

Exploring Individual Choices When Joining the Mafia or ‘Ndrangheta

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Abstract

The relevance of issues pertaining to human choice in modern times is unquestionable. In this article, we will delve into the matter of choice for the first time — its presence or absence within criminal organizations. The activities of criminal organizations serve as a litmus test for gauging the efficacy and endurance of both the organization and its individual members under intense external pressures. According to modern postmodern doctrine, the choice of a contemporary human is ostensibly independent in virtually all aspects; however, the question of the effectiveness of such an approach for both society as a whole and the individual remains unresolved.

The purpose of this article is to examine the concept of human choice within the Mafia and ‘Ndrangheta — its presence or absence. Does the availability of personal choice benefit both the individual and the organization? Furthermore, what factors contribute to the resilience of organizations existing beyond the boundaries of the law? Addressing these questions provides criminologists with insights into the structure, organizational dynamics, and individual attitudes within such entities. Throughout this study, the author considers the organizational structures of criminal groups like the Mafia and ‘Ndrangheta, drawing from previous research in southern Italy, as well as philosophical, anthropological, and criminological postmodern literature. Methodologically, the study employs a descriptive approach, comparative analysis, immersion in the studied environment, and prototypical method.

Keywords

Mafia, ‘Ndrangheta, Southern Italy, criminal, choice of human

Introduction

Italy boasts a lengthy history of criminal entities, such as the Mafia operating in Sicily, the Camorra situated around Naples, ‘Ndrangheta historically linked to Calabria, and the Sacra Corona Unita originating from Puglia. These organizations engage in a diverse range of criminal activities, encompassing racketeering, drug trafficking, smuggling, fraud, murder, and corruption. Despite their origins in southern Italy, these criminal entities have expanded globally, with numerous members on every continent.

The pursuits of these criminal groups involve both legal and illegal enterprises, territorial control, influence in politics and economics, and the use of violence to safeguard their interests and intimidate adversaries. The Italian government actively confronts these organizations, acknowledging their persistent threat to public security and regional stability. Counteraction measures employed by the Italian government include legislative initiatives, with laws and policies targeting organized crime, specifically addressing racketeering, drug trafficking, and corruption. Additionally, special operations and investigations, conducted by the police, carabinieri (military police), and other law enforcement agencies, aim to apprehend and prosecute criminal organization members. Witness protection programs are implemented to ensure the safety of witnesses cooperating with the government and to fortify their position in legal proceedings. The Italian government also actively pursues a policy of asset forfeiture, involving the confiscation of property and financial resources belonging to these criminal organizations.

Italy collaborates with other nations and international organizations to exchange information and conduct joint operations for information sharing, coordinated actions, and the prosecution of criminal group members, particularly considering the transnational nature of certain criminal activities. Public support in the fight against the criminal organizations is a crucial aspect, with ongoing efforts to track and obstruct financial flows associated with criminal groups.

Notably, social and educational programs for social rehabilitation and support in affected territories play a significant role, aiming to prevent the recruitment of new members into criminal groups. Active public engagement, raising awareness of the issue, and supporting those cooperating with law enforcement are integral components.

These efforts are often interconnected, necessitating constant updates and adaptations in response to changes in the activities of criminal organizations. Combating organized crime is a long-term and intricate task, with ongoing initiatives at various levels. Many Italians and social organizations vehemently oppose criminal activities and endorse government efforts. Despite these endeavors, organized crime in southern Italy remains persistent and adaptable to new conditions. Addressing this challenge demands sustained efforts and collaboration across legislative, law enforcement, community, and international levels.

Participating in expeditions to the southern region of contemporary Italy as part of the Institute of Memory's research team, I was directly involved in investigating the existing criminal traditions in southern Italy – namely, the Mafia and the 'Ndrangheta. The results of this research have been documented in the monograph authored by Ukrainian scholars O. Maltsev and V. Lunov (2020) titled "Philosophy of Southern Italy." This article delves into the timeless question of choice, exploring its role or absence in successful organizations through the lens of two criminal entities, namely 'Ndrangheta and the Mafia. It is noteworthy that the research interest of diverse scholars and experts is drawn to criminal organizations in Southern Italy (Buonanno & Pazzona, 2014; Calderoni et al., 2017; Catino, 2015; Craparo et al., 2018; Lavorgna & Sergi, 2014; Ravenda et al., 2019; Scognamiglio, 2018; Sergi, 2019).

