

Italy's other 'other mafia': remediation and representations of the 'ndrangheta

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Introduction

It is generally agreed that public perceptions of organised crime are profoundly impacted by the mass media and popular culture, and that cultural representations play a major role in constructing dominant narratives.² Furthermore, many scholars have observed that fictional representations of organised crime have helped shape the policies of governments and law enforcement agencies.³ Woodiwiss, for example, points to the impact of the 'mythology' of the Italian-American mafia on organised crime control policy in the United States and internationally.⁴ The Italian-American mafia has certainly cast a long shadow in this regard; Smith notes the implicit racism of many media representations of organised crime, highlighting their frequent recourse to ethnic descriptors in the portrayal of a dangerous 'other'.⁵ This reflects the so-called 'alien conspiracy' myth, the nefarious and lingering perception that organised crime is 'not a part of society and shaped by society itself, but is instead a problem of 'outsiders' that threaten society'.⁶ The Italian-American mafia is the archetype for this myth; in the 1950s, televised senate hearings helped to propagate the idea that organised crime in the US was in the grip of a foreign criminal conspiracy originating in Sicily. The dominance of the alien conspiracy narrative in the US began to recede in the 1980s, but the tendency to categorise organised crime through ethnicity and to concentrate the blame on 'outsider' groups rather than confront wider social causes has proved enduring.⁷

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All translations from Italian are my own, unless otherwise specified.

² Patricia Rawlinson, 'Organized Crime Mythologies' in H. N. Pontell (ed), *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Criminology and Criminal Justice* (OUP 2016) 6.

³ William Chambliss and Elizabeth Williams, 'Transnational Organized Crime and Social Sciences Myths' in Felicia Allum and Stan Gilmour (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Transnational Organized Crime* (Routledge 2015).

⁴ Michael Woodiwiss, 'The past and present of transnational organised crime in America' in Allum and Gilmour (eds) *Routledge Handbook of Transnational Organized Crime* (Routledge 2015).

⁵ Dwight C. Smith, 'Wickersham to Sutherland to Katzenbach: Evolving an "official" definition for organized crime' (1991) *Crime, Law, and Social Change*, 16, 135-54.

⁶ Edward Kleemans, 'Theoretical perspectives on organized crime' in Letizia Paoli (ed) *The Oxford Handbook of Organized Crime* (OUP 2014) 1.

⁷ Rawlinson (n 2).

This chapter applies the alien conspiracy perspective to the Italian context, using it as a lens through which to explore the representation of one particular mafia. The term 'alien' must clearly be reinterpreted somewhat for this purpose – the emphasis shifting from the explicitly 'foreign' to the 'other' – but the core concept of designating organised criminal groups as a phenomenon consisting of 'outsiders', ethnically distinct from the majority, remains highly applicable. The focus of the analysis is the 'ndrangheta, the mafia organisation native to the region of Calabria, which for most of its history has been underestimated 'strategically, politically, financially, internationally, and culturally'.⁸ I argue that an awareness of the 'otherness' of Calabria and its people within the Italian cultural imagination has impacted the portrayal of the 'ndrangheta in key cultural representations produced by Calabrians, with a distorting effect. In this chapter I identify two key tendencies: the first seeks to 'reclaim' the 'ndrangheta's past, minimising its negative traits in the process of 'defending' the region from negative characterisation or externally-imposed stereotypes. I have termed this phenomenon '*calabresismo*', mirroring the Sicilian cultural and political movement *sicilianismo*.⁹ The second, more unusual, approach is to reject the mafia itself as a foreign entity within the region; this will form the focus of this chapter. Throughout, I insist on the importance of appreciating the specificity of the Calabrian context.

The significance of cultural products should not be underestimated, particularly given their capacity to both reflect and influence discourses, and their substantial role in shaping perceptions of the mafias in the cultural imaginary. Indeed, Mete suggests that one of the key battlegrounds for tackling the mafias lies in the cultural sphere, identifying a 'social imagination which glorifies the mafia by distorting the reality',¹⁰ to which cultural representations from a range of media are primary contributors. Just as in the case of the US mafia, Italian cultural production surrounding organised crime has contributed to a highly complex network of representation and reality, within which the border between fact

⁸ Anna Sergi and Anita Lavorgna, *Ndrangheta: The Glocal Dimensions of the Most Powerful Italian Mafia* (Palgrave Macmillan 2016) 2.

⁹ Amber Phillips, 'Corrado Alvaro and the Calabrian mafia: A critical case study of the use of literary and journalistic texts in research on Italian organized crime' (2017) *Trends in Organized Crime*, 20(1-2), 179-195. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12117-016-9285-0>.

¹⁰ Vittorio Mete, 'Quali politiche contro quali mafie. Una proposta di classificazione delle politiche antimafia' Paper presented at the XXIV Conference of the Società Italiana di Scienza Politica, Venice, 16-18 September 2010 3.

and fiction is highly porous. The history of Italy's mafias is filled with cultural representations that have been both produced and consumed by *mafiosi* themselves; Dickie identifies a 'strange feedback loop which is as old as the organisations themselves',¹¹ while Ravveduto¹² describes the effect of a 'hall of mirrors',¹³ with representations from multiple media sources intersecting, overlapping and interacting to reinforce stereotypes in a 'vortex in which reality and fiction participate equally in the creation of a sole image'.¹⁴

This chapter will consider this 'feedback loop' or 'hall of mirrors' through the lens of cultural memory, exploring processes of remediation in cultural representations of the 'ndrangheta's past. Given the tendency within criminology to focus on screen representations of the mafias, my analysis focuses instead on literary representations; a field which to date has largely been the preserve of Italianists and historians.¹⁵ Even then, scholarly work devoted to representations of the 'ndrangheta remains scarce, though this is more of a reflection of Calabria's marginality rather than the corpus of available material.¹⁶ My analysis is influenced by the work of Birgit Neumann, who insists on the active role of literature, and in particular the novel, in reflecting and influencing cultural memory.¹⁷ Neumann observes that 'fictions of memory may symbolically empower the culturally marginalised or forgotten and thus figure into an imaginative counter discourse'; a phenomenon which is highly applicable to Calabria, as illustrated below.¹⁸ In examining fictional constructions of the 'ndrangheta's past, I draw on Erll's definitions of the terms 'remediation' and 'premediation'.¹⁹ In terms of the former, Erll notes that what is known about a 'site of memory' – a memorable event – 'seems to refer not so much to what one might cautiously call the "actual events" but instead to a canon of existent medial

¹¹ John Dickie, 'Historicizing Italy's Other Mafias: Some Considerations' in 'Italy's Other Mafias in Italian Film and Television: A Roundtable' (2013) *The Italianist* 33 (2) 201-203.

