

MIGRATION AND MAFIA ACTIVITIES: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS OF ITALIAN MIGRANTS' CRIMINAL PRACTICES IN THE BELGIAN FOOD SECTOR.

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If money comes into the world with a congenital blood-stain on one cheek, capital comes dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt'.
(Karl Marx – *Capital*)

1. MAFIA PRACTICES "AROUND THE TABLE". RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

In recent decades, many criminological and journalistic works have studied the relationship between society and criminal powers and, more specifically, between mafia activities and international mobility (Fijnaut, Paoli 2004). Conversely, socio-anthropological researches have shown little interest in this topic due to the difficulty to conduct in-depth investigations on a social phenomenon that takes its roots in the grey zone between legality and illegality.

This research is inscribed in a socio-anthropological and ethnographic perspective (Whyte, 1943 Trasher 1927, Becker 1963; Bourgois, 2003; Venkatesh 2013) and aims to understand the relationship between some Italian migrants, certain economic activities and mafia practices (use of force, violence and threat as means of wealth accumulation) in Belgium.

Mafia activities taking place in Belgium are compared to those which are carried out in southern Italy, the society of origin of the migrants involved in the study (Sayad 1999), in order to highlight the different kinds of relationship between mafia practices, transnational economic networks and the Belgian context (Varese 2011).

The research questions guiding this study focus on the relationship between the role of some Italian migrants in Belgium and the proliferation of mafia practices within capitalistic economic processes: Is there a relationship between Italian immigration and the establishment of economic and mafia activities in Belgium? Are mafia practices exported through migratory flows and cultural ties, as the official discourse seems to suggest? Have they played a role in Belgian elites' accumulation of power and profit? Is there a relationship between the economic processes of capitalism – in which legal and illegal economies are inextricably intertwined - and economic practices that are based on the exercise of violence and heterogeneous groups of interest?

The research hypothesis is that the mafia practices of old and new Italian migrants in Belgium are not the result of the exportation of criminal activities through migratory or cultural ties, but rather the outcome of a complex system of production in which entrepreneurial careers of migrants become criminal careers (Sanfilippo, Palidda 2012; Santino 1994; 2007; Vercellone, Lebert 2001, Ruggiero 1996). In this view, the diffusion of mafia practices is the result of a complex adaptation to the Belgian economic market and society, where these activities are not inscribed in structured and vertical organizations, but they are rooted in a system of relations that goes beyond Italian communities, involving a range of local actors who aim to accumulate capital and power.

To verify this hypothesis, I examine the different types of relationships between migration, economic activities and mafia practices in the food sector, which is characterized by the presence of several Italian enterprises.

Here I propose a theoretical framework that aims to go beyond traditional paradigms of interpretation to investigate the dynamics of the capitalistic economy and the relational system in which these practices are rooted and flourish (Venkatesh, Levitt 2000; Venkatesh 2008; Vercellone, Lebert 2001 Santino 2007; Sciarrone 2009).

This socio-anthropological approach, based on the ethnographic technique of participant observation (Malinowski 1929), aims to contribute to the scientific literature on this topic providing new data and knowledge about the relationship between migration, economic activities and criminal practices in the era of global capitalism.

2. CONTEMPORARY MAFIA ACTIVITIES AND INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY: BRIEF *EXCURSUS* ON TWO THEORETICAL APPROACHES

In recent decades, there have been two major schools of thought which have dominated the academic and public debate about the relationship between mafia and international mobility and on the capability of criminal organizations to move from their places of origin to different immigration contexts. The first one has developed the concept of “transnational globalized crime” (Sterling 1995; Shelley 1999, Williams 2001; Castells 2001) and the second one has focused on the “demand for extra-legal protection” (Reuter 1987; Gambetta 1993 Varese 2011).

The scientific assumptions of the first group of researchers link the spread of organized criminality to the advent of globalization and the rise in migration flows (Sterling 1995). According to these scholars, mafias are real multinational corporations of crime, increasingly independent from a specific territory and detached from the sovereignty on which the modern state system is based. Therefore, the international activity of criminal organizations is facilitated by the demolition of language barriers and the increased mobility. Criminal organizations move around the world as big corporations aiming to expand in new economic markets and benefit from cheap labour and abundance of raw materials in certain areas of the world (Shelley 2003).

