in Palermo there is a genuine and effective antimafia mayor, and in Sicily a genuine and effective antimafia regional president.

Many say that in Italy and in the United States, the old mafia was a by-product of the imperfect transition from traditional society to modern society⁴. Cosa Nostra

3 Putnam Robert, "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital", *Journal of Democracy*, 6 (1), Jan 1995, pp.65-78; Hedlund S., Sundström N., "Does Palermo Represent The Future For Moscow?", *Journal of Public Policy*, Volume 16 / Issue 02 / May 1996, pp 113-155.

4 Hess Henner, *Mafia. Ursprung, Macht und Mythos*, Herder, Freiburg 1993. See also Anderson R. T., "From Mafia to Cosa Nostra", *American Journal of Sociology*, 71, (November 1965), pp. 302-310; and about the main historical issues, dalla Chiesa N., *Contro la mafia*, Einaudi, Torino, 2010, and Arlacchi P., *Mafia Business: The Mafia Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Oxford U. P., New York, 1988.

is far from being Italy's only criminal association. The South of the country hosts tree other major crime groups: the Camorra, from Naples and its hinterland, the *Sacra corona unita* from Puglia, and the 'ndrangheta from Calabria. In Sardinia there is no mafia, but other criminal groups known for their cruelty in abduction for ransom. Each of these groups has its own memoirs, its own political connections, its own style of doing bad things. The history of Southern Italy is very different from the history on Northern Italy; the North of the country was the first incubation of modern Europe and its regions are even richer than German areas; the South, on the contrary, was under feudalism until the nineteenth century and its percentage of literacy were very similar to the Russian levels. The South was largely feudal and agricultural, illiterate and poor. Even now, the North is clearly European in richness and customs; the South is clearly similar to Mediterranean countries or eastern countries, such as Bulgaria: in crucial fields (such as infant mortality or PISA test in education), statistics are the base of the comparison⁵. In 1861 the unification of the country was marked by the fall of the Bourbon monarchy in the South: public order collapsed, new opportunities for rapid enrichment suddenly rose, popular unrest and despair were enormous while violent entrepreneurs were on stage for power and privilege. Comparative criminologists stress that the situation was very similar to Russia after the breakup of the Soviet Union. In any case, that time was for sure the beginning of many forms of organized crime in Southern Italy.

A specific historical evolution does not does not imply shame or delay. In 2010, while attending the European summit of the group of 20 major economic countries, president Obama was asked if he believed in American exceptionalism. He replied: "I believe in American exceptionalism, just as I suspect that the Brits believe in British exceptionalism, and the Greeks believe in Greek exceptionalism".

In short, the reconnaissance of local exceptional experiences is possible (perhaps necessary), and there is a need to bond them together in a sincere law enforcement collaboration. We have an interest in recognizing the good values and wonderful qualities existing in all the countries, despite those pieces of the past that that are unloved and are unlovely.

As Russia, for centuries Sicily has been practically and ideologically outside the Christian West, apart from patterns that grew out of the Carolingian Empire and on

⁵ Sidoti Francesco, *Istituzioni e criminalità*, Cedam, Milano, 1996. See the detailed review of that book, written by Mary Gibson, in "Italian Politics and Society", 1997.

the Pope-Emperor diarchy. Sicily was another world. But it was a many splendored world. Once upon a time, the Mediterranean was the centre of the earth, and then Sicily was at the centre of the Mediterranean, birthplace of Archimedes and Euclid, reference point to Plato and Aeschylus, homeland for the first human attempts in democracy and rule of law⁶. When the Mediterranean became a Muslim lake, Palermo took in the archetypal courts of Byzantium, Jerusalem, Athens, Rome, and Damascus, speaking in many languages: Greek, Latin, Arab, Norman, pseudiskaz, and Hebrew. After, the axis of history changed again and the Atlantic became the center of the world: Sicily tumbled down at the borders of the West, geographically and institutionally distant from the skeleton of modern Europe, going from Manchester to the Rhine.

The new mafias are a by-product of the imperfect transition of all world countries to a global civil society and to a unified human history. This is only a part of the story. Without reference to the international context, there is a fundamental misunderstanding of the mafia phenomenon. At the heart of the Italian weaknesses, that explain both the mafia presence and pretence, has lain a close relationship between organized crime developments and international political events. The southern Italian migration into the US was distorted by American Prohibition, which was crucial in the involuntary building of a massive international mafia network, not existing before⁷. After Fascism, the Sicilian mafia flourished again within unstable political conditions due to the characteristics of Italy after World War II. From 1946 to 1989, in a Europe divided by the Iron Curtain, Italy was the frontier country where the cold war was bitterly fought, both because of the presence of the Pope and because of the presence of the strongest Communist party in the world outside the Soviet area.

Even now there are international reasons for the global mafias bonanza. The demand for illicit goods and services is the main cause for the increasing presence of illicit markets in world economy. In 2012 President Otto Perez Molina of Guatemala opened the rhetorical offensive against the drug war, arguing that “global drug policy today is based on a false premise: that the global drug markets can be eradicated”. But he was not alone: people such as Kofi Annan, Paul Volker, George

6 Mazzarino Santo, *Tra Oriente e Occidente. Ricerche di storia greca arcaica*, Bollati-Boringhieri, Torino, 2007.

7 Sidoti Francesco, *Il crimine all'italiana. Una tradizione realista, garantista, mite*, Guerini, Milano, 2000.

Soros, and George Shultz, concluded in much the same way as Molina. And as long as drug prohibition remains the legal standard, criminal groups around the world will have a huge economic motivation.

