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Caterina Gozzoli, Antonino Giorgi & Roberta Lampasona

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SIGNS OF ‘NDRANGHETA IN LOMBARDY: STUDY OF A CULTURAL ARTIFACT

CATERINA GOZZOLI AND ANTONINO GIORGI
Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan, Italy

ROBERTA LAMPASONA
Palermo University, Palermo, Italy

This work would like to be a contribution for a more thorough knowledge of the phenomenology of the Mafia in Lombardy. It is a study carried out according to an ethnographic approach, which proposes the analysis of a cultural artifact aiming at understanding the logics and structure of the Mafia organization from different social interlocutors’ representations and lived experiences.

KEYWORDS: Coexistence, cultural artifacts, Mafia culture and organization.

The purpose of the research, consistent with previously conducted studies (Gozzoli, Giorgi, and D’Angelo 2014a), is to explore this anthropo-psychical and sociocultural system which is ‘*Ndrangheta* and to study the way it has characterized involved territories as well as their inhabitants (Giorgi et al. 2009). Through an in-depth qualitative analysis of a video-documentary containing testimonies, wiretapping and interviews of people who have in/directly been having to do with ‘*Ndrangheta*, we could understand how strongly this phenomenon is present in the considered territory (a city in the North of Italy), controlling its political, social, and financial transformations, and at the same time there would seem to be phenomena of social denial, feelings of sufferance, pain, fear in victims, and a crucial impossibility of coexistence.

The possibility to connect information coming from different viewpoints and to grasp some recurrences allowed highlighting effective tools for counter-action and intervention modalities.

PRESENCE OF ‘NDRANGHETA: LOOKING FOR SIGNS ON THE TERRITORY

This contribution aims at exploring the anthropo-psychical and sociocultural system represented by ‘*Ndrangheta* in northern Italy, and understanding the way

Address correspondence to Caterina Gozzoli, Department of Psychology, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, I.go Gemelli 1, Milan 20123, Italy. E-mail: caterina.gozzoli@unicatt.it

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this characterizes the territories involved and their inhabitants (Di Blasi and Lo Verso 2011). According to an ethnographic methodology (Geertz 1973; Fetterman 1998), in order to make the territory aware of the need to fight against this phenomenon, we would like to remember that the ethnographic approach is based on the study of all material and immaterial objects, made by human beings (artifacts), which are kept, passed on, and modified by means of their same action, as a way to understand the culture of specific groups, places, and territories (Shein 1985; Cole 1996a, 1996b).

Artifacts, symbols, and exterior constructions of culture are embodied, shared by people through their everyday experience and, later on, used to read reality and interact with it. They are visible, tangible, and audible expressions of behaviors based on cultural norms, values, and assumptions (Gagliardi 1990; Gozzoli et al. 2014b). Ethnographic research has therefore the aim to observe people, with the purpose to examine in detail experiences, situations, environment, activities, relationships, interactions, and processes they have been carrying out in their everyday life (Pulman-Jones 2008).

The artifact at issue refers to a video documentary titled: "*Sei sicuro? La Piovra a Brescia*" [Are you sure? Mafia in Brescia], produced by the student association *Studenti Per-Udu* in co-operation with the Brescia Antimafia Network. The latter was born from the need to make the population in that province of Lombardy aware of the Mafia phenomenon and turned itself in after Fortugno's lawsuit.¹

We think it is important to underline this datum, just because in the aftermath of this trial, several emotions and attitudes arouse from it. On one hand, there was the incredulity to learn that a culture considered so far away was instead settled and deeply rooted on their territory since some years. On the other, was the frustration of having never realized what was really happening under everyone's eyes. This is the reason why the anti-Mafia network decided to bear clear witness of what was happening and evolving in the territory of Lombardy.

Several people took part in the production of the video documentary, among whom representatives and officials belonging to institutions, organizations, and associations engaged in the struggle against Mafia, trade-union organizations, municipal representatives and public servants, environmentalists, entrepreneurs, local reporters, up to former '*Ndrangheta* members and victims' testimonies. The protagonists documented their significant experience and knowledge about '*Ndrangheta*, giving us a truly complex framework of the Mafia phenomenon in Lombardy.