According to Phil Williams (2001), current criminal organizations are able to migrate easily. Castells (2001) agrees with this interpretation and identifies a series of places where, in his opinion, mafias have recently established: for example, *Cosa Nostra* (Sicilian mafia) in Germany, the Chinese triads in the Netherlands, etc.. This approach – drawing from the concept of “liquid modernity” of Zygmunt Bauman (2000) – is based on the idea that mafias are “liquid” and autonomous organizations, which make business all over the world. This “liquidity” is not connected to the availability of monetary resources, but is directly linked to a specific interpretation of the modernity in which the control of the territory has been replaced by a fluidity that is not well specified. Consequently, mafias are conceived as sorts of “universal octopuses” (Sterling 1990), who create networks or engage in conflicts on the basis of changing core interests. This interpretation of mafias is dominant in several Western political and institutional environments.

Differently, the hypothesis of the second group of researchers argues that the transplantation of mafias is not a simple process. Moreover, the advent of globalization and the intensification of international economic flows help criminal organizations to expand their businesses without physically moving from a country to another (Varese 2011). Hence, the presence of mafias away from their places of origin is not the product of globalization, but the consequence of the repressive action carried out by the state in a specific country (Varese 2011).

According to what is argued by Reuter (1987) and Gambetta (1993), mafias do not move from their places of origin in conditions of normality, but, when they are pushed to move (because of changes in the legal, economic or political system), they tend to privilege locations where they already have contacts (relatives, friends etc.). The presence of some mafia criminals abroad does not automatically lead to the establishment of mafias in these contexts (Varese 2011). Indeed, a mixture of factors is needed for mafias to take roots in a context that is far from their societies of origin. First of all, the absence of competing criminal groups that offer illegal protection is fundamental. The entrenchment of a foreign criminal organization is more likely to take place when its presence in the new context is related to the opening of new markets that are not effectively regulated by local authorities (Gambetta 1993). Hence, where the transplantation of mafias occurs in more or less distant territories, it is related to a demand for “criminal protection” (Varese 2011); in other words, the presence of large illegal markets, widespread real estate speculation, the absence of commercial barriers and the inability of the State to efficiently solve local conflicts tend to generate this type of demand.

According to Varese (2011) and Gambetta (1993), mafias do not move easily because their strong conflict mediation function is rooted in the context of origin. However, the presence of former members of mafia groups, who migrated as a consequence of stricter policies or to improve their social condition can enhance the transplantation of criminal organizations in more or less developed countries, where governments are weak (Gambetta 1993). In these contexts, institutions may be

unable to protect “property rights” (private property), favouring the growth of a demand for extra legal protection. Mafias can provide services to companies and play a central role in the regulation of and access to certain sectors of the economy, exercising a dispute resolution function, which is prevalently achieved through the use of violence (Gambetta 1993).

Hence, according to the Oxford school, mafias flourish in contexts where institutions do not govern the economy and fail elsewhere. (Varese 2011, Gambetta 1993).

This literature has often failed to fully understand the complex link between mafia phenomena and the relational contexts in which they take place. Moreover, these studies have not considered mafia activities in certain economic, social and political contexts that are completely different from those where they originally developed. Indeed, if on the one hand a part of this literature has emphasized the importance of the relationship between migrants and migratory contexts in the development of criminal activities, on the other hand it has failed to satisfactorily study the complex relationship between organized crime and migration in the places of arrival and departure of migrants. Indeed, if the first approach to the study of “transnational crime” makes a superficial analogy between migration and mafias in the context of the globalization, the second group (the Oxford school), tends to reproduce classic stereotypes, which are largely based on the old "deficit theories" and used to interpret mafia phenomena. In other words, they refer to the absence of the State where mafias are primary actors in economic regulation.

4. MAFIAS, « PARADIGM OF COMPLEXITY », « MAFIA BOURGEOISIE » AND PROCESSES OF PRIMITIVE ACCUMULATION. SOME ASPECTS OF THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.

In light of these preliminary reflections, I would like to propose a different theoretical framework to thoroughly investigate the formation of mafia economic activities and their materialistic and relational nature. This approach builds on the idea that mafias do not operate in the absence of States and Governments, or against them, but they compete with other institutional actors to the political organization of the society. In this domain, and on the basis of the different contexts, mafias exert more or less hegemony (Gramsci 1975, Bourdieu 2012; Debord).