In the idea of a “mafia State”, there is the implicit concept of a strong State, or a shadow State, acting as coordinator of mafia activities. While now in Russia the underworld is an anarchic galaxy, full of independent variables: criminal groups can be hired to carry out work for secret services or bad corporations, and so on, but are not an integral part of them or of the normal State bodies. This interpretation is supported by influential observers. Commenting Luke Harding book⁸, Stephen Holmes⁹ argues that it’s far from clear that the killing of journalists and lawyers with a social conscience requires an initiative from the top. For instance, in the most troubling case, Aleksandr Litvinenko could have been murdered by a group of former or serving FSB agents, Harding writes, “acting on their own initiative to get rid of a troublesome traitor. ... Regarding his own harassment at the hands of the FSB, Harding says: ‘It’s possible that a billionaire individual unhappy with something I’d written about his business affairs may simply have paid the FSB to chuck me out’.” The same logic has been applied to many other relevant issues. The editors of Anna Politkovskaya’s newspaper, the *Novaya Gazeta*, estimated her murder was orchestrated by Chechen groups, whose human-rights violence were one of her favorite themes.

In the Post-Soviet era, Russia started its transition from a centrally controlled economy to a market-directed economy in a chaotic way. It was absolutely clear that Russians suffered a vacuum where the directing and deterring presence of the State should have been. In such vacuum, organized crime acted as quasi-governmental institution which sold what the official government did not provide: opportunities, commodities, services, protection and enforcement of property rights. But a vacuum was not the same as a reign controlled by the mafia.

Historically, mafia activities do not reflect a strong government. Mafia activities, on the contrary, reflect a government that isn’t strong enough to protect citizens¹⁰.

⁸ Harding Luke, *Mafia State: How One Reporter Became an Enemy of the Brutal New Russia*, Guardian, London, 2011.

⁹ Holmes Stephen, *Fragments of a Defunct State*, London Review of Books, Vol. 34, No. 1·5, January 2012, pp. 23-25.

¹⁰ Varese Federico, *Mafias on the Move: How Organised Crime Conquers New Territories*, Princeton U. P., Princeton, 2013.

Currently we can see the transition from the chaos of the Yeltsin years to a *managed democracy*. “De-democratization”, as it is often called, initiated not for some Soviet nostalgia but for the necessity to end a chaotic transition. The differences among democracy, indirect democracy, polyarchy, pluralism, and anarchy is a classical concern, born with the first experiences, thousands of years ago and living today in the West in many forms, from the debate on *governability*¹¹ to the debate on *diet Coke democracy*¹². In Russia, Putin may have only moderated and coped with his kind of fateful polycentrism, but he certainly did not initiate it. Polyarchy by itself is very distant from full utopian democracy. But full democracy is an ideal and has never been a reality. Real democracy has always been plagued by illegal activities. In itself, the notion of polyarchy means that small groups of interest have an effectively enforced right to freedom of expression, particularly political expression. Frequently, criminal groups are ordinary interest syndicates¹³. The famous Putin assertion made in Finland in October 2006, during a European Union meeting (“mafia is not a Russian world”), and the indications of numerous European scandals, made in the same occasion, are elements of the Russian vision: the unwillingness to accept lessons on democracy, and lessons in general. It is a Western habit to moralize and look down noses at others. But, given Russian history, a superiority complex is in the wrong place.

2. METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES: IGNORANCE AND KNOWLEDGE

From the open daily coverage of the *Moscow Times*, to the secret reports by the US ambassador in Moscow (uncovered by WikiLeaks), there is a strong collection of bad material about “the corrupt nexus at the heart of the Russian state”. Kremlinology and Sovietologists were not reliable in the past, due to their inability to foresee the fall of Communism, and are even less so now, when stunning revelations are still stuck in Cold War battle mode. The persistent Soviet Scare’s

11 Cfr. Crozier M., Huntington S.P., Watanuki J., *The Crisis of Democracy: Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission*, New York University Press, New York, 1975.

12 Berggruen Nicolas, Gardels Nathan, *Intelligent Governance for the 21st Century: A Middle Way between West and East*, Polity, London, 2012.

13 Block Alan, *East Side - West Side. Organizing Crime in New York 1930-1940*, University College Cardiff Press, Cardiff, 1980; Bovenkerk F., Levi M. (eds.), *The Organized Crime Community. Essays in Honor of Alan A. Block*, Springer, 2007.

lingering hold on Russia analysis is exposed by the labels. Here is post-Communist Russia in a nutshell: “Russia has become the world’s foremost spy-state”, “soft authoritarianism”, “not much has changed”, “hybrid regime”, “it’s like the Soviet Union”, “nomenklatura capitalism”, “Russia’s state media is totalitarian”, “Russian government has fallen back on traditional KGB ways of dealing”, “a mafia-controlled state”, “an atomised kleptocracy”, and so on: abused labels which seem to have returned off the set of a Cold War play that, unknown to die hard Sovietologists, was mothballed in 1991.

