



When corruption creates its Mafia. The “middle-world” case in Rome

Alberto Vannucci¹

Accepted: 24 November 2023
© The Author(s) 2024

Abstract

The judicial operation “mondo di mezzo” (middle-world) revealed in 2014 the existence of a criminal network in Rome, dubbed Mafia capitale. Its main function was the governance of a systemic corruption scheme that permeated many sectors of the public administration and the political process of the Italian capital city. Notwithstanding a convulsed judicial history, the network analytically manifests traits of a mafia-type group. Through a qualitative content analysis of intercepted materials, juridical files, and interviews, this paper argues that the peculiar systemic corruption scheme of Mafia capitale has indeed generated mafia-type behaviours. Mafia capitale interconnected corruption and collusion in public procurement, corruption in the bureaucratic and electoral processes (the upperword) together with enforcement of deals from the underworld. This mafia-type group was able to enforce extra-legal deals, through reputational assets and intimidation, inducing people into compliance and silence and gaining benefits for a period of almost three years.

Keywords Corruption · Mafia-type groups · Public procurement · Collusive agreements · Hidden exchanges · Italy

Rome is a city that doesn't produce anything anymore... there is no industry, no cultural business, the economy is parasitic, tourism is third-rate... that's what Rome is made of, a city that now produces only power, power that falls on other power, that crushes other power, that manures other power, all without ever progress, it's normal that people then go crazy

Nicola Lagioia, *La città dei vivi*, Einaudi 2021.

✉ Alberto Vannucci
alberto.vannucci@unipi.it

¹ Department of Political Sciences, University of Pisa, Via Serafini 3, 56126 Pisa, IT, Italy

Introduction

On December 13th, 2012, in Rome, at the bar of the ENI gas station in Corso Francia – headquarter of the criminal organization which the Prosecutors baptized Mafia capitale – the leader Massimo Carminati (C.) illustrates the “programmatic manifesto” of his group, in a taped conversation with a gang affiliate.

It’s the theory of the middle-world, mate. ...there are... the living above and the dead below and we are in the middle (...)and then it means that there is a world... a world in the middle where everybody meets and you say: fuck how is it possible that... I know that tomorrow I can be having dinner with Berlusconi...(...) Fuck it’s impossible...do you understand the idea? ... the middle world is the one instead where everything meets.. that is...do you understand?...then people...people of a certain type...of any, of whatever class... they all meet there..(...)..you stay there...but not as a matter of class...as a matter of merit, no? ...then in the middle, even the person who is in the upper-world has an interest in someone from the under-world doing things for him that no one else can do..(...) that’s the thing...and everything gets mixed up.¹

Carminati was a neo-fascist terrorist during the late 70’s and early ‘80 s of the past century, later involved in criminal businesses with the Rome mafia-type group Banda della Magliana (Mazzeo 2015).² In the Italian far-right cultural environment of that period references to Tolkien’s literary imaginary abounded. This can explain why Carminati applies the literary metaphor of the middle-world to describe the functional role of his criminal group: a *connective tissue*, having power and authority to bind otherwise separate and no communicating worlds, i.e. the world-above of the *living ones* – made up of white-collars, professionals, entrepreneurs, institutional actors – and the netherworld of the *dead ones* – populated of violent thugs, robbers, drug traffickers.

The judicial operation “mondo di mezzo” (*middle-world*), which revealed the existence of the criminal network Mafia capitale, started on December 2014, with the incarceration of 28 individuals; in June 2015 other 48 individuals were arrested.³ After the first and second rulings, in July 2017 and September 2018, on June 2020 the Court of Cassation issued the final judgment on the case.

By tapping into the under-researched field of corruption studies within organised crime research, this paper aims at disentangling the characteristics of resources and interactions among the *above* and *below* actors involved in the network of corrupt exchanges propelled, regulated and enforced by Mafia capitale. The peculiar nature

¹ Tribunal of Rome, Restraining Order P.P. 30,546/10 R.G., November 28, 2014: 33.

² As Carminati proudly affirms in his judicial testimony: “I am an old fascist from the 1970s, and I am glad to be this way. That has been my life. Many of my friends died [in the fight], and I am extremely happy to be who I am.” (Tribunal of Rome, Hearing March 29, 2017, N.R.G. 12,621: 34–5).

³ Investigators were intercepting an individual for another judicial inquiry; by accident he was involved in what became the Mafia capitale corruption scheme. (Court of Cassation, Ruling n.1525, June 12, 2020: 4–5).

of this network, in fact, can shed light on the potential positive-feedback effects fostering criminal organizations' activities and corrupt practices.

Despite the case-study nature of this paper, some general research questions guided the analysis: (i) which facilitating factors and mechanisms can induce the forming of a mafia-type group operating as a provider of regulation and enforcement services within an "administrative arena" of corrupt public decision-making? (ii) which resources are used to adapt its supply of protection to the specificity of such illegal market? (iii) which are the interdependencies of such mafia-type group's activity with interrelated arenas of informal/illegal exchange populated by both white collars and other criminal actors?

Theoretical background

Corruption and organized crime have mostly been studied separately, being the one a causal or intervening variable for the diffusion of the other, and vice versa (Holmes 2015). In fact, a comprehensive assessment of the conditions that influence their potential overlapping has never been fully conducted (Philp 2015). This gap in research can be explained by several factors. Firstly, both fields of research lack a commonly accepted definition, resulting to even more "contested" conceptualization as we look at their linkage: the lack of a clear analytical distinction between the two has hindered interstitial research and led to "divided" research approaches (Finckenauer 2004; Varese 2010). Secondly, these fields suffer from an "organisational myopia" in looking at their interaction: the analysis of the institutional and organisational context, behaviours, and processes that support corrupt exchanges (Lambsdorff 2002; della Porta and Vannucci 2012) have been largely overlooked in the literature (Luo 2005), in favour of principal-agent (Klitgaard 1988) and collective action approaches (Rothstein 2011; Mungiu-Pippidi 2015). Similarly, OC studies often view OC solely as a cause of corruption (Gilligan 1999), within a zero-sum game with legal institutions where OC either use bribes or violence (potential or actual, i.e., through intimidation or killings) to gain impunity or influence/control in decision-making (Fiorentini and Peltzman 1997; Dal Bó et al. 2006). OC groups would therefore operate similarly to other private interests by lobbying or bribing public actors to gain anticipated control and preferential treatment in public (non-) decision-making (Godson 2003; Bailey and Taylor 2009; Gounev and Ruggiero 2012).

Corruption has consequently been viewed as a *necessary* condition for OC groups to survive and thrive, as "organized crime almost always involves corruption" (Maltz 1985: 24) and "corruption has a centrality for illegal markets that it does not have for legal markets generally", generating economies of scale in the organization and diffusion of criminal activities (Reuter 1983: 123). Firstly, larger-scale criminal organizations may require corrupt exchanges of political, judicial or police protection to safeguard themselves from the risks of prosecution, arrest and seizure of illegal revenues and assets. Secondly, corruption is an instrument for achieving and maintaining monopolistic control over illegal and legal sectors, as well as territories, thus obtaining a competitive advantage over other criminal

groups (Schelling 1984). Hidden and privileged access to key public arenas can significantly affect the balance of powers between criminal groups, increasing expected profits and “criminal life-expectancy” to those able can establish stronger collusive ties with their institutional counterparts (Maltz 1976). Thirdly, impunity becomes an essential asset, particularly for mafia-type groups, whose core business is the supply of private protection, especially (but not exclusively) in illegal markets and in other extra-legal transactions which are not enforceable in courts of law (Gambetta 1993). To establish a recognizable reputation as a reliable provider of guarantees, a mafia-type group must demonstrate its capability to assure their long-term organizational survival against illegal competitors, as well as state institutions (Sberna and Vannucci 2019; Gambetta 2009).

