

The evolution of the Australian ‘ndrangheta. An historical perspective

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Abstract

This paper explores the phenomenon of the ‘ndrangheta – a criminal organisation from Calabria, South of Italy and allegedly the most powerful among the Italian mafias – through its migrating routes. In particular, by focusing on the peculiar case of Australia, the paper aims to show the overlapping of migrating flows with criminal colonisation, which has proven to be a strategy of this particular mafia. The paper uses the very thin literature on the subject alongside official reports and newspaper articles on migration and crime, mainly from Italian sources, to trace an historical journey on the migration of people from Calabria to Australia in various moments of the last century. The aim is to present the evolution and growth of Calabrian clans in Australia. The topic is largely unexplored and is still underreported among Australian institutions and scholars, which is why the paper chooses an historical approach to describe the principal paths in this very new field of research.

Keywords

Australian ‘ndrangheta, criminal colonisation, Italian mafias in Australia, Italian migration in Australia, organised crime in Australia, transnational organised crime

Introduction

The link between migration and organised crime is today under scrutiny and can be considered physiological in a world where everything – people, goods, communication – migrates very quickly. In historical perspective, the routes of Italian emigration, from the 19th century to the Second World War, are also those that have led to the internationalisation of mafia organisations. However, it cannot be generalised that wherever there have been massive migratory flows – especially those from South of Italy – there have emerged mafia-like organisations on the model of the Italian ones. As pointed out by Emilio Franzina (1998, p. 68), ‘*the conditions found on arrival or, rather, after the arrival*’,

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also influence the formation of colonies of mafia and organised crime, which at first sight, as in the US, 'would seem 100% imported from the South of the Peninsula'.

This paper, explores migration from Calabria, South of Italy, towards other continents but mainly towards Australia, in order to establish the link between migration and the existence of the criminal group from Calabria, the 'ndrangheta in Australia. Analysing the links between migration and criminality of Calabrian origin in Australia aims at raising awareness about the presence of the 'ndrangheta in the country, which is accepted by Italian scholars (Ciconte & Macri, 2009), but neglected overseas. The international reach of the 'ndrangheta is a topic of great interest today in Italy and in Europe (Direzione Nazionale Antimafia (DNA), 2012; Europol, 2013). Studying the migration of Calabrian organised crime to Australia can add to the study of the potency of the 'ndrangheta in general.

This work is a preliminary attempt to approach this topic from an historical criminological perspective, and draws together the very confused and thin literature on the subject with media analysis. The difficulties of access to certain information and the predominant use of already existing data from Italian sources or journalistic accounts represent a limit of the study, but nevertheless could represent a starting point for more focused research.

The 'ndrangheta – from Calabria to the world

Calabria is one of the 20 regions in Italy. It has a population of less than 2 million, divided in five provinces and 409 municipalities of which 155 are in Cosenza, 80 in Catanzaro, 97 in Reggio Calabria, 50 in Vibo Valentia, 27 in Crotona (Figure 1 and ISTAT, 2013). National statistics reveal that in 2011 the region was behind, both in terms of average productivity rate (48.8% compared with the national average of 62.2%) and in terms of unemployment rate (12.7% compared with the national average of 8.4%) (Camera di Commercio Reggio Calabria, 2012).

1 Unemployment and underdevelopment have been both the effect and the cause of the presence of the Calabrian mafia (Censis, 2009; Vittorio, 2009), which in its territory acts as governing actor and is the main, sometimes the only, investor (Ciconte, 2013; Sciarrone, 2010; Sergi, 2014). Considered the most powerful among Italian mafias (DNA, 2012), the 'ndrangheta controls a great portion of the cocaine trafficking in Europe (Calderoni, 2012). Its turnover in 2008 was estimated to be more than 44 billion Euros, 2.7% of the Italian GDP (Eurispes, 2008), even though these figures have been criticised (Calderoni, 2014). The 'ndrangheta relies mainly on family ties and on a shared culture rooted in Calabria. The Italian National Antimafia Prosecutor (DNA, 2012) confirms how it seems clear that the core of the organisation still is in Calabria, even though the organisation is known for its delocalisation policies. The movements, migration and transplantation of the 'ndrangheta beyond regional and national borders is the object of growing research interest (Calderoni, 2011, 2012; Dickie, 2013; Lavorgna & Sergi, 2014; Sciarrone & Storti, 2014; Varese, 2006, 2011). The penetration of the criminal organisation is arguably escalating and has become a worrisome phenomenon in contemporary times.

The geography of the 'locali'¹ of the 'ndrangheta in the world is not analogous to the destinations in which migrants from Calabria have settled (Forgione,