Luke Harding argues that Russia leadership operates according “to self-enriching mafia principles”. If the mafia were only an industry of self-enriching it should be a firm like many others. The fact that the “mafia category” by journalists, scholars, and politicians is used in improper manner, calls into question the reliability of contemporary democratic theory. In the Russian mafia literature there are frequent wild over-interpretation based on very scant evidence. Some part of the argument is perfectly sound and forcefully illustrated while another part is dressed up in the forms of a detective novel jargon.

In the West, the published literature on Russian criminality is huge, highly readable and persuasive, because it combines gory information with a rip-roaring writing. Countless books and articles have reported on the Russian mafia in breathtaking terms bordering on hysteria¹⁴. Many relate the Russian crimes with panache. This chilling description of innumerable blood-stained dealings is frequently pointed to give readers the shivers. This narrative is entertaining and, at times, as frightening as the darkest crime fiction: an absorbing and terrifying account of the true tragedy of an entire country. An Elizabethan spectacle with top people reciting the role of the main villain in the village. Titus Andronicus should stay well in it, but not Prince Myshkin.

14 Friedman Robert, *Red Mafia: How the Russian Mob Has Invaded America*, Little Brown & Co, New York, 2000, where there is this difference between the Russian mafia and the Italian mafia: whereas the Italian criminals generally desist from harming judges, prosecutors, journalists, and guiltless family members, the Russian criminals shoot anyone “just to see if their gun works”. A different discussion in Finckenauer J.O., Elin J.W., *Russian Mafia in America: Immigration, Culture, and Crime*, Northeastern, 2001, where there is a very interesting conclusion: “The Russian mafia is first, not Russian, second, not a mafia; and third, not even an organized crime. *Russkaya mafia? Nyet!*”, p. XIV. In the same book, see the excellent pages on how media distorts perceptions of organized crime.

This literature became a must for mafia buffs, but does not succeed in being both opinionated and precise. It has performed a excessive work of rebranding. It combines compelling horror with suspicion, hopes, values, history, and resentment. Rarely have we found a scientific analysis founded on unambiguous concepts and unpretentious methodology. Many pretentious observers speak quickly about history, but do not remember that history is a slaughter of “the happiness of peoples, the wisdom of States, and the virtue of individuals”¹⁵. Sometimes there is a clear pretence of allocating infantile certificates of good behavior and pathological superiority complex.

Amateurs of historical judgment are frequently implacable. While history is a servant of constructionist attitudes. Not only history, even reality is now increasingly structured by interests and power, fascinations and fears, immersed in a wash of electronic imagery and cybernetic information systems of all sorts. Mafia narrative is intrinsically controversial. As regards Russia, Western mafia pundits cite exact names, real facts and obscure events. In order to spot the main problems, here I shall present a list of the methodological issues.

1. Mafia narrative is intrinsically controversial because its protagonists necessarily do their business in secrecy and silence: they do not want go in jail. Historical reconstruction cannot use archival detective work, because archives do not exist: the phenomenon remains largely mysterious. If the phenomenon remains almost entirely undocumented, it is impossible to formulate judgments involving an entire country, including the more obscure, controversial, unresolved part of that history, frequently challenged, changed, unresolved even in trials conducted for years and by the mosr independent prosecutors in the world (this is the Italian case, where Andreotti and Berlusconi have been indicted, convicted, acquitted on the same charges: with the first judgment overturned in the appeal court and then overturned again by the Supreme Court of Cassation). The history of criminal organizations is little known; indeed some of it has been entirely shrouded in myth until now.

2. Because of the lack of certitudes, narrators are frequently playing the role of an industrious outsider or a touristic insider: the first is unaware of his ignorance, the second is conscious about his casual encounters. Both are wholly reliant on poor sources and published literature. They lean on personal experience, undisputed

¹⁵ Hegel G.W.F., *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, translated by Sibree J., *The Philosophy of History*, Batoche Books, Kitchener, Ontario, 2001, p. 35.

Western perspective, blatant exaggeration, and gripping storytelling. Empathetic immersion in the wild modern Russia do not allow snobbish conclusions.

3. Poor sources on an obscure problem inspire the infantile, or paranoid, or brief idea that mafia groups are directed or however connected in a criminal super-elite. The final destination is demonization and conspiracy theories (i.e., in the *Great Rouble Scam* case)¹⁶. There is substantial literature on the paranoid style of democratic politics. In the West, on internal affairs, the paranoid schizophrenics liked to see the CIA behind everything; in foreign affairs, the paranoid schizophrenics liked to see the KGB behind everything. Both generally attributed all troubles to one or another, sometimes in combination.

4. The paranoid style exalts itself in grandiosity and omnipotence. Mafia octopus corruptly co-opts or absorbs state institutions and representatives. Unwillingly, that mafia literature has created the myth of the mafia's invincibility. It is actually counterproductive, because some people could think that it is better to join in than fight.

5. Western mafiology is most frequently non academic and cannot be judged as one. However it can be judged from the perspective of a consequential ethics. It is theoretically and practically counterproductive. Ethics has pure explosive in his hands, because a moral judgment has practical consequences. If Russia is a "mafia State", some form of external intervention is required.