These approaches only partially explain reciprocity mechanisms and collusive partnerships that can be fostered between criminal and institutional actors (Barnes 2017; Magaloni et al. 2020). In fact, bribes can also become a *business in itself* for those mafia-type groups capable to provide *guarantees* to corrupt exchanges or collusive agreements amongst partners in extra-legal deals, reducing the corresponding searching, negotiation and enforcement (i.e., transaction) costs (Fazekas et al. 2022). In other words, governance services provided by OC groups may become an integral and functional component of corrupt exchanges, which have been theorized as a potentially networked phenomena (della Porta and Vannucci 1999; Jancsics 2015; Yu et al. 2020).

In corruption, like any other illegal deals, there are in fact *exogenous* sources of uncertainty on resources at stake, due to the risk of police control and repression from the state’s apparatus. There are also *endogenous* sources of uncertainty, originating from the vulnerability of participants to partners’ opportunistic behaviour: a formal third-party enforcement mechanism, as that provided by the state to legal contracts (della Porta and Vannucci 2012) is missing. Mistrust may then determine a failure of potentially profitable deals especially when actors and transactions escalate (Lambsdorff 2007), or – even more costly – an involvement in judicial inquiries and other political and social sanctions.

Mafia-type groups are qualified as extra-legal governance organizations performing key functions not only as enablers or brokers, but specifically as regulators and enforcers of both illicit trades and licit interactions: “a mafia group is a type of organized criminal group that seeks to control the supply of protection” (Varese 2010: 17). There’s a variety of criminal governance mechanisms, especially in arenas and spaces that states struggle to govern (Lessing 2021: 2), such as illicit sectors (Catino 2019). As Gambetta (1993:17) puts it: “the main market for mafia services is to be found in unstable transactions in which trust is scarce and fragile. Such is the case, for instance, with illegal transactions in which no legitimate enforcement agency—in other words, the state—is available”. Also in the legitimate economy, e.g., in the lucrative sector of public procurement, mafia-type groups can reduce transaction costs associated with corrupt exchanges (Caneppele & Martocchia 2014; Ravenda et al. 2020) and with collusive agreements among companies (Gambetta and Reuter 1995), effectively “oiling the wheels” of the corruption machinery. Their political-institutional counterparts, in turn, can reciprocate as gatekeepers allowing them to access various benefits (profitable contracts and licenses, impunity, etc.), in

a symbiotic relationship which over time tends to strengthen everyone (della Porta and Vannucci 2012, 2021).

The infrastructure of governance enforced by mafia-type groups can thus incorporate the various nodes of a corruption networks (political, administrative, economic, professional, etc.), providing governance services either separately or jointly, and moulding the expectations of participating actors (Bussell 2017). Mafiosi use of a set of *heterogeneous* resources – violence and intimidation, but also reputation, intelligence, networks of relationships, internal bonds of trust and identification – as inputs to provide a guarantee of property rights and the fulfilment of informal rules and contractual agreements. While OC groups may use or threaten the use of *violence* to establish and enforce such infrastructure of governance, their success is ultimately determined by their ability to *prevent* disputes rather than *settle* them (Gambetta 1993). The less frequent the use of violence, the smoother corrupt transactions can take place with participants' mutual satisfaction, making it a good proxy for evaluating the stability of systemic corruption (Barzel 2002). Reputation—recognizable and long-lasting mafia “brand”—may substitute the actual use of coercion, as a more effective and cost-reducing strategic asset for mafia-type groups. For its reputational resources to be effective, they also require an infrastructure of social contacts and relationships where information on its credibility and effectiveness as enforcer can circulate. Such criminal “social capital” of strong internal bonds and weak external ties (Sciarrone 2009) allows the mafia-type group to enlarge the set of counterparts among white collar actors, at the same time both providers of valuable resources and “customers” of protection services in their extra-legal deals.

Additionally, the electoral process can be included in the perimeter of corrupt transactions enabled, regulated and sanctioned with mutual advantage by mafia-type groups. The latter, in fact, can enforce vote-buying, frauds, corrupt exchanges based on political financing, protecting corrupt politicians from political uncertainty due to democratic competition, and allowing them to strengthen their grip on institutional roles and profitable decision-making power (della Porta and Vannucci 2013). For all these services, actors involved in corrupt exchanges would be paying the mafia-type group a price, which can be any good or asset.

Background and methods

This paper focuses on the Mafia capitale's case through a socio-political analytical lens: it will not consider the debated issue of the judicial qualification of its illegal activities, which dominated the Italian media and public commentators' narrative on the case (Ciccarello 2016; Sergi 2016; Pezzi 2019; Lacroce 2020) Reversing its first instance rulings⁴ and the Court of Appeal's judgement,⁵ the final scrutiny of the Court of Cassation in 2020 did not confirm the applicability of the 416bis article of the Italian criminal code – membership in mafia-type organisation. The court

⁴ Court of Cassation (sez. VI pen.), Rulings n. 24,535 and 24,536, March 10 2015.

⁵ Tribunal of Rome, Court of Appeal, Ruling n. 10,010/2018, December 10, 2018.

did find that the peculiarity of this network was the systemic adoption of *corruption strategies* but that this would not qualify the “ingredients” of the “mafia-type association” criminal offence, i.e., the intimidating force of the associative bond; the conspiracy of silence and subjugation of those who belong to or interact with the criminal group.⁶ In its verdict the Court of Cassation “unpacked” Mafia capitale into two separated criminal organizations, one operating in typical “under-world” illegal activities (loan-sharking, extortion, etc.), the other involved in corruption, collusion and other white collar-crimes. While debatable also on a legal standpoint (Visconti 2015; Sergi 2019a), such ruling does not contradict the divergent analytical lens in this paper. Within a sociological framework, in fact, a criminal group becomes mafia-type when it is capable and willing to provide governance and private protection in illegal markets (Gambetta 1993; Varese 2010). According to our analysis, Mafia capitale emerged *endogenously* within a pre-existing arena of corrupt exchanges, as a governance structure ruled by criminal and entrepreneurial actors capable and willing to provide *private protection* (Vannucci 2016).

Coherently with Carminati’s “middle-world” metaphor outlined in the introduction, we argue that analytically, Mafia capitale is a mafia-type group born out of a corruption scheme. The empirical evidence shows how Mafia capitale had become a connective tissue between different arenas of illegal activities. It solved disputes and enforced corruptive and collusive deals while minimizing the use of violence thanks to reputational capital. This aligns more with the thesis of the prosecutors, who comparing Mafia capitale with other mafia-type groups notice: “a completely original physiognomy, reaching an advanced stage of evolution, in which the recourse to violence and other crimes typical of mafia organisations is minimized, and the criminal association’s core business is business and public contracts”.⁷

Initially overlooked, several red flags signalled the consolidation of the equilibrium of systemic corruption that Mafia capitale created. A report of the Italian Anticorruption Authority (ANAC), published after the start of the judicial inquiry, highlights a large set of significant anomalies in procurement procedures in the Municipality of Rome from 2010 to 2014. Among them: “massive use of non-public procedures in almost 90% of all procedures”; adoption of negotiated procedures in “blatant non-conformity with the rules”; “generalised failure to verify the requirements for participation”; “lack of control on performance”; “subcontracting above maximum thresholds allowed”; “lack of motivation in public decisions”; “failure to refer to the type of subcontracting applied (...). This leads ANAC to believe that the genesis of such practices goes back a long way and in many cases could be a shrewd ploy to orient public contracting towards (...) distortions, even of a corruptive nature” (Bianconi 2015). Evidence from the judicial investigations eventually induced the Council of Ministries to approve the dissolution of the Municipality of Ostia (district of Rome), since “the exercise of political and administrative powers had been strongly influenced by a mafia-type association”⁸; the Prefect of Rome,

⁶ Court of Cassation, Ruling n. 626, May 10, 2015: 18.

