CHAPTER 9

OMERTÀ
Violence and Cultural Practices

Jane Schneider and Peter Schneider

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is a reflection on *omertà*, very roughly translated as a code of 'silence before the law'. It is based on our mid-1960s fieldwork in a rural town in the western Sicilian interior that we call Villamaura, our subsequent experiences in rural Sicily during the 1970s and our shift of field sites to Palermo, the regional capital, in the 1980s and 1990s. This long arc of both time and geography will enable us to assess the changing status of *omertà* for both the mafia and the society surrounding it. Regarding the 1960s and 1970s, we analyse both why *omertà* was second nature to mafiosi, and the practices that influenced its presence in the wider society. For the 1980s and 1990s, we dwell on changes brought on by both anti-mafia prosecutions and an anti-mafia social movement. Spectacularly, some mafiosi followed justice collaborator Tommaso Buscetta who, in 1984, revealed his secrets to the prosecutor, Giovanni Falcone. Deborah Puccio-Den dedicated her recent book, *Mafiacraft: An Ethnography of Deadly Silence*, to Judge Falcone, 'the first anthropologist of the mafia', for his 'unprecedented dialog' with Buscetta (Puccio-Den 2021: 31). In a concluding section, we attempt to speculate on *omertà* today.

THE CODE OF *OMERTÀ*

As we said in our first book, based on 1960s fieldwork in Villamaura, *omertà* conveys the sense that justice is a private, and not a public matter. As such, a

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respected person will handle his own affairs without recourse to legally constituted authority. Quoting political theorist Gaetano Mosca, we acknowledged that among mafiosi 'it is a sign of weakness and cowardice to obtain satisfaction for an offense through courts of law' (Mosca 1949: 228). Letizia Paoli, who wrote a dissertation on mafia brotherhoods, which she then published as a book in both Italian and English, declared that

> [t]he core of this code consists in the categorical prohibition of cooperation with state authorities or reliance on their services, even when one has been victim of a crime. Such is the force of this prohibition that even if somebody is condemned for a crime that he has not committed, he is supposed to serve the sentence without giving the police any information about the real criminal. (Paoli 2003: 109)

Mosca and Paoli emphasize how *omertà* serves the purposes of mafiosi. In the 1960s and earlier, it was common to paint the mafia in a much more essentialized way. According to the ethnologist and physician Giuseppe Pitré, who wrote his understanding of mafiosi around the turn of the twentieth century, *omertà* was based on the word *omu*, defined as a true man. A collector of folklore, Pitré wrote that members of the mafia incapsulated 'beauty, grace, perfection and excellence of its kind . . . the idea of . . . superiority and skill in the best meaning of the word' (quoted in Lupo 1993: 6). Defining themselves as 'men of honour', mafiosi boasted of being superior at resolving their problems without resort to the institutions of criminal justice. A mafioso 'does not bear a fly on his nose . . . If he is offended, he does not resort to Justice, he does not rely on the Law' (quoted in Paoli 1997: 31). To do so, in his view, would be *schifusu* (disreputable) or *'nfame* (unworthy). Puccio-Den (2021: 152) lists positive meanings that Pitré attached to the word 'mafia'; they have to do with 'courage, pride, the capacity to assure protection of one's relatives without restoration to state justice'.

HOW MAFIOSI ENFORCED THE CODE OF *OMERTÀ*

Obviously, given the mafia's reputation for violence, if one of their number was known to collaborate with the police or judiciary, that member was likely to endure a painful revenge against himself or his family. A leader of the mafia might order that he be killed, leaving the actual execution of the murder to one or more loyal underlings, thereby obfuscating the trail of evidence that could lead to the crime. His corpse might also disappear according to one of the techniques in which mafiosi specialized. Or his body might be left, as it were, on display, possibly with the tongue cut out, symbolically conveying his 'talking' as the reason for his murder. *Omertà* also prevailed in the case of fugitives from the law. Mafiosi were renowned for their capacity

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to hide for extended periods of time – up to more than two decades in the best-known cases. It was well understood that the hideout would be familiar to the fugitive, replete with ample networks of support. Anyone who revealed where he was hiding, thus breaking the code of *omertà,* would do so under the penalty of death.