¹² Marcello Ravveduto, *Lo spettacolo della mafia: Storia di un immaginario tra realtà e finzione* (Kindle edn, Edizioni Gruppo Abele 2019)

¹³ *Ibid.* ch 9, para 2.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* ch 9, para 3.

¹⁵ See for example: Robin Pickering-Iazzi *Mafia and Outlaw Stories from Italian Life and Literature* (University of Toronto Press 2007); Ravveduto (n 12).

¹⁶ See Pasquino Crupi, *L'anomalia selvaggia: camorra, piciotteria e 'ndrangheta nella letteratura calabrese del novecento* (Sellerio 1992) and Phillips (n 9).

¹⁷ Birgit Neumann, 'The Literary Representation of Memory' in Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nunning (eds) *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies* (De Gruyter 2010).

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 341.

¹⁹ Astrid Erll, 'Literature, Film, and the Mediality of Cultural Memory' in Erll and Nunning (n 17).

constructions, to the narratives and images circulating in a media culture.²⁰ Premediation, meanwhile, ‘draws attention to the fact that existent media which circulate in a given society provide schemata for future experience and its representation’: in short, ‘depictions of earlier, yet somehow comparable events shape our understanding of later events’.²¹ Evidently, the Calabrian mafia is not in itself a ‘memorable event’, but a constant and evolving phenomenon. Nonetheless, the concept is applicable to the ways in which individual cultural products are both premediated by existent media and discourses, and themselves remediated (and, in the process, altered) in subsequent representations. This can be applied to individual cultural products – which may have been echoed and distorted in a range of subsequent media²² – and to the remediation of specific events in the mafia’s history, which can be reframed to take on new meaning.

Historical background

It is first necessary to clarify the precise meaning of the word ‘mafia’: a criminal organisation that, beyond its criminal activities, also seeks to provide extra-legal governance through territorial control.²³ As well as being able to infiltrate legitimate businesses and politics, such groups possess the ability to accumulate and employ social capital,²⁴ and are to a greater or lesser extent tolerated by their host communities. These elements of control and consensus are of particular interest in the study of cultural production, since as Dickie notes, Italy’s mafias gain consensus via directly and indirectly shaping the way in which they are represented.²⁵ A key element of this process is the alignment of the mafia group with the culture and traditions of the host community. As Truzzolillo observes, ‘the interweaving of criminality and popular values has important implications, in terms of disguise and legitimisation, for the actual development of the criminal organisation, irrespective of whether or not this is a mythical representation’.²⁶ Cultural representations can reflect and

²⁰ Ibid. 392.

²¹ Ibid. 392-93.

²² Phillips (n 9).

²³ Federico Varese, *Mafias on the Move: How Organized Crime Conquers New Territories* (Princeton 2011) 6.

²⁴ Rocco Sciarrone, ‘Mafie, relazioni e affari nell’area grigia’ in Rocco Sciarrone (ed) *Alleanza nell’ombra. Mafie ed economie locali in Sicilia e nel Mezzogiorno* (Donzelli 2011).

²⁵ Dickie (n 11) 201.

²⁶ Fabio Truzzolillo ‘The ‘ndrangheta: the current state of historical research’ (2011) 13(3) *Modern Italy* 369.

reinforce this process of legitimisation, as a growing body of research has sought to explore; see for example, Castagna's analysis of the popularity of traditional Calabrian songs featuring the 'ndrangheta.²⁷

A number of mafia groups are currently active in Italy, but academic and public attention have typically gravitated towards a 'big three', comprising the Sicilian mafia, the *camorra* (associated with the region of Campania), and the 'ndrangheta, native to Calabria. While each can trace its origins to roughly around the mid-nineteenth century, and each can be labelled a 'mafia' according to the criteria outlined above, the three are separate, distinct organisations with their own characteristics and peculiarities. Of the three, the Sicilian mafia is undoubtedly the most famous, and has produced the most substantial cultural footprint both within Italy and abroad. The Camorra, meanwhile, has begun to catch up: described as the 'other mafia' in reference to the traditional dominance of Cosa Nostra in the Italian and international public imagination, Campania's mafia now has a much more firmly established, distinct identity in the public consciousness, thanks partly to the huge success of Roberto Saviano's book *Gomorra* (2006) and the subsequent film and TV adaptation.²⁸

The 'ndrangheta, meanwhile, might be described as Italy's other 'other' mafia: for most of its history, it has been neglected by government and media alike. The name 'ndrangheta itself only came into widespread use in the 1950s, and for much of its history there was no public discussion of organised crime specific to Calabria.²⁹ Indeed, Italian authorities have been painfully slow to acknowledge the 'ndrangheta's existence as an entity in its own right: it was only officially recognised under Italian law in 2010.³⁰ Likewise, for a long time the wider world failed to take notice, until the Duisburg massacre in 2007, when the murder in Germany of six men of Calabrian descent provoked a storm of national and international media interest in the organization.³¹ When one considers the context of

²⁷ Ettore Castagna *Sangue e onore in digitale. Rappresentazione e autorappresentazione della 'ndrangheta* (Rubbettino 2010). See also: R. Dainotto, *The Mafia: A Cultural History* (Reaktion 2015).

²⁸ Giulio Bogani et al., 'Le mafi rappresentate: a dieci anni di Gomorra' (2016), *Passato e presente*, 98, 19-53, 20.

²⁹ Truzzolillo (n 26) 364.

³⁰ The word "'ndrangheta" was added to Article 416-bis of the Italian Criminal Code (Legislative Decree modified from Law No. 50, 31 March 2010, in *Gazzetta Ufficiale* 30 March 2010, No. 78).