3. A CONTROVERSIAL EVALUATION

Mafia narrative is very controversial. Economists do not know exactly if mafia kills development or is its Achilles' heel. Everyone knows that the mafia is the contrary of progress, but countries plagued by the worse mafia (for instance, Mexico) have a very good economic performance (the same happened in Italy, in the past, when the country was the fifth largest industrial power on earth¹⁷). Nations can be socially dynamic and politically free even while they suffer the presence of widespread criminal organizations. Italy and Mexico are the most obvious case, but Japan, the US, Taiwan, and Hong Kong fit into the same frame.

¹⁶ Sterling Claire, *Crime Without Frontiers: The Worldwide Expansion of Organised Crime and the Pax Mafiosa*, Little, Brown, 1994.

¹⁷ LaPalombara Joseph, *Democracy, Italian Style*, Yale U.P., New Haven, 1987.

The economy is puzzled; the law even worse. In Italy, even the best lawyers back interpretative conundrum. When, in 2002, former Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti was sentenced to 24 years in prison (a trial concerning a 1979 killing of a journalist who supposedly used detrimental information about him), prime minister Silvio Berlusconi called it “the ultimate stage of a judicial scheme” to undermine moderate and rightist Italian political leaders and an example of “justice gone mad”. Mr. Andreotti had previously been acquitted on the same charges, in 1999. Then, the appeal court, in 2002, overturned that ruling. His lawyers continued to appeal it in the Supreme Court of Cassation which in conclusion cleared him, in 2003. In the national soul-searching, many people believe that the second sentence was right, even if finally overturned. On the contrary, many people believe that Mr. Andreotti (and Mr. Berlusconi after him) have been victims of overzealous, politically motivated prosecutors. None reject the idea that Mr. Andreotti and Mr. Berlusconi were politicians accustomed to compromises and pacts with the devil. But complicity with the mafia is another story.

The constant charges and countercharges of mafia responsibilities between journalists and politicians, victims and lawyers, have frequently thrown the country at a point of utter exasperation. Humanitarian external intervention has been not profitable to the crisis identity that swept through Italy for decades. A case in point is the critical evaluation¹⁸, written by Edward Luttwak about a book on Italy and mafia, by John Dickie, an internationally recognized specialist, whose works are spectacular bestsellers. He has been translated in 21 languages.

In order to find a path in notoriously intricate mafia woods, we will try to find help in other observers of savage landscape and quintessential humanity, as some Popes, some Presidents of the United States, and Charles Darwin.

4. BILL EMMOTT: A STEREOTYPE

I underline the celebration of Dickie’s interpretation made by Bill Emmott, the world known ex director of *The Economist*, author or collaborator in several reflections, books, movies, judicial decisions, about Italian mafia. Bill Emmott is

¹⁸ See Dickie John, *Mafia Republic: Italy’s Criminal Curse: Cosa Nostra, Camorra and ‘Ndrangheta from 1946 to the Present*, Sceptre, London 2013, and the Edward Luttwak review: “The Honoured Society”, *London Review of Books*, 35, 20, 10 October 2013, with the following exchange of letters, LRB, 24 October 2013 and 7 November 2013, pp. 29-30.

one of the best opinion makers in the world. He loves Italy and declared his love in the movie *Girlfriend in a coma* and in the book *Forza, Italia*. The former editor of *The Economist* admitted as much some time ago: “We can’t wait to find an excuse to wheel out the same old prejudices and clichés about Italy and the Italians. We want to talk about sex and beautiful women, and the Italian passion for calcio. (...) we adore discussing the Mafia”.

In the prestigious London journal *The Times*, 18th May 2013, Bill Emmott has published a very important review of the Dickie’s book. The beginning of Bill Emmott review is astonishing: “Italians often complain that foreigners are obsessed by the Mafia, turning a localized problem of organized crime into a stereotype that damages the image of a whole nation. Yet as John Dickie, a historian of Italy at University College London, shows in this chilling and eye-opening book, the real problem is that the stereotype is correct”. These lines deserve a terrific underscore, because they highlight at least two decisive points:

4.1. There is a stereotype that damages the image of a whole nation.

4.2. This stereotype is correct.

Obviously, prejudices, clichés, and stereotypes about Italy and the Italians, are not an English specialty. The Spanish paper *El País* published an article on Italy using the headline: “*La espagueti-democracia*”. The strap line was: “Italy revives its reputation as Europe’s Odd Man Out”¹⁹.

By definition stereotypes can be sometime true, but are essentially founded on ignorance: they are a brutal shortening of meaning, the contrary of a cautious and nuanced perception. Jumping beyond H. J. Gadamer and neurosciences, we do not want offend stereotypes. We live immersed in stereotyped simplifications which help us to live, because make sense of reality. In a world full of signs and symbols, stereotypes simplify and systematize the variety of our daily information, which is frequently overloading on us. Thanks to stereotypes, the complexity of our life is simplified and new information is more easily accepted, classified, recalled, predicted, and reacted to. There is a large literature on stereotypes such as racism and so on. Stereotypes serve to channel psychosis, rage, envy, brutality, aggression, and violence. But we can do a lot against it, including knowing human inevitable necessity of them. The problem is not worthwhile to social scientists

¹⁹ Sartori Giovanni, *La Democracia en 30 Lecciones*, Taurus, Madrid, 2008.

only; as Keynes told us, specific political decisions are guided by larger mind-sets, where stereotypes have their work cut out for them.