Methods

The exploration of criminal organizations necessitates employing diverse methods and approaches, including descriptive analysis, comparative analysis, and the prototopological method. Notably, the study underscores the application of specific methods, such as the descriptive method and the method of system analysis and synthesis, which encompass:

- Analysis of Previous Studies and Literature: Examining existing research and literature on organized crime and criminal groups to comprehend their history, structure, and activities.

- **On-the-Ground Study:** Immersing in the daily life of communities affected by organized crime to gain a comprehensive understanding of its societal impact.
- **Legal Status and Countermeasures:** Investigating the legal status and countermeasures in various countries, including laws targeting organized crime.
- **Court Decisions Analysis:** Scrutinizing court decisions related to criminal organizations to identify judicial strategies and law enforcement effectiveness.
- **Financial Impact Analysis:** Examining the legalization of money and investments, and assessing the impact of organized crime on the regional and territorial economy.
- **Political Influence Analysis:** Assessing the impact of organized crime on political structures, including bribery and corruption.
- **Anti-Corruption Strategy Effectiveness:** Analyzing the effectiveness of anti-corruption strategies within the context of organized crime activities.
- **Crime Types Study:** Investigating the types of crimes committed by criminal organizations and their prevalence.
- **Member Characteristics Analysis:** Analyzing the characteristics of criminal organization members, including their motivations and psychology.
- **Cyberanalysis:** Studying cybercrime and employing technology to detect and disrupt criminal activity online.
- **Data Analysis Techniques:** Applying data analysis techniques to identify patterns and trends in criminal activity.
- **Ethnographic Research:** Studying different criminal locations and groups in diverse cultures to identify commonalities and unique characteristics.
- **Observational Studies:** Observing the behavior of criminal groups in their natural environment for an in-depth understanding of cultural characteristics.
- **Comparative Case Studies:** Conducting comparative case studies of cultural contexts in different countries and regions to examine cultural, historical, and social factors influencing criminal activity.
- **Culture and Organizational Structure Analysis:** Examining the impact of culture on organizational structure and determining how cultural values shape the hierarchy of criminal organizations.

Specific methods for studying organized crime may include various approaches, depending on the goals and objectives of the study. Here are some specific methods that may be used:

- **Insider Interviews:** Involving ex-members of criminal groups, witnesses, law enforcement, attorneys, victims, and experts to obtain primary information about the internal structure, strategies, network of connections, and methods of activity of criminal organizations.
- **Crime Statistics Analysis:** Examining court records, crime statistics, and law enforcement reports to study the types of crimes, their frequency, geography, and trends related to criminal activity.
- **Social Surveys:** Surveying local residents, businessmen, and members of public organizations to assess the impact of criminal groups on social life, the level of fear, opinions, and proposals to combat criminal activity.
- **Network Analysis:** Investigating connections between members of criminal groups, their contacts, and financial transactions to identify the structure of the organization, key figures, ways of financing, and influence.
- **Economic Analysis:** Evaluating economic data of regions exposed to criminal activity to assess the economic impact of criminals, their participation in legal and illegal sectors, and their influence on investment and regional development.
- **Forensic Analysis:** Examining crime scenes, traces, and tools used for the reconstruction of events, identification of crime characteristics, and analysis of methods used.
- **Social Media Analysis:** Monitoring social media, forums, and internet resources to observe discussions and debates, identify trends, and assess public opinion.

- Document Analysis: Studying court documents, dossiers on suspects, and bank records to obtain specific facts and details concerning the activities of criminal organizations.

All these methods enable a deeper understanding of the issue and answer numerous questions. For the purposes of this article, the main question revolves around choice: Does a person have a choice to become a criminal or not? Therefore, the article also considers these questions from the perspective of Lipot Szondi's works and his fate-analysis, which is based on the doctrine that "choice determines a person's fate." Szondi not only emphasized the importance of choice in human fate but also demonstrated that individuals, even in unconscious choices, determine their fate. To gain a deeper understanding of the distinctions between the two criminal organizations, we employ heuristic models: "Mafia is a ship," and "Ndrangheta is a family."

Results

The research revealed that 'Ndrangheta is the sole organization in which family disillusionment does not emerge. This organization is fundamentally rooted in the family structure ("ndrina" serving as its foundational element), and those born into 'Ndrangheta families develop a sense of devotion from a young age. Within the 'Ndrangheta framework, a principle is upheld: individuals dedicate themselves entirely to the family, and in turn, they are provided for by the family. In a different cultural context, particularly given the unique characteristics of the Ukrainian mentality, a child might have taken offense or resisted such expectations. However, in the 'Ndrangheta context, these reactions are practically non-existent due to significant compensation: the family offers an environment and knowledge that allow a child to become remarkably prosperous and esteemed very swiftly (typically by the age of 18-25).