DIALOGUING VOICES: THE ANALYSIS OF THE SOCIAL ARTIFACT WITHIN THE GROUNDED THEORY APPROACH

The contents of the video documentary were analyzed by means of the Grounded Theory model (Glasser and Strauss 1967; Charmaz 2014). In more specific terms, our analysis conducted by software Atlas.ti 7.0, which organizes words in so-called "Family" (a meta-level of meanings that generate a theoretical hypothesis), aims at reconstructing the theories underlying the information analyzed (Richards 2005, 2007; Friese 2014), and continues through a more and more refined categorization

process. This process cannot take place through a linear inductive path, but through a circular one. The results achieved thanks to the qualitative analysis of data have been extremely relevant to thoroughly know *'Ndrangheta* and understand the several sectors in which this criminal system deepens its roots.

We would like to underline how the data extrapolated from the video documentary and the conclusions deriving from their analysis confirm and somehow increase the theories subtending the operation *Crimine-Infinito* [Endless Crime],² which allowed outlining those, so to say, identifying and distinctive features of *'Ndrangheta* in Lombardy (cf. Gozzoli, Giorgi, and D'Angelo 2014a). This maxi operation against Calabrian *'Ndrangheta* and the correlated Mafia clans in Milan, carried out by Direzioni Distrettuali Antimafia (DDA) [Anti Mafia Police District Headquarters] of the courts in Reggio Calabria and Milan led to the arrest, and what followed was the condemnation of more than 200 people, convicted of crimes such as murder, drug trafficking, preventing the right to freely vote, laundering of money coming from illicit activities such as corruption, extortion, and usury (Chiavari 2011).

SOME RESULTS

How 'Ndrangheta Moves in Lombardy

Once territories, ranks, hierarchies, and competences have been established, clans continue what they have been doing for decades: the criminal control of the territory. Business moves around drug trafficking, estate purchase, extortions, usury, and, most of all, public procurement and the construction industry. A silent infiltration, due to the insertion of illicit money in one among the richest regions of Italy. A pollution of economy, a distortion of competition (Calderoni 2012). Drug trafficking, financial activities, and public procurement have represented bread and butter for *'Ndrangheta* members, who have been very careful to maintain balance not only among them, but also with other forms of criminality present in Lombardy.

Figure 1 (the family extrapolated from the software Atlas.ti) allows delineation of work mafia in the territory and which are main sectors of investment. This was possible thanks to the contents of the interview of the Chief of Brescia Anti Mafia Flying squad.

As it can be tracked down in this figure, the sectors where *'Ndrangheta* invests are mainly those of building and ground movement: the building industry keeps on being the primary sector, thanks also to the acquisition of workforce and labor coming from illegal immigrants and endemic poor people living in the outskirts of Milan (Eurispes 2008). The market of ground movement shows thus itself as monopolized by *'Ndrangheta*, with local entrepreneurs oppressed by intimidations and extortions, or aware of the fact that associating with some people can be dangerous, but also very sure and fruitful. Moreover, this movement and the massive use of lorries seem to be the best tools to dispose of toxic waste in quarries and illegal garbage dumps, even as filling during works of construction or demolition to get, in this way, further conspicuous profits together with those

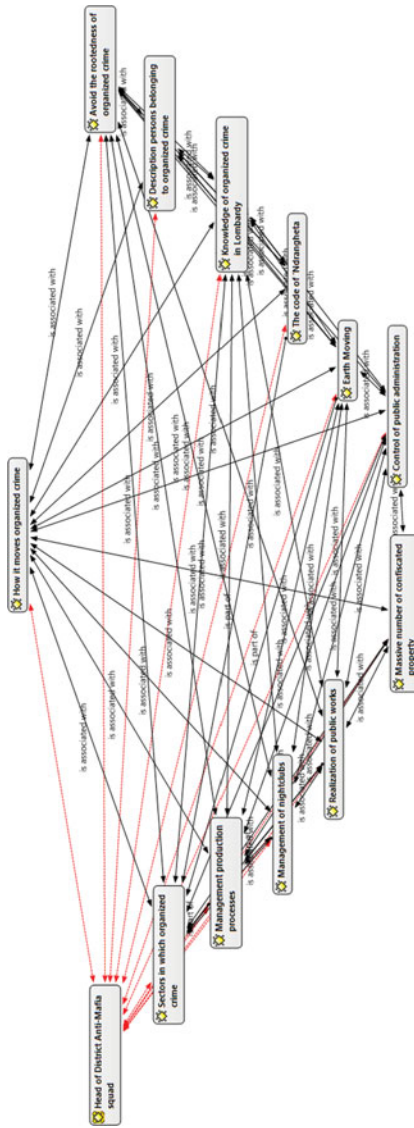


Figure 1. Head of district anti Mafia.

achieved with contracts. The building site thus becomes the most suitable theatre for this kind of illegal activity, often isolated with enclosures making it difficult to control, with lorries going in and out with few controls to pass.