Bill Emmott certifies the existence of a stereotype about Italy. This is a stereotype among many others. From Jacob Burckhardt to Orson Welles, the relationship between crime and Italian history has been represented in trouble. Jacob Burckhardt and Orson Welles were mainly interested in Michelangelo and Leonardo, Machiavelli and Raffaello; they were aware about the abundance of crime in the Renaissance, but saw crime as a servant of splendor. After the stereotype changed rudely. When Denis McSmith wrote a *History of Italy* in some ways similar to that of John Dickie (and it was a large publishing success, certainly the best-selling volume in the world on Italian national history), some natives rebelled, emphasizing that a form of racism was visible in his prose, along with blatant distortion. Gioacchino Volpe, the greatest historian of Italian nationalism, wrote that Denis McSmith was unacceptable and unbelievable. Rosario Romeo, the greatest historian of industrial Italian development, wrote that Denis McSmith was unacceptable and unbelievable.

In the United Kingdom, stereotypes are not new. From the 15th to the 18th century, by the English ruling class, the Irish were frequently stereotyped as savages, so making their selling as slaves and displacement appear all the more justified. Exacerbated by political stereotypes, in Ireland, the great famine of 1740-1741, and the great famine of 1845–49, killed hundreds of thousands people and caused mass starvation and emigration. Ireland population dropped from over 8 million to 4.4 million in 1911.

The vibrant bard of Anglo-Saxon nationalism, Winston Churchill, wrote famous lines about Gandhi, or the Red Indians of America, or the black people of Australia, or the Polish, or the Chinese, or the Pakistanis, or the South Africans, or the Irish, and Jews. Some detested stereotypes were frequently present in his fabulous eloquence, from the worldwide Jewish conspiracy to accidental admiration of Hitler and Mussolini “patriotic achievement”²⁰.

There is a little English past that is unloved and it is, unlovely; yet we will try to bring our problem and its compelling consequences to light in an English-friendly study. In this perspective, I will underline many other English glories: the special kind of suspicious Enlightenment, Darwinian evolutionism, economic freedom,

20 James Lawrence, *Aristocrats: Power, Grace and Decadence*, Little Brown, New York 2009; Id., *Churchill and Empire: A Portrait of an Imperialist*, Pegasus, Cambridge, 2015.

the spirit of liberty, and republican tradition. It should be ridiculous a history of England built in stereotypes or in stories as the Opium War, or the anti Spanish alliance with pirates, and so on (Karl Schmidt used that way in his *Land und Meer*, written in his Nazi years). Obviously, Winston Churchill is greatly admirable and helpful in comprehension of democratic system and Denis McSmith is a distinguished historian and a highly readable author.

5. JOHN DICKIE AND HIS SUPPORTERS

The advertisement of Dickie books are frequently repeating: “This is a history everyone should read”. Famous historians made clear appraisal. Denis Mack Smith wrote: “Highly readable...compelling. The narrative is entertaining and, at times, as chilling as the darkest crime fiction. It combines compelling horror with clear, rational analysis”.

Not only foreigners wrote magnificent reviews on his evaluation about Italian history. In 2005 the President of the Italian Republic appointed John Dickie as *Commendatore dell’Ordine della Stella della Solidarietà Italiana*, the Order of the Star of Italian Solidarity. Clearly, Dickie has been supported by many Italians and his narrative is completely congruous with mainstream Italian interpretation²¹.

Not only a book has been so praised. For instance, in 2014, John Dickie published *Mafia Brotherhoods*. The research for the book was generously supported by a large national grant-making foundation in the United Kingdom. Clearly, Dickie’s interpretation is totally congruous with mainstream international interpretation.

6. EDWARD LUTTWAK AND HIS SUPPORTERS

Edward Luttwak made a long and compelling series of observations to John Dickie’s description on mafia issues. In order to spot the main differences between the two different visions of Luttwak and Dickie, I present a list of the diverging positions.

6.1 Luttwak was infuriated by the title of Dickie’s book: *Mafia republic*. Even if there is some evident failure of the Italian state to govern Sicily effectively since

²¹ Gammone Mariateresa, *Corruption in classical European criminology, 1876-1914*, International Forum on Crime and Criminal Law in the Global Era, Beijing, 2013.

unification, that title is too much. The title is a very good summary of Dickie's vision, but it could be seen as an infuriating vision (because it could be also seen as an highly misleading and stereotyped vision). Many people work for that Republic and some law-abiding Italians could be infuriated to know that they are citizens of a *Mafia republic* and it is worthwhile to note that even foreigners, as Luttwak, are infuriated. The point is that some infuriated observers think that Italy has been overzealous against mafia and hosted the best antimafia fighters (who frequently died in their fight).

6.2 In Luttwak's vision, Dickie has too many certitudes "about a phenomenon that remains almost entirely undocumented but for the deeply flawed documents that emerge from Italy's system of justice" (which is not completely reliable, Luttwak says). If the phenomenon "remains almost entirely undocumented", it is impossible to formulate judgments involving the entire history of the country, including the more obscure, controversial, unresolved part of that history, frequently changed, challenged, unresolved even in trials conducted for years and by the more independent prosecutors in the world.

6.3 Luttwak says: Dickie is "an industrious outsider, wholly reliant on published literature ... He added no errors to those of the published literature he has studied – much of it necessarily journalistic, very little of it scholarly". Here there are two accusations: against the outsiders and against the published literature.