This perspective draws from on a series of studies conducted at an international level, which theorize the “paradigm of complexity” (crime, accumulation, power, cultural code, social consensus) to understand the Sicilian Mafia (Santino 1994; 2006; 2007). This paradigm analyses the relationships between crime and criminal organizations and between mafia and mafia practices. Moreover, it highlights the links between crime and the socio-economic context, those between legal and illegal activities, and finally, those between criminal groups, social actors and institutions (Santino 2007).

According to Santino's “paradigm of complexity”, «mafia is a set of criminal organizations [...] which act in a large and branched relational context drawing a system of violence and illegality that aims to accumulate wealth and to obtain positions of power, which also uses a cultural code and enjoys a certain popular support (Santino 2006, p. 246)».

This definition allows to study criminal organizations in their real human dimension and in relation to the economic and social context in which they operate. But, more importantly, it pays attention to key aspects of mafias: the accumulation of economic power and its implementation through relational strategies.

Umberto Santino (2007) states that mafia phenomena have to be analysed as a “multi-sided prism” (Santino 2006, p. 246), which holds criminal, social, economic, political and cultural aspects that are deeply rooted in the capitalistic dynamics of society.

The relational context in which mafia groups operate is interwoven with relations of kinship, friendship, complicity and common interests, giving rise to a “social bloc” that crosses the society as a whole. This criminal heterogeneous composition includes the most disadvantaged social classes as well as the middle and upper classes. At the bottom of this diagram are the lower classes (sub-proletariat, unemployed, etc.), which are occupied as precarious and flexible labour workers in legal and illegal activities. Conversely, at the top of this social bloc are the professionals of the middle

and upper classes (lawyers, financial advisors, doctors, accountants, notaries etc.), who represent the strongest sections of mafias. Therefore, in this scheme, it is possible to find entrepreneurs associated with mafia and politicians, but also public officers or policemen linked to mafias through common interests (De Biase 2011; Biquet, Favarel-Garrigues, Santino 2007).

In this “social bloc” the value of the various components is not equivalent, but it is characterized by the same power and class relations that are generally present in the society. Indeed, the dominant function is exercised by the legal/illegal actors (entrepreneurs, politicians, heads of institutions, members of government, professionals, police officers mafia bosses, etc...) that Santino describes as “mafia bourgeoisie” (Santino 2006). This concept is at the origins of mafia power and it had already been analysed by Leopoldo Franchetti (an important politician of the Italian historical right) after the Unification of Italy in his work on Sicily. He stated that mafia leaders were “the troublemakers of the middle class” or upper class, who played the role of capitalists and entrepreneurs in the mafia system (Franchetti 1877).

Other authors, such as Lenonardo Sciascia (1970) and Mario Mineo (1970), defined this social composition as “mafia bourgeoisie”, “capitalistic-mafia bourgeoisie” or a «social class that can be generally defined as bourgeoisie, more accurately “mafia bourgeoisie” (Sciascia 1970, p. 77)» which is profoundly rooted in the economic and social context. However, this concept, which is useful to analyse the most important aspect of criminal organizations – i.e. the economic and relational dimension of mafias - has rarely been used in the studies on mafia activities.

The concept of “mafia bourgeoisie” aims at explaining two distinct and fundamental dimensions of mafias:

- 1) the relational system in which organized criminal groups are rooted and that constitutes the necessary basis to their reproduction (Santino 2006);
- 2) the role of private violence and illegality in the economic process of accumulation and in the implementation of relations of domination and subordination.

Violence and illegality, as noted by Marx (1967) in the first volume of “The Capital”, have played a fundamental role in the accumulation process of capitalism during the historical phases that led to the transition from feudalism to capitalism (Marx 1967, Wallerstein 1984). This assumption explains the latest socio-economic shifts from fordism to post-fordism until the advent of the neoliberal globalization, in which, as stated by Harvey (2005), new capitalistic mechanisms of reproduction and accumulation are reinforced through a violent process of “accumulation by dispossession” (privatization of public services, expropriation of “common goods” etc.) (De Angelis 2001; Sanchez 2012; Glassman 2006).

These phases, in certain areas, have prompted the development of mafias, which during the years have gained a great ability to adapt to different social scenarios and to accumulate wealth (Santino 2006; Sciarrone 2011; Saint-Victor 2012).