⁷ Tribunal of Rome, 2014, cit.,: 33.

⁸ Ministero degli interni, 2015, Relazione finale sugli esiti dell’accesso a Roma capitale, doc.661/2; 832.

under request by ANAC, appointed new administrators to social enterprises previously involved in the corruption scheme.⁹

Empirical data used for this analysis of the Mafia capitale's case were extrapolated from judicial acts: 3 pre-trial detention orders, 6 rulings of first- and second-degree trials, plus appeal of detention orders; 3 rulings of the Court of Cassation; 229 min of first trial and 32 min of appeal trial hearings, 109 folders containing transcripts of wiretaps. The latter, which provide vivid description of the subjective experience of individuals involved, will be extensively used in this paper to analyse the content of the interactions among actors. These proceedings were analysed adopting a twosteps analysis: first, a thematic analysis was applied to pre-trial detention order and rulings in order to single out key issues, understanding the main actors' activities and their functions within the criminal network, which were converted into a codebook of approx. 30 variables. Secondly, a dataset was generated coding data for content, obtained processing also transcripts of wiretaps and hearings, which were searched through keywords focusing on resources; actors' identity and role; cooperative or conflictual nature of interactions. The analysis of documents was integrated with purposeful interviews (5) with prosecutors, journalists, and scholars, and complemented by ad-hoc reading of media coverage on the case in the years the case was active.

The rise of Mafia capitale: looking for protection in a troublesome political-administrative space

As a procurator describes it, Mafia capitale endogenously emerged within the Municipality of Rome's pre-existing endemic corruption;

Deep-rooted corruption is the main issue in Rome, together with a set of crimes which includes major bankruptcies, tax frauds, bid rigging and related phenomena. Rome is a complex metropolis, also from a criminal point of view, and Mafia capitale came out as just one piece of a much larger and more complicated mosaic.

Besides a legacy of widespread malpractice, other facilitating factors have contributed to consolidate corrupt networks in the municipality of Rome. First, Italian parties, once facilitators of political careers and guarantors of informal exchanges, progressively weakened and this multiplied – also locally – individualistic demands for money from politicians and wanna-be representatives to private and entrepreneurial interests (Newell 2017; della Porta and Vannucci 2021). Secondly, deregulation of public sectors, privatization and outsourcing of welfare services to private or social enterprises undermined state controls and expanded opportunities for a clientelistic or corrupt misuse of public resources (Mete and Sciarrone 2016; 12). Thirdly, bureaucratic red-tapes generated a state of “constant emergency” in several sensitive and lucrative areas of public intervention, where large amounts of

⁹ La Repubblica, “Mafia Capitale, Gabrielli nomina i commissari della coop La Cascina”, July 6, 2015.

resources were allocated to private contractors with extraordinary, highly discretionary, and corruption-enhancing decision-making procedures (Martone 2016: 23).

In a context of widespread corruption, Mafia capitale emerged as a third-party enforcer (Barzel 2002) by reducing uncertainty in the relationships among actors involved, regulating their meetings, negotiations, and fulfilment of contractual commitments. As Varese (2011:23) observes, private protection “may be welcomed by sectors of the population because it provides an advantage in a given market”.. When customers (and beneficiaries) of such “service” are powerful white-collar actors, their compensation (in the form of confidential information, influence, judicial protection, etc.) may in turn strengthen the effectiveness of the criminal group as enforcer.

Carminati’s past in drug trafficking, extortion, usury, with connections to neo-fascist terrorism and secret services, allows him to capitalize on criminal skills, political contacts, and blackmailing power. Carminati describes his criminal curriculum during a taped conversation:

I used to do politics in those days, then ... politics stopped being politics and became political crime... there was a low-intensity war first with the left, and then with the state, I had contacts with the Banda della Magliana ...the only real boss there ever was ...Franco Giuseppucci ... who was a good friend of mine... I’ve known him my whole life, and I knew everybody else¹⁰

An entrepreneur confirms this about Carminati:

He had dealings with the Magliana gang.... he’s one of the bad ones... these guys have the money to wage war, because in the good old days they did what they did...he knows the Mayor...go to him...they all go to him to ask.... on Sunday the Mayor was having lunch at his house...when you need something go to him...they all go to him....”¹¹

Mafia capitale’s activities started with a “business agreement” between Carminati and Salvatore Buzzi, convicted in 1983 for murder. The two had met in prison, as the latter explains in his judicial testimony: “I’ve known Carminati my whole life, but I’ve had business relations with him since 2011”; “He used to come to my social enterprise in the morning, and I would tell him about problems”.¹² Since 1986 Buzzi had launched a rampant entrepreneurial career in the sector of public procurement in Rome, as manager in 13 social enterprises with 2200 employees, whose overall turnover increased from 26 million euros in 2010 to more than 50 million euros in 2013.¹³ Mafia capitale had a “network-like organizational structure” (Brancaccio 2016),¹⁴ involving four individuals in the tough environment of the *netherworld* and

¹⁰ Tribunal of Rome, P.P: 30,546/10 R.G.N.R., PROG.1100, RIT 3850/12, June 21, 2012: 12.

¹¹ Tribunal of Rome, cit., Rit. 1676\13 prog. 17,168, January 22, 2014: 4.

¹² Tribunal of Rome, N.R.G. 12,621, Hearings March 8, 2017: 261; March 13, 2017: 258; March 14: 163.

¹³ Tribunal of Rome, Ruling n.11730/2017, July 20, 2017: 3085.

¹⁴ See also Tribunal of Rome, 2014, cit.: 35.

middle-world and ten entrepreneurs, politicians, bureaucrats, professionals operating in the *upper-world* of white-collar. However, its core consists of the tight, friendly bond between Carminati and Buzzi, a renowned underworld figure on the one side, and a successful redeemed entrepreneur on the other. Their bond exemplifies the symbiotic nexus of reciprocity across business and illicit affairs involving white-collar actors the mafia-type members.

Mafia capitale operated in Rome within a specific 'political-administrative space' (dalla Chiesa 2015), providing regulatory services in two interconnected political-institutional arenas. On the one hand, the procurement sector; on the other hand, political-bureaucratic exchanges and electoral market, both functional to influence the allocation of public contracts.¹⁵ During his trial testimony, Carminati explains why the demand for protection comes from the "upperworld" of white-collar criminal activities: the lack of trustworthiness and a need for reliability could endanger potential businesses.

I come from a world where we are all much more honest, a kind of honesty that is clearly at a lower level (...) In other words, it is not that we have ten commandments, we have three, but we respect them all. The beautiful souls of the upperworld have ten and do not respect a single one, so perhaps we respect more commandments than those above....¹⁶

A fundamental business regulated and enforced by Mafia capitale is the allocation of rents and bribes derived from public contracts in specific sectors, particularly those exposed to emergency management (e.g., immigration centres) and other "extraordinary" conditions.¹⁷ In Buzzi's tapped description: "we closed this year... with a turnover of forty million, but all the money... the profits we made on gypsies [sic], on the housing emergency and on immigrants".¹⁸ According to Buzzi, profits from public contracts are higher than those achievable in traditional illegal markets: "Do you have any idea how much I earn on immigrants? (...) drug trafficking yields less".¹⁹ Frequently recurring in intercepted dialogues is the metaphorical description of the corrupt mechanisms as a "cow" that "if it doesn't eat, it cannot be milked"; "it has to eat"; "we have milked the cow a lot here".²⁰ High gains in the public sector

¹⁵ Mafia capitale expanded later, since November 2012, its supply of private protection in the recovery of loans and debts (Tribunal of Rome, 2017, cit., 3086), where it tended to become monopolist. When another individual of "relevant criminal status" was "contacted to receive 'protection'" from an entrepreneur, as soon as he knew the identity of his competitor he "refused to intervene in the face of the danger arising from the 'criminal reputation' of the associates, advising his interlocutor to leave it alone and pay what was due". (Court of Cassation, 2015, cit.: 16).