Consequently, the guiding principle within the 'Ndrangheta is "you do everything for the family, and the family does everything for you." A child acknowledges their debt to the family, for the family offers immediate and tangible support (rather than mere words). 'Ndrangheta is grounded in such forms of compensation, among other factors, which obviates the existence of a "disillusionment with parents" phase within this criminal subculture. This dynamic contributes to the 'Ndrangheta's reputation as the most robust and resilient criminal organization globally.

At present, 'Ndrangheta members are dispersed worldwide, engaging in various activities. Nevertheless, Calabria remains their origin, their "homeland," where they frequently return for vacations, treating it as if it were their own. Notably, in the 'Ndrangheta, there is no pursuit of a "Great Mother" figure (representing the bearer of knowledge); instead, every individual within this subculture is born and lives under the protection of the Great Mother, given that the "family" serves as a manifestation of this concept.

Historically, it's worth noting that the Order of Christ has consistently been one of the wealthiest and most influential institutions, functioning as a knightly order with unparalleled power. This very Order underwent a transformative shift and evolved into what we now recognize as the 'Ndrangheta. The name "Ndrangheta" translates to "a circle from which there is no escape." This philosophical notion conveys the idea that once someone is born into this organization, there is no alternative; it is seen as fate or divine will. This contrasts with the approach of other criminal organizations in southern Italy. For instance, the Mafia aligns more with the concept of the Great Father, while the Great Mother's path is seldom followed or openly acknowledged, acting as another distinctive selection criterion (Maltsev & Lunov, 2020). "If you entered the organization and your wife takes precedence over everything else, it effectively means there's no way up for you from that point" (Maltsev & Lunov, 2020, p. 239)

Formulating the Research Questions. Presentation of the Core Content

The awareness of the Mafia's criminal activities, the notoriety of Camorra gangs, and the intricacies of 'Ndrangheta operations are widely known. One of the fundamental questions that emerged in our study was whether individuals become criminals due to their circumstances or if they are inherently predisposed. Hence, the subculture of Calabria has been remarkably illustrative over the past century and a half in showcasing how the 'Ndrangheta functions as an "circle with no escape." For those born within the confines of 'Ndrangheta, there seems to be no exit; their path is seemingly predetermined to criminality. However, upon reaching adulthood, there appear to be no moral dilemmas or uncertainties among 'Ndrangheta members. This is because the 'Ndrangheta provides ample benefits, security, education, effectiveness, and overall prosperity. Among various contributing factors, it's worth highlighting that 'Ndrangheta stands out as one of the world's wealthiest and most privileged entities.

Antonio Nicaso, in his book "Blood Brothers," expounds upon this topic by stating, that in the case of the Calabrian criminal organization, the organizational model follows that of patriarchal societies. The family, also known as 'ndrina,' constitutes the fundamental unit of the 'Ndrangheta. It starts with the core capo-bastone family and expands to include others, often with some degree of kinship. These additions, usually subordinate at first, eventually coalesce to form a 'local' structure" (Gratteri & Nicaso 2007).

In the monograph titled "Philosophy of Southern Italy," authored by O. Maltsev and V. Lunov (2020), a perceptive insight emerges: a specific group of individuals bears resemblances akin to children when their qualities and personality traits are subjected to comparative analysis – this group constitutes criminals. For example, criminals and children alike share a belief in their entitlement to engage in acts such as theft, robbery, and plunder. Moreover, the enduring memory of societal mistreatment shapes the criminal's lifelong experience – a parallel to children who retain memories of offenses and injustices committed against them. Both the child and the wrongdoer share two pivotal characteristics: a shared propensity to "remember" and a steadfast belief in their "entitlement," which essentially signifies a resolute determination. This intrinsic determination and sense of entitlement have persisted and been esteemed by society across epochs. Throughout history, authorities and governing bodies have sought to quell criminal elements through tactics including arrests, the establishment of new laws, restrictions, penalties, and imprisonment. Paradoxically, these attempts often spark counterreactions. Remarkably, the concentration of diverse "masters and experts" from the criminal world within prisons has resulted in the refinement of their skills in these controlled environments. It was also an excellent location for recruiting new members into criminal organizations. Curiously, those in positions of authority, both knowingly and unknowingly, replicate the strategies of their predecessors (Maltsev & Lunov, 2020).