Hence, this dynamic of primitive accumulation (based on expropriation and exercise of violence) has marked both the history of the mafia and the history of capitalism (Vercellone, Lebert 2001; De Angelis 2001). For this reason, building on the work of Vercellone and Lebert (2001), I propose to analyse mafias as endogenous forms of capital accumulation.

This theoretical approach contradicts the liberal paradigm on which the majority of mafia studies are based. Indeed, the fundamental postulates of liberal political economy and liberal political philosophy lay on the idea that the “welfare state” and the market are the institutions which separate economic activities from the exercise of the violence, legitimizing and guaranteeing property rights due to individual work (Smith 1776 Weber 1922). In this view, primitive accumulation processes take place in primordial stages of capitalism when market forces are not yet established.

In this context, mafia economic activities would be considered as products of the violation of the market laws or the result of certain societies remained at the margins of capitalistic development.

Hence, on the base of these liberal postulates, mafia organizations - that is to say a series of

heterogeneous groups who conduct economic activities aimed at the accumulation of capital through the exercise of force - tend to be analysed as the product of socio-economic forces and cultural models that are incompatible with the values and the ethic of capitalism and democracy (Vercellone, Lebert 2001).

In this way, mafia activities and mafia's colonization of a part of the economic market through criminal practices are presented as an exogenous shock that is brought about by the revival of certain practices that belong to the initial stage of the "social contract", which is at the origin of the foundation of the "Welfare State" and the capitalistic market (Arlacchi 1983).

For these reasons, Arlacchi (1983) considers mafia phenomena as the result of the weakening of the State that has lost the legitimate monopoly of violence, or as the product of the degeneration of the civil society, which betrays the values and ethic of capitalism (Vercellone, Lebert 2001).

On the contrary, the history of capitalism, as noted by Marx (1967, p.714) and Braudel (1979), has shown that this system has always been characterized by a systematic violation of the market laws as they have been theorized by the liberal political economy. In Braudel's (1979) words, the domain *par excellence* of capitalism is an area of "anti-market" «where the great predators roam and the law of the jungle operates. This is the real home of capitalism (Braudel 1979, tomo II, p. 197.)».

This point is particularly relevant, because these dynamics of capitalistic accumulation of wealth are at the heart of mafia powers and of "mafia bourgeoisie", who increase their capital and profit within the accumulation processes of capitalism through a system of relation that involves a variety of social and institutional actors.

Hence, this perspective, which focuses on primitive accumulation processes of capital, provides a better understanding of the relationship between "capitalistic bourgeoisie" and "mafia bourgeoisie" and between "capitalistic entrepreneurs" and "mafia entrepreneurs".

To make an example, the "mafia bourgeoisie" of the Gabellotti¹ in Sicily is similar to the bourgeoisie of the enclosure movement in England (Franchetti 1877 Marx 1872). The Sicilian agrarian bourgeoisie used the same predatory methods that the English enclosure bourgeoisie had adopted to promote the capitalistic transformation of the countryside, expropriating lands on the base of an essentially private and illegal initiative, with the support and encouragement of the State (Dockès and Rosier 1983; Marx 1967, pp. 724-725). Therefore, in England, as in southern Italy, the illegal expropriation of lands could be read as one of the main modalities of the primitive accumulation of capital. In these two cases the capitalistic transformation of social relations in the countryside and the same capitalistic processes of accumulation have generated in the British context the birth of "industrial bourgeoisie" and the birth of "mafia bourgeoisie" in the Sicilian context (Vercellone, Lebert 2001).

These aspects of the dynamics of accumulation in the capitalistic process are particularly important because a great part of the literature on mafia seems to maintain that mafia accumulation can be exclusively achieved through illegal trafficking, racketeering and other criminal practices.

These aspects of mafia accumulation represent only a small part of mafia economic power, as the most important mafia activities are profoundly rooted within the economic dynamics of capitalism (Vercellone, Lebert 2001). Another example of what I want to demonstrate here can be found in the reconstruction processes that characterized Southern Italy during the Second post-war period. In this context, mafia organizations guided, after facilitating the military landing of Americans in Sicily, the development of a part of the country making enormous profits in the construction, industrial and agrarian sectors and repressing all those social movements which tried to oppose to their interests (Hobsbawm 1959; Barbagallo 2010, Santino 2006). These dynamics have characterized the history of mafias from XIX century to date, not only in Italy but also in the United States, Canada, Germany, Belgium, etc. (Santino 1994 Forgione 2009).