But *omertà* was not exclusively enforced by violence; certain features of mafia culture lent legitimacy to the concept. Although the word 'mafia' is widely used to label many kinds of criminal organization, historically it referred to fraternal sodalities whose respective local 'chapters' or 'families' (in Italian, *cosche*, singular *cosca*, after the tightly bundled leaves of the artichoke) laid claim to territories – urban neighbourhoods, entire rural villages and towns – in which, thanks to a reputation for violence made credible by episodic violent acts, they imposed a kind of order, extorting a fee (in Italian, the *pizzo* – a 'beak-full') for their services. Rapid capitalist development fostered by new political regimes created considerable disorder in each of the situations where mafias emerged. Amid the resulting mayhem, mafiosi presented themselves as self-anointed vigilantes and 'problem-solvers' for beleaguered businesses and landowners (J. Schneider 2016).

Each such mafia 'family' was transgenerational. For the Sicilian mafia, kinship mattered to recruitment, but so too did aptitude. Leaders (*capi*), older and charismatic, typically sought to avoid or resolve internal conflicts that could draw the attention of state authorities, in part through continuous negotiation and gossip, in part through episodically constructing translocal power structures. Members of mafia groups also engaged in smuggling enterprises, but this illegal activity initially took second place to territorially grounded extortion and racketeering (Blok 1974; Catino 2019; Gambetta 1993; La Spina 2008; J. Schneider 2016; Varese 2001, 2011).

Mafias worthy of the name demanded discipline, loyalty and *omertà* from their members – values reinforced, obviously, through the threat of violence, but also through cultural practices, such as initiation rites. Historical research on the mafia in Sicily, and the testimony of turncoats who have broken the rule of silence – about which more below – have described the initiations. Presumably inspired by masonic rituals – mafiosi often shared jail time with Freemasons during the second half of the nineteenth century – a sponsor would command a novice to hold the burning paper image of a saint, presumably the Virgin of Annunciation, who was the patron saint of the mafia, while pricking his finger and, mixing the ashes with his blood, would lead him to swear an oath to a life of discipline, loyalty and *omertà* (Fentress 2000: 26, 217; Lodato 1999: 32–35; Lupo 1993: 182; Pezzino 1995: 5–7, 71–72, 89–119; Recupero 1987: 313–14).

Mafiosi apparently had a charter myth to back up their vision that they were *uomini di onore* – 'men of honor'. In the mid-1960s, we were told by

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a Villamaura mafioso that to comprehend the 'true spirit' of the mafia, we should read a book titled *The Blessed Paolists* (*I Beati Paoli*), authored by Luigi Natoli and published in 239 instalments in a main Palermo daily, *Il Giornale di Sicilia*, in 1909–10. Natoli, who used the pen name William Galt, narrates the adventures of an eighteenth-century secret society whose members, dressed in sack cloths and with heads hooded, ventured out of their meeting place, a warren of tunnels under Palermo, to administer justice to rich and poor families alike, addressing unfairness, not only among the brothers of a ducal house, but also between ordinary folks and the aristocracy. Justice is possible thanks to these *beati paoli,* driven by spiritual forces and totally disregarding the accumulation of power and wealth on their own. Significantly, Flaccovio republished *I Beati Paoli* in 1984.

Besides intimidation, initiation rituals and a charter myth, there is one other practice that lured mafiosi into commitment to *omertà*. Mafia *capi* prepared for the possible arrest and imprisonment of their members, setting aside funds exacted from followers and from the *pizzo* to cover the lawyers' fees of incarcerated colleagues. There was also attention paid to the families of those in prison, looking out for their healthcare needs and even a daughter's dowry. Alessandro Colletti describes this as a 'welfare system' of the Italian mafias – Calabrian 'Ndrangheta and Neapolitan Camorra as well as the Sicilian mafia. To quote Colletti, the knowledge that 'protection is extended and guaranteed to their relatives [is] an additional factor which strengthens loyalty to the group'. Or again, 'all mafia leaders know that it is fundamental for them to protect their members in order to maintain secrecy and internal *omertà* which will allow the organization to survive despite judicial investigations and police arrest' (Colletti 2019: 111–12; see also Jacquemet 1996).