The southern part of Italy offers a rich reservoir of such illustrative cases. Initially, the so-called "criminal organizations" in southern Italy, which persist to this day, did not originate as criminal entities; they were, in fact, state organizations representing prior forms of authority, particularly linked to the influence of the Spanish Empire. Nonetheless, global power dynamics shifted, culminating in the reunification of Italy in 1861. This shift resulted in a change of leadership, with individuals opposed to the former Spanish Empire taking control. Consequently, the new regime labeled followers of the Spanish King as criminals. It is worth emphasizing that up until this historical juncture, those labeled as 'criminals' were once esteemed individuals, often nobles, who had served the Spanish Crown. They were more than mere "state entities retained under the auspices of the King of Spain." These individuals were highly trained and adept, akin to what one might term "special units" in contemporary parlance. They later participated in various political coups, bourgeois revolutions, and the

like across Europe. Prior to these events, these skilled operatives, often members of knightly orders, were entrusted with establishing order in newly conquered and colonized territories, a task they executed remarkably well on a global scale, including in regions such as the Americas, Africa, and Southeast Asia. This organization not only comprised nobility and knightly order members but also functioned as a genuine training hub in the southern reaches of Italy, cultivating specialized forces of diverse profiles. These centers significantly contributed to the expansion of the Spanish Empire, as the saying goes, "success depends on the people." However, in 1861, the unification of Italy transpired, ushering in a new political figure – King Vittorio Emanuele. This leader declared individuals from southern Italy, who had been aligned with the former Spanish Empire, as enemies and sought their eradication or relocation, such as to South Africa, a former colony of the Spanish Empire (Maltsev & Lunov, 2020).

Maltsev's research in the southern region of Italy, in which the author of the article had the privilege to directly participate, has unveiled the role of fate within another criminal structure – the Mafia. In this context, fate presents itself through what is termed a "Meeting with Chaperone." According to the Mafia's perspective, managed fate entails progression within the organization, reaching up to the level of a Capo, or advancing through the hierarchy to its upper echelons. Notably, Palermitans, much like accomplished swordsmen, hold great reverence for death and lack problems about renunciation as a philosophical concept; they are often referred to as "people with glass eyes." These individuals are the epitome of devout religious zealots, harboring a fearlessness of death and an attitude of respect toward it. For them, death is the pivotal juncture marking the commencement of tangible action – consider, for instance, the phenomenon of "vendetta." It's noteworthy that neither the 'Ndrangheta nor the Camorra exhibit the same audacity as the Mafia. Mafia representatives have brazenly targeted judges, even as they exited the courtroom, firing from a mere one-meter distance. They've orchestrated explosions that claimed the lives of judges' families, including children. They've rigged sections of highways to eliminate specific targets and engaged in a myriad of other audacious acts.

The findings of expeditions, outlined in the book "Deceptive Silence" by Dr. Oleg Maltsev (2018), unveil the core and mechanism of the Mafia and 'Ndrangheta organizations' "own religion" – an exceptional way of life and worldview. Religion, as a concept, includes preachers and adherents, who in this case make up the members of the organization. A distinctive attribute of 'Ndrangheta's "own religion" is its propagation within the family context. Here, the term "family" takes on a literal sense, encompassing blood connections. Presently, it's known that in Palermo, a broader conception of family prevails, wherein family members needn't solely be bound by blood. In 'Ndrangheta, for instance, the father stands as the family's leader, while in Palermo, it is the grandfather who assumes this role. Another significant divergence is that the 'Ndrangheta is profoundly tethered to the past, while the Mafia's influences are rooted in the future. Where the 'Ndrangheta rests upon a foundational ancestral concept, the Mafia is built upon an archetypal sequence. This underscores distinct motivations between the organizations.

When gauged through the lens of academician G. S. Popov's memory science, an intriguing insight emerges: the contrast lies in how the Mafia and 'Ndrangheta cultivate skills (Maltsev, 2018). The Mafia initially employs the archetypal sequence and then transitions to the ancestral concept, whereas the 'Ndrangheta follows the reverse order. Essentially, the 'Ndrangheta must strategize for its future, while the Mafia molds its present in alignment with the future. It's akin to the Mafia existing in the future, directing the present to manifest that future. On the contrary, the 'Ndrangheta resides in the past, where the past is their present and the present becomes their future. Their perception of the world deviates from the norm, departing from the perspective of most individuals. While the Mafia inhabits the "current world" familiar to us, the 'Ndrangheta resides in an entirely separate realm – the past. For them, the unfolding

present embodies their future. Their attention might veer toward the future, or the present, but the core of their existence resides in the past.