³¹ In summer 2007, six men of Calabrian origin were murdered outside an Italian restaurant in the German town of Duisburg in an attack motivated by an 'ndrangheta feud. The scale of the massacre was unprecedented outside of Italy, and attracted a wave of international media attention and interest in Calabrian organized crime. See, for example, S. Holmes, 'A mafia family feud spills over'

the 'ndrangheta's native region, its relative marginality and anonymity becomes less surprising. Calabria has always been among Italy's poorest regions, and lacks the geopolitical significance of Sicily or Campania; its population is also much smaller, at 1.96 million compared to Sicily's 5 million inhabitants.³² Overall, Calabria's standing in the Italian public imaginary has historically been fractured, 'weak and evanescent', characterised by backwardness and 'otherness'.³³

While Calabria's regional identity is substantially less well defined than that of Sicily in Italy's national consciousness, it shares the negative characterisation typically attributed to the South. Counter-reformation missionaries described Calabria as being populated by 'savages',³⁴ while 18th-century Grand Tourists for the most part steered well clear of its mountainous terrain and its reputation for banditry and extreme poverty. Through the work of the famous 19th-century criminologist Cesare Lombroso,³⁵ the negative stereotypes associated with Calabria were racialised, and the region gained a name as a land of 'atavistic criminals who had prematurely disembarked from the train of evolution'.³⁶ While Lombroso's biological positivism has long since been discredited, the negative associations linked with Calabria have proved enduring; as evidenced by a now-infamous Wikileaks cable in which an American official in 2008 declared that 'Calabrians have a reputation as a distant, difficult people', and that this 'most problematical' region would be a 'failed state' were it not part of Italy.³⁷

This marginality helps to explain the historic tendency amongst the media, public, government, and academics alike to fail to appreciate the specificity of Calabria's mafia, and to approach it simply as an 'add-on' to the Sicilian phenomenon. It is certainly the case that the two mafias share some similarities: taking Catino's approach to organisational structure,

(BBC News, 16 August 2007) <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/6949274.stm>> accessed 26 January 2021.

³² European Commission, 'Calabria' (Regional Innovation Monitor Plus, 2020) <[https://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/regional-innovation-monitor/base-profile/calabria#:~:text=Calabria%20is%20one%20of%20the,million%20\(Eurostat%2C%202020\).](https://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/regional-innovation-monitor/base-profile/calabria#:~:text=Calabria%20is%20one%20of%20the,million%20(Eurostat%2C%202020).>)> accessed 27 January 2021.

³³ Castagna (n 27) 20.

³⁴ Peter D'Agostino 'Craniums, Criminals, and the 'Cursed Race': Italian Anthropology in American Racial Thought, 1861-1924' (2002) *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 44(2), 319, 319.

³⁵ Prior to beginning his career as a criminal anthropologist, Lombroso served as a volunteer army doctor in a campaign against brigands in Calabria.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Embassy Naples. 'Can Calabria be saved?' Wikileaks Cable: 08NAPLES96_a. Dated 2 December 2008, <https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08NAPLES96_a.html> accessed 26 January 2021.

for example, the Camorra has a 'horizontal' organisational order,³⁸ formed of individual groups often acting in direct competition with one another.³⁹ The Sicilian mafia and the 'ndrangheta, meanwhile, can be described as having a 'vertical' organisational order, with a level of centralised power and systemic decision-making processes.⁴⁰ Other similarities can also be observed between the 'ndrangheta and the Sicilian mafia: Paoli for example notes that both are sworn secret societies, and both draw on ritual practices to help develop internal cohesion.⁴¹

A key difference, however, lies in the fact that the 'ndrangheta is now widely considered to be the most powerful mafia organisation in Italy.⁴² Its wealth is also believed to be unmatched; it has been widely reported in the media that its turnover in 2013 amounted to a staggering 53 billion euros, though as Mete has observed, such figures should be treated with caution.⁴³ At first, it might appear to be a curious paradox that Italy's wealthiest and most powerful mafia should also be its least famous. However, it is precisely this anonymity that has allowed Calabria's mafia to thrive; while the focus of law enforcement was trained on Sicily in the 1980s and 1990s, the 'ndrangheta was able to quietly capitalise on the ensuing weakness within the Sicilian mafia, overtaking the latter and growing increasingly dominant in Europe's drug trade (to the extent that it now occupies a dominant position in the European cocaine market).⁴⁴ A further manifestation of the 'ndrangheta's power lies in its unparalleled success in setting up operations abroad; 'ndrangheta clans are currently operating all over the world, including in Canada, the USA, Australia, Colombia, Switzerland, and Germany.⁴⁵

³⁸ Maurizio Catino 'How Do Mafias Organize? Conflict and Violence in Three Mafia Organizations' (2014) *European Journal of Sociology* 55 177.

³⁹ Felia Allum, *The Invisible Camorra: Neapolitan Crime Families Across Europe* (Cornell University Press 2016).

⁴⁰ Catino (n 38) 182.

⁴¹ Letizia Paoli, *Mafia Brotherhoods* (OUP 2003).

⁴² See Ercole Giap Parini, 'The strongest mafia: 'Ndrangheta made in Calabria' in Andrea Mammone and Giuseppe Veltri (eds), *Italy Today: The Sick Man of Europe* (Routledge 2010); Sergi and Lavorgna (n 8).

⁴³ Mete (n 10) 3.

⁴⁴ Francesco Calderoni, 'The structure of drug trafficking mafias: the 'Ndrangheta and cocaine' (2012) *Crime Law Social Change* 58, 321. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.uwe.ac.uk/10.1007/s10611-012-9387-9>

⁴⁵ Europol, 'Threat Assessment: Italian Organised Crime' (June 2013) <<https://www.europol.europa.eu/publications-documents/threat-assessment-italian-organised-crime>> accessed 27 January 2021.

Structurally, the organisation is complex and sophisticated. It should be noted that the 'ndrangheta has produced significantly fewer *pentiti* (defectors who collaborate with the authorities) than Italy's other mafias. A key reason for this is the fact that unlike the Sicilian mafia, the 'ndrangheta actively capitalises on family relationships to reinforce its structure; this reduces the likelihood that affiliates will breach *omertà*, since to do so would involve betraying one's own family.⁴⁶ The extent to which the 'ndrangheta can be referred to as a single organisation is disputed; Sergi and Lavorgna reject the conception of the Calabrian mafia as a monolithic organisation, arguing instead that it should be understood as a more fragmented phenomenon.⁴⁷ While accepting the existence of some centralised coordination structures, Sergi and Lavorgna view the 'ndrangheta as a 'behavioural model', strongly linked to the 'manipulation of traditions, rituals, and social practices of communication and leadership among Calabrian individuals'.⁴⁸ The 'ndrangheta is, in other words, a phenomenon that combines cultural *and* structural elements in order to prosper. Emphasis on either cultural or structural factors has been a key feature of the academic debate on the mafias in Italy, and is of direct relevance to the construction of the 'ndrangheta in the public imagination, as I will outline below.