In light of these considerations, I argue that the development of modern mafias has its starting point

¹ The Gabellotti were the land manager of the Sicilian aristocracy during the process of the Italian Unification (1861) and they supported the action of northern Italian troops detaching themselves from the aristocracy who had remained loyal to the power of the Bourbons. At that point, they expropriated the lands of the local aristocracy by force and, with the support of the new Italian State, became the owner of wide land estates and created a new class of agrarian bourgeoisie.

in the very mechanisms of the capitalistic economy where they lead their activities through the construction of complex and heterogeneous systems of relations aiming at the accumulation of capital and power and led by the action of the "mafia bourgeoisie" (Vercellone, Lebert 2001 Santino 1994).

5. SHARING THE NETWORKS: EXTRACTS OF MY FIELDWORK DIARY. AN EXEMPLARY STORY

Friday 14 March 2014:

Salvatore, one of my informers, has been arrested again two weeks ago. During this time, my relationship with Jonathan has become closer. He has invited me several times at his house for dinner and I have decided to tell him more about my research in order to protect myself, especially after a careful reflection about the arrest of Salvatore and the time spent together. We have talked about my research and Jonathan has offered to introduce me to some of his contacts who work in the Belgian food sector. In particular, he wants me to meet a man he calls "my godfather in Belgium". He is an Italian entrepreneur, Mr Umberto, who is a very powerful man, emigrated from Sicily forty years ago and currently living in the Flanders. According to Jonathan, Mr Umberto is the king of the Belgian food sector as far as Italian products are concerned.

I called Mr Umberto one week ago and I took an appointment for today at 9:30 in the Flanders, in a village where he owns an Italian food products import/export company. I asked Jonathan to come with me, and I will pick him up later, so we can go together. I really want Jonathan to come with me because he is in business with Mr Umberto and this would give me the opportunity to listen to very interesting conversations. We arrive on time at Mr Umberto's hangar (Jonathan told me that Mr Umberto is a very punctual man). When we arrive, Mr Umberto is alone in the office of his hangar. He has a number of offices in Brussels, Antwerp and Charleroi, but he has decided to directly manage his business from home. Indeed, he lives not far from the office, in a huge villa surrounded by about ten acres of woods. We knock at the door of his office and he immediately replies: "Come on guys, I was waiting for you". Jonathan introduces me and Mr Umberto smiles and says in a very polite way: "Dear Marco, welcome to my home". Then he continues: "First of all, let's have a cappuccino at an Italian café near here and then we can discuss anything about your research and my personal story". Mr Umberto is almost seventy years old, he is not a broad man, he has white hair, a bushy moustache and a really big nose. He is dressed in an elegant fashion, slightly old style. We go across the hangar and we reach Mr Umberto's car to go to the Italian café. During the trip, Mr Umberto tells me that he is one of the leaders of the Italian community in that area. Indeed, when he arrived in Belgium, back in the 1960s, he founded an Italian newspaper with Filippo (another important Italian man who has worked at the European Commission for a long time and is now the president of an influential Italian association in Belgium), a few years ago they had a dispute for economic reasons and Mr Umberto hints that there have even been episodes of violence between them. When we arrive at the Italian café, the situation becomes extremely embarrassing for me. Indeed, as we go through the entrance the people we meet greet Mr Umberto with respect and great reverence. Some of them, Italian or Turkish men even kiss Mr Umberto's hands. People who kiss Mr Umberto's hands are very nice to me and show me great respect because I am with him. Once we are in the café, the owner and his wife come to say hello to Mr Umberto: "Hello Zio Umberto, what a nice surprise is your visit this morning. The table over there is always free for you. I will immediately be back to your table to take your order". We are not yet at the table that the lady is ready to note the order and she moves our chairs to make us more comfortable. After that, as I had imagined, Jonathan and Mr Umberto start to discuss about their business. They talk about a certain Luigi, an Italo-Belgian entrepreneur who does not pay producers in time and is causing many troubles to Mr Umberto. To this regard, Mr Umberto says: "we need to understand that if Luigi does not stop, we will make him very unhappy. I think that with people like him we should use the old methods. We go to him in his restaurant, and while he is eating we push his head four times against the plate and if he does not understand, we shoot a bullet in his leg". I do my best not to show my astonishment, but I cannot talk and I shut up until Mr Umberto, concerned about my