6.4 In Luttwak analysis, the specificity of Sicilian situation is compelling. Environment and geography are more relevant than actors and history. The mafia is a local environmental adaptation, subordinated to main national and supranational systems. Unification was disastrous for Sicily. Even today, Sicily is afflicted by the euro. Sicilians are responsible for the grotesque inefficiency of their own regional and municipal governments, but Sicilians have solid reasons to resent the persistent economic damage that national and supranational institutions inflict on them.

6.5 To Luttwak in the old days the honoured society functioned as a kind of informal police force. To Dickie this idea is a mystification, littered with many other mystifications. It is important to underline a function of that kind of informal police force: a function of anticommunist containment, which (according to many observers) has been in the past a main reason for the endurance of mafia relics in contemporary Italy, legitimating high political connections.

6.6 Unhappy with the Luttwak review of his book, Dickie wrote: "If the mafia had a political ideology and an official interpretation of Sicilian history, Luttwak's

article would represent an excellent summary of it". The allusion is the silver bullet against someone who is labeled as a monster. Sometimes even staunch mafia opponents have been labeled as *unofficial interpreter*, *collaborator*, and *traitor*. Leonardo Sciascia is the best case in point.

6.7 Dickie impute to Luttwak the "infantile idea" that mafia networks "are united in a criminal super-elite". But he cannot believe how vast and treacherous is that criminal super-elite in the Luttwak circumstances. Outside the chorus of political correctness, there is not only some world famous novelist. In the past, some Luttwak "mystifications" (Dickie's words) were co-divided by the super-super-elite, including Catholic Popes and American Presidents. It is well known that Catholic leaders for decades have took it easy on mafia issues. They were not mafia accomplices, but they were convinced that communism was worse than the mafia and that the mafia was a kind of informal police force. Even Pope Ioannes Paulus II (born Karol Józef Wojtyła) was a friendly supporter of the Archbishop Marcinkus; above all, Pope Ioannes Paulus II hardly and openly supported Senator Giulio Andreotti, the hypothetical head of the mafia octopus, in the years when Vatican money was heavily used to finance Solidarnosc in Poland. In the November 1982, in the middle of the worse mafia killings, Pope Ioannes Paulus II visited Sicily and and not once mentioned the word mafia. For sure, a lot of mafia money disappeared in the Banco Ambrosiano, and the Vatican admitted some form of responsibility in the failure of that bank, giving in the final settlement a payment of 250 million dollars to the creditors.

From Sicily to Poland, from Washington to Harvard²², Luttwak is not alone. Behind him there are silent witnesses. Not only the Vatican soft pedaled explosive issues. Even the President of the United States have been people at least ignorant or guilty or deserving sincere comprehension. I will try to do it. Dickie was not the first to speak about the mafia Republic. When another implacable literary foe of mafia, Alexander Stille, wrote a famous book²³, an embarrassing review was published²⁴. M. Mewshaw (born in Washinton D. C. and lived in Rome as an editor at the *New York Times* magazine) wrote that for years the CIA, FBI, DEA, IRS worked in Italy, exchanging information with the corresponding Italian law-enforcement agencies, and cooperating in many initiatives. The antennas of the De-

22 Luttwak, Edward, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire*, Belknap, Harvard, 2011.

23 Stille Alexander, *Excellent Cadavers: The Mafia and the Death of the First Italian Republic*, Pantheon, New York, 1995.

24 Mewshaw Michael, "A Chronicle of Corruption and Terror", *The Washington Post*, June 4, 1995

partment of State are the best equipped and the most powerful; it is not possible that they did not know what everyone knew in Italy.

The review concluded that it was unlikely the official position of the American government, which seemed to forget many years of intense collaboration. In fact, that collaboration was not denied. In June 1998, testifying in the trial of seven-time prime minister Giulio Andreotti (who was accused of ignominious mafia connections), Maxwell Raab (who served as American ambassador in Italy under President Ronald Reagan) and Peter Secchia (who served as American ambassador in Italy under president George Bush), both claimed to have no knowledge whatsoever about any link between Mr. Andreotti and the mafia. Andreotti said that their testimony represented a “certificate of good behavior”, given by ambassadors and presidents²⁵.

A.D. Sofaer, already main legal consultant in Ronald Reagan and George Bush administrations, was chosen by Andreotti as a lawyer in the college of defense against the accusations of mafia responsibility. Sofaer was a great expert from different relevant points of view: from 1979 to 1985, as a state administrative judge in New York and then nominated in the district court for the Southern District of New York, he had many times considered Cosa nostra activities. At the end, in 2003, the Supreme Court of Cassation cleared Andreotti, sentencing that the Italian seven time prime minister, *after 1980* demonstrated “ever more incisive commitment to the antimafia cause”, to the extent that he even put his own and his family’s lives in danger.

Until 1984 (the year of Buscetta’s collaboration), the profound transformation of the mafia was not clear to many observers, including judges and politicians. In the past, the mafioso was a rifleman in an agricultural society. After, he became a rifleman in a technotronic society, and (thanks to drug trafficking) the owner of a fantastic amount of money²⁶.

25 Cfr. A. Antonov (A. Fallico), *Il Gatto rosso*, Meridiano Zero, Milano, 2014.

26 Sidoti Francesco, "Italy: A Clean-up after the Cold War", *Government and Opposition*, 28, 1, 1993, pp. 9-37; Sidoti Francesco, *The Italian Secret Services, in AA.VV., Geheimdienste in Europa, Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, Wiesbaden, 2009*.