The 'ndrangheta and culturalism

Beyond the marginality of its native region, the historic failure of the Italian state to recognise the scale of the threat posed by the 'ndrangheta is linked inextricably to wider debates and discourses surrounding the mafias in Italy. As noted above, Italy's government, academics, public and media were for a long time focused primarily on Sicily, with little attention paid to the specificity of Calabrian organised crime. Broadly speaking, academic debate on the mafias was historically dominated by two schools of thought. The first, which prevailed until the early 1980s, viewed Italy's mafias as a set of cultural attitudes and behaviours typical to the Southern regions, and denied the existence of organised, structured criminal groups. These 'Culturalists'⁴⁹ included foreign researchers who came to Sicily to conduct fieldwork in the 1960s and 1970s,⁵⁰ and Italian sociologist Pino Arlacchi,

⁴⁶ Varese (n 23) 33.

⁴⁷ Sergi and Lavorgna (n 8) 3.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Paoli (n 41) 15.

⁵⁰ See Henner Hess, *Mafia and Mafiosi: The Structure of Power* (Saxon House 1973); Jane Schneider and Peter Schneider, *Culture and Political Economy in Western Sicily* (Academic Press 1976).

who authored an influential work in 1983 examining the so-called 'traditional mafia' of both Sicily and Calabria.⁵¹

Following the extensive and widely-publicised judicial investigations into the Sicilian mafia in the 1980s – which revealed the structured, sophisticated nature of the organisation's activities – the culturalist position was no longer tenable, and the second school of thought thus emerged; academic focus shifted to the organisation's entrepreneurial activities.⁵² This more economically-centred approach turned its attention to the structural conditions and operations of mafias as business actors.

To some extent, Arlacchi's 1983 book combined the two, by distinguishing between a 'traditional mafia' (individuals manifesting traditional cultural attitudes and behaviours) and an 'entrepreneurial mafia' (a more economically-driven mafia phenomenon which supposedly developed alongside the economic boom of the 1960s).

The reason that these perspectives on the mafia are important is clear: the way in which a phenomenon is conceptualised by the public, academics, and the media, is inextricably linked to the way in which it is conceptualised by policymakers and by those charged with tackling the mafias. Put simply: the way we understand it affects the way we choose to fight it. For example, if the mafias are interpreted as a cultural phenomenon, the state will invest more resources into educational policies, while if the strength of the mafias is understood to lie in their financial resources, repressive measures such as confiscation orders are more likely to be prioritised.⁵³ Thus, since the Calabrian mafia was conceptualised for much of its history as an underdeveloped, disorganised phenomenon, a violent product of a poverty-stricken region and its culture, it is unsurprising that the 'ndrangheta was for so long missing from Italy's statute books.

Evidently, neither the culturalist nor the structuralist school of thought is unproblematic. The old culturalist position was always in fact a fallacy: Lupo points out that were mafias simply a manifestation of traditional culture, they would be ubiquitous across the South, rather than being found concentrated in specific areas.⁵⁴ Furthermore, evidence firmly demonstrates the existence of organised criminal groups in both Sicily and Calabria at least as far back as the late 19th century, firmly countering the culturalist insistence on the

⁵¹ Pino Arlacchi, *La mafia imprenditrice. L'etica mafiosa e lo spirit del capitalismo* (Mulino 1983).

⁵² Paoli (n 41) 15.

⁵³ Mete (n 10) 5.

⁵⁴ Salvatore Lupo *Storia della mafia* (Donzelli 1993) 22.

absence of formal structures.⁵⁵ Meanwhile, Paoli is critical of an overly structural approach, pointing to the crucial significance of cultural codes and norms to the internal cohesion of mafia groups.⁵⁶ More recently, scholars have called for a more nuanced and holistic approach to the understanding of the mafia phenomenon, with a focus on its complexity. Mete argues that the mafias are: ‘formed of a web of economic, entrepreneurial, political, relational and cultural aspects, all underscored by a constant physical and psychological threat’.⁵⁷ With specific regard to the ‘ndrangheta, Sergi and Lavorgna have argued that it fits neither the culturalist nor the structuralist perspective; deeply entrenched in Calabrian culture, yet also inextricably linked to Calabria’s structural political and economic weaknesses.⁵⁸

Despite these advances in the understanding of the mafias, the culturalist perspective, and in particular the trope of a ‘traditional mafia’ contrasting with a modern, ‘entrepreneurial’ mafia, have proved particularly tenacious, and cultural representations hold part of the key to understanding why. The roots of the culturalist perspective can to a large extent be traced back to a 19th-century cultural and political movement known as *Sicilianismo*, which evolved in response to concerns among the island’s elites that Sicily was becoming a byword for criminality in the national public imagination. This must be located within the wider context of Italy’s ‘Southern Question’, which cannot be addressed satisfactorily within this chapter; suffice it to note that since Italy’s unification, the South has been associated with images of ‘otherness’, lawlessness and savagery.⁵⁹ In response to negative press coverage and public opinion, the *Sicilianisti* maintained that the mafia was a particular attitude developed in response to Sicily’s history of colonisation and oppression; it was a set of cultural values, not a criminal organisation. Although this was untrue, the significant and long-lasting impact of *Sicilianismo* as a cultural and political movement upon the academic and public understanding of the mafia is highly indicative of the porosity of the border between fact and fiction, a working illustration of the ‘hall of mirrors’.

⁵⁵ See Paoli (n 40); John Dickie *Mafia Brotherhoods* (London: Sceptre, 2012); Truzzolillo (n 26).

⁵⁶ Paoli (n 41) 22.

⁵⁷ Mete (n 10) 3.

⁵⁸ Sergi and Lavorgna (n 8) 17.

⁵⁹ Enrico Dal Lago, ‘Italian unification and the Mezzogiorno: Colonialism in one country?’ in Enrico Dal Lago and Róisín Healy (eds), *The Shadow of Colonialism on Europe’s Modern Past* (Palgrave Macmillan 2014).

The links between the culturalist perspective and cultural representations are sometimes surprisingly direct. Arlacchi's influential 1983 work, which differentiated between a 'traditional mafia' and an 'entrepreneurial mafia' in Calabria and Sicily, is notable for its frequent recourse to Calabrian cultural products, particularly novels, which the author uses to shore up the argument that the pre-1960s Calabrian mafia was a strictly cultural phenomenon. This is an example of the 'feedback loop' in action: fictional narratives are absorbed directly into the historiography of the mafia (though it should be noted that Arlacchi is selective in the fictional narratives he chooses, excluding those which contradict his thesis).⁶⁰ I have argued that there is a visible tendency within Calabrian cultural production to resist negative stereotyping and 'othering' by presenting a benign, fictionalised construction of the 'ndrangheta's past, in a phenomenon which can be termed 'calabresismo'.⁶¹ A key example is the work of Corrado Alvaro, a celebrated Calabrian author and journalist who, writing in the 1950s, actively minimised the negative traits of the 'traditional' mafia, working to develop a cultural memory which disconnected the negative aspects of the 'ndrangheta from the culture and identity of the region.⁶² To Alvaro, the 'enemy' was the outside influences that distorted the 'ndrangheta: consumerism and 'gangster' culture imported from America, while the 'old' mafia stood for traditional values.