OMERTÀ AND THE SURROUNDING SOCIETY

Over many years, *omertà* sealed the lips of potential witnesses in court proceedings as 'insufficient evidence' led to the release of accused perpetrators. This was not only true of mafiosi, but also of others in the surrounding society. In the mid-1960s, when our initial fieldwork took place, we frequently encountered the following dialect phrase: 'Unn' sacciu niente, ne oggi ne ieri' – 'I don't know anything about it, and never did.' Anton Blok, whose fieldwork overlapped with ours during the 1960s, recorded phrases of a similar kind, for example, 'anyone who is deaf, blind and mute will live a hundred years in peace.' Blok (2010: 64) comments in his reporting that the '*habitus* of reserve, secrecy and reticence' transcends a 'mere statement of fact' to exhibit a speech act, a normative prescription to guide behaviour.

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'Speech acts [are] also called "performatives": by *saying* something they are also *doing* something' (ibid.: 58).

Both Blok in 'Genuardo' and we in 'Villamaura' discovered that, at least in the rural towns, Sicilians lived by the rule that it was important 'not [to] mention what you may have seen by chance. Do not answer questions. When people insist, just say "Unn' sacciu" ("I do not know")' (Blok 2010: 64). A norm to live by dictated that what one did was one's own business, expressed in the frequently heard expression: 'fa i fatti suoi' ('mind one's own business'). One should not 'embroil' oneself in the affairs of others. As a friend of ours explained, 'when you see two people fighting, you turn away quickly, pretending not to notice. Should you witness a theft, you do the same. Anyone who betrays a thief does it not from conscience, but to get himself embroiled with the thief or the victim.' Additional proverbs expressed the same idea: 'to talk little is a beautiful art'; 'the mouth is a betrayer of the heart'; 'the ideal man has long steps and a short tongue' (Schneider and Schneider 1976: 193; 2003: 83–84).

As was true of mafiosi, *omertà* involved a positive commitment to the idea of a personal vendetta, according to which an honourable man would avenge his own grievances and those of his family without resorting to courts of law or lawyers. For ordinary people, given the presence of mafiosi in their midst, it was also a way to avoid the morass of role conflicts inherent in situations where uncertainty reigned in relationships to the parties involved – a socially approved way, even for school children, of withdrawing from conflict without losing friends or face. Vulnerability to being extorted was an effect. One can rationalize extortion as a protective cover or realize that one succumbs to it out of intimidation. In effect, fear and protection were two sides of the same coin. In any case, the victims of extortion most often maintained their silence (Puccio-Den 2021: 187).

During our stays in Sicily in the mid-1960s and 1970s, people also made use of the categories *furbo* and *fesso*, the former meaning wily and astute ('smart, astute, vigilant and inventive' in the words of Blok 2010: 64), while *fesso* was an insult, describing the fool – someone easily taken for a ride. Clearly, the *furbo* was respected, even as he took advantage of others. Based on our fieldwork and reading, we linked the words we were learning – *omu*, *omertà*, *furbo* and *fesso* – to the kind of society we encountered. To us, two features of this society stood out. It was highly patriarchal, to the point that 'crimes of honour' were still considered legitimate, and clientelism loomed large – having a friend was better than having a [legal] right.

This cultural system – extreme patriarchy and pervasive patron–client relations – was certainly wider than the geographical area that gave rise to the mafia – historically, the western provinces of Sicily. It was wider, even, than the geographies of the two other powerful mafias of Italy, concentrated

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in Campagna and Calabria. Indeed, patriarchal and clientelist values have been written about extensively for both the north and the south littorals of the Mediterranean, and other societies as well. Perhaps this has something to do, historically, with the values stressed in a rural society heavily influenced by transhumant pastoralism. Abusive grazing and animal rustling were among the practices that rural dwellers confronted regularly, and which they had to resolve by themselves because the countryside was impossible to police. Many rural mafiosi had such a pastoral background (Schneider and Schneider 1976: 65–66, 178–79).