¹⁶ Tribunal of Rome, N.R.G. 12,621, Hearing March 29, 2017: 99–100.

¹⁷ The attractiveness of profits in public contracting in situations of emergency also results from an "ironic" text message of good wishes sent by Buzzi to a city manager during the holiday season: "Let's hope that 2013 will be a year full of garbage, refugees, immigrants, displaced persons, minors, rainy so the grass grows to mow and maybe with some blizzards: yay for social enterprises" (http://www.huffingtonpost.it/2014/12/12/sms-vergogna-buzzi_n_6313266.html, access July 2023).

¹⁸ Tribunal of Rome, 2014, cit.: 1040.

¹⁹ Tribunal of Rome, 2014, cit.: 1026.

²⁰ Tribunal of Rome, Restraining Order P.P. 30,546/10 R., May 29, 2015: 23, 410.

become incentives for both private and public actors to adopt legal “market” strategies, but also bribery or collusive agreements. The by-product of “unregulated” competition, however, could be potential disputes and conflicts, which may endanger an orderly, predictable, and “safe” realization of corrupt exchanges, primary goal of all actors involved. And this is where Mafia capitale intervenes to enforce hidden pacts.

Deterrence of competition is a preliminary condition to avoid risks of reporting and frictions in the management of corrupt deals. Cartel agreements among entrepreneurs require reciprocal trust on illegal and deferred exchanges, involving subcontracting, supplies, hiring, participation shifts, agreed-upon bids in tenders. Buzzi (B.) conducts negotiations among those involved, but he also has the authority to sanction by exclusion any untrustworthy potential partners, as it emerges in this conversation with another colluding entrepreneur:

B.: Look, then we fix the tender this way... yesterday I talked with L., so ... our aces in the hole to make us win the race should be ... C. ... that I'm going to have a nice coffee on Friday. And I'll also put CO. on the field, ... [...] to make it right you have to make a deal with L., in which we say we provide the tender... [...] so here he is, he is in the subcontracts..., but not him ... in order to win the tender... because S. is a lame horse, no! ...you want to win it or you want to lose it...

CG: Let's say that, then if he wants to go alone...

B: But you say to go alone ...do me a courtesy, go.... [...] you tell him ...and if you play it right, you can go on the fourth lot, that no one competes, and you win it ...²¹

In another tender for the collection of mixed recyclables Mafia capitale prevents the defection of a company, which tries to reject Buzzi's collusive proposal with a "no square deal",²² by relying on the protection of another criminal group (aligned to camorra clans)). Intercepted conversations between Buzzi and his collaborators describe the dispute and its solution: "you have to be careful because it smells like camorra, huh?... I mean, one thing is to disrupt agreements on an auction, another thing is to bring the fucking camorra..., I mean, how the fuck can we do that...". To resolve the dispute enforcing the cartel agreement, Carminati promises his intervention: "well, no, but let's go talk... I'll come with you and handle it... but... He'll give us a blowjob... damn".²³ The restoration of the collusive agreement, also achieved thanks to the persuasive intervention of corrupt politicians, takes place in a meeting with the competitor, who eventually "got scared", upon being informed that "while he was doing that thing, then it's better if there's peace...".²⁴ A message sent to a collaborator, three days before the tender closing, celebrates the new agreement,

²¹ Tribunal of Rome, 2015, cit.: 28.

²² Tribunal of Rome, RIT 1741/13, pr. 44,292, January 16, 2014.

²³ Tribunal of Rome, RIT 3240/13, pr. n. 6649 -A-5, January 20, 2014.

²⁴ Tribunal of Rome, RIT 1741/2013, p. 44,599 and 44,600, January 18, 2014.

in which Buzzi obtains the public contract: "Nuntio vobis gaudium magnum habemus papam".²⁵

Mafia capitale ensured a prompt and effective resolution in a variety of disputes arising on resources at stake in corruption in public contracts: delays in the issuance of certifications, excessive demands for bribes, allocation and unlocking of funds, non-approval or delayed approval of resolutions.²⁶ For example, Buzzi in an tapped dialogue, describes a dispute with the Municipality of Rome over the payment of a contract for the construction of a nomad camp, for which he had already agreed on bribes:

...once we had a problem in the Campidoglio [Town Hall of Rome], because the Campidoglio...to make the camp, of course, how much had we budgeted? One hundred...instead of one hundred it is one hundred and twenty... three hundred thousand euros more. After the agreement with A. [then mayor of Rome] we had to make another agreement ... we practically had to talk to his head secretary ... a mastermind.

The quarrel is promptly reconciled by resorting to Carminati's intervention, to induce immediate compliance:

I called Massimo and told him...Look, here I have difficulty in getting of three hundred thousand euros...he called me back and told me...Go to the Campidoglio at three o'clock and L. [the head secretary] will come down and talk to you... ..Hey, at five to three he'll come down! He says... I spoke with Massimo, everything's fine, go tomorrow... Hey, everything's really fine! They are afraid of him, they are afraid ...".²⁷

An interconnected political-bureaucratic arena of potentially unstable exchanges extends to the political and electoral process, where Mafia capitale regulated politicians' and bureaucrats' decision-making power on direct allocation or assignment; renegotiation of contractual conditions; integrations of contracts; confidential information (regarding bidding timelines, award criteria, future contract extensions, etc.). Vote buying; purchase of party membership cards; political financing of the public actors involved in corrupt exchanges, all consolidated the *sympiotic nexus* between the mafia-type group and its institutional counterparts. The latter could reciprocate providing long-lasting political protection to the mafia-type group's entrepreneurial activities.(della Porta and Vannucci 2021).

In taped conversations it emerges that the criminal group can deploy in the electoral market direct support to politicians through workers of its social enterprises, as Buzzi explains to Carminati: "we're supporting both of them... we've given 140 votes to G. and 80 to C. ...".²⁸ According to Buzzi, intercepted chatting with his

²⁵ From latin: "I announce you a great joy", the formula used to proclaim the election of a new Pope. Tribunal of Rome, 2014, cit.: 665–6.

²⁶ Court of Cassation 2015, cit: 15.

²⁷ Tribunal of Rome, Rit. 3240–13 pro. 54, April 20, 2013.

²⁸ Tribunal of Rome, RIT 3240–13 pro. 4632, October 28, 2013.

wife, Mafia capitale can also “triangulate” support thanks to its pre-existing cooperative relationships with members of other criminal groups_ “how do you support A. [the former Mayor of Rome]? By giving him the names of 7–8 mafiosi we have in the cooperative who can lend him a hand...”.²⁹ Buzzi can similarly reassure the politician A.: “no, no, don’t worry, don’t worry. Now we’ll send to... to M. the list of people, our friends from the South, who are in the South and can give you a hand with... quite a few votes.”