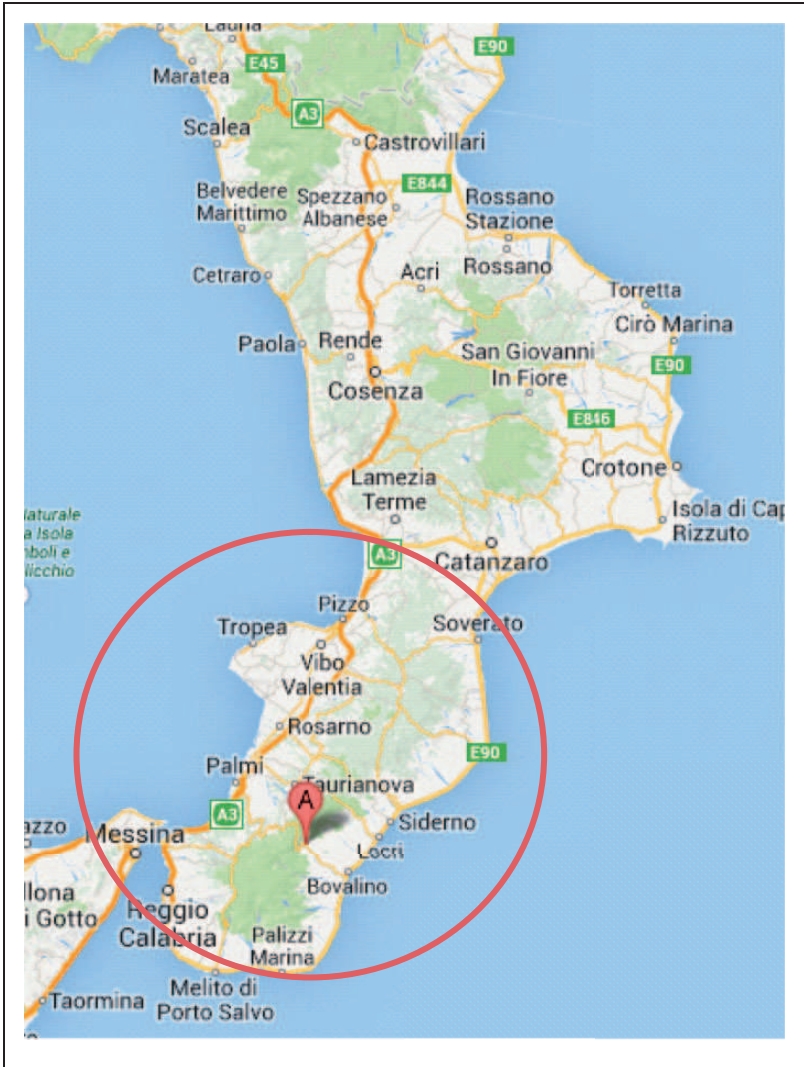


Figure 1. Region of Calabria, South of Italy (GoogleMaps). The pointer 'A' indicates the position of Plati', within the area of Reggio Calabria where migration has been more influential and where the 'ndrangheta is believed to be most powerful.

2009; Varese, 2011). There is not, in fact, an automatic link between the presence of communities of immigrants from areas with a strong mafia presence in Calabria and criminal colonisation (DNA, 2012, p. 109). Countries such as Argentina or Brazil, for example, both destinations of massive migratory flows, did not experience settlements of Calabrian criminal clans (DNA, 2012; Varese, 2011). In fact, although one certainly cannot exclude that among the many Calabrians escaping from poverty and oppression there were criminals (Scarzanella, 2004), Italian Mafias, as we know them today, do not

seem to have ever become deeply rooted in Argentina (Varese, 2011). In 1930, the Italian scholar Oreste Ciattino published a book to explain criminality in the Argentinean capital Buenos Aires: *'together with the atavistic crime we also have evolutionary delinquency; together with the murderer, the thief, we have a criminal who appears in society'* (Ciattino, 1930 as cited in Magnani-Tedeschi, 1931). It was, in short, a type of criminality fed by the atmosphere of the city with poverty as fundamental cause, but there was nothing to indicate the presence of Calabrian mafia clans. This does not mean that Argentina has not historically known mafia-like phenomena. In the 1930s, in fact, the Sicilian mafia was present in the territory and the city of Rosario was sadly compared to the Chicago of Al Capone, brutally affected by the activities of two clans who were fighting for control over illegal activities including gambling and prostitution exploitation (Díaz Araujo, 1971; Varese, 2011). According to Varese's research (2011), however, differently from what happened in other parts of the world (such as New York), suitable opportunities were lacking in Rosario; for example, protection rackets could not be successfully imposed on illegal markets. This prevented a proper transplantation of mafia methods in the city.

In recent years all South American countries, and therefore Argentina as well, have been affected by the transnationalisation 'policy' of the Calabrian 'ndrangheta, which seeks to monopolise the cocaine market and must necessarily maintain direct relationships with the criminal stakeholders of strategic producer and exporter countries through emissaries on site (DNA, 2012). However, what happened in Argentina similarly occurred in Brazil, another country of Italian migration. At the end of the 19th century, the Italian community was massively present and active in São Paulo, causing a lot of concern, in fact, from 1895 to 1898, the area of São Carlos, an area with a high concentration of migrants from Calabria, was disturbed by violent raids of a gang of 40 Calabrians and their leader from Monterosso Calabro, Francesco Mangano (Monsma, Truzzi, & da Conceição, 2003). Relying on ethnic solidarity, this gang was responsible for arson, assaults, thefts, injuries and murders. *'The Mangano gang of São Carlos is the only known example, even if the topic is under-studied and it may be that in São Paulo there may have been other Italian bandits with more limited roles'* (Monsma et al., 2003, p. 73). The fact that mafia-type organised crime did not root in Brazil is probably due to the lack of a suitable environment for the development of rural banditry – as the one of Calabrian tradition in the 19th century (Ciconte, 2011) – alongside the unavailability of elites who would protect criminal activities and the inability to bribe the police (Monsma et al., 2003).

Different, however, has been the situation in the USA, Canada and Australia, countries in which the presence of criminal groups with a clear ethnic connotation – settled in Calabrian communities (Coletti, 1995) – is documented as early as the last century. Already in 1911 a parliamentary committee in the US launched the alarm and pointed to the new Calabrian and Sicilian immigrants – who, since 1900, had given priority to routes towards Ellis Island. As confirmed in judicial reports of the time (Critchle, 2009), they were considered responsible for the growth of urban delinquency. The names of Frank Costello (born Francesco Castiglia in Lauropoli, village near Cassano Jonio in Calabria) and Albert Anastasia (born Umberto Anastasio in Parghelia) are perhaps the most well-known Calabrian bosses associated with Cosa Nostra families (Critchle, 2009).

Calabrian mafia groups settled in Canada in the early years of the 20th century. In those years, Giuseppe “Joe” Musolino, cousin of the famous Calabrian bandit with the same name (Ciconte, 2011), was active in Toronto at the head of a gang of Mafiosi from the Aspromonte (mountains in the Centre-South of Calabria) devoted to extortion and racketeering (Schneider, 2009). The more Calabrian communities integrated in the country, the more criminal bonds stretched. Between Toronto and Montreal, the ‘ndrangheta had an autonomous and overwhelming development (Edwards & Auger, 2012). Some mafia bosses are part of the history of crime and their clans are an example of the establishment of the organisational model of the Calabrian ‘*ndrine* (clans) in lands of emigration. Particularly notorious was clan of Rocco Zito, considered one of the first patriarchs of the Canadian ‘ndrangheta (Edwards & Auger, 2012; Nicaso & Lamothe, 2005). Also notorious was Rocco Perri, a poor immigrant who had left Platì (a small town in the province of Reggio Calabria and in the heart of the Aspromonte mountains, see Figure 1) at the age of 16. He became the most well-known smuggler in Canada (and had among its clients Al Capone and Joseph Kennedy, father of the future president of the United States) (Edwards & Auger, 2012; Nicaso, 2005). He accumulated a fortune and died without an heir (Sergi, 2004). Vic Crotoni originally from Mammola, and Paolo Violi, originally from Sinopoli, are both remembered as the heads of the Canadian ‘ndrangheta, in the 1960s and 1970s, respectively (O’Connor, 2011).