OMERTÀ AS HEGEMONIC

For the code of *omertà* to be this influential in the wider society, there had to be some hegemonic strategies on the part of mafiosi – some manipulation of the patronage system – starting with the mafia's clout in electoral politics. The post-war Italian government, founded on the principles of universal suffrage and proportional representation, gave rise to an array of 'mass' political parties. Governments formed and reformed but in each case, the new prime minister and the cabinet were drawn from an alliance of centrist parties that, for several decades, pivoted around the Christian Democratic Party and, given the Cold War, excluded the Communists. At election time mafiosi were among the party hustlers (*galloppini*) who rounded up voters, in part by promising favours or threatening punishments. (In Villamaura of the 1960s, a voter deemed untrustworthy would be assigned an idiosyncratic combination of preference votes that could be identified when the votes were counted – a public event at which mafiosi discovered voters who did not do what they were told.) According to one of the earliest justice collaborators, Antonino Calderone, between friends and kin a single mafioso in Sicily could count on forty to fifty persons, adding up to one hundred thousand 'friendly' votes in the Province of Palermo alone (Schneider and Schneider 2003: 52).

As a consequence, mafiosi strengthened their alliance with the state. Scholars of the Sicilian mafia use the word *intreccio* to describe the relation. The word literally means a tightly woven or plaited braid of hair. In its broader implications, it references an 'organic interweaving', an imbrication, to describe the mafia–state relation. Umberto Santino (2000: 381), for one, considers the *intreccio* the key to the mafia's economy and system of power (see also Catanzaro 1992; Chubb 1982, Schneider and Schneider 2003; Sciarrone 2011, 2019). This does not mean that the totality of the state is implicated; on the contrary, scholars have also embraced the phrase *pezzi dello stato* – pieces of the state – noting that, since the mafia's inception in

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the nineteenth century, there have always existed anti-mafia 'pieces' as well (see Lupo 1993).

The 'pieces of the state' that are *intrecciato* (intertwined with the mafia) are first and foremost the politicians who play a critical role in staffing the criminal justice system – the system that historically proclaimed that accused mafiosi could not be prosecuted for 'lack of proof'. Mafia-mediated rewards and punishments to ordinary Sicilians extended well beyond the courts and police to take in employment in the public sector, successful bidding on government contracts, healthcare, relief on taxes, acquisition of licenses, resolution of disputes with neighbours or competing businesses, and recommendations to help children pass exams in school – all of which added up to a host of ways to reward and punish citizens besides menacing them with violence. Of course, there was the menace of violence, too, especially for businesses and landowners who would dare to denounce the *pizzo*. Spectacular cases are widely known of a businessman or a journalist or an anti-mafia activist who ended up dead for breaking the code of *omertà*. The *intreccio*, however, enabled mafiosi to exercise hegemony without such violent acts.

Extending beyond the state, mafiosi greased the wheels with lawyers, teachers, bankers, doctors, priests and bureaucrats as well as with collaborating politicians, police officers and judges, the more so as these persons occupied positions of authority in key institutions. Calderone likened the mafioso to a spider as he 'builds his web of friends, acquaintances, obligations' (Arlacchi 1993: 20). During our first years in Sicily, mafiosi typically invited local and regional notables – the mayor, the local parliamentary deputy, clerics, lawyers, bankers and owners of land and enterprises – to their weddings and baptisms. They often also asked such persons to serve in the role of witness to a wedding, or godparent to a child, this being a way to establish a lifelong mutual obligation. As a rule, the invitations were not refused. Although they surely elicited varying degrees of apprehension about eventual requests for reciprocity, it was considered flattering and possibly auspicious to be asked. Significantly, mafia funerals were notorious for the large number of notables and professionals who joined the procession of mourners.

In the interior of the island, sheep-shearing festivities were staged with similar fanfare. We participated in several of these events in the 1960s and 1970s, at which the local priest, veterinarian, politicians and officers of the Carabinieri joined shepherds, mafiosi and their families in awesome feasts of roasted goat and stewed innards. Generally, mafioso wives prepared the pasta for such events, but the men, in a gendered division of labour, roasted the goats and stewed the innards (Schneider and Schneider 2011).

In addition to the life-cycle celebrations of the mafioso and his family, a strategic occasion for nurturing relationships with notables and

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professionals was the rustic banquet or *schiticchia*, often following a hunt. In contrast to the above celebrations, where women participated, these affairs tended to be exclusively male; indeed many mafiosi were excellent cooks. Peter Schneider had the unforgettable opportunity to experience five such feasts, held over three months in a succession of towns to celebrate an accord between a meat wholesaler and local butchers who had been at odds. At each of the banquets, three entertainers disappeared into a back room, eventually to reappear with a beach umbrella and what resembled priestly vestments, ringing a bell. They then performed a profane and ribald parody of the Catholic mass, in which they wove comments about the absent wives and daughters, repeated odes to friendship and chanted '*a mincchia*' (prick) instead of 'amen'. The ritual became known as the *messa mincchiata*.