silence, turns his eyes to me and says: "Dear Marco, there are many people without dignity in the business world that we must keep out of the market because they do not keep the promises they made. A few years ago, I had the same kind of problem with the owner of a renowned Italian restaurant in Brussels. He owed me ten thousand euro, but for six months he kept delaying the payment. One day, I got very angry and I decided to go directly to his restaurant. He was having lunch with some very important Italian politicians. I went to his table, I politely said hello to his guests, took him by his ear and dragged him out of the restaurant. Then, still holding his ear, I brought him to the bank while everyone was watching. When we arrived to the bank, I gave him a kick in the ass and forced him to withdraw the money he owed me" Mr Umberto stops for a moment, then he says laughing: "As you can understand, one has to use bad manners with this kind of people, otherwise it is very easy to go bankrupt ". I shake my head, pretending to understand. After about thirty minutes, we leave the café to return to Mr Umberto's hangar and during the short trip, while Jonathan continues to talk about business and competitors in the Belgian food sector, I try to make a small search on Mr Umberto online.

According to the news I read online, Mr Umberto is one of the most famous Italian entrepreneurs abroad. Many Italian politicians have made reference to his successful story and his activities in their public speeches on Italian emigration. Artists and renowned athletes at international level have dedicated books to Mr Umberto. Briefly, he has very powerful friends, including Italian ambassadors, Italian and Belgian ministers, and even prime ministers. What I read on the web is confirmed by the pictures hanging on the wall behind his desk: they portray Mr Umberto in informal circumstances with one of the former presidents of the Italian Republic, some politicians and many Belgian artists and athletes. From what he told me in our previous conversation, I can say that he is in constant touch with many of the characters who appear in the photos and he is even involved in economic activities with some of them. But there is one picture that really catches my attention, a shot of Mr Umberto and Frank Sinatra hugging each other.

I immediately ask him when that picture was taken and with a serious and almost proud tone in his voice he replies: "Frank was a friend of my family. I am from Corleone (the most famous Sicilian mafia village) and my mother was the niece of Joe Bonanno, the most powerful mafia leader in the history of New York. Over the years I have spent a lot of time in New York and I have had the opportunity to know a lot of famous people such as Frank Sinatra, or even Francis Ford Coppola. Francis has been at my place in Belgium as well as in Sicily several times. The reason why I live in Belgium as opposed to the United States is that, during the 1960s, a big Italian food corporation hired me as the Commercial Executive Director for Europe and its headquarter was in Belgium". Those last confessions leave me truly astonished, especially the discovery that some branches of the Bonanno family have settled in Belgium. Then the topic of the conversations shifts again and he starts speaking about how a good entrepreneur should run his businesses in today's world, he explains that it is extremely important to struggle without hesitation to survive on the market, as there are only few men of honour, while the majority of businessmen do not respect the agreements. While our conversation becomes more and more interesting, the phone constantly rings and I have the opportunity to observe Mr Umberto at work and to listen to his phone calls with lawyers, Italian producers and other entrepreneurs. When our meeting is close to the end, Mr Umberto shows all his interest for my research, but the phone rings again. This time it is the daughter of a powerful Italian politician, a Professor of a renowned Italian university and a former minister who recently stood for elections as a European Commissioner for Justice. This girl, who speaks Italian without a regional accent like all high-class ex-pats who live in Brussels, is a parliamentary assistant of two Italian MEPs. During the conversation, she reminds Mr Umberto that the next day there would be her son's baptism at 1:00pm. The call ends with warm greetings and afterwards Mr Umberto tells me that he had been asked to be the godfather of the baby, who is the nephew of Senator Sabatini, one of his oldest and most devoted friends. Before leaving, he insistently asks me to give him my book on the Neapolitan mafia, as he would like to read it. Indeed, Mr Umberto is often invited by ambassadors, politicians and other institutional representations to discuss about mafia and to present some books on