Hence, the ‘Ndrangheta subculture encapsulates a logical model resembling a snake beneath a stone. Symbolically, the concealed snake signifies a residence in the past; any attempt to uncover or disturb this past could result in its emergence into the present, and the instigator might find themselves entangled in predicaments. Additionally, this model’s essence mirrors the process of constructing an organization, a topic touched upon in the methodology of analyzing criminal traditions.

‘Ndrangheta rests upon an ancestral concept, which is a part of person’s memory – their past. This leads to ‘Ndrangheta existing in what seems like an isolated realm, impervious to external entry. In contrast, the Mafia operates within this world, constructing its trajectory towards the future. Metaphorically, a member of the ‘Ndrangheta views the unfolding of their life as something that has already happened; there is no future. They believe they have already accomplished everything solely by virtue of their affiliation with the organization. Change transpires exclusively in the present. A conventional European perspective on the “future” or dreams appears absent because, to them, everything has already transpired.

In the perspective of the ‘Ndrangheta, life unfolds as a voyage from the past to the present, revealing a pivotal element of their invulnerability. This ethos and lifestyle yield a pronounced edge in today’s criminal landscape. Essentially, ‘Ndrangheta remains untainted, governed by a past where endeavors deemed impossible in the present become viable. The Mafia, on the other hand, must navigate the contemporary realm, adapting to orders, shifts, and strategic considerations. It could be said that ‘Ndrangheta adheres to medieval principles, unfazed by external judgments. Their demeanor corresponds to that of medieval knights. Should the need arise to swiftly “sever heads,” they won’t hesitate to do so in the present moment. The Mafia, while also possessing the capacity for forceful actions, approaches matters tactically, taking public sentiment and societal order into careful consideration. Essentially, the Mafia’s course of action is shaped by the subtleties inherent to a given historical era or contemporary circumstance (Maltsev, 2018).

However, as we are aware, nothing emerges from absolute nothingness. This suggests that the depicted mechanism likely had historical precedent. Delving deeper into centuries gone by, we can assert with confidence: such organizational frameworks did exist. Knightly orders, for instance, originated from family clans; a child would be schooled in swordsmanship from a young age, imbibing family traditions, ultimately becoming a lifelong follower of knightly ideals. The status of knighthood held a value more precious than life itself. This prototype aligns with the lifestyle and character of the ‘Ndrangheta organization. Conversely, the Mafia’s structure bears resemblance to that of a pirate ship. Team formation occurs swiftly; the individual who brings a new crew member assumes responsibility for their integration; each team member is required to contribute pertinent skills for the collective purpose; the ship’s primary goal revolves around generating profit and redistributing it amongst the crew.

Discussion

In addressing the question of an individual’s choice to become involved in criminal activities, this study acknowledges the inevitable connection with the issue of combating organized crime. The endeavor to combat organized crime is recognized as a multifaceted and complex task, necessitating a comprehensive and multidimensional approach, with foreign authors proposing key concepts and strategies. These encompass the strengthening of legal measures through the adoption and active enforcement of stringent laws tailored to the specifics of criminal activities. Additionally, the establishment of dedicated courts and the appointment of specialized judges for organized crime cases aim to enhance prosecution effectiveness.

Witness protection is another crucial aspect, involving guaranteed safeguards for witnesses and law enforcement officers to mitigate threats from criminal organizations. Technology is utilized to ensure witness anonymity and protect their families. Financial tracking services play a role in monitoring the financial operations of criminal organizations and identifying their funding sources. Actively confiscating property and finances serves to weaken their economic foundation.

International collaboration is emphasized, encouraging countries to exchange information on criminal organizations, their leaders, and operations. Joint international operations involving law enforcement agencies from different countries contribute to a more coordinated effort. Educational programs are developed to prevent the recruitment of new members into criminal groups, informing the public about the mechanisms of criminal activity and its societal consequences. Employing modern technologies to combat cybercrime and secure law enforcement information is crucial. Analyzing social media helps track the activity of criminal groups and identify new threats. Implementing programs to support territories affected by criminal activity is also deemed important.

When addressing concepts and contributors in the fight against criminal groups, it's crucial to recognize the broad and intricate nature of the issue. Various researchers and practitioners approach the problem from diverse perspectives. Here are some influential approaches and authors in combating organized crime:

1. Social ecology theory: Cesare Lombroso (1898) posits that crime stems from the social environment and societal structure, suggesting that changes in the social setting can reduce organized crime.
2. Oligarchic organization theory: Giovanni Falcone (2011) proposes that criminal groups adopt an "oligarchic structure," with skilled members making decisions and overseeing the organization.
3. Prevention concept: Salvatore Lupo (2002/2011) focuses on crime prevention through public education, youth support, and anti-corruption efforts to deter recruitment into criminal organizations.
4. Power of the law concept: James C. Scott (2008) highlights the significance of analyzing the power and force used by criminal groups, offering strategies for effective confrontation.