By reinvesting part of the proceeds from corruption into electoral support, Mafia capitale protects corrupt politicians from political uncertainty, by also influencing the outcomes of municipal-level electoral competitions. Buzzi oversees various strategies of electoral bribery, which he vividly describes in another intercepted conversation:

I pay everyone, I pay... Even two dinners with the mayor, 75,000 euros seem like too little to you? (...) You have to be good because the social enterprise survives on politics. Why should I be the one doing the work that many others can do? I finance newspapers, advertise, fund events, pay secretaries, pay for dinners, pay for posters. On Monday, I have a dinner that costs 20,000 euros, can you imagine... (...) This is when I pay the most... during the local elections... we spend a lot of money on the Municipality (...) and if you make the wrong investment, if you bet on the wrong horse... now I have four... four horses running... with the PD [centre-left], then with the PDL [centre-right], I have three, and with M. [a civic candidate], I have connections with L. (...) so it’s all good.³⁰

A bipartisan support for corruptible counterparts, following a principle of “portfolio diversification” in political investment, minimizes uncertainty regarding voting outcomes: regardless of the election result, there will be institutional counterparts that the criminal group can turn to. As Buzzi states, speaking with an employee:

B: Oh, we had bought them all...

If A. [centre-right candidate for Mayor] had won, we’d all bought them, we’d start off *fiuuuuu* [phonetically: rocket imitation] I have the councillor for public works, T. had to be councillor for social services, C. would go to the environment... what the fuck more do you want... [...] ...and now let’s see M. [centre-right elected Mayor], then we manage things with M. [...] fuck do you know? We have... O., four of them O., D., P. and N.³¹

The solidity of political balances and power structures within public institutions increases the stability of corrupt exchanges, by establishing unwritten rules and recurring contractual clauses that define the criteria for sharing the profits created through influence on public decision-making.

²⁹ Tribunal of Rome, 2014, cit.: 556.

³⁰ Tribunal of Rome, 2014, cit.: 1039–40.

³¹ Tribunal of Rome, 2014, cit.: 125–6.

Resources for the enforcers

Reputation is an effective resource for the leaders of Mafia capitale. As Gambetta (1993:44) notices: “a reputation for credible protection and protection itself tend to be one and the same thing. The more robust the reputation for the protection firm, the less the need to have recourse to the resources which support that reputation”. In addition to his own criminal background, Carminati capitalized on the media visibility from an article in the weekly magazine "l'Espresso," which identified him as one of the four "Kings" of the criminal underworld in Rome.

R: Have you read L'Espresso...?

C.: Damn... but all this... for our work... these are also good things...

R.: They are even more protected...

C.: That's good... they feel secure... damn...

R.: And even so sometimes, when you talk to people, they run away...³²

In this dialogue the twofold nature of protection supply emerges: it can have a reassuring role of a guarantee against issues, or, alternatively, a ominous shape of an unwanted request.

Carminati's reputation of being well-connected with prominent political figures and capable of blackmailing them, further enhances the aura of invulnerability surrounding him. In an intercepted conversation, Buzzi explains Carminati's power derived from bipartisan political protection, linked to his blackmail power:

B.; "Do you know why... he's untouchable? Because he was the one who brought the bribes for Finmeccanica [Italian public society]! Bags of money! He brought them to everyone...! He doesn't tell me the names because he doesn't tell me... everyone! Finmeccanica! That's why every now and then... 4 million in envelopes! 4 million! In the end, he told me... 'Sure, I brought money to everyone!' Everyone! Even the communist party"³³

Furthermore, in 1999 Carminati had been involved in a robbery at a bank located within the Rome Tribunal. Breaking into 147 selected safety deposit boxes, he obtained confidential information that could explain his enduring impunity, as it emerges in a dialogue between Buzzi and an employee.

B.: He does.... a robbery, the safety deposit boxes, so they find everything, and even more..."

BG.: ...it's where the judges put things...

B.; ... and someone can be blackmailed...

BG.: ...eh, if he puts it in the box...

B.: ...how come, how do you explain that he was never convicted? Until now they convict him only for that one crime...everything else always acquitted...³⁴

³² Tribunal of Rome R.I.T. 7974/12, December 13, 2012.

³³ Tribunal of Rome, 2014, cit.: 203.

³⁴ Tribunal of Rome, Rit. 8416/13, progr. 6460, August 7, 2014.

His involvement in numerous investigations for serious crimes without conviction, according to prosecutors: "fuelled his criminal reputation (...) contributing to the creation of a myth of impunity and shaping his public image (...) as a participant in obscure plots of deviant powers."³⁵

Exceptional recourses to violence or simple threats quickly resolve any conflicts or frictions in the regular management of corrupt exchanges. Carminati himself recognizes, in a tapped dialogue, that the ultimate source of his authority comes from "the street", i.e., the capability to enforce through violence: "Because in the end... on the streets... you have to ask them, 'What's your name?'... we always have control... someone like you [politician, white-collar] will never have control on the streets... you will always need us on the streets."³⁶ The criminal-royal attribute that the magazine *L'Espresso* gave him is proudly displayed to induce a reluctant public manager to comply:

Now we will make him scream like a slaughtered eagle... otherwise, the King of Rome will come here... you are a subordinate... it's the King of Rome who comes here, I will enter through the main door... you see what I will do to him... if he doesn't piss me off... he better close the procedure right away.³⁷

An intercepted conversation between Carminati and an affiliate shows how another public manager, who had previously received "kickbacks", was disciplined through a physical assault after failing to fulfil his commitments:

C. "He's the one who's supposed to handle us the good tenders for this thing to work well...(.) but then... I... I beat him up, you know? It's not like... yeah..."
 BR. "But he's the one... you gave him the kickbacks..."
 C. "For the public works, for the ones he gave us, yeah... of course....."³⁸

In another tapped dialogue, Carminati identifies the essence of his activity as a provider of a wide-ranging protection to both political interlocutors and individuals operating in the business and professional fields. The aim is to *prevent* disputes before they even arise, addressing various types of *problems* such as claims from other criminal organizations or corrupt officials, delays in payment for completed work, removal of uncompromising officials. This ensures security and certainty in illegal deals, as stated in the clauses of the ideal "protection contract" proposed to entrepreneurs:

So, what's the deal... we have to intervene beforehand... 'Do you want to stay safe?' (...) Because they always call us... later, buddy!... I've learned that... (...) so... you tell them, listen... so you make these statements... 'They tell me you have... a lot of problems... but hey, why not put some capable guy next to you,

³⁵ Tribunal of Rome, 2014, cit.: 39.

³⁶ Tribunal of Rome, RIT 7974/12, December 3, 2012.

³⁷ Tribunal of Rome, RIT 7967/12, progr. 27, December 10, 2012.

³⁸ Tribunal of Rome, RIT 7974/12, December 3, 2012.

he'll make money'... and he will make money... but if we put someone next to you, then... no one will... see... anymore'.³⁹

Contacts with white-collar counterparts, cemented by mutual interest, are embedded in a peer-to-peer relational framework, as Carminati explains referring to an entrepreneur: "It must be an equal relationship... tell me that you give me a million euros... all this shit... doesn't interest me, since I'm making a 'courtesy'... it is normal that businesses together arise from friendship....I let him make money".⁴⁰ Trust from friendship or past political comradeship also becomes a precious and long-lasting connective bond in business, as Carminati expresses in a taped conversation: "I never abandon friends, and friends never abandon me".⁴¹ In other words, social capital is consolidated through the complementarity of services offered within the network of informal and illegal exchanges, which the operation of the criminal group helps to expand, making it more cohesive, flexible, and resilient.

Outcomes: multi-level systemic corruption and mafia-type traits

The systemic and regulated practice of corruption in public procurement in Rome is the main arena where Mafia capitale plays its role of provider of extra-legal governance. Bribes, however, are just one component of a broader circuit of covert transactions, where the criminal group acts as a guarantor and politicians, bureaucrats and entrepreneurs are willing partners. We can argue that Mafia capitale builds an enlarged systemic corruption scheme: through bribery and collusive agreements in public procurement, political appointments, and influence in the electoral process, such mafia-type group manages to gain profits as well as inducing people to reciprocally profitable compliance in the fulfilment of illicit pacts.