7. TRUTH AND HISTORY

In many judicial cases, jurists distinguish between *juridical* truth and *factual* truth. The more naïve speak about historical truth: there is an infinite literature on the falsity of historians. If history has some truth, it is (as Hegel told in the first pages of *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*) that history is a slaughter of “the happiness of peoples, the wisdom of States, and the virtue of individuals”.

History can be blatantly false. Great historians say, with more tact, *invented*²⁷. We can invent stories and history, following interests and passions, circumstances and opportunities. In the polytheism of values and in the consequent anarchy of interpretation, everyone can choose the evidence “that suits”, said Umberto Eco. There is full awareness on sources and evidences quandary, already in the first Chinese historiography, about three thousand years ago, and, in the West, from the beginning, in Herodotus and Thucydides. The two founders of Western historiography were well aware of sources reliability. Thanks to them, historians of the fourth century BC formulated our correct endeavor: telling *what had been done*. But, who knows? Cicero called Herodotus the “father of history”, yet Plutarch called Herodotus as the “father of lies”. In the first chapter of his *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Thucydides wrote: “And with reference to the narrative of events, far from permitting myself to derive it from the first source that came to hand, I did not even trust my own impressions, but it rests partly on what I saw myself, partly on what others saw for me, the accuracy of the report being always tried by the most severe and detailed tests possible. My conclusions have cost me some labor from the will for coincidence between accounts of the same occurrences by different eye-witnesses, arising sometimes from imperfect memory, sometimes from undue partiality for one side or the other”. Shortly, in Hegel words, history is a slaughter where different people say different stories. The ‘polyphonic’ qualities of a good historian is in the ability to expand his narrative, including many protagonists and bearing contradictory perspectives rather than a single authorial outlook. A good historian knows how many inventions there are in every narrative, where invention can be a forgery or a creative fabrication, moved by the best intention.

²⁷ Hobsbawm Eric, Ranger Terence, *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge U. P., Cambridge, 2012.

In fact, today, a famous essay of Giulio Bollati has for title *the invention of modern Italy*²⁸. As in any place, in any land where people say this land is my land, the Italian national character is first invention, then history. Invention versus invention, I prefer the invention made by people who died fighting against the mafia. Giovanni Falcone, for instance, who objected the habit to handle the mafia as an overused word in all-inclusive terms: a stereotype²⁹.

8. GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS

Italy is not only the country of the mafia; it is also the country of the best antimafia³⁰. In twenty years, there have been important achievements, sometimes underestimated. In definition and prosecution of the associative crimes, Italy has scored some spectacular successes in its decades-long fight against the mafia, capturing top bosses, persuading turncoats to testify, and encouraging ordinary citizens to resist shakedowns. Social antimafia movements have been strong and influential³¹. Today there is in Palermo a genuine and effective antimafia mayor and there is in Sicily a genuine and effective antimafia regional president.

Why has been invented a so bad stereotype about Italian history and the *mafia Republic*? There are many reasons for the birthplace of a negative interpretative scheme and for a transformation in a stereotype. Primarily, a stereotype is made by social interests and narrated by special interests. Frequently there is a false consciousness without consciousness of falsity.

Politicians, journalists, judges, and scholars, have specific interests. The description of the mafia as an issue has been connected to many political conflicts. For instance, the Italian left for decades denounced rightly mafia crimes, and documented atrocities against popular movements and widespread opposition.

28 Bollati Giulio, *L'invenzione dell'Italia moderna. Leopardi, Manzoni e altre imprese ideali prima dell'Unità*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino, 2014.

29 Cfr. Gammona Mariateresa, Sidoti Francesco, *Giovanni Falcone e la scuola siciliana della giustizia*, in Costantino S., Giurintano C., Lo Verde F.M. (a cura di), *Lecture e riletture sulla Sicilia e sul Meridione*, FrancoAngeli, Milano, 2015.

30 Sidoti Francesco, *The Italian Political Class*, in "Government and Opposition", vol. 28, n.3, Summer 1993; Sidoti F., "The Significance of the Italian Elections", *Government and Opposition*, vol. 29, n.3, Summer 1994; La Spina A., "The Italian Fight Against the Italian Mafia", in Paoli L. (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Organized Crime*, Oxford U. P., Oxford, 2014, pp. 590-611.

31 Santino Umberto, *Mafia and Antimafia: A History*, Tauris, London, 2014.

In an open society, free journalism and free speech are elementary foundations of civilization, progress, and democracy. Clearly, journalism plays a vital role in creating a global system of checks and balance. Access to free information empowers citizen with the tools they need in order to participate in the democratic process. Many journalists are proud “moral guardians” and it is well-known that many journalists died in Italy and everywhere just because they were in the front row against the mafia. So said, Even Theodore Roosevelt, in 1906, cautioned about possible pitfalls of muckraker reporting, while acknowledging the benefit of muckraking journalism.

Sensationalism is a temptation, in order to attract attention and increase circulation or audience share. In media studies, the first criteria deciding what is “suitability” concerns satisfaction. Even editors favor narratives that have a large social impact. Ritualistic mafia-bashing alternates between gripping storytelling and pretentious analysis. Narrators are sellers. Sometimes their pages are filled in a book, but are journalistic in essence. Generally speaking, mafia narrative is highly readable because must be commercial, so is not always reliable - much of it is necessarily journalistically founded, not scholarly. Supported by uncertain evidence, mainstream mafia narrative goes on to make bigger, bolder and much less supported claims, in order to reach a wider audience. The mafia complicities and the sinister conspiracy have been a boon for writers.