An output is shown below (Figure 2) representing the family “Ground Movement” obtained from the text analysis of data with respect to the abovementioned phenomenon of building industry and of the way *‘Ndrangheta* moves to carry out its business.

What Are the Characteristics of *‘Ndrangheta* in Lombardy? One of the most important data coming from the analysis of the phenomenon concerns the structure of *‘Ndrangheta* organization: no more, as it was formerly thought, with an horizontal extension and no unitary top, but, on the contrary, having a pyramidal co-ordination, called Province or Crime.

The horizontal structure is formed by local *‘ndrine*, managed by *famiglie* through the principle of geographic homogenization, according to which a certain area of Lombardy belongs to a family, and a certain area of Calabria belongs to the same family; there is a subdivision of territory as if it was a photocopy of Calabria in Lombardy. A pyramidal structure adds to this, making it a perfectly “functioning” organization, where a central structure called “*la Lombardia* [Lombardy]” acts as connection with the “*casa madre* [main office].” The *Locale* cannot move away from it, neither psychologically or on the real plan. It is the government and decision-making structure of all the *locali* present all over Italy and the world, which all strategies and important decisions for colonies, too, depend on.

From environmental tapping we can understand how Milan should be considered today as an almost completely autonomous province from Reggio Calabria, with at least 15/16 *locali* and as many *Capi-Locale* [Local Bosses]; only in the territory of Brescia, can we speak of the existence of six *Locali* placed in various areas of the territory. As it is clear from the interviewees’ words, all the *locali* present in Lombardy:

- are and feel *‘Ndrangheta*: they are almost exclusively composed of subjects with a Calabrian origin and often belong to *‘Ndrangheta* members’ families;
- always work autonomously on the territory of Lombardy recurring to the Mafia method;
- rule on their portion of territory but talk with each other through the structures of Lombardy, even if, on the occasion of some contrasts, some Calabrian reference *‘ndrine* were called to intervene.

Despite their Calabrian descent, the members of *‘ndrine* in Lombardy settled in the north a long time ago and permanently live there: this had allowed a keen knowledge both of the territory and the people they get in touch with. As a consequence, we can say that the *‘Ndrangheta* association we have analyzed is not simply the peripheral articulation of the Calabrian criminal structure, but on the contrary, it is an autonomous association performing crimes and intimidating actions on the district territory, generating subjection and *omertà* (conspiracy of

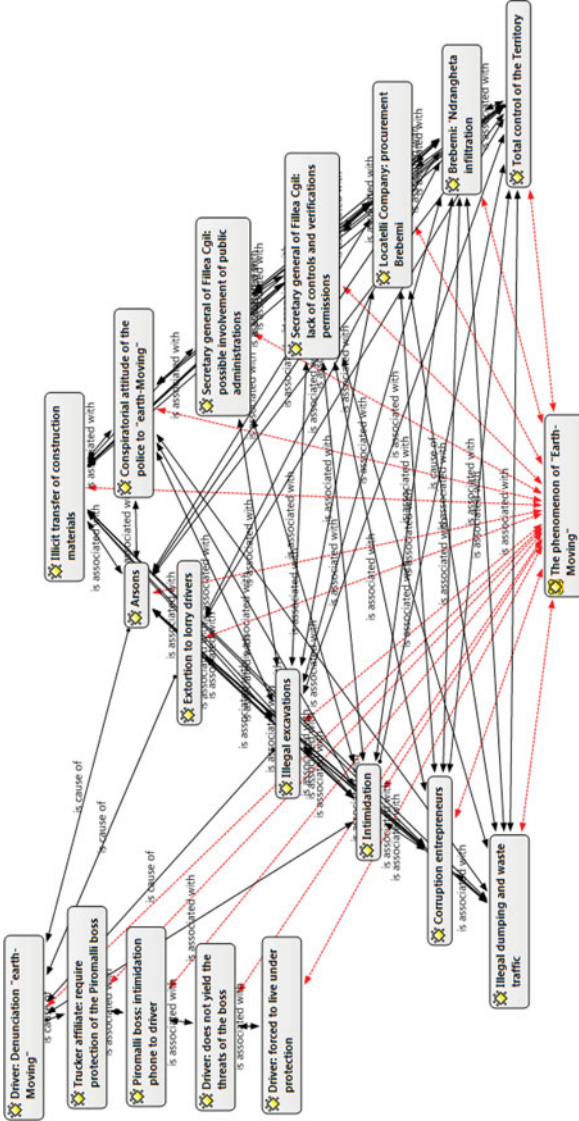


Figure 2. The phenomenon of earth moving.

silence). Starting from the tapping performed and the testimonies collected in the video documentary, it is clear how traditional values founding the Calabrian Mafia could perfectly adapt to the new reality of Lombardy with which they integrated.