These approaches and authors represent just a portion of the diverse strategies to counter criminal organizations. It's crucial to acknowledge that an effective counter-strategy often requires a combination of approaches, considering the specific conditions and context of each situation.

Drawing from the aforementioned research outcomes, we gain insights into the fundamental disparities between the two entities within the southern Italian region – the Mafia and the 'Ndrangheta. In tandem, it's crucial to revisit the concept of choice, a facet that confronts individuals at various junctures of life. Within contemporary society, the notion of "choice" pervades multiple aspects of human existence, spanning from everyday decisions like selecting products at a store to more substantial spheres like participating in state elections. Numerous studies focus on the ways individuals make decisions (Ceschi et al., 2019; see also Coupland, 2015; Davies et al., 2016; Gambetti & Giusberti, 2019; Kulcsár et al., 2020; Läßle & Barham, 2019; Van Parys & Ash, 2018).

Modern developed capitalist societies, governed by the principle of free choice, have even introduced novel concepts – such as the substitution of "sex" for "gender" – which enables individuals to opt for a different gender from the one assigned at birth. This extends to the justification for altering their original sex-based classification. Consequently, it unintentionally prevents a thorough exploration of these subjects, limiting the potential to identify root causes, describe repercussions, and formulate strategies for eliminating such phenomena.

In accordance with the teachings of Lipot Szondi (1944), the trajectory of one's fate is determined by choice. Szondi not only emphasized the significance of choice in shaping

human fate but also substantiated that an individual, even through unconscious decisions, shapes their fate. Within his works, Szondi (1944, 1963) introduced a model that portrays a person behind the wheel of a metaphorical bus, representing their fate. Accompanying the driver, the person, are numerous passengers – all of them relatives. When faced with a novel situation requiring a decision, a member of the person’s family takes the reins and assumes control (relying on a figure of the relative, that is in person’s memory, even if that “relative” is physically deceased by that time). Simultaneously, the individual remains accountable for the actions of this “relative figure.”

L. Szondi (1944) concluded that “Choice makes fate,” an axiom central to the fate-analysis. In the book “Philosophy of Szondi” by Dr. Maltsev, a straightforward model is outlined to elucidate the concept of “tropism,” a notion introduced by L. Szondi. It involves picturing a person with five different paths, metaphorically termed “tropes,” lying ahead. According to Szondi, these paths encompass all possible avenues – there are five in total. As a person navigates their life, they consciously and unconsciously make a choice from these five paths. The first path involves selecting love or the object of affection (a beloved partner); the second path entails choosing the object of friendship (this concept encompasses partnerships, interactions, reliable companions); the third path relates to profession; the fourth path concerns the choice of illness; and finally, the fifth path encompasses the choice of death, ranging from suicide to specific diseases like cancer or accidental demise (Maltsev, 2019).

Certainly, an individual’s choices are inherently personal matters. Yet, the act of making a choice carries implicit consequences, effectively steering them along a certain path. Thus, a choice serves as the switch that transports a person from one path to another. The nature of the choice itself — whether conscious, semi-conscious, intuitive, or unconscious — is inconsequential. What truly matters is the act of a person “transitioning” to a different path, often without foreknowledge of where this path might ultimately take them or the events that await at its conclusion.

For an individual born into an ‘Ndrangheta family, there is no choice. From early childhood, they inherit a predetermined philosophy, knowing that their partners will emerge from the family circle, their career shall serve their family’s interests, death holds no fear, and even their choice of love will be made with the participation of family. Contrastingly, when an individual joins a Mafia family, this decision is often a result of their own volition, influenced by a sequence of preceding choices they have made or choices that have been made for them by external parties (Maltsev, 2018).

Modern society largely believes in its capacity to forge independent choices, yet scrutiny of global phenomena invites skepticism toward this assumption. Consumption stands as both the propulsive force and the primary barometer dictating the fluctuations of the contemporary world economy. The trajectory of economic growth or decline hinges upon the trajectory of consumption, in turn determining prosperity and stability. Remarkably, even the act of consumption is a manifestation of choice, which often perceived as exclusively guided by personal will.