Calabrians in Australia: Between proletarians and criminals

Australia has always been considered an historical base of the Calabrian ‘honoured society’² even without systematic studies on the topic (Abadinsky, 2010). Certainly, in the 20th century, the village of Platì in particular – a stronghold of the Mafia – and in general the province of Reggio Calabria have provided the most substantial share of regional migration to Australia. Until 1940, however, it remained a small minority of the Italian community as a whole. In fact, according to the data from Australian registers analysed by Charles A Price, the migrants from the area of Reggio accounted for only 8% of Italians (Price, 1954). However, since the beginning of the 20th century around 70,000 Calabrians have moved to Australia to stay, initially employed as shepherds, miners or farmers (Baggio & Sanfilippo, 2011; Castle, Alcorso, Rando, & Vasta, 1992). In addition to Platì, many small and poor towns of Calabria, like San Luca and Locri, have provided a constant flow of migrants to Australia. The group from Calabria is now the largest³ after the Sicilian one and large communities concentrate in cities such as Midland and Perth and in the suburbs of Balcatta, Stirling and Osborne Park (Rando, 2007).

A few figures – even though largely from secondary data – are enough to give the dimension of migration from Calabria to Australia, which, however, was not always such a popular destination for Calabrians (Baggio & Sanfilippo, 2011; Castle et al., 1992). From 1876 to 1925, for example, only 1903 Calabrians undertook the trip to the sunny Oceanic shores, of whom 1620 departed from 1919 to 1925, an insignificant number in comparison with migration flows towards South and North America in the same years. From 1876 to 1900 only 14 Calabrians reached Australia; 35 in 1901 and 150 in 1910. The highest number, 860, arrived in 1922. Because of the uncertain and ambiguous migration policy of the fascist regime (Vernassa, 2003) and the restrictions

introduced in the US and Argentina, in 1924 and in 1925 figures were still high: 238 and 490, respectively (O'Connor, 1993). In these years the existence of criminal activities of a group of Calabrians, diffusely known as 'black hand', was ascertained, in the Tropic of Capricorn, which had attracted migrants with the opportunity to work in the sugar cane plantations (Harvey, 1948; O'Connor, 1993).

Ethnic factors together with the nationalist and corporatist policy implemented by the fascist diplomatic and consular representatives in the country favoured the tendency of new migratory contingents to aggregate (O'Connor, 1993). The new guidelines of the fascist government dried up migration flows not only to Australia, where Italians suffered personal restrictions at the outbreak of World War II. In Queensland only – where one-third of the total Italian population had settled – 2216 immigrants were interned in concentration camps; of these, 602 already had British citizenship, 41 had been born in Australia (Rando, 2005) and many were from Calabria (ITENETs, 2007).

After World War II, thanks to a bilateral agreement for a controlled migration between Italy and Australia, signed in 1951 and renewed three years later, the number of Italians moving to the country became quantitatively significant. In this period, flows of migrants and criminals overlapped in a clear and obvious way, at least for Italian authorities (Ciconte & Macri, 2009). Driven by economic needs, more than 360,000 people migrated from Italy between 1947 and 1976, 280,000 of them seeking permanent employment (Bertelli, 1983; ITENETs, 2007). Australia became one of the main destination countries, with the state of Victoria most favoured. This was not only true for Italian migrants: between 1945 and 1979, 4.8 million immigrants reached Australia, 8.5% of which were Italian (Bertelli, 1983; ITENETs, 2007). The net balance of Calabrian immigrants in Australia has been remarkable. Only between 1959 and 1979 – according to data compiled by Bertelli (1983) – there were 36,675 Calabrians, 26.2% of the total Italian migrants, the highest share among the regions (followed by Sicily, another region very exposed to mafia influences, with 35,615 people equal to 25% of the total).

In the Calabrian Diaspora in Australia, migration routes became one with the routes of mafia clans in search of new spaces and markets. From areas of classical and high density mafia activities, such as Platì, Locri and San Luca (Ciconte & Macri, 2009) different mafia families have exported their illegal activities to Australia with methods and models similar to those used in Calabria. By no means did all migrants have links with mafia families. It seems certain, however, that since the 1920s, Calabrians – considered racially inferior and discriminated against because of their brown skin – brought with them elements of their popular culture, some of which are also part of mafia culture (ITENETs, 2007). Every year in Australia, for example, there is a celebration for Our Lady of the Mountain of Polsi. For the majority of migrants the festival serves to reaffirm the identity of origin, as rightly pointed out by the Italian–Australian scholar Gerardo Papalia (2008), and in this sense it can be seen as one of the many Marian feasts of immigrants from Calabria around the world (Rosoli, 1990). However, it cannot be dismissed that such a festival also has strong symbolic significance for the clans of the 'ndrangheta who consider the Madonna of the Mountain their protector. In Polsi, the 'ndrangheta holds their annual summit during the festival to regulate the lives and affairs of the criminal organisation (Ciconte, 2011; DNA, 2012).