This element of nostalgia is a recurring motif in representations of the Calabrian mafia across other media; Castagna has observed a similar phenomenon in the images of the 'ndrangheta contained within Calabrian traditional popular songs (*canzonette*), with an emphasis on what he terms 'the good mafia of long ago'.⁶³ Stressing the significance of the oral tradition to the development of the 'ndrangheta and perceptions of it, Castagna observes that 'still today there remains a widespread, nostalgic popular perception, particularly in those over the age of 70: the old mafia of the "traditional" world was "good", "it kept order", while the new mafia is a different thing, it became corrupted over time'.⁶⁴ Castagna also identifies that journalists and academics have tended to uncritically interpret

⁶⁰ Amber Phillips, 'Old Mafia' and 'New Mafia' in the Novels of Saverio Strati, 1957–1977' [2020] 12 (2) *New Readings* <<https://newreadings.cardiffuniversitypress.org/articles/abstract/10.18573/newreadings.115/>> accessed 27 January 2021.

⁶¹ Phillips (n 9).

⁶² See Corrado Alvaro, 'I briganti', *Corriere della Sera* (18 May 1955) 3; and Corrado Alvaro, 'La fibbia', *Corriere della Sera* (17 September 1955) 3.

⁶³ Castagna (n 27) 31.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

the material from these songs as an 'authentic' representation of the 'ndrangheta's past, irrespective of the truth; this clearly illustrates the tendency of receivers from differing spheres to remediate fictional or stylised narratives, interpreting them as 'authentic' portrayals of the mafia's past. As Erll observes, this process 'tends to solidify cultural memory, creating and stabilising certain narratives and icons of the past'.⁶⁵

A key element of the re-working of the past in these cultural representations of the 'ndrangheta lies in their blending of fact and fiction, which sees real episodes from history mixed into the narrative and remediated; Alvaro, for example, blends recorded history with imagination in his journalism.⁶⁶ This practice is also replicated in the most successful recent Calabrian novel to feature the 'ndrangheta, as I illustrate below.

Reclaiming the narrative: *Anime nere*

Given that for most of its existence, the 'ndrangheta has existed outside of the national and international media spotlight, it is of no surprise that Calabria's mafia is yet to star in a work of comparable international acclaim to *The Godfather* or *Gomorra*. However, representations of the organization are gradually growing more numerous as awareness of its existence and activities increases outside its home region, particularly in the wake of the Duisburg massacre. The number of books published about the 'ndrangheta has increased cumulatively with each passing decade,⁶⁷ and with the release in 2014 of the internationally successful film *Anime nere* – arguably the most popular and widely-diffused representation of Calabrian organized crime ever to be produced – the landscape of representation is evolving rapidly. The film, set and shot predominantly in Calabria, with actors speaking largely in dialect, has been distributed in over twenty countries, and has won multiple awards. Its depiction of Calabrian criminality has led it to be described and interpreted by many Italian critics as the first ever 'ndrangheta movie, and while this is not technically true, it is certainly the most celebrated.⁶⁸

The film is based on the eponymous novel by Gioacchino Criaco, published in 2008. Criaco was born in Calabria in 1965, but moved to Milan after qualifying as a lawyer. The

⁶⁵ Erll (n 19) 393.

⁶⁶ Phillips (n 9).

⁶⁷ Dickie (n 11); Bogani et al (n 28).

⁶⁸ There have been several attempts to portray the 'ndrangheta on the silver screen, but none have enjoyed popular success. Notable examples include Elio Ruffo's *Una rete piena di sabia* (1967), Paolo Pecora's *Faida* (1988), and Carlo Carlei's *La corsa dell'innocente* (1992).

'ndrangheta is an inescapable element of his family history: the author's father, Domenico, was killed in a bloody feud in 1993, and his brother Pietro is a convicted *'ndranghetista*, captured in December 2008 after years spent as one of Italy's most wanted criminals. The author's birthplace, Africo, also has its own connections with the Calabrian mafia – and indeed, serves as a key setting within the novel, though it is never explicitly named.

These connections are worth briefly exploring in more detail here, given the novel's borrowing of elements of Africo's past. In fact, there are two Africos: one nestles high in the Aspromonte, the mountain massif which dominates Calabria's southernmost province. Literally translated as 'harsh mountain', the area has long held a place of infamy and notoriety in the Italian public imagination and to most is known chiefly for two things: extreme poverty, and crime. In the 1970s and 1980s, the Aspromonte gained a particular place in the Italian national consciousness for its association with the so-called 'kidnapping season', a particularly dark period in the nation's history which saw hundreds of victims taken hostage – many hidden away in the impenetrable mountain villages – and held to ransom.⁶⁹ These kidnappings became a key source of income for the 'ndrangheta,⁷⁰ and brought national focus on to Calabria's mafia, normally excluded from the news.⁷¹ Africo itself was particularly notorious for the extreme poverty suffered by its inhabitants, and it featured in several early-20th century campaigns against poverty in the south.⁷² In 1951, however, the village was partially destroyed by a terrible flood, and the residents were displaced to a new settlement – also named Africo – located several miles downhill on the Ionian coast, after twelve years of living in temporary structures. The process of resettlement was a fiasco, and the former inhabitants of the mountain village found themselves severed from a way of life that had been pursued in the village for centuries. The village – both the semi-abandoned mountain Africo, and the coastal settlement – thus occupy a position of unusual prominence within the Italian national public imagination.

Anime nere was Criaco's first novel, written over the course of just four days. The author has since written two further novels which deal with the 'ndrangheta – *Zefira* (2009),

⁶⁹ High profile victims of this wave of kidnappings included John Paul Getty III, abducted in 1973 in Rome and released after the payment of a substantial ransom.

⁷⁰ John Dickie, *Mafia Republic* (Sceptre 2013).

⁷¹ Ravveduto (n 12).