Crucially, Mafia capitale reduces political uncertainty resulting from unpredictable electoral competitions, instability in parties' leaderships, allocation of bureaucratic roles, and alliances between parties and factions. Valuable resources accessible through the network of exchanges regulated and enforced by the criminal group multiply: contracts, money, employment, promotions, electoral contributions, confidential information, etc. These fuel politicians' demand to enter in this arena of regulated corruption. Buzzi describes this process in a tapped dialogue with an employee:

B: Now, you know... I go to a City Council meeting, and the councillors come to me...

R. For sure, these councillors are not doing too well in terms of morality...

B: You know, P. came to me He said: 'oh, when do you hire me?' When you give some work to me. If you don't, I don't.⁴²

³⁹ Tribunal of Rome, 2014, cit.: 53–4.

⁴⁰ Ibidem.

⁴¹ Tribunal of Rome, RIT. 1629/13, prog. 2031. June 10, 2013.

⁴² Tribunal of Rome, 2015, cit.: 31.

Similarly, Mafia Capitale reduces the uncertainty of (protected) entrepreneurs by ensuring a constant flow of contracts and profits. The power to ensure compliance in corrupt exchanges with politicians emerges in an intercepted conversation between Carminati and Buzzi:

B: Fuck off but these city councillors have to be at our beck and call why do I have to be at your beck and call I pay you ...

C: Pieces of shit

B: And you're still being an asshole

C: A gang of pieces of shit

B: But when I can get these guys to sign... He says 'if you respect the agreements?' Do you know who I am? Do you remember where I come from?

C: Respect...

B: I am sincere ... I fulfil the agreements, but if I don't fulfil yours...

C: We fulfil agreements in advance, eh? ... I don't know how many people fulfil agreements in advance. We fulfil them all in advance

B: We have great credibility (...)

C: In fact, we hoard everything for this...⁴³

The criminal actors operate within this *gray area* of "positive-sum interactions" with white-collar individuals, where boundaries between licit and illicit arenas may become blurry and shifting (Sciarrone 2019). They derive reputational resources, social capital, and expectations of impunity from such hidden and corrupt exchanges, which in turn enhance the effectiveness of their protective services. This fuels a positive-feedback mechanism that progressively strengthens both the internal cohesion of the informal network and the operational efficiency and "life expectancy" of criminal actors. As one of the prosecutors in the case summarizes:

Systematic reiteration of corrupt practices was functional to boost the criminal reputation of the boss, and therefore of the organization itself. An aura of all-mightiness and invincibility allowed them to induce entrepreneurs, but also the circle of politicians and functionaries supported in their career, to strictly comply with the rules of the illegal markets. Conspiracy of silence was another effect of such Mafia capitale grip on the public and economic sphere.

Mafia capitale's regulation of corruption in public contracts reduced transaction costs between colluding entrepreneurs and public actors, ensuring horizontal extension to all tenders – without any exception – in the decision-making centres within its operational arena. For example, in the waste management public company AMA, judges observed that "the corrupt phenomenon has reached its maximum expression, contaminating all tenders"⁴⁴ In the intercepted dialogue, Buzzi recalls the percentage of the contract value already paid to the CEO of AMA, to explain why he could easily reject the request of a regional councillor who wanted an additional cut: "I

⁴³ Tribunal of Rome, RIT 8416–13, prog. n. 6432, August 6, 2014.

⁴⁴ Tribunal of Rome, Court of Appeal of detention orders, Ruling 3342/2014, *p.p.* 30,546/2010, December 17, 2014: 89.

told him, 'We gave P. (AMA's CEO), who was in charge, 2.5%... given 120,000 euros out of 5 million... now why all this money to him?'⁴⁵

The two leading figures of Mafia capitale continuously emphasize the importance of a deliberate strategy to build amical relationships with political and institutional counterparts, adapting to overturns in government coalitions. For instance, when there is a change in the ruling majority of the Municipality of Rome, Buzzi vividly describes in an intercepted conversation his investment in establishing connections with the new politicians in charge: "So put on a miniskirt and go lure these people, my friend, you know.... You have to sell yourself like a bitch."⁴⁶ The cooperative nature of the interaction between white-collars actors and Mafia capitale is exemplified by the judicial testimony of a public manager in the government commission which allocated migrants to different facilities, explaining the monthly 5000 euros "fee" he received from Buzzi: "I worked as a consultant... a liaison with the Ministry of Interior, with the prefectures, let's say in that world difficult for social enterprises to access because it is a rather closed world, so the network of relations that I had accumulated over time... relations with the public administration are not easy, you cannot find the right interlocutor for the various problems ..."⁴⁷ Acquittance with politicians is an added value to Mafia capitale's criminal business, as Carminati explains referring to a municipal councillor G.: "Now he's got it... my friend... who's at the Municipality... and then... they take contracts... then they pass resolutions..."⁴⁸ On his side, G. describes in the judicial testimony the cordial relationship with Carminati and Buzzi, mixing their common business and political interests: "I had no problem getting to know Carminati... [he and Buzzi] asked me to take an interest in a matter, and I did it...[...]. When I became group leader, the relationship between local government and social enterprises changed, so my connection with Buzzi became natural, relaxed"⁴⁹ Mafia capitale's political connections could then be converted into further profitable relational capital. For instance, the Mayor introduced Buzzi to the executive director of the public company AMA, later involved in the criminal network and convicted for corruption. In his testimony: "The Mayor summoned me, as I entered in his room there was Buzzi and the Mayor said 'I introduce you to Salvatore Buzzi, he complains that he gets no work in AMA'... then he started talking about their personal relations in a joking manner ... A few days later the Mayor asked me if I could accompany him to a dinner organised by Buzzi with other people... around fifty or sixty... it was a dinner for knowing others, to get relations".⁵⁰ Capitalizing on a dense network of relationships with institutional counterparts at various levels of government (municipal, regional, national), Mafia capitale supervises dealings in several public decision-making processes. It ensures then an effective multilevel governance of corrupt exchanges, which includes budget

⁴⁵ Tribunal of Rome, RIT 8416–13, prog. 4469, May 16, 2014.

⁴⁶ Tribunal of Rome, 2017, cit.: 3084.

⁴⁷ Tribunal of Rome, Hearing February 1 2017, N.R.G. 12,621: 49–50; 53.

⁴⁸ Tribunal of Rome, 2017, cit.: 1530.

⁴⁹ Tribunal of Rome, Hearing, February 22, 2017, N.R.G. 12,621: 18;–20.

⁵⁰ Tribunal of Rome, Hearing, February 22, 2017, N.R.G. 12,621: 22–25..

choices; resource allocation; distribution of resources for immigrant centres/flows; tailor-made tenders and specifications; prompt issuance of payment orders; and favourable renegotiation of contractual considerations. For example, a regional councillor "provided us with a lot of money for the Municipality of Ostia", while "the President of the Municipality, whom I went to speak to... is approving formal acts to give everything to us."⁵¹ The mayor of another small municipality close to Rome is considered "at disposal" due to the capability of Mafia capitale's group to influence decisions taken by a Regional Councillor (L).

C: He can't do anything why? Let me tell you why, because the money comes from the Region. If he doesn't do what we say, L. blocks everything, makes it difficult...

A: Even... even funds for building this gym?

C: For everything! For everything... what he has to do... the money comes from the Region... I'm talking about everything that comes from the Region. If L. doesn't let it happen, we have to... we have to throw obstacles his way.⁵²

The stability of corruption pacts requires a reciprocal trust to prevent turbulence, which could result from genuine competition in bidding processes. Buzzi and another colluding entrepreneur discuss the robustness of an implicit agreement in sharing tenders among colluding entrepreneurs, which had been initially challenged by an entrepreneur in such terms:

B: Two kicks in the ass.. I'll kill you... I don't participate to yours [referring to public tenders], you don't come to mine, and no one goes on anyone.