Italian criminal organizations. Indeed, he describes himself as a person who is very sensitive to social and cultural issues. He owns two charitable foundations and he organizes several charity events in partnership with the European institutions or private circles of the Belgian elite. Moreover, he shows me some documents which prove that he has financed several Belgian and Italian movie directors who produced very successful films. When Mr Umberto asks my book on the Neapolitan mafia, I look at him flattered and I say: "I think I have a copy in the car, I'll get it". He thanks me several times and says: "You are a loyal and honest guy who does not hide himself behind his finger. For this reason, you deserve all my respect and I will help you during your research. Moreover, Jonathan told me very good things about you and I trust him because he is like a son for me". I shake Mr Umberto's hands thanking him for his help and time. He says: "I will call you in the next weeks because I want to invite you and Jonathan to have a dinner together at an Italian restaurant near Liège. They always leave a free table for Zio Umberto and every Friday they get fresh fish from Sicily just for me. This could be an opportunity to spend a wonderful evening together. I would also like to invite Senator Sabatini, I think you would enjoy a conversation with a great intellectual and politician. I thank him again, explaining that his help is precious to my research and his story is extremely interesting for me. When I sit in my car, I let out a sigh of relief, but almost immediately Jonathan jumps in and I still cannot relax.

6. CONCLUSION: PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS FROM FIELDWORK TO TEXT.

In this last section, I will shortly reflect on my first months of participant observation, which have been aimed to analyse the presence of mafia practices in the Belgian food sector.

This fieldwork has allowed me to penetrate in a complex network of actors who conduct or manage legal activities, using illegal methods and strategies to impose themselves on the market.

The variety of actors, as I showed in the extract of my fieldwork diary, is the pillar of these groups of interest, which try to monopolise shares of the Belgian economic market mixing legal activities with mafia methods of accumulation such as the use of violence and force, although, in some cases, this latter is only symbolic.

During my participant observation, I identified some factors that seem to have a structural role in the trajectories of some entrepreneurs of Italian origin in the Belgian food sector.

In particular, I refer to: a) the importance of using predatory, violent and illegal methods to accumulate profits on the legal market; b) the construction of relational strategies (involving institutional actors, professionals, police officers, politicians, businessmen, criminals) through which these groups promote and legitimize their accumulation.

Starting from these two considerations, I would like to highlight the points that should be further investigated and substantiated in my future study, consistently with the abovementioned theoretical framework and assumptions:

1) So far, I have not observed the presence of a structured mafia organization as a sort of "mafia octopus" which is branched out into the Belgian food sector through international linkages (Sterling, 1995). On the contrary, the subjects involved in these activities seem to constitute a "mafia network" that is composed of various kinds of social, economic, political, institutional and criminal actors (Santino 2007). Mafia networks are fully installed in a globalized context, which is characterized by a close relationship between illegal/legal and formal/informal economies (Kokoreff Peraldi Weinberger 2007).

For these reasons, we can analyse these networks through the category of "mafia bourgeoisie" (Santino 1994), which is an heterogeneous group composed by legal and illegal actors who work together sharing the common interest to accumulate wealth and profit.

In this sense, "mafia bourgeoisie" appears as the most influential circle of a large cross-class social bloc in which there is a consistent group of criminals who belong to the working class and to the sub-proletariat that I have frequently met during my fieldwork. These heterogeneous actors seem to operate in what might be called a "grey area": an economic

space where the mechanisms of capitalism intersect with the interests of elites and those of criminal actors, originating mafia networks (Blok 1974). These criminal networks are not structured in a pyramidal way but they have a more horizontal strategy of power where everyone plays a different role, resulting from the position that he/she occupies in the society, and can develop an hegemony on the economic market through forms of complicity and collaboration in different activities (Sciarrone 2011).

2) Moreover, despite a great deal of literature supports the idea that mafia accumulation can exclusively be achieved through illegal activities, during my fieldwork I observed a wide range of mafia practices of accumulation that are fully conducted in the legal market. This seems to suggest that mafia accumulation processes are the result of a close relationship between legal activities and illegal strategies of market colonization that are established within the same economic mechanisms (Vercellone, Lebert, 2001). On this point, it would be useful to study more in depth the scholarship on the relationship between formal/informal and legal/illegal economy at the time of the neoliberal globalization and on how the practices of “accumulation by dispossession” are increasingly connecting these two dimensions (Sanchez 2012; Harvey 2005; Glassman 2006).

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