The rise of the 'ndrangheta in Australia

The rise of the Calabrian clans in Australia began in the 1920s when the first signs of a violent battle for control of fruit and vegetable markets in the state of Queensland were recorded (Ciconte & Macri, 2009; Harvey, 1948). A historical review of the presence of the 'ndrangheta in the country was undertaken in November 1964 by Colin Brown, an Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) agent, leading a committee on Italian organised crime (Minuti & Nicaso, 1994; Spagnolo, 2010). The Brown committee published the results of a very intensive investigation in a 147-page report entitled *The Italian Criminal Society in Australia*, which was delivered to federal authorities and never made public in its entirety (Ciconte & Macri, 2009). The report indicated that the arrival of the Calabrian 'ndrine in Australia had a precise date, 18 December 1922, with the arrival of the ship 'Re d'Italia' (King of Italy), considered in the report the first carrier of Calabrian criminality to Australia. The records held by the National Archives of Australia do confirm this account⁴: the ship Re d'Italia transported more than 1000 people from various locations in Italy, to Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide. Among those immigrants were also people with links to criminal clans in the country of origin; three of them are considered the founders of the 'ndrangheta in Australia (Ciconte & Macri, 2009; Minuti & Nicaso, 1994). Two of them are known: Antonio Barbaro,⁵ who settled in the state of Victoria, known as 'the toad', and Domenico Strano, who settled with his family in New South Wales where he died in 1965 and received a very sumptuous funeral. The identity of the third founder is uncertain, even though it is known that he established the 'locale' in Perth. The settlement of the Calabrian clans, after the arrival of the ship 'Re d'Italia', always according to the Brown committee, took place in a few years. The most attractive business, before entering into the drug market, was the fruit and vegetables farmers markets in the state of Queensland, at the time controlled by mafia boss Vincenzo d'Agostino (Ciconte & Macri, 2009; Harvey, 1948; Spagnolo, 2010).

Several criminal episodes – red flags of the presence of Calabrian clans in the territory – took place from 1928 to 1940 (Harvey, 1948). The area of Ayr, Ingham and Innisfail in northern Queensland, where Calabrian migrants had settled, was the scene of 30 criminal acts including 10 murders attributed to a mafia war whose contenders were Calabrian and Sicilian migrants (Harvey, 1948; Spagnolo, 2010). But no one was really able to understand and interpret those events at the time, which were attributed, as noted by Salvatore Lupo (2008) and picturesquely described by John Harvey (1948), to an organisation called 'The Black Hand', based also in Canada. News reports of the time also show some significant events that have ethnic and criminal connotations linked to Calabrians. On 24 December 1925, for example, a group of 8–12 Italians, after a fight in the pool, in Victoria Street, North of Melbourne, faced a policeman, Constable James Clare, who was with two colleagues in civilian clothes. According to the news reported in *The Argus* newspaper in Melbourne on the 26th of December,⁶ Clare died after having been stabbed. Accused of the crime was Calabrian immigrant Domenico Condello, who had arrived in Australia three years before. At his court appearance on 19 January 1926, Condello was acquitted, claiming that Clare had offended him and his friends without even declaring he was a policeman. The funds necessary for his defence had been collected in the Italian community by the boss Antonio Barbaro (Ciconte & Macri, 2009; Macri, 2012).

The 'ndrangheta in those years was establishing new '*locali*'. Letters found in the house of Domenico Belle in 1930 revealed to the police that Antonio Brando was the leader of a clan in Melbourne. Brando wrote that the mere fact of being born in Plati was, in his view, more than enough to assert his authority (Ciconte & Macri, 2009). Two years later, on 20 January, Rocco Trimarchi was killed in Griffith⁷; he was listed as one of the first bosses of the city in a report by John T Cusack, supervisor of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) who arrived in Australia to give advice to investigators together with Italian police commissioner Ugo Macera, who had previously worked in Calabria (Ciconte & Macri, 2009).

The Brown committee had also investigated other names of the Calabrian clans: for example, Joseph Roller, boss in Mildura, who died in 1964 with his two sons taking over the leadership of the clan, and Domenico Alvaro, known as 'Mr. Lenin', who was born in Calabria in 1910 and who became the boss of a clan in Sydney in 1960 after the death of Raffaele Mafri (Ciconte & Macri, 2009). The clans of the 'ndrangheta, in short, had spread across Australia together with migrants and controlled various licit and illicit businesses. It is important to clarify that, according to the Italian Antimafia Prosecutors (DNA, 2012), Australia, together with Canada and the North of Italy represents today one of the three known 'branches' of the 'ndrangheta outside Calabria. According to the DNA there is in fact an 'Australian Crimine',⁸ headquarters of the 'ndrangheta in Australia, which preserves the unity and the coordination of the organisation far from Italy. The 'Australian Crimine' does not allow the organisation to fall apart. When, for example, Vincenzo Angilletta attempted to fill the gap of power left after the death of Domenico Italiano – boss of Melbourne known as '*The Pope*' who died in 1962, – the Australian Crimine ordered his murder in 1963 to avoid the proliferation of 'bastard' clans (Spagnolo, 2010). The coordinating structure, in fact, does not allow open and blatant violation of the rules: it is prohibited – as confirmed in the latest report of the National Anti-Mafia Directorate (DNA, 2012, p. 124) for a similar recent case

... that, after breaking or cracking the relationships with his locale and the "Australian Crimine", a member, could ever get the chance to open a new 'locale' in Australia and become independent from the context, by seeking support from other authoritative members.

Interestingly, in the second half of the sixties, when migration essentially stopped, the regeneration of existing mafia clans with new recruits from Italy also stopped. According to Italian authorities, when Calabrian migration headed to European countries and the North of Italy (Ciconte, 2010, 2013), the Australian 'ndrangheta, already formed, continued to provide a perfect anchor for criminal activities away from the motherland and under the supervision of the *Australian Crimine*.

The growth of the Australian 'ndrangheta

Often compared to the famous 'Five Families' of New York are the 'seven families' of Adelaide, the clans Sergi, Barbaro, Trimboli, Romeo, Nirta, Alvaro, and Perre, which are based in South Australia, but with branches throughout the country. The 'seven cells' have been repeatedly linked to the '*ndrine* in Calabria (Ciconte & Macri,

2009; Macri, 2012). Similarly, families like Arena, Muratore, Benvenuto, and Condello. Medici, Musitano, Pochi, Pelle, Polimeni and Agresta, among others, exercise their control in the rural areas (Ciconte & Macri, 2009; DNA, 2012). Their presence dates back to the early 1950s. In October 1951, a severe flood hit Plati causing 18 deaths, '*when the river Ciancio came, furious out of water, from the throat of Aspromonte, [and] took away two-thirds of the poor households*' (Sergi, 1994). The village back then comprised 7200 inhabitants of whom 5000 eventually chose to pack and leave (Ciconte & Macri, 2009). The escalation of the local clans and the migration to Australia of many affiliates of the 'ndrangheta, from Plati and nearby villages, disguised among peasants, workers, skilled craftsmen and enterprising merchants, '*driven away by age-old poverty and natural plagues*' (Sergi, 1989), dates back to that event (Manfredi, 1993). Calabrian migrants were in search of better living conditions legally or illegally obtained. New South Wales became the Promised Land. The presence of so many immigrants coming from the area of Plati even led to the founding of a town called New Platì (near Fairfield), west of Sydney (Veltri & Laudati, 2009).