M.: No one goes on anyone, sure

B: He's [the entrepreneur] the only one who could go on something because he didn't achieved shit, so I told him 'stay home, next round we'll find something for you' ... [...] I stopped them, they are friends.... [...] eh, they asked: 'is there space for us?' ... I said '... the space is not there ... then we saw each other in the Municipality 'yes ... he says, ah let's take a step back' ... I told him 'look, you have accrued a credit, I remember that you have a credit.... and they also withdrew'.⁵³

Significantly, Buzzi will later report to Carninati the successful adjudication of all the public contracts to colluding firms, while the latter comments: "we always have to be on call to get a piece of dough".⁵⁴ Buzzi also describes to another entrepreneur how "the boss" (meaning Carminati) reprimanded him for not effectively managing a collusive pact. Carminati's intervention in the dispute can convince reluctant entrepreneurs to comply the agreed-upon rules in the allocation of tenders, in order to avoid "a war":

⁵¹ Tribunal of Rome, 2014, cit.: 35.

⁵² Tribunal of Rome RIT 1676/13 prog. 21,600, April 18, 2014.

⁵³ Tribunal of Rome, 2015, cit.: 130.

⁵⁴ Tribunal of Rome, 2015, cit.: 129.

We have an iron agreement with A, fifty fifty... don't shit me, I have an agreement that never... is never betrayed. [...] He [Carminati] said, 'I guarantee this... So either you trust me or you can fuck off.' That was the speech, so you tell them (...) to shut up... at least as long as the balance lasts (...) in the end, the balance is guaranteed by him... besides, it's not worth starting a war because nobody knows what the fuck will happen here...⁵⁵

Respecting the spheres of autonomy of the various actors in the network, politicians define the objectives of local policies, specifically lucrative projects to be planned and implemented through public contracting. Mafia capitale performs a function of coordination and protection of hidden exchanges. In Carminati's view, expressed in a tapped dialogue, the essence of the relationship with politicians is sanctioned by a veiled threat:

You tell them, 'Now what the fuck... now that we've done this, what projects do you have? Because you guys do the projects... politics... now, what projects do you have? Keep us in mind for the projects you have, what do you need? What can I do? How can I earn? Do you need earth-moving? Should I put up posters on billboards for you? Do I have to wipe asses? That's right, I'll do it for you, because if I find out that someone else is doing it, you understand? Well, then it becomes unpleasant...'⁵⁶

Besides politicians, other public officials (councillors, public managers, bureaucrats) were de facto "employed" by Mafia capitale with salaries ranging from 1,500 to 10,000 euros per month, depending on their decision-making role. Buzzi describes how the value of what they can provide is considered when calculating these sums; for instance the amount of immigrants allocated to facilities managed by Mafia capitale's social enterprises. In Buzzi's words:

The reasoning we had at the time was a profit-sharing arrangement (...) we can even quantify it, look... if you... if you give me... a hundred people, we make one euro per person... I don't know, just as an example, you understand? *'I'll assign you 200 people in Rome, 200 in Messina... 50 over there... and... we quantify them...'⁵⁷

The network of politicians on the payroll and those indebted for support in the election campaign, allows Mafia capitale to guarantee hidden exchanges by also applying sanctions to non-cooperating public managers. Facing the reluctance of a municipal manager to comply with his requests, Buzzi comments: "But this woman is an idiot, it's not possible, right? She doesn't receive you, doesn't talk to you, doesn't talk to anyone, she's a real moron, where the hell does she live? I mean, really, we need to get rid of her." The manager was consequently removed with a

⁵⁵ Tribunal of Rome, 2014, cit.: 1023–4.

⁵⁶ Tribunal of Rome, RIT 1636/13, prog. 2031, June 10, 2013.

⁵⁷ Tribunal of Rome, 2015, cit.: 206.

political decision.⁵⁸ Another public manager A. in charge of tenders outside the sphere of influence of politicians had to be approached carefully. In the discussion between Buzzi, Carminati and another affiliate:

B.: A. takes the bribes. [...] If he takes the money let's go and buy him, right? [...] When ... somebody tells him 'sorry, but by doing so you are coming against politics' he told him 'politics relates to social enterprises, these tenders are something that has nothing to do with politics'. He buggered them!...

C: Either we get him fired away or we buy him.

C: If we buy him is better. [...] A clever bastard though...someone who does something like that is a clever bastard...go make it up...

CC: Yes but it's politics that doesn't count for shit in Rome....

C: No, in different times he would have been smacked on the head⁵⁹

Mafia capitale, in fact, could also influence political appointments and promotions. In this dialogue Carminati and Buzzi discuss the almost certain appointment of a friendly manager – encouraged to accept with the prospect of increasing his salary through a monthly bribe – in a lucrative department of the Municipality of Rome, thanks to the intervention of politicians on the payroll.

B: listen, then maybe...it's even premature to say it, but ninety per cent we managed to place our friend at the fifth Department...he didn't want to go, we had guaranteed him two thousand euros a month more... come on, we'll give you 2.000 euro more... and he knows it must be ours...let us change the director... because today we don't even have any information... we don't know what's happening, we don't know anything...⁶⁰

Finally, Mafia capitale provides guarantees of observance of the fundamental code of *omertà* – conspiracy of silence – in case of accidental imprisonment of individuals in the corruption network, which is a precondition for its expected stability.⁶¹ When a bribed politician was expected to be arrested for his involvement in a corruption inquiry, Carminati and Buzzi induced him not to collaborate with judges, alternating threats and incentives. So Buzzi describes the episode to an affiliate:

"the relationship with...but also the relationship with Massimo [Carminati]... I have...his money, you know what he told me when...He was fearing to be arrested because if they arrested him [the politician]... if he talked the next one would be him ...he came to me he says 'look whatever happens you have my money, you keep and manage it, you don't have to give it to anyone, anyone who would come here to you.. not even my wife', isn't that satisfying?

CA: Fuck! And there I'm telling you... it's a satisfaction but....

⁵⁸ Tribunal of Rome, 2014, cit.: 146.

⁵⁹ Tribunal of Rome 2018 cit.: 149.

⁶⁰ Tribunal of Rome, RIT 3240–13 prog. 4632, October 28, 2013.

⁶¹ The enduring lack of reports of those who met Mafia capitale, despite "prevarications and suffered violence", confirms the sanctioning of such code of silence (Tribunal of Rome, 2014, cit.: 72).

B: That is to say that he trusts me more than.... [...] And then he's going to get him, before they went, we went to get them.... we told him 'so either you shut up and you're revered or if you talk then there's no place for you to hide' ..we went to get them a week before...Anyway, he's behaving well...but when they arrested him you were a little bit afraid, weren't you?

CA: Yes, but then in there I made him find some...friendship, some warmth.⁶²

Figure 1 summarizes the main interactions and resources in hidden exchanges. Mafia capitale's supply of protection shielded political, bureaucratic, and entrepreneurial actors from turbulences and uncertainties and red-flags as outlined in the third section. Two main interconnected arenas of hidden exchanges can be identified. The first relies on to the allocation of resources through public contracting procedures: Mafia capitale regulates the recurrent interactions among corrupt political or bureaucratic decision-makers and colluding entrepreneurs and obtains a quote of the rents at stake. The second arena involves extra-legal political-bureaucratic exchanges and the electoral process: Mafia capitale promotes and enforces informal agreements on electoral financing, votes, political appointments, obtaining in return political protection and legitimization, which reinforce both its entrepreneurial and criminal roles.