The ability '*Ndrangheta* had to build a system of values, mentalities, ways to think, behavior codes, culture, within the territory of Lombardy, interacted with the entirety of financial, social, political, cultural activities of a whole region. The codes represent a crucial tool for the behavior and the education of the members' mentality; important to ensure the sense of belonging to the organization and therefore of being protected (Giorgi et al. 2009). Intimidations and extortions, physical and psychological violence, or, more in general, revenge, represent defense tools for the organization; conspiracy of silence and revenge as essential, not eradicable aspects of '*Ndrangheta* ethics, psychology, and mentality.

The massive entrenchment and infiltration in Lombardy gives us evidence of the acquisition of a new mentality, which involves all ethical, moral, social, and financial aspects of the territory, in such a way as to create what has been defined as "Mafia culture"³ (Figure 3).

Coexistence Systems. Control and submission are modalities that involve fantasies of possession and not of exchange while meeting one another. When this takes place, the relationship that originates is grounded on the denial of unfamiliarity (Carli and Paniccia 2003). What comes out from the voices of the participants to this study (Figure 4), is that control is a characteristic that is consciously used by '*Ndrangheta* members for a calculated achievement of their criminal purposes. Examples are: the control of each subject's entrance in the organization, of criminal actions through periodic meetings, of one's neighbor (whether he is a member, a collaborator, or an external person) and of each and every action he performs an emotion he feels, in order to guarantee the level of conspiracy of silence; the overbearing control of the territory.

Interviewees say that '*Ndrangheta* immediately educates to its own discipline. Besides not leaving freedom of action and thought to the people it is involved with, the entrance into the organization finally becomes the only possible horizon for the individual's self-realization. This is the reason why some important people working in various sectors such as entrepreneurship, building industry, construction companies, contracts for public works, and public administrations end up colluding with '*Ndrangheta*. This situation seems today to be worsened by the crisis, which makes the '*Ndrangheta* member's capital immediately accessible.

Some among the interviewees deny the existence of the phenomenon showing diffidence and at the same time concern. It is not a lack of awareness/visibility about the diffusion of '*Ndrangheta* in Lombardy, but rather a defensive and passive form of control that many citizens and city councilmen carry out perpetuating that conspiracy of silence typical of Mafia culture. This can be connected to the reactions of panic, sufferance, and pain the intimidating and revenge systems '*Ndrangheta* uses to stimulate in the victims. A further trend to deny the phenomenon seems to be underestimating the problem; therefore, today people take cover behind the false hope that this reality is a problem only limited to the south of Italy.

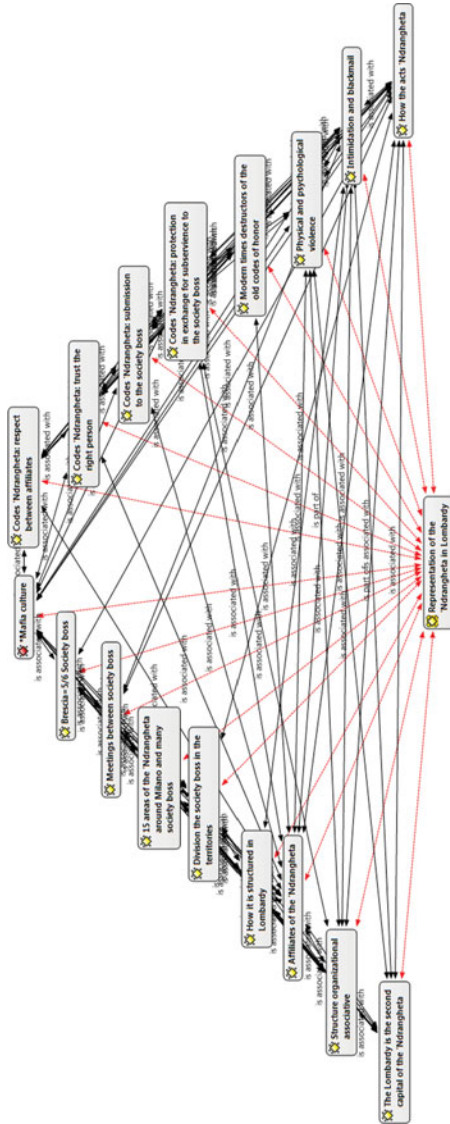


Figure 3. Representation of 'Ndrangheta in Lombardy.