Thanks to the flood in Calabria, the Australian 'ndrangheta experienced its economic boom (L'Europeo, 1988) and the peak of its colonisation process in the fifties. At the same time, the Australian groups also played a big role in the growth of the clans in Calabria. In Griffith, for example, the 'ndrangheta laundered the money from the kidnappings that, especially in the 1980s, have been the major activities for the clans of the triangle Plati-San Luca-Careri (Ciconte, 2011). The Australian Immigration Department raised the alarm, fearing the illegal movement of members of the 'ndrangheta and requiring clear criminal records to enter the country (ITENETs, 2007). Neither Calabrians nor Sicilians enjoyed a good reputation and their entry into the country was not very welcome (ITENETs, 2007; Sgrò, 2000). However, the number of people already settled made it possible to preserve and keep the Calabrian community intact in the following years.

Since the 1980s, in any case, the Australian authorities could not ignore the fact that the criminal clans of Calabrian origin were becoming a social phenomenon deeply rooted in some areas of the country. In 1981, the Australian Bureau of Criminal Intelligence (ABCI) was already aware of the presence of the 'ndrangheta in the country. According to the ABCI, Australia was divided into six areas by the Calabrian mafia, each of which had its own leader (Ciconte & Macri, 2009). The number is not accidental: it is the same number found in Canada or in Basilicata, where with the contribution of the 'ndrangheta has recently grown the fifth Italian mafia, called the Basilischi (Sergi, 2012b). Every independent sub-group of the 'ndrangheta is always made up of six cells, because traditionally the seventh is always meant to be in Calabria. Seven units are, in fact, in Calabria (Ciconte, 2011; DNA, 2012). According to the ABCI, in the early 1980's Giuseppe Carbone was the boss in South Australia, Domenico Alvaro in New South Wales, Pasquale Alvaro in Canberra, Peter Callipari in Griffith, Giuseppe Alvaro in Adelaide and Pasquale Barbaro in Melbourne (Sergi, 2012a). The situation is likely to have remained unchanged today, at least in terms of areas of influence. For example, in May 2012, Barbaro was sentenced to life imprisonment for his role in the organisation devoted to the importation of drugs from Italy. This event brought the 'ndrangheta to the forefront in the news, but it also shows how the history of the organisation is still very influential. According to Italian prosecutor Vincenzo Macri (2012) the knowledge

of the clans and the phenomenon in the 1980s and the 1990s was more specific and focused than it is today.

In 1987, the federal National Crime Authority (NCA) sought the authority of Italian experts to investigate a secret society of Calabrian origin, known by various names, including the name 'ndrangheta, already used in Calabria (Ciconte & Macrì, 2009). The Italian police sent Chief Nicola Calipari to Australia for a period of three months to ascertain whether the presence of Calabrian migrants in Australia constituted a mafia-style threat on Australian soil. Calipari's report, published on 2 May 1988 – and released entirely for the Italian audience only in the book by Ciconte and Macrì in 2009 – refers to a 'Griffith Group' and confirms the presence of Calabrian mafia clans mainly engaging in drug-trafficking. Two codes of rituals of the 'ndrangheta, one found at Domenico Nirta's house in Giralang, on the outskirts of Canberra, and another seized in December 1987 from Raffaele Alvaro in Adelaide, were analysed, interpreted and reconstructed by the Australian authorities. The two codes closely resemble other codes found in Calabria, are handwritten and, most likely, orally transmitted, which would explain the linguistic errors and archaic vocabulary (Ciconte & Macrì, 2009; Sergi, 2012a). The Calipari Report reveals that the first code was found during a secret ritual among 12 men who were about to celebrate the initiation ceremony of one or more 'picciotti' (youngest members awaiting full affiliation). Nirta's code is titled the 'Rituale di Sgarro' (Ritual of Misdeed) while Alvaro's one is titled 'Rituale di Camorra' (Ritual of Extortion). Even though full of linguistic mistakes, the texts are still comprehensible and show many similarities with affiliation codes found in Calabria (Spagnolo, 2010).

A focus on the activities

Analysis of the organisation's criminal activities, derived mainly from the Calipari Report, shows the organisation engaged in the cultivation and trafficking of cannabis, ecstasy and cocaine, extortion, tax evasion, insurance fraud, illegal gambling, and – although rarely – murder (Ciconte & Macrì, 2009). As Calabria and in other places where the 'ndrangheta has moved, the first stage of the criminal penetration is the attempt to monopolise the drug market, while investments in other activities and interest in politics represent a second, more sophisticated, level (Ciconte, 2011). Violence may also follow, usually in the form of "excellent murders"⁹ – premeditated assassinations of key individuals (Barbagli & Gutti, 2002). An example of an 'excellent murder' is that of Bruce Donald MacKay, 44, a member of the Liberal Party in Griffith, who was killed in July 1977 because his press campaign against drug production in the country was directed against families who had emigrated from the Ionian coast of the province of Reggio Calabria (McCoy, 1980; Minuti & Nicaso, 1994), and for his role in the arrest of four people accused of drug-trafficking, three of whom had emigrated from Calabria (Sergi, 2012a). The Calipari report in 1988 confirms the links between the families of Griffith and this murder (Ciconte & Macrì, 2009). Robert Trimboli, a boss who had emigrated from Platì and who had never severed the ties with mafia clans in the country of origin, was charged with the murder. Born in 1931 in Platì, he had spent his childhood in his parents' farm not far from Griffith. Considered the king of drug-trafficking he had been the one who forcefully introduced the 'ndrangheta into the drug business

(Small & Gilling, 2009). *'For investigators all over the world he was the real brain of drug trafficking in the continent'* (Sergi, 1991). Extremely rich and powerful enough to travel on a yacht provocatively named 'Cannabis', Trimboli, immediately after his trial, managed to flee to Spain where he died in 1987. The people investigated in the trial were all originally from Plati: bosses and members of the clans Sergi, Barbaro and Trimboli who had established large illegal plantations of marijuana in the spacious, lush regions of Australia (Sergi, 1991). By financing the purchase of lands with the proceeds of kidnapping, in the 1980s, the 'ndrangheta controlled illegal plantations in Griffith, Michelago and Yerlarbin *'capable of delivering profits estimated at around 60 million dollars per year'* (Sergi, 1991, p. 85). New South Wales had been turned into a huge mafia corporation.