Why are bad news welcomed? From Aristotle thereafter, we know that a story must be plotted around a tragic incident which grabbles the reader’s attention. In some respect even global village was not very different from the ancient theater and circus. Marshall McLuhan emphasized that, in order to sell the good news (the advertisement) in the contemporary media you need to have a lot of bad news. For contemporary media, the best news is the bad news, “as any newspaper can confirm from the start of the press until today”. In this regard, McLuhan produced some of his most famous aphorisms: “Real news is bad news ... Advertisements are all good; the news is all bad”. Obviously Mafia was not in the bad news McLuhan stresses! He thinks about things such as floods or other natural disasters, “on the ground, at sea, in the sky,” but a political disaster is consistent with this theory (which I revisit with the help of the subsequent literature, from Debord to Baudrillard, from Jeffrey C. Alexander to Manuel Castells). The general point has been synthesized by Gary Kenyon and William Randall: “no trouble, no tale; no ill, no thrill; no agony, no adventure”.

Sensationalism is responsible for bad news. But it is a long and complex history. Among the classics, one must quote the *bösartigem Wohlbehagen*, a “malicious pleasure” connected to the misfortunes of others, which really must be profoundly rooted in humanity. About it, in the *Metaphorologie*, Blumenberg cites the ancient verses of Lucretius.

On Italy, the *bösartigem Wohlbehagen* is operated and motivated by experts. Donatien Alphonse François, Marquis de Sade wrote about Italy: “Why does Heaven send such wealth to those so little able to appreciate it?”. Many Italians suppose that the Marquis de Sade is still living and fighting against them.

9. A VICTORY

Organized crime is a huge presence in the global economy. It is odious, parasitic, violent, and always debilitating. But the Italian Republic was not so bad. The narrative on the Sicilian mafia could be less pessimistic than some illustrious scholars say. In any case, they are all honorable scholars. They say that Italy was a mafia Republic. If that is true, it is a serious fault, and Italians have paid seriously for it. With the permission of those scholars — they are all honorable men—I have come here to finish my lines speaking on a victory.

Frequently, journalists, investigators, prosecutors, politicians, describe the mafia as an all-powerful enemy able to control everything and everyone. This simplification is factually incorrect, sociologically hazardous, ethically treacherous, and finally counterproductive under the political point of view. In fact, stating that the mafia has had almighty power may lead to the argument that it is not to be opposed, prompting people and public opinion in despair and passivity. On the contrary, the mafia has been fought with noteworthy success both in Italy and in the United States since the beginning of the 1980s, thanks to new people, new laws, and new institutions specialized in the fight against mafia, drugs and crime enterprises.

Giovanni Falcone was murdered by the mafia in 1992 and many others illustrious institutional Italian figures have been murdered, but today the top mobsters are in jail and will die in jail. Nowhere have the mafias been investigated and prosecuted as they have in Italy. Nowhere has corruption been as thoroughly analysed and comprehended. Nowhere else had the power elite to be as careful as in Italy; there are impartial prosecutors and judges. Historical victories have been achieved since the early 1990s and the Sicilian mafia has entered a period of acute crisis in Italy

and in the USA. The Sopranos symbolize the end of an era: the Sicilian-American mafia on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

Suspicious experts say, can the mafia ever be defeated? The Italian government may have delivered only a temporary setback. Problems are real, but the successes are also real. This does not mean that *Cosa Nostra* is thrashed or that law enforcement control should be reduced. The mafia must be seen within a new international context, born after the Berlin wall³².

In the global village, fictional accounts have room and dignity. The victory against the Sicilian mafia is a hyphenated victory, made in Italy and in the USA. To a large extent, the key to achievement was the ability to collaborate. The true antimafia account should be about international collaboration, partnership, mutual friendship, and common values. A sincere antimafia endeavor should point to the importance of alliances in an increasingly complicated and interconnected world. In Italy and in Russia, the Hollywood mafia narratives are an ancient plot, which can be completely understood only in a general perspective about simplistic fictional accounts.

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PALERMO I MOSKVA - MAFIJAŠKI STEREOTIPI

Apstrakt

U radu se elaboriraju stereotipi u vezi sa mafijom koji se tiču Palerma i Moskve. Organizovani kriminal je i više nego prisutan u globalnoj ekonomiji. Mafija je suštinski kontroverzna jer njeni protagonisti uglavnom rade u tajnosti i tišini. Suštinska borba protiv mafije se mora zasnivati na međunarodnoj saradnji, partnerstvu, obostranom prijateljstvu i zajedničnim vrednostima. Iskreno nastojanje borbe protiv mafije bi trebalo da ukazuje na značaj udruživanja u sve komplikovanijem i međusobno povezanom svetu. U Italiji i Rusiji, glamurizovana holivudska mafija je naracija prošlosti, koja se jedino može u potpunosti razumeti kroz opštu perspektivu simplističkih funkcionalnih susreta.

Ključne reči: Mafija, sociologija, Italija, Rusija, demokratija, Palermo, nasilje.