⁷² In 1910 Africo was the subject of a campaign against Southern poverty led by social activist Umberto Zanotti Bianco, while in 1948 journalist Tommaso Besozzi described it in *L'Europeo* as an 'emblem of desperation.'

and *American Taste* (2011) – and these titles join a small but burgeoning sub-genre of fictional literature, both Calabrian and otherwise, to feature the 'ndrangheta in recent years, particularly in the wake of Duisburg. None of these texts, however, have matched the success of *Anime nere*; Criaco's bestseller was published in a second edition in 2014, to coincide with the release of the film, and has also been translated into French, German and English. It features three core male protagonists: the narrator (who remains nameless until the very end of the text), and his friends Luciano and Luigi. Our introduction to the trio occurs in the 1970s when they are still teenagers, living between the semi-abandoned 'old' Africo, and 'Africo Nuovo', the settlement built to replace it. The boys live in poverty, and begin stealing to buy themselves schoolbooks and better clothes. Meanwhile, the so-called 'kidnapping season' in the Aspromonte is at its height, and the narrator's father, concerned by his son's crimes, agrees to shelter kidnapping victims for the mafia in order to bring in some extra money. The three boys, however, are set on pursuing their criminal ambitions, and the text follows them to 1980s Milan, where they build themselves a small empire on the back of international heroin and cocaine trafficking. With the dawn of the 1990s, as their enemies multiply and the crackdown on organized crime sets in, their Milanese empire crumbles, and the narrator and Luciano find themselves in prison. On their release, they return home to Africo to enact their final revenge against the local mafia boss, Don Peppino Zacco, who (it is gradually revealed) arranged for the murder of Luciano's father decades earlier, as well as the brutal killing of the narrator's father and a number of their friends.

While *Anime nere* is undoubtedly a novel about organised criminality, the sympathetic protagonists are not 'ndranghetisti, and instead exist in a constant uneasy, hostile co-existence with the mafia, which eventually develops into all-out war. Within the text, the mafia is represented as an antagonistic 'other', its foreignness contrasted with the values and beliefs of the protagonists. This is emphasised through the names used by the narrator; in place of the words 'ndrangheta or 'ndranghetisti, a range of (often pejorative) terms are used, including *pungiuti* (literally 'the pricked' or 'blood brothers') and 'bruciatori di Santini' (saint-burners), both of which refer to the 'ndrangheta's macabre initiation ritual.⁷³ The protagonists, meanwhile, along with the generation of young Calabrian criminals like them,

⁷³ During the 'ndrangheta's initiation ritual, the new affiliate is traditionally cut with a knife and made to bleed on an image of a saint or *santino* (usually Archangel Michael), which is then burned. See Enzo Ciconte, *Riti criminali: I codici di affiliazione alla 'ndrangheta* (Rubbettino 2015).

are identified variously as ‘children of shepherds’, ‘children of the forest’, and ‘dark souls’. Significantly, the former two terms delineate the strong ancestral claim of these individuals to the land, a claim which is portrayed as more legitimate than that of the detested mafiosi, as I will go on to explore.

In spite of their crimes, Criaco’s narrative repeatedly and firmly casts the children of the forest as morally superior to the mafiosi. The model for their lifestyle and ambitions, the ‘greatest dark soul, who struck terror into the mafiosi’⁷⁴ is the character of Sante Motta, the narrator’s older cousin and illegitimate son of a capomafia. Barred from becoming an affiliate of the mafia as a result of his illegitimacy, Motta’s father urges him to steer clear of mafiosi at all costs; he condemns them as liars and traitors, describing them as a ‘cancer’ on the land.⁷⁵ Sante thus forges his own path, making a fortune for himself through drug trafficking in the North. He is idolised by the narrator and his friends, and draws them more deeply into the criminal lifestyle, giving them a taste of the wealth to be made in Milan. He also, crucially, encourages and empowers the boys to distance themselves from the hypocritical mafiosi, pointing out that while the *pungiti* grow wealthy, the unfortunate shepherds who help them end up in prison. Sante is characterised as decent and fair-minded, and his murder at the hands of Don Zacco’s men leaves the protagonists hungry for revenge. Their close relationship with Sante’s widow and son serves to highlight the loyalty and close ties of kinship between the children of the forest, which is contrasted with the cynicism and selfishness of the *pungiti*.

The portrayal of the *children of the forest’s* moral superiority to the mafia rests substantially on a fictional construction of the latter’s history as an alien, colonial entity. The narrator indicates that the mafia was created by ‘the immoral Bourbons’,⁷⁶ who understood that ‘to maintain control over the riotous population, dispersed across hundreds of tiny mountain villages’, they would need a system of ‘internal control’ alongside their military might.⁷⁷ This portrayal of the mafia represents a fascinating contrast to the recurring, nostalgia-glazed representation of the ‘ndrangheta’s past elsewhere as an upholder of traditional values and protector of the people. The mafia in *Anime nere* is cast as a foreign

⁷⁴ Gioacchino Criaco, *Anime nere* (Rubbettino Editore 2008) 98.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 23.

⁷⁶ The Royal House of Bourbon of the Two Sicilies ruled Southern Italy from the 18th century up until 1860.

⁷⁷ Criaco (n 74).

entity, which *since its inception* has worked in collusion with the authorities in order to exploit and oppress the native population. Such a portrayal is highly unusual among literary representations of the 'ndrangheta; other Calabrian novelists have certainly criticised the mafia as backward and incompatible with traditional values (see for example Saverio Strati's construction of the mafia in his own fictionalised version of old Africo, in the 1957 novel *La teda*⁷⁸). However, the characterisation of the mafia as explicitly foreign is practically unprecedented.

I argue that this characterisation of the mafia represents an attempt to reclaim the positive mythologised elements of the 'ndrangheta's past and transpose them onto a new brand of Calabrian protagonist, embodied by Criaco's children of the forest. This is particularly evident towards the end of *Anime nere*, when the narrator and Luciano return to Africo with their friends to finally take on Don Zacco, launching a 'revolt' against the mafiosi. After their victory, Criaco depicts a near-Utopian vision of an alternative to life under the mafia:

'People began to turn to us with all kinds of problems. We helped everyone without asking for anything in return; they were our people. Petty crime ceased; we had more work than the police'⁷⁹

In this description, Criaco has effectively absorbed a number of the tropes often associated with the 'old mafia' or 'traditional mafia' in other representations – specifically its role in mediating disputes and helping the needy – and claimed them instead for the children of the forest. The use of the term 'revolt' is particularly significant, as the mafia are depicted as an external occupying force, aligned with the authorities and not with the interests of the people: indeed, it is by colluding with the authorities that the *pungiuti* attempt to enact their final revenge on the narrator. Criaco is thus able to retain the moral opposition to the mafia which is essential to maintaining the sympathy of the contemporary reader, and at the same time borrow positive aspects from its mythology and folklore, applying these instead to the 'native' or 'true' Calabrians who resist them: the children of the forest.