Following the MacKay murder, the murder of Colin Winchester in 1989 changed forever the perception of Calabrian immigrants (Kennedy, 2000). Colin Winchester, Deputy Chief of the Australian Federal Police (AFP), was murdered outside his home in Canberra. He had been involved in a delicate investigation aimed at mapping of land purchased by mafia families of Plati (Gratteri & Nicaso, 2009); after his death 188 cannabis plantations were discovered precisely on lands owned by Calabrians. Campbell, Toohey, and Pinwill (1992, p. 228) reported claims by authorities linking the Winchester murder to criminal syndicates of Calabrian origin:

'This particular murder has all of the hallmarks of what happens in Italy and in the US where criminals execute judges as well as top law enforcement officers to coerce them into submission.'

However, the case has been in the eye of the media for years and has been considered an example of racism and group polarisation (Campbell, Toohey, & Pinwill, 1992; Kennedy, 2000). Former public servant David Eastman was convicted in 1995 for this murder, while the mafia hypothesis was, at least formally, abandoned (Jarrett, 1995). However, in August 2012 an inquiry on Eastman's conviction was announced (Waterford, 2013). On 31st May 2014, the inquiry recommended that Eastman's conviction to be quashed, because of 'deeply flawed forensic evidence' (Owens, 2014). The inquiry was welcomed by Antimafia prosecutor Vincenzo Macrì, who is convinced that the murder was certainly linked to the 'ndrangheta (Guilliat, 2013; Macrì, 2012).

At the time of the Winchester murder, between the mid-1990s and 2001, several police operations in Italy (Zag, Domino and Decollo) have shed light on the international networks of drugs and criminal activity in Australia and beyond. Operation Siderno Group, in the first half of the decade, showed how the 'ndrangheta operated in the Northern United States and Canada, and also had ties with Australia (mostly for cannabis trafficking). Australia, in fact, offers fertile fields and certain availability of cheap labour, as well as less rigorous controls in some areas (Ciconte, 2011). Operation Zag in the mid-1990s was an investigation led by anti-Mafia prosecutors in Reggio Calabria, which revealed the relationships between criminals and Calabrian partners in Australia involved in money laundering after the export of cocaine from Italy to Australia (Sergi, 2012a). Operation Domino tracked the import of cocaine from Colombia and Turkey and worked on the assumption that there was a unique organisation from Colombia through Italy towards the rest of the world. Operation Decollo (1991–2001) revealed a triangular relationship between Colombia, Italy and Australia (Ciconte & Macrì,

2009; Sergi, 2012a). Members of the 'ndrangheta had bought from Colombian drug traffickers between 100 and 800 kg of cocaine packaged in blocks of marble and stone, and had sent them to a shipping company in the Calabrian port of Gioia Tauro or to the port of Adelaide. The investigation also involved shipments of cocaine from Venezuela and Colombia to Italy, France, Spain, the Netherlands and Germany, and in Togo and Australia. The trial was held in Italy, but four members of the Australian group (three Italian-born and one Australian) were also charged in Australia (Sergi, 2012a).

Also in the 1990s, another murder that presents a strong and organised 'ndrangheta in Australia was the murder of Geoffrey Bowen, National Crime Authority detective. He was killed in 2 March 1994 by a package that exploded in his office in Adelaide right after delivery (Ciconte & Macri, 2009; Madigan, 2013). The day after he was murdered, Bowen was scheduled to testify in a trial against, among others, Domenico and Francesco Perre, from Plati. The two brothers had been involved in an operation in the Hidden Valley in 1993, leading to the arrest of 13 people after the discovery of cannabis plantations (15,000 plants) for a total value of over \$40 million (Sergi, 2012a). Following the murder of Bowen, Dominic Perre was arrested in July 1994, but the investigating authorities failed to prove allegations against him. To this day the case remains unresolved and is considered one of the most important unsolved cases in the country (Madigan, 2013), which causes cyclical interest from the local media. Most recently, a documentary dedicated to the event, titled 'Terror at home' was aired by *Sunday Night* in July 2012.

Contemporary days

Recent judicial history shows that criminal activities involving Calabrian clans and Australia are not limited exclusively to the province of Reggio Calabria, and in particular to Plati, but extend to other Calabrian provinces (Sergi, 2012a). The National Antimafia Prosecutors (DNA, 2012) differentiate between internationalisation (also transnationality) or delocalisation, and colonisation, according to the level of penetration of the clans into a foreign country. Contemporary literature also talks about colonisation (Massari, 2000) or 'transplantation' (Varese, 2006, 2011). More research is needed to place the Australian experience among these classifications. Today's 'ndrangheta in Australia is based both on kinship ties and on traditional activities; this would contribute to a thesis of transplantation especially if protection activities can be proved at the local level (Varese, 2006). However, when discussing Australia, the Italian Antimafia Prosecutors speak of colonisation or transit criminal activities (DNA, 2012). Studies on migration of criminal groups, especially in recent years, have considered the possibility that certain groups make informed choices to move into a targeted place for business. Anticipating those choices could help defeat organised crime (Williams & Godson, 2002). In the case of Australia, however, it seems that migration drives came before mafia-related ones and indeed, that the proliferation of organised crime groups was a collateral damage of migration. As already noted by Varese (2011, p. 7):

'it seems plausible that when large groups of individuals migrate from territories where mafias are pervasive, some with criminal skills will also relocate and be more likely to engage in mafia activities in the new territory'

This corroborates the observation that *'migration from territories of origin where there is a high proportion of mafiosi appears to carry the greatest threat of mafia transplantation'* (Varese, 2011, p. 16). However, the links between migration and organised crime are not only not obvious and cannot rely on pre-established social models, but very much depend on the local characteristics of the area of destination. In this sense, Australia's late observation of the events surrounding Calabrian migrants might have facilitated ethnic aggregation and mafia clans' proliferation. Even today the knowledge and awareness of the 'ndrangheta in Australia does not match the knowledge available to Italian authorities on the same issue.