The banquets, which generally took place in country houses or rural restaurants, grew in size from around twenty men to around eighty, as mafiosi invited non-mafiosi to the feasts – for example politicians, notables, priests and two veterinarians (normally charged with inspecting butcher shops for sanitation and the circulation of stolen meat). At one of the events, hoses with spigots attached descended over the banquet table from an attic above where the hosts had installed a barrel of wine. On this and one other occasion, there were fireworks after the meal. During all five evenings, a few men performed erotic strip dances. The last banquet featured one entertainer who dressed in a black cape and pink satin nightgown, into which he had stuffed two breast-like oranges. Everyone present greatly enjoyed the transgressive character of the 'horsing around', not to mention the commensality of their hosts (see Schneider and Schneider 1984; Schneider and Schneider n.d.).

These references to rustic banquets should not give the impression that past occasions for amicable encounters between mafiosi and elites were only small-town affairs, however. Upper-crust members of Palermo society were welcome guests at hunting parties in country settings. They also had at their disposal any number of urban locales well suited for privileged encounters. Nino Salvo, the powerful tax collector for all of Sicily and a 'made' mafioso, owned the Hotel Zagarella, on the coast just east of Palermo. Here, he played poker with Salvo Lima, then the Christian Democratic mayor of Palermo (Arlacchi 1993: 175). In 1995 this hotel became a centrepiece in the dramatic trial of former Christian Democratic prime minister of Italy, Giulio Andreotti, accused (but finally acquitted) of having colluded with the mafia. Photographs taken in 1979 by renowned photographer Letizia Battaglia were introduced into evidence. One of them shows Andreotti at Zagarella with Nino Salvo, Salvo Lima and other regional DC leaders (Arlacchi 1995: 105).

In wining, dining and entertaining politicians, notables and professionals, mafiosi were less concerned to establish quid pro quo transactions than to

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cultivate relationships of interest and affect. The outrageously good times converted potentially useful elites into an open-ended resource – persons perhaps never approached for favours, but who were always approachable – 'a disposizione', as the saying goes. 'Cu avemmo da?' – 'who do we have there?' – is a typical question that a mafioso asked on approaching an institution on behalf of himself or a client. The hegemony of *omertà* owed a great deal to the resulting 'spiderweb of friends, acquaintances and obligations', as well as to threatened punishments. This continues to be true today. For a recent ethnographic study conducted in a rural town of the west Sicilian interior see Theodoros Rakopoulos (2018), who describes the persistence of *omertà*, in part backed up by the possibility of violence, but also in part because of the patronage system, enhanced by the sociability of mafiosi (see also Ben-Yehoyada 2017; Palumbo 2009).

THE SICILIAN MAFIA DISCOVERS AMERICA

Such was the system that supported *omertà* in the general population, but a devastating conflict was brewing below the surface – one that would greatly complicate the patronage system and, more broadly, the *intreccio*. We follow historian Salvatore Lupo (1993, 2008) in delineating two powerful networks of mafia formation in western Sicily, already evident in the late nineteenth century. Lupo argued that the orchard zone in and around Palermo, and Palermo city itself, were well positioned to engage with the US, whereas the mafiosi of the great estates of the interior, whose primary activity was associated with rustling and banditry, were less so. To fully appreciate this difference, it is useful to understand the potency of prohibitionism in American history – the outcome of the particular trajectory of white settler colonialism, slavery and immigration. The colonizing settlers and their descendants corralled, squeezed and exterminated the Indigenous population; appropriated their land to 'improve' its use; and imported wave after wave of labour from abroad. First were the African slaves who, after 1808, when the trans-Atlantic traffic was deemed illegal, were made to become 'breeders' of slave labour for expanding plantations. After the Civil War, as the US became a colossal industrial power, factory workers came from Ireland and Germany, Eastern and Southern Europe – fourteen and a half million between 1900 and 1917, including one million Sicilians and southern Italians. Immigrant Chinese mined for gold and built the railroads that tied it all together.