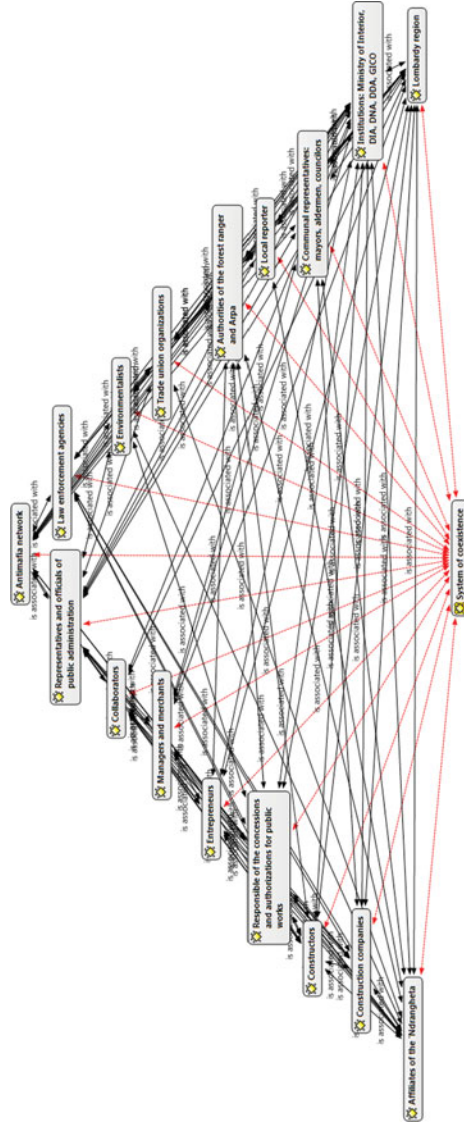


Figure 4. System of coexistence.

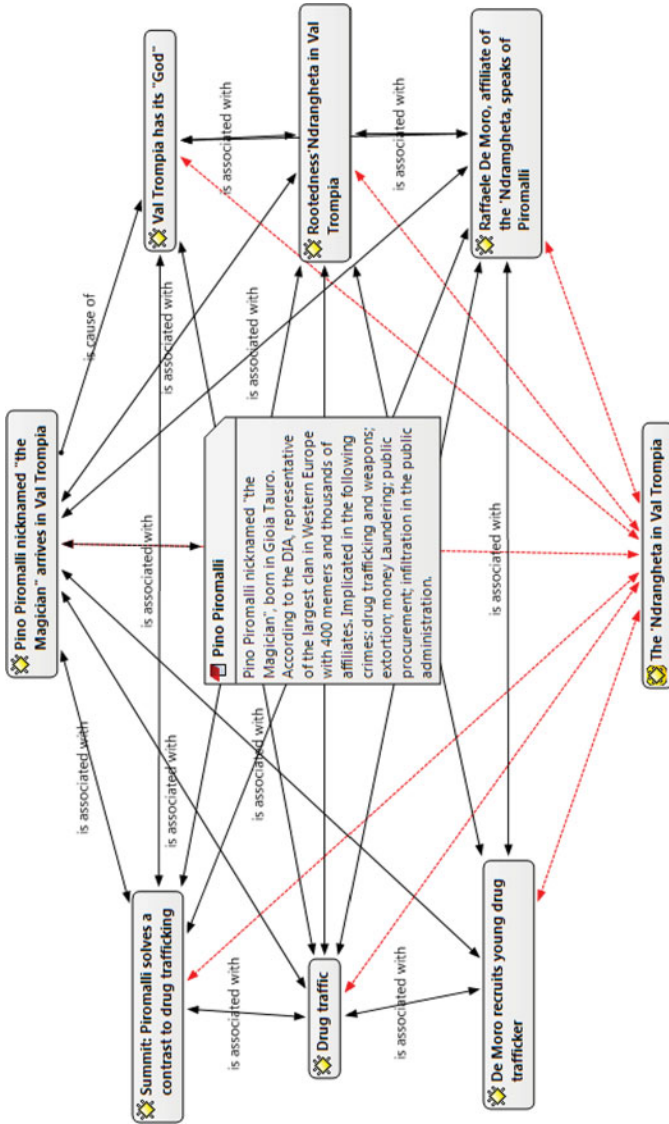


Figure 5. The 'Ndrangheta in Val Trompia.