The following case is a good example of what has been said so far. At the end of May and beginning of June 2012, three men living in Australia – Nicola Ciconte, Vincenzo Medici and Michael Calleja – were convicted for mafia association and smuggling 500 kg of cocaine into the country. The trial took place in Calabria where the three were found guilty in absentia because Australia could not grant extradition (due to the lack of a mafia membership offence in Australian law). Moreover, the Australian authorities had started their own investigation on the three men, but the evidence provided by the Italian courts, including the testimony of an informant, could not be used in Australian courts as the request for extradition was rejected (Sergi, 2012a). According to the archives of Italian prosecutors, Ciconte had maintained contacts with accomplices in Vibo Valentia and, in collaboration with Medici and Calleja, had made several trips from Australia to Calabria to define the details of shipments and payments. Ciconte, the son of Calabrian immigrants who settled in Victoria in 1955, strengthened his mafia ties through his relatives in Italy. The father of Medici was a notorious gangster in Australia and was murdered in the early 1980s. Eventually, Ciconte, a native of the state of Victoria (where today about 40% of the Italian-Australian population resides) and resident on the Gold Coast, received a 25-year prison sentence: the court had found him guilty of mafia membership for a conspiracy with Calabrian clans to import cocaine into Australia between 2002 and 2004 from Colombian producers. Medici, originally from Mildura, and Calleja from Melbourne, were both sentenced to 15 years for aiding and abetting Ciconte (Macri, 2012; Sergi, 2012a). The sentence pronounced in Calabria in 2012 revealed how poorly documented is the phenomenon of Italian criminal organisations operating in Australia. The phenomenon is under-reported and not fully understood in the scenario of organised crime in the country (Macri, 2012) and does not appear in the threat assessment of organised crime in the country (Australian Crime Commission (ACC), 2013). According to a study carried out by the Attorney's General Department in connection with development of an Organised Crime Response Plan (2010), crimes such as drug-trafficking or people trafficking have led to an increase in violence, drug dealing and theft, which are all offences connected with organised crime groups. In 2013, the ACC explained that the costs of organised crime in Australia each year range around \$15 billion; this represents a serious threat to Australian society, but there is no mention of the Calabrian mafia (ACC, 2013). Indeed, while in Australian literature attention has been paid to various manifestations of organised crime (Ayling, 2012; Powell, 2009), it seems that the policing focus is on motorcycle gangs (Ayling & Broadhurst, 2012; Barker, 2007) and Chinese triads (Ayling, 2011).

The gap between what the Italian authorities take for granted – the existence of a deeply rooted Australian 'ndrangheta – and the Australian accounts could be

problematic for another reason. Italian authorities agree on the fact that the 'ndrangheta in Australia is not only dedicated to drug-trafficking or other traditional activities, but also, as in Calabria, has interests in politics, mostly at the local level (Ciconte, 2011, 2013; Forgione, 2009). Known to Calabrians are, for example, interceptions in 2011 involving 'ndrangheta's affairs in Siderno (near Reggio Calabria) between Domenico Antonio Vallelonga (known as Tony) – Calabrian of origin and former mayor of Stirling from 1997 to 2005 – and the 'ndrangheta boss Giuseppe Commisso (Ciconte, 2013). Even though the judicial proceedings are not final yet, the Italian Anti-mafia prosecutors have the details of the interceptions proving the connection in the 2000-page decree for custody issued within Operation Crimine 2,¹⁰ a massive investigation involving more than 40 people in 2011. As agreed by experts (Ciconte, 2011, 2013; Forgione, 2009; Macri, 2012), even though there has not been any official inquiry into the levels of corruption of public officials or police officers and penetration of mafia figures into the public sector in Australia, the existence of networks of the 'ndrangheta in Australia is judicially proven at least in Italy, not only at an economic level but also at a more concerning social level.

Another event, which has been considered emblematic of the strength of Calabrian clans in Australia (Ciconte & Macri, 2009; McKenzie & Baker, 2009) is the case of Francesco Madafferi. Madafferi – born in 1961 in Oppido Mamertina near Reggio Calabria – arrived in Australia at the age of 27, with a tourist visa. Soon after, he got married and had four children. Madafferi, who already had problems with the law in Italy, remained as an illegal immigrant in Australia; after 12 years the authorities issued a deportation order against him. In 2000, the Minister for Immigration rejected Madafferi's appeal and confirmed the expulsion. The name of Madafferi had not been linked to drug-trafficking in Australia and the Italian community rebelled against the expulsion. In fact, Madafferi's family, in particular his brother Antonio, were very respected men in the Calabrian community in Melbourne even though more than once involved in police investigations (McKenzie & Baker, 2009). In support of Madafferi Nino Randazzo, director of the two Italian newspapers '*The Globe*' and '*The Flame*' printed in Melbourne and Sydney, and future Democratic Party senator in the Italian Parliament, wrote an open letter to the minister (Ciconte, 2013; Ciconte & Macri, 2009). The decision was overturned, however, only in 2005, when the new Immigration Minister officially quashed the expulsion for humanitarian reasons. The events surrounding this decision were considered suspicious by the media (Tham, Costar, & Orr, 2011). The newspaper '*The Age*' in Melbourne advanced the hypothesis that the gracious behaviour was due to the fact that Madafferi's brother Antonio, who had been recognised as a member of the 'ndrangheta in Italy, had donated thousands of dollars to the Minister's political party (McKenzie & Baker, 2009; Murphy, McKenzie, Welch, & Houston, 2008). Madafferi was arrested in 2008 after the world's biggest ecstasy seizure in the port of Melbourne when the boss Barbaro was arrested (Sergi, 2012a; Tham et al., 2011). In August 2008, authorities found 4.4 tonnes of MDMA corresponding to 15 million ecstasy pills hidden inside tomato jars each of which contained 2.5 kg of product. After the operation, called 'Operation Bootham/Moko' – which for obvious reasons was carried out both in Italy and in Australia – 18 people were arrested in four Australian States, Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and New South Wales. Among these, apart from Pasquale Barbaro, boss in Griffith and