In his book “The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures,” Jean Baudrillard (1970/2016) expounds that according to Gervasi and others, “needs are interdependent and are the product of a learning process, rather than a rational calculation” (p. 70). Choice is not arbitrary; it’s subject to social influence and mirrors the cultural framework within which it operates. Notably, not just any product is manufactured and consumed; it must hold significance within the prevailing value system. This perspective lends itself to viewing consumption through the lens of integration, as stated by Parsons: “The goal of the economy is not the maximization of production for the individual, but the maximization of production linked in with the value system of the society” (Baudrillard, 1970/2016, p. 70). Desenbury similarly articulates that a single choice is fundamentally at play: the diversification of commodities based on an individual’s hierarchical standing. What truly sets consumer behavior apart is the contrast in

choices across various societies and their convergence within the same society, underpinning its status as a societal phenomenon. This diverges from economists' perspective; their "rational" choice has transformed into a conformist choice, one harmonizing with group values. Therefore, needs are more directed toward values than objects; their fulfillment predominantly symbolizes an alignment with these values. In its essence, a consumer's core, automatic and unconscious choice entails adopting the lifestyle emblematic of a specific society – rendering it distinctively particular.

J. Baudrillard (1970/2016) contends that within the realm of consumption, the semblance of human choice being free is deceptive. In reality, individuals are compelled to establish distinctions. Baudrillard (1970/2016) asserts that this underpins the boundless nature of consumption, resulting in consumer demands outpacing remarkable productivity growth, thereby constituting a "reserve army" of needs that propels economic advance.

In "Fatal Strategies," Baudrillard (1983/1999) demonstrates that choice is an "ungenerous imperative." Any philosophy that binds humanity to the exertion of its will only plunges individuals into despondency. If, for one consciousness, there exists nothing more gratifying than having a clear understanding of its desires, then, on the contrary, for a different, obscure yet vital consciousness (non-consciousness), happiness is intricately tied to the very futility of the will. In this alternate perspective, the allure lies in not comprehending one's desires, in embracing a state free from conscious choice, and in experiencing a disillusionment with its own inherent objective will (Baudrillard, 1983/1999).

People are not only generally oblivious to the fact that numerous of their "desires" are being inculcated and thrust upon them, but naturally, they often lack the inclination to delve into this truth. They may not even be certain whether they truly desire to want at all. However, when confronted with a myriad of evidence, there is a whisper from the depths, a kind of "malevolent spirit." It suggests that it might be wiser to place faith in advertising or information mechanisms, entities that will undertake the task of "persuading" them, shaping their choices (or to lean on the political establishment, entrusted with educating fellow citizens about the state of affairs).

In secrecy, every individual gravitates towards an arbitrary and severe system that strips away choice, rather than enduring the anguish of a free system where the nature of their desires remains enigmatic. In the former scenario, one is sentenced to absolute determination, while in the latter, they confront indifference (Baudrillard, 1983/1999). Deep within, each person leans towards an order that is stringent and seemingly improvised (or even not logical, like predestination or ceremonial), a sequence of events so fragile that even a minor disturbance could shatter its integrity. This inclination prevails over the entire dialectical trajectory of reason, where ultimate logic reigns supreme, transcending the nuances of language.

Naturally, on a subconscious level, we yearn to evade fate and transgress established rituals, just as we possess an inherent inclination to disrupt any form of order with force. However, this inclination towards violence is predetermined; it is woven into the very fabric of ceremonial arrangements. It doesn't arise spontaneously; rather, it orchestrates a calculated dramatic reversal, as elucidated by Baudrillard (1983/1999). Conversely, according to Christian religious philosophy, even God refrains from impinging upon human choice. Nevertheless, modern consumer society has effectively eroded this dogma intrinsic to an enduring religious belief.

Conclusions

If we contrast the two organizations Mafia and 'Ndrangheta, evaluating them according to the principle of security and stability from outside and inside, we can conclude that 'Ndrangheta, through the method of structure formation, will "win" this fight against Mafia. 'Ndrangheta

is more closed; its members are bound together primarily by blood ties; from birth, the child has no choice; having only one path forms an unquestionable loyalty to the organization and no suggestion of even betraying the structure. However, the 'Ndrangheta will lose out to the Mafia in another category, such as the time it takes to form the structure. 'Ndrangheta requires several generations of people to form, while the Mafia, due to its formation on the principle of a ship model, the speed of creation and completion of the team from the carriers of the necessary skills and "professions" does not require much time, nevertheless it is more susceptible to betrayal.