White settler colonialists and their descendants perceived imported laborers not only as dangerous but also as 'alien' – less than civilized, sexually aggressive, vengeful and rebellious. Psychoactive substances and experiences only intensified the imagined threats, causing workers to reach for

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euphoria, engage in superhuman violence or simply dissipate. Prohibitions were a way to criminalize both the feared substances *and* the 'dangerous' immigrant groups with whom they were associated (see Booth 1996; Gootenberg 1999; Musto 1987). With the arrival of Southern and Eastern Europeans, saloons came under attack; industrial employers viewed them not only as a breeding ground for crime and corruption, but also as a protected space for agitators to stir up 'communist' trouble. They were joined by the moralistic, puritanical Women's Christian Temperance Union to agitate for the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which from 1920 to 1933, when it was repealed, prohibited the production, transport and sale of intoxicating liquors. Simultaneous with this was the energy devoted to international agreements banning the circulation of non-medicinal drugs, and to the policy shift from the medical treatment of (middle-class) addicts to a definition of working-class addicts as criminals, in need of draconian punishment. Fast forward to the present, when the 'war on drugs' (in proportion to population) has landed more persons behind bars than in any other country (Musto 1987: 184–85, 346–47 n. 9). According to Michelle Alexander, who published *The New Jim Crow* in 2010, roughly 25 per cent of the imprisoned population is there for drug offenses and of them, Blacks are ten times more likely than whites to be so charged, even though whites' consumption of drugs is comparable (Alexander 2010).

In *Quando la Mafia Trovò l'America*, Lupo shows how United States alcohol prohibition upended the mafia 'families' that had earlier been established in New York, Chicago, Detroit, New Orleans and other cities by members of the first wave of Sicilian immigrants. Some in this wave had arrived as children, becoming mafiosi in America. Some others were already experienced mafia 'enforcers' upon arrival. Whatever their level of skill and experience, US-based mafiosi were initially marginal to bootlegging operations when compared to members of other immigrant groups. Soon, however, they invested in clandestine stills and vehicles for smuggling, provided armed guards to truckloads filled with contraband, set up protected places for buyers and sellers to meet and acted as brokers between dealers and clients.

This leap of scale reverberated in Sicily. Lupo's careful research reveals that in the 1920s, a 'second wave' of migration, this time many of them already established mafiosi in their twenties or older – many of them also from Castellammare del Golfo – set off across the Atlantic. Whereas US sources attribute this movement to the fascist repression of the mafia under Mussolini's 'iron prefect', Cesare Mori, Lupo argues that pull factors were more decisive – namely, the opportunity, communicated by migrant relatives, to profit from the prohibited traffic in alcohol. His case is strengthened both by the embrace of bootlegging on the part of the second-wave migrants and by chronology: Mori did not assume his position in Sicily until after

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these players had already left the island. We see yet again, writes Lupo, 'how forbidding an activity considered legitimate can determine perverse effects that are singularly grave' (Lupo 2008: 65–66).

There occurred another scalar leap: networking and interethnic collaborations across territories, thereby facilitating the formation of powerful business enterprises for transporting and distributing alcohol; the militarization of weaponry, including, by the mid-1920s, the 'Tommy' submachine gun, capable of penetrating automobiles; and the addition to the arsenal of bombs, designed to sow terror and destabilize state authorities. Throughout, there was a drastic escalation of conflict, in part for market share between businesses, in part to pursue vendettas against treacherous colleagues, or imagined traitors, accused of having 'loose lips'. Conflict in turn led to rounds and rounds of meetings, ostensibly to negotiate a de-escalation of violence, but often provoking more killings. In popular culture, the conflicts are represented as 'wars' – 'beer wars' in this case.

THE SICILIAN MAFIA AND NARCO-TRAFFICKING

The prohibition of alcohol by constitutional amendment was short-lived, as was the vast and lucrative market, so attractive to mafiosi, for contraband liquor, beer and wine. Prohibitionist US drug policy commands a much bigger place in history, dating to the turn of the twentieth century and continuing. More than this, whereas alcohol prohibitionists tried, but failed, to gain the cooperation of other countries, US drug laws are reinforced through international treaties, negotiated with noteworthy input from American authorities (Musto 1987; Nadelmann 1990). The result has been a smugglers' bonanza, even more tempting to mafiosi than bootlegging. As Lupo shows, already before the First World War, members of mafia families in Palermo's orchard hinterland obtained morphine from pharmaceutical industries in Germany and Milan, where manufacture was legal, and smuggled it in crates of citrus fruit, sardines and anchovies. Destined for partners in the Sicilian immigrant community in New York, many of the crates were shipped from Castellammare (Lupo 2008).