Throughout the novel, the author insists on the specificity of the geographical, historical, and socio-cultural context of the Aspromonte to establish a case for its moral specificity and contextualise (though never explicitly defend) the criminal actions of the protagonists. A key element of this is the impact of the shared cultural trauma of the

⁷⁸ Phillips, 'Old mafia and new mafia' (n 60).

⁷⁹ Criaco (n 74) 235.

relocation of the village following the 1951 flood; an enforced breach with generations of shared history, perpetrated against the people by the state.

The protagonists' heritage and specific cultural identity is worth examining in greater detail here. Despite a good deal of the plot taking place in Milan and the characters' various trips to locations all across Europe, the novel is firmly rooted in a fictionalised, unnamed version of Africo, and the mountains that surround it (the Aspromonte). Indeed, the mountain landscape surrounding the ancient village effectively acts as one of the novel's protagonists, with its myths, history, tradition and folktales driving the plot and serving a cautionary purpose. The oral transmission of folk history is personified in the novel by the character of Bino (an elderly friend of the narrator's father), who according to the narrator, 'represented the historic memory of the mountains'. Through Bino's memories and folktales, the author effectively transmits the shared values of the area's inhabitants, and constructs a moral basis for the actions of the protagonists, founded on the values of mutual support and respect for the environment and the community. There is a particular insistence on the importance of man living symbiotically with his surroundings, respecting nature and never taking more than he needs. In one story, Bino explains that once, the shepherds of the Aspromonte lived in harmony with the wolves; one would attach itself to each flock, occasionally killing one of the weaker animals, but in return protecting the whole from other predators. Over time, however, shepherds became possessive and greedy, so the weak and sickly beasts now end up on the tables of 'stupid customers', while the wolves run wild, causing much greater harm.⁸⁰

This mutually beneficial relationship ruined by greed seems to represent an allegory for criminality; in the moral universe occupied by the characters, to take what you need to survive is acceptable, but pushing too far and disrupting the natural balance leads to disaster. When the children of the forest forget their values of mutual assistance or move too far from their roots and grow greedy, their judgment clouded by cocaine, it leads to their downfall. The implication is that the children of the forest have inherited this role from the brigands evoked by Bino in his stories, which have a distinctly Robin Hood-esque sheen; according to Bino, for example, when the '1951 flood' destroyed the village, the brigands did more to feed the poor than the state. When the army was sent in to disperse the brigands, the latter escaped to the mountains and were sheltered by grateful locals.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 62.

Crucially, the successes of the narrator's gang rest on their friendships with other Calabrians and the repayment of old kindnesses: the children of the forest are always strongest when they stay true to their origins and stick together, honouring the tradition of mutual assistance. The text thus occupies a slightly uncomfortable moral position, romanticising the children of the forest's Robin Hood approach to wealth distribution and mutual assistance, and the dividends paid by their friendship and loyalty to one another. The debt to the heroic mythology surrounding infamous real brigands, not least Giuseppe Musolino, is clear, even though Musolino is never evoked by name.⁸¹

The narrator repeatedly states that it is right that he and his colleagues should pay for their crimes, with self-critical reflections (often related specifically to the drug trade). However, the reader is also given the very firm sense that the children of the forest represent a benign alternative to other forms of criminality, for example the foreign groups which move in to occupy the space left when the narrator's gang lose their grip on Milan. The criminal activity of the children of the forest is contextualised in relation to the greater evils of foreign criminals, the mafia, and the state.

One element that *Anime nere* (2008) shares with previous Calabrian literary representations of organized crime in the region is this firm and repeated emphasis on the detachment of the State from the interests of the people. In the novel, as well as systematically failing the villagers in the aftermath of the flood, the state authorities represent an active antagonist, unscrupulously co-opting the services of the *pungiti* to repress the children of the forest and end the peace and order which they have imposed. The author is keen to disrupt the reader's perceptions of morality and justice when it comes to Calabrian criminals, with particular regard to the role of the authorities, and he is not afraid to break taboos in the process. As the state-mafia conspiracy to dismantle the children of the forest's utopia continues, the protagonists enact a desperate scheme of Luciano's devising, kidnapping a local Judge, Barresi, and a Piedmontese police official. In an open challenge to the well-established narrative of anti-mafia judges as martyr-like figures, the two captives in the novel are portrayed as part of the ruling classes and firmly out for their own interests.⁸²

⁸¹ See Dickie (n 55) 196-209. Giuseppe Musolino (1876-1956) was a bandit who became known as the 'King of the Aspromonte' for his exploits.

⁸² It should of course be noted that the position of anti-mafia figures in the public imagination is far from undisputed (Leonardo Sciascia's notorious 1987 article 'I professionisti dell'antimafia', published in *Corriere della Sera*, comes to mind), but it is relatively safe to say that anti-mafia judges and prosecutors are generally depicted in positive terms in public discourse, and that Criaco is

The northern police official is criticised by the characters for his arrogance and his contempt for the people of Calabria,⁸³ and the narrator derides the hypocrisy of the two men, referring to them ironically as ‘the two whining heroes’.⁸⁴ In Criaco’s narrative, the anti-mafia figures are simply another element in a wider mechanism of state oppression against the children of the forest, toward whom we are consistently encouraged to feel sympathy.

Throughout the novel, the narrator demonstrates an awareness of the ‘othering’ of Calabrians within the Italian public consciousness, and the novel appears to seek to regain control of this narrative. When the protagonists find themselves in prison in the early 1990s, the narrator comments that ‘The hardship was greatest for prisoners from the South, especially if you were Calabrian’. To judges, prosecutors and police, Calabrians were ‘the scum of humanity, immoral and amoral beasts’.⁸⁵ This frustration at the simplistic, prejudiced approach to Calabrian criminality underscores the whole text. The author is keen instead to present a more complex (and substantially more sympathetic) portrait, drawing heavily on the specific social, cultural, and historical context of the Aspromonte. The ‘final showdown’ of the text further highlights the state’s incomprehension of the situation in Calabria, as armed police officers arrive to arrest the narrator and Luciano expecting a dangerous battle, but are confronted instead with two men in their forties quietly drinking coffee with the local policeman. The implication of the scene is clear: the authorities and the public have been misinformed about the true nature of crime in the Aspromonte.