mastermind of the operation, was also Madafferi (Ciconte & Macri, 2009; Sergi, 2012a). After the arrest, a virulent polemic against the Liberal Party erupted because of those rumours, and in 2009 an enquiry was sought by the Commissioner of the AFP to investigate the alleged donations and association of members of the Liberal Party with members of a mafia group in order to prevent the expulsion of one of their member, Francesco Madafferi (Ciconte & Macri, 2009). The inquiry confirmed a number of donations made throughout the years by figures linked to Calabrian crime syndicates, but at the same time found no wrongdoing on the Minister's (and the party's) part (Ciconte, 2013; Ciconte & Macri, 2009; Nicholls & McClymont, 2014; Tham et al., 2011). As reported in the media, this story is far from being clear from an historical point of view.

Suggestions of 'ndrangheta involvement either in politics or in criminal markets are rarely to be found in media reports. Indeed, the closer we get to contemporary days, the more difficult it has become to track Calabrian involvement in criminal businesses in Australia. Whether this is because of changing features of migrated population or because of the lack of a proper focus on this specific group by the Australian authorities, still needs to be further investigated.

Conclusion

Migration and globalisation have enabled the criminal organisation known as the 'ndrangheta to move beyond its country of origin. However, the extent of these movements across the globe is difficult to analyse and quantify. After having exploited the traditional migration routes, the 'ndrangheta has been developing very lucrative business on a global scale. The link between migration and the 'ndrangheta in the Australian case is probably more evident than elsewhere, but the field is understudied because it mainly relies on Italian sources. It is undeniable, however, that the dynamics of migration and proliferation of criminal groups often overlap. From the 1920s onwards Calabrian 'ndrine rooted in Australia with a precise and independent identity, and, most of all, always maintaining contact with the motherland Calabria. This process, confirmed at a socio-historical level, has also been legally proven, but only in Italy as a result of Italian prosecution. In the view of the National Anti-Mafia prosecution office (DNA, 2012), the Australian case is one of *colonisation* directly dependent on migration. The phenomenon of mafia colonisation is peculiar of the 'ndrangheta only, among the Italian mafias, because, even the Sicilian Cosa Nostra did not operate at the same level of awareness when established outside Italy (DNA, 2012). However, the DNA (2012, p. 108) warns that *'not in all the territories that have been destination of Calabrian migration, the 'ndrangheta is structured according to the patterns that are proper of the archetype in Calabria'*. But in Australia this seems to be the case.

This paper has reviewed the evidence, which links migration from Calabria with the manifestations of criminal phenomena of ethnic origin. The paper has mainly used existing literature, newspaper and scattered official information to look at the way the Australian 'ndrangheta has developed throughout the decades. Conspicuous migration has allowed an historical and structured presence of the 'ndrangheta with significant impact on illegal economic activities and also in political and social aspects of the country. Chronicles and media reports throughout the years have more than once referred to

Calabrian groups operating in various illegal markets with support from Calabria. Family ties have been made tighter by migration and nostalgia for the mother country; violent ‘excellent murders’ might have gone unpunished; the drug market has been flourishing and the penetration has been suspected and investigated. The risk is that, if undetected and underestimated, the phenomenon will grow undisturbed. The ‘ndrangheta is a silent and fluid organisation, whose tentacles will seek to penetrate even further in Australian society. Even though the criminal colonisation of Australia is unique because of the peculiar events linked to migration in the country, the presence of the Calabrian ‘ndrangheta so far away from Italy should come as a warning. The relationship between Calabria and Australia for drug-trafficking, for example, requires further attention, and the lack of awareness of the implications of this Italian mafia abroad is worrisome. Whereas it is true that there is no direct link between migration and criminal transplantation, even the mere presence of fellow nationals in a given country will always be something the organisation can take advantage of when deciding to move activities abroad. The Calabrian mafia counts on ethnic solidarity in Italy but also abroad. The dangerousness of this threat in Australia largely depends on migration history, which is peculiar to this country, but the characteristics of the Calabrian ‘ndrangheta have certainly found in this peculiar migration history a very fertile territory to settle and grow.

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2

Notes

1. A ‘locale’ is a group of ‘ndrine (family clans, units) usually present in the same territory and working together in the same areas.
2. One of the first names of the ‘ndrangheta.
3. Nine associations of Calabrian immigrants are active today in Australia. Three in the state of Victoria in Northcote, West Brunswick and Bulla. Three others operate in Western Australia, two of which are in Perth. The others are in Queensland, Melbourne and in South Australia.
4. National Archives of Australia, at <http://recordsearch.naa.gov.au>
5. Although, his name is spelled Barbara in the National Archives.
6. See digitalised edition of the newspaper online at <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/2175711>
7. See articles on *The Argus* online, <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/result?q=Rocco+Trimarchi>
8. With the word ‘Crimine’ is intended a structure of control on various locali of the ‘ndrangheta. According to the latest DNA report (2012) there is a Calabrian Crimine, a North Italy Crimine, an Australian Crimine, and a Canadian Crimine.
9. Excellent Murders is a literal translation from the Italian ‘delitti eccellenti’, which is the way demonstrative mafia murders are usually called (Ciconte, 2011).

10. PROCURA DELLA REPUBBLICA Presso il Tribunale di Reggio Calabria Direzione Distrettuale Antimafia Decreto di Fermo di indiziato di delitto – artt. 384 e segg. c.p.p. – Procedimento n. 1389/2008 R.G.N.R. D.D.A, vol. I-II-III-IV (for the Australian links, see volume III).

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