During the 1930s, as alcohol prohibition came to an end, mafiosi poured their accumulated capital into supplying and expanding the US market not only for morphine, but also for opium, heroin, cocaine and casino gambling. First-wave immigrant from Lercara Friddi Charles 'Lucky' Luciano became a leading entrepreneur in these fields until his arrest on pandering prostitution charges in 1936. It is likely that a strategic meeting, held in Havana in 1946, at which he was present, paved the way for heroin, refined in Marseilles by Corsican gangsters, to be transported through Cuba to a number

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of US cities (see P. Schneider 2016). Additional arrangements were forged in October of 1957, when Joseph Bonanno, a 'second-wave' migrant from Castellammare and head of the Bonanno family in New York, presided over a four-day meeting in Palermo, whose agenda included ways to protect the drug trade should the Cuban government fall to the Castro revolution, which it did in 1959. (A famed meeting in Apalachin, New York, one month later, saw some one hundred mafiosi, drawn from cities across the US, and also from Italy and Cuba, dealing with similar issues.) Subsequently, a 'third wave' of mafia migrants, nicknamed 'zips' after an earlier moniker for Sicilian Americans, created the famed 'pizza connection' – a drug delivery network remarkable for its social and geographic expanse.

In the early 1970s, with the break-up of the French connection and the retreat of Marseilles as a strategic hub for the refinement of imported heroin, Sicily took its place in that commerce (McCoy 2003). With help from Marseilles chemists, mafiosi set up clandestine labs and experienced the same turmoil that characterized the American mafia during alcohol prohibition: spreading treachery and paranoia; arsenals of Kalashnikovs and bombs displacing the old, less destructive *lupara*; new approaches to state authority in which the murder of uncooperative officials became, suddenly, imaginable; increasingly sophisticated strategies for money laundering and capital investment; and endless meetings that, in the end, stoked rather than calmed disputes.

'War' was again the word most often used to characterize the crisis. The second mafia 'war', which spanned the 'long 1980s', was characterized by an unprecedented number of homicides and disappearances – over five hundred by 1983 (Lupo 1993: 212–14) – by bombings and, new for the mafia, by assaults on government officials. This 'war' pitted interior mafia groups, centred in Corleone, against mafiosi in the Palermo region. Tensions surrounding a range of business opportunities, above all in construction, were rife, but the fuse was lit by issues surrounding narcotics. The conflict pitted the Corleonesi groups, historically marginal to drug trafficking but now becoming aggressive investors, against groups that were historically advantaged by their access to orchards, ports and the airport in the Palermo hinterland. In Lupo's (ibid.) words, the Corleone-centred faction had on its agenda 'cutting out the Sicilian-American axis and taking over the narcotics profits for itself'. The two historic factions of mafiosi were identified by the press as the 'winners' (*vincenti*) and the 'losers' (*perdenti*).

Under their brutal leader, Salvatore (Totò) Riina, the Corleonesi ('winners') were responsible for most of the 'excellent cadavers' – state officials killed by the mafia from the late 1970s until the early 1990s (see Stille 1995). Lupo also has memorable words to describe how heroin trafficking upended the relationship between the mafia and the state. He and a coauthor, legal

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scholar Giovanni Fiandaca, in a book titled *Non Ha Vinto la Mafia*, argue that formerly both mafia and state institutions had oscillated toward convergence, their leaders speaking the same 'language of order'. Once this pattern was broken, each mafia-instigated massacre triggered waves of anti-mafia mobilization, in which 'pieces of the state', bolstered by an anti-mafia citizens' social movement and by new laws, pursued police and judicial repression – which in turn provoked more violence against state officials. That this unfolding dialectic between mafia and anti-mafia resulted in immense suffering needs to be acknowledged and redressed (Fiandaca and Lupo 2014; see also Coco 2022).