Remediation

Anime nere can be interpreted as an attempt to re-write the history of Calabrian organised crime by offering a new perspective, a demonstration of Neumann’s ‘imaginative counter discourse’. As part of this process, Criaco employs and subverts real episodes from history, adapted to fit his own narrative. A striking example of this is the story of the ‘salters’. In the novel, the protagonists find themselves on a train with an elderly man, who flees in fear when he learns they are from the village, shouting ‘the salters, heaven help us!’.⁸⁶ The narrator explains that the story involves ‘our grandparents back in the 1940s’, ‘a

actively subverting this as part of his wider goal to undermine audience perceptions of Calabrian criminality.

⁸³ Criaco (n 74) 217.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 220.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 191.

⁸⁶ Criaco (n 74) 78.

group of starving village rogues' who stole some livestock from a neighbouring village.⁸⁷ Sometimes the thieves would cook the stolen meat and share it with friends, including a man named Peppe Tavilla. Unfortunately, the seven men were falsely led to believe that Tavilla had betrayed them, so they murdered him, stabbing him and covering the wounds with salt. Their subsequent infamy sullies the reputation of the whole village, but the novel's narrator recounts the tale with considerable sympathy for the perpetrators: 'the seven murderers were themselves victims, paying for the deed with decades of hard prison time, and discovered at the trial that their victim was innocent.'⁸⁸ The true villain of the story is identified as the woman who concocted the false rumour; described pointedly as 'a cruel, childless gossip'.⁸⁹ The narrator closes the episode by reflecting: 'Poor Peppe. A victim, like so many others, of a dissatisfied whore.'⁹⁰

This story strikingly resembles a real event which took place in nineteenth-century Africo, uncovered by Dickie in his research into Calabrian court archives on the early 'ndrangheta.⁹¹ In 1894 a physically disabled, elderly man named Pietro Maviglia was brutally murdered. Maviglia was a member of the early 'ndrangheta who had been expelled from the group for turning state's witness. His former comrades invited him to a meal as a peace offering, but he was found dead the next morning with five stab wounds, and cooking salt sprinkled in the wound at his throat. As Dickie's analysis and the court documentation roundly demonstrate, the real Maviglia was murdered at the hands of the earliest incarnation of the 'ndrangheta; this crime was committed by members of a criminal sect, not by the misguided, well-intentioned brigands of Criaco's fictionalised version.

Criaco's fictional retelling and 're-claiming' of this episode of Calabrian history recalls a similar practice employed by Alvaro.⁹² Just as Alvaro adapted elements from history and hearsay to add depth to his own fictional representations of the 'ndrangheta's past, so Criaco utilises the past to re-imagine organized crime in Calabria, representing it in a more sympathetic light by removing its mafia associations, and casting the murderers as victims. This process of borrowing and distorting collective history and the collective imagination is strikingly cyclical, and actively embodies the processes of remediation observed by Erll.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 80.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 79.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Dickie (n 55) 178-95.

⁹² Phillips (n 9).

Conclusions

I argue that the image of the 'ndrangheta in the public imagination has historically been tied inextricably to the image of Calabria itself, characterised by backwardness and 'otherness'. Within Calabrian cultural production, one can observe a deep awareness of this 'otherness', which is manifested in different ways in Calabrian representations of the 'ndrangheta. Some Calabrian authors seek to reclaim the narrative and reject the association between regional tradition and criminality, but adopt different strategies in order to do so. In Alvaro's work, the damage to Calabrian identity inflicted by its associations with organised criminality is reconciled through recourse to the 'traditional vs modern' model of 'ndrangheta history. In this model, a benign traditional iteration of the phenomenon is contrasted with a mafia which has been subject to corrupt external influences, firmly separated from traditional culture (or anything that can be identified as specifically Calabrian). Alvaro's insistence on the specificity and, to an extent, the superiority of the Calabrian context is an example of what I have defined as *calabresismo*.⁹³ By presenting a benign construction of the 'ndrangheta's past in his 1955 writings on the organization, Alvaro creates an example of Neumann's 'fictions of memory';⁹⁴ disseminating an idealised construction of the past in response to the stimulus of perceived attacks on his home region in the national press. This is done by designating a malign outside influence – be that Sicily or America, or modern consumer capitalism.

The tensions between the framing of Calabrian organized crime as region-specific phenomenon with unique characteristics, and as the result of 'imported' influences, are interesting because of their recurrence in cultural representations of the organization: some national press representations have used them to reinforce the image of Calabria and its mafia as fundamentally backward and in need of external 'help' to modernise.⁹⁵

In contrast, Criaco subverts this construction of the 'ndrangheta's relationship to traditional society by re-claiming the traditional values which are so often aligned with those of the honoured society or 'old mafia' (as Castagna⁹⁶ and many others have termed it). In

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Neumann (n 17) 334.

⁹⁵ See, for example, Adriaco Luise, 'Una ventata di contestazione scuote la feroce mafia calabrese', *La Stampa Sera* (29 October 1969), 3.

⁹⁶ Castagna (n 27) 31.

Anime nere, Criaco identifies the 'ndrangheta instead as an entirely separate, almost colonising power, whose hypocritical values have always been incompatible with those of the host society. In doing so, he presents a unique representation of the mafia's role within traditional culture and society, grafting characteristics traditionally ascribed to the 'benign' early 'ndrangheta, such as mutual support, onto another group – the 'children of the forest', who are portrayed as the descendants of the region's original settlers, as well as the successors of the Robin-Hood like brigands.

These constructions of the 'ndrangheta's past are significant, as I have argued, because of the influence of fictional constructions of the past on both other spheres of cultural responses, and on memory culture. As Neumann notes,

The concepts of memory staged within the medium of fiction may influence the extra-literary memory culture [...] these concepts can influence the creation and reflection of individual as well as collective images of the past. As a medium of cultural self-reflection, literature – through its aesthetic structure – paves the way for cultural change.⁹⁷

There is much work still to be done on the relationship between the 'ndrangheta and popular values and traditions in the public imaginary at both regional and national level. As Truzzolillo observes, and as I noted in the introduction, the implications of this conflation are substantial, 'in terms of disguise and legitimization, for the actual development of the criminal organization, irrespective of whether or not this is a mythical representation'.⁹⁸ I have demonstrated that this is perpetuated by cultural representations, and that these representations are in turn capable of being absorbed into academic narratives – but there is much more to be learned.

⁹⁷ Neumann (n 17) 341.

⁹⁸ Truzzolillo (n 26) 369.