In light of the results obtained from the analysis of the video documentary, the attack to coexistence is clear as well as the diffusion and deeply rooted presence of Mafia culture on the territory, which does not only involve the mentality of organized crime but has a wider meaning because it means denying social rules in favor of private and family rules. In general terms, a denial not only of otherness in favor of one's own belonging system, but a refusal to share rules, norms that transmit relationships, with a violent social narrowness. This is a way of thinking typically of the Mafia, which expresses through behaviors distorting the relationship between public and private. Public institutions are thought and lived as if one related to a huge family that has to be controlled. Social relationships are mainly started and perpetuated to create a psychological dependence between one another. The culture of the Mafia obviously favors the development of organized crime because it gives priority to the establishment of personal relationships, placing a secondary role on the respect of social rules.

As an example, we would like to conclude with a chart representing and explaining the culture of the Mafia. Inside the family (Figure 5) a quotation was reported taken directly from the examined text, in reference to what Boss Piromalli says and the way he does it when he recruits a young trafficker. His are dense words, bearing a way of thinking and acting typical of the Mafia, which can make explicit the phenomenon most people have denied so far.

FUTURE STEPS AND INTERVENTION PERSPECTIVES

This contribution proposes the analysis of a social artifact as a way to approach a serious and shifty phenomenon such as the *'Ndrangheta*. Cultures and experiences born in the territories where *'Ndrangheta* is settled are still not much explored, especially in northern Italy. For this reason, psychology is called to give its contribution in order to fight against the settlement of the phenomenon, through cultural tools and modalities of clinical and social intervention, in the always clearer awareness of how this reality is a source of major social uneasiness and deep psychological suffering.

All this becomes possible planning, on one hand, with concrete psychological intervention and tools of change both for territories and people living there; on the other, promoting a cultural revolution to make citizens aware on the cognitive and emotional level, and at the same time being able to spread a new culture of legality.

NOTES

1. Fortugno's lawsuit, which took place at Brescia's Court between 2010 and 2011, is called this way after its three main culprits, Calabrian brothers Gaetano, Marcello, and Rocco Fortugno, from Gioia Tauro (Rc) and considered by the GICO [Italian acronym for Organized Crime Investigation Group] of the Italian Finance Police as connected to Piromalli-Molè's clan. Before the judge 10 culprits variously accused of extortion, possession of stolen goods, weapon and drug trafficking, benefitting from the control of prostitution, with the aggravating circumstance for some of them to have performed the aforementioned crimes with typical Mafia modalities. The first degree sentence, passed on April 8, 2011 by the Court led by Judge Giovanni Pagliuca, inflicts for all of the culprits

- penalties for a total of 45 years, of which 10 years and 9 months and 6 years, respectively, were given to Rocco and Gaetano Fortugno (whose aggravating circumstance was also confirmed according to the article no. 7 D.L. 19271991), and a 3-year imprisonment for Marcello Fortugno.
2. Being the co-ordination between the two DDA, the main strong point for the success of the operation, we have to talk about the operation *Crimine–Infinito* as trait d'union of the two investigation branches "*Crimine*" in Reggio Calabria and "*Infinito*" in Milan.
 3. The "*Cultura mafiosa [Mafia Culture]*," present in the family: Figure 3 represents a super code, as it can be understood from the different color of the symbol representing it. The identification of a super code in Atlas.ti corresponds to the combination of two codes together with the chosen operator to mark the relationship quality. What orientates the researcher in the choice of the codes from which he or she can later create a super code is the grounded index; that is, how many times those constructions or semantic labels are present in the text and therefore how many times they can be traced back, and the density index, that is the number of connections that particular code has with other codes. Bearing respectively in mind these indexes from the working window Atlas.ti puts at our disposal, the "Code Manager," it is possible to understand what codes can provide the ground for the explanation of the phenomenon under exam. In doing so, we arrive at the final analysis stage, which is the theoretical coding, which will result in the detection of the "Core Category" (De Gregorio and Lattanzi, 2011). In the case we propose here, the super code "*Mafia Culture*" is the product of the codes: *What is* 'ndrangheta and *How does* 'ndrangheta act.

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