A CRACK IN *OMERTÀ*

Among other dramatic transformations, the terror of the late 1970s through the early 1990s produced the phenomenon of the justice collaborator. In the early 1980s, the US Justice Department's Witness Protection Program and the Pizza Connection prosecutors, who were both Sicilian and American, began to cultivate mafiosi who would turn state's witness. Ironically called *pentiti* by the Italian press, such justice collaborators were initially drawn from the losing mafia faction, tempted by sentiments of revenge and fear (but hardly repentant – Dino 2006; Schneider and Schneider 2003: 132–35). A famous *pentito*, Tommaso Buscetta, lost close relatives to the carnage of the drug wars, including two sons. Accusing the Corleonesi of corrupting the mafia, he helped the prosecutor Giovanni Falcone construct a sociogram of mafia organization. Falcone and other prosecutors of the anti-mafia 'pool' indicted 475 mafiosi, most of whom were convicted and sentenced to prison in Palermo's extraordinary 'Maxi-Trial' of 1986–87. So dramatic was this outcome that, in the 1987 elections, *cosche* leaders went out of their way to mobilize votes for the Socialist Party, in effect to send a warning to Christian Democrats, Lima and Andreotti.

On 31 January 1992, Italy's Supreme Court upheld the vast majority of the Maxi-Trial convictions, certainly an unexpected result that led to the assassination of Lima (Caselli et al. 1995). On 23 May 1992, Magistrate Falcone, his wife, also a magistrate, and three members of their police escort were massacred by bombs that exploded under the highway from the airport to Palermo, and the following 19 July, Falcone's close friend and successor, Magistrate Paolo Borsellino, together with his police bodyguards, were killed by another explosion in Palermo city. Riina, arrested in 1993, was accused a few years later of ordering the murder of Lima and both of these assaults. Theodoros Rakopoulos (this volume) illuminates the complexities of the annual events that commemorate the tragic massacres of Falcone and

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Borsellino. (Just recently, there was great ceremonial attention to the thirtieth anniversaries of those sad events.)

The capture of mafia members from the 'winning' Corleonese faction, and 'turning' some of them into *pentiti*, meant that Sicily ceased to be a hub of drug trafficking, passing that role on to other regions, for example Calabria, where the 'Ndrangheta holds sway. But all was not over for the mafia, as the other two chapters on Sicily in this volume illustrate. For one thing, as a consequence of the Maxi-Trial, the number of mafiosi who had to hire lawyers, and the number whose families required financial support because they were in prison, grew exponentially, pressuring mafiosi who remained free to double down on exacting the *pizzo*. Moreover, the dynamics surrounding justice collaborators changed. As mafiosi learned that they could modify their harsh prison terms only by offering to become state's witnesses, they manipulated the system to their own ends. Mafia leaders, to take one example, began to offer 'amnesty' to mafiosi who had broken *omertà* but were willing to recant their testimony (see Dino 2011: 2019).

The legacy of the anti-mafia process of the 1980s and 1990s is uncertain, at best. On the discouraging side, the world that ex-prisoners are joining offers new possibilities for criminal activity, among them waste management, banking, healthcare and even wind farms. At the same time, however, the levy of the *pizzo* is not as straightforward as it used to be. As a consequence of public pressure, new legislation penalizes the victims of extortion and usury if they follow the code of *omertà* and do not file a police complaint. By 2007, the Italian organization representing manufacturers – an organization that had earlier turned its back on Libero Grassi, a clothing producer in Palermo who, in 1991, had denounced the *pizzo* and was then killed by the mafia – declared that they would deny membership to entrepreneurs who did not denounce their extortionists. Two years earlier, student activists in Palermo created an organization, Addiopizzo, which, with help from various national NGOs, now campaigns on behalf of businesses that refuse to pay the *pizzo* (Gunnarson 2014; La Spina 2019; Orlando 2012). Most important of all, from the point of view of *omertà*, are the efforts of the anti-mafia movement to establish the 'rule of law', banish patron–client relations and elevate the status of women in society (see Schneider and Schneider 2003). These efforts are fraught with uncertainty, especially in rural areas – witness Rakopoulos's chapter, which details the moralizing tendencies of anti-mafia workers from Palermo who fire otherwise well-meaning persons of San Giovanni because they were seen talking to a mafioso. But in Sicily, today, many more people speak out, defying the code of *omertà*, sometimes at considerable cost to themselves – witness Ben-Yehoyada's chapter, which describes the work of courageous journalists and how they navigate their craft.

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