At present, criminal enterprises such as Mafia, Camorra, 'Ndrangheta, and Sacra Corona Unita and others persist in their operations, notwithstanding heightened law enforcement scrutiny. It is crucial to recognize that illicit activities are undergoing transformations in response to governmental strategies and societal influences. Key aspects of contemporary criminal endeavors encompass:

- Active participation in the drug trade, involving production, transportation, and distribution of narcotics.
- Traditional racketeering involving the extortion of funds from businesses and local residents in exchange for protection or favors.
- Smuggling various goods, ranging from weapons to luxury items, and engagement in organized criminal enterprises such as illegal gambling and trade in counterfeit goods.
- Influence over local and regional authorities through corrupt practices, including bribery of officials, politicians, and law enforcement personnel.
- Transnational activities, participating in international drug trafficking, smuggling, and other forms of organized crime on a global scale.
- Embracing modern technology to streamline activities, encompassing financial transactions, secure communications, and concealing traces of criminal operations.
- Continuous adaptation of methods in response to law enforcement measures, aiming to evade arrest and trial.
- Investment of illegally obtained funds in legitimate economic ventures to legitimize gains and exert influence in the business sector.
- Establishment of territorial control through violence to intimidate competitors and the local populace.
- Preservation of the traditional family structure with sworn loyalty and severe consequences for violations.
- Internal conflicts and power struggles within criminal organizations.
- Portrayal of a semblance of legitimacy through charitable actions and public events.
- Active involvement in cyberspace through participation in cybercrime.
- Formation of international connections and cooperation with other criminal organizations worldwide.
- Concealment of criminal activities through legitimate businesses and organizations.
- Control of new and emerging industries to secure influence and revenue.
- Utilization of violence to intimidate witnesses, competitors, and adversaries.
- Legalization of proceeds through various financial schemes, real estate investments, and banking operations.
- Employment of encrypted messages for confidential communication among organization members.
- Criminals' constant adaptation to changing conditions and law enforcement strategies to ensure continued activity and survival.

Effectively countering criminal organizations demands not just robust law enforcement actions but also extensive community backing and global collaboration. A unified approach to crime prevention, fortifying legal structures, and safeguarding witnesses remains integral

in the battle against criminal activities. Such efforts can serve as a shield and cultivate a favorable perception among the local populace. Despite governmental and law enforcement endeavors, tackling criminals persists as a formidable challenge. These groups perpetually adjust to evolving conditions and countermeasures, necessitating ongoing enhancements and fine-tuning of strategies to combat them. International collaboration and public endorsement are pivotal in this ongoing process.

The above, among other things, is confirmed by trials against members and leaders of the Mafia in the U.S. and Italy. In the battle against the 'Ndrangheta, Italy was compelled to enact laws on criminal liability for mere affiliation with the organization, without the necessity of proving distinct *corpus delicti*. The system of upbringing applied in 'Ndrangheta, which excludes the choice of a person, ensures the stability of both the criminal organization itself and the stability of the psyche of a person as its member (even if this stability is aimed at fulfilling the functions and tasks of the organization itself). Exclusion of choice in each member of the organization provides the so-called common good of the whole organization at the expense of its stability from external influence.

Even if we turn to the movie *The Godfather*, we can see that one of the main characters of this movie, Michael Corleone, initially had no intention of joining the organization (Coppola, 1972). Don Vito Corleone himself expressed his dissatisfaction with his son's choice, however, did not deprive him of his choice as such. The described situation is almost impossible in 'Ndrangheta, where a child is brought up as a member of the organization from a young age, adopts its philosophy unconditionally, absorbing it with his mother's milk, which allows him, for example, to be absolutely calm even if he is detained by the police. Even if he is detained or sent to prison, he is confident in the organization, and the organization is confident in him. It is not without reason that Prof. Antonia Nicaso, at one of the scientific meetings that took place in 2019 in the city of Odessa, compared an 'ndrangetista sitting in front of a police officer for interrogation to a block of ice (Huzhva, 2019).

Modern man's choices are conditioned by his philosophy, his upbringing, what he receives at a young age, and from the moment he is born. Beliefs are formed throughout life and determine multiple subsequent choices. Thus, the famous philosopher John Locke (1690) compared a person to a blank sheet of paper on which one writes, shaping the person himself. He even suggested that teachers should be held accountable for what they write. However, in the 21st century the situation has changed somewhat: as Jean Baudrillard demonstrated in his works, modern society and each of its members individually have only the illusion of choice, casting their vote in favor of those who prefer to remain behind the scenes.

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