Conclusive remarks

The Mafia capitale case shows how incentives for cooperation across different arenas, involving white-collar in the "upperworld of the livings" and criminal actors in the "underworld of the dead", ensured a relatively peaceful distribution of corruption deals in public contracting in Rome for over two years. The extended reciprocity in offering extra-legal protection increases both the expected profits and the stability of political actors, entrepreneurs, and criminal actors, extending the expected time horizon of their interaction. In addition to the threat of violence, this strengthened their incentives to remain "in the game", respecting its unwritten "laws" while discouraging defections, denunciations, and collaboration with investigators.

The territory where Mafia capitale operates as an extra-legal authority cannot be attributed to a geographically defined area (neighbourhoods, municipalities, etc.), but rather to public offices and power arenas in the Municipality of Rome. These loci provide the intangible market for the offer of private protection where Mafia capitale establishes itself as a monopolist. The capacity to monopolise illegal markets is a trait of mafia-type groups (Schelling 1984; Gambetta 1993). Participation in specific domains of covert exchange delimits the set of economic property rights subject to its "jurisdiction." Another contextual variable, implicitly emerging in this analysis, has contributed to fuelling the demand for protection directed at Mafia capitale in clientelistic and corrupt exchanges: the organizational weakening and

⁶² Tribunal of Rome, RIT 3240/13, prog. 53, 54, 55, April 4, 2013.

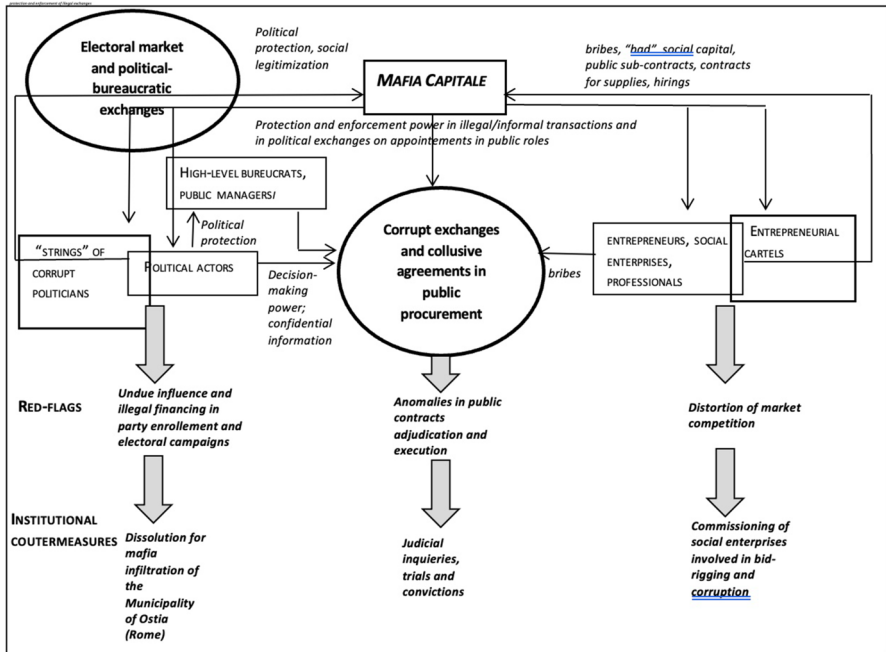


Fig. 1 The “mafia capitale” regulated network of corrupt exchanges in public procurement

delegitimization of Italian political parties, which until the early 1990s had been the pivotal third-party enforcer in systemic corruption (Sciarrone 2017).

Lastly, the case of Mafia capitale demonstrates the group’s strategic and organizational adaptability to the exogenous uncertainty resulting from the state’s repressive actions. Adjusting its operational strategies to the socio-economic status of entrepreneurs, in the trade-off Mafia capitale prioritizes the use of reputation and blackmail information, easier to hide, to violence and intimidation in its supply of private protection. Its network-like organizational model provides a flexible governance structure for the web of informal norms, transactions and obligations which realizes under its enforcement range (Sergi 2019b). Weaker communication and chains of authority, which characterizes more hierarchical structures, can in fact be compensated by other organizational properties reducing transaction costs, as resilience, flexibility, externalization and on-demand acquisition of services from individuals having high-profile professional or criminal skills.

We have argued that the Mafia capitale systemic corruption network generates mafia-type behaviours, including the ability to induce compliance in corrupt and other illicit and extra-legal deals; to effectively intimidate or subjugate whenever occasionally needed; to bring “order”, i.e., predictability and governance, in potentially troublesome arenas and transactions, naturally uncertain and volatile. Mafia capitale organized and managed the enforcement of resources emerging from the underworld to supply protection services demanded by white-collar actors of the upperworld. Mafia capitale acted as glue for hidden exchanges. Crucially, systemic

corruption in Rome created its own mafia, by activating a process which increased power, profits, and expectations of impunity of all actors involved.

Acknowledgements The author wishes to thank Emilia Lacroce, Elena Ciccarello and Mario Portanova for their support in the data collection phase and Professor Anna Sergi (University of Essex) for her comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

Funding Open access funding provided by Università di Pisa within the CRUI-CARE Agreement. This paper was funded by the MIUR PRIN 2017 – 2017CRLZ3F: PolitiCanti. The Politicisation of Corruption and Anticorruption Strategies in Italy (PI – Alberto Vannucci).

Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

References

- Bailey J, Taylor MM (2009) Evade, corrupt, or confront? Organized crime and the state in Brazil and Mexico. *J Polit Latin Am* 1(2):3–29
- Barnes N (2017) Criminal politics: An integrated approach to the study of organized crime, politics, and violence. *Perspect Polit* 15(4):967–987
- Barzel Y (2002) *A Theory of the State*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
- Bianconi G (2015) Senza controlli e poco trasparenti. *Corriere della Sera* 2015:2–3
- Branaccio L (2016) Mafia capitale. *Associazione mafiosa e fazione politica*. *Meridiana* 87:91–106
- Bussell J (2017) When do middlemen matter? *Governance* 31(4):1–16
- Caneppele S, Martocchia S (2014) Italian mafias, public procurement and public works in Southern Italy. In: Caneppele S, Calderoni F (eds) *Organized Crime. Corruption and Crime Prevention*, Springer International Publishing, New York, pp 293–299
- Catino M (2019) *Mafia Organisations*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
- Ciccarello E (2016) La posta in gioco di Mafia Capitale. *Meridiana* 87:65–89
- Dal Bó E, Di Dal Bó P, Tella R (2006) “Plata o Plomo?”: Bribe and Punishment in a Theory of Political Influence. *Am Polit Sci Rev* 100(1):41–53
- dalla Chiesa N (2015) A proposito di ‘Mafia Capitale’. *Alcuni problemi teorici*, *Rivista di studi sulla criminalità organizzata* 1 (2):1–15
- della Porta D, Vannucci A (1999) *Corrupt exchanges*. Aldine de Gruyter, New York
- della Porta D, Vannucci A (2012) *The hidden order of corruption*. Ashgate, Farnham
- della Porta D, Vannucci A (2013) Italy: The Godfather’s party. In: Casas-Zamora K (ed) *Dangerous Liaisons*. Brookings Institute Press, Washington, pp 195–246
- della Porta D, Vannucci A (2021) *La corruzione come sistema. Meccanismi, dinamiche, attori*. Il Mulino, Bologna
- Fazekas M, Sberna S, Vannucci A (2022) The extra-legal governance of corruption. *Governance* 35(4):1139–1161
- Finckenaer JO (2004) Problems of definition: what is organized crime? *Trends Org Crime* 8:63
- Fiorentini G, Peltzman S (1997) *The Economics of Organised Crime*. Cambridge University Press
- Gambetta D (1993) *The Sicilian Mafia: the business of private protection*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge
- Gambetta D (2009) *Codes of the Underworld*. Princeton, Princeton University Press

- Gambetta D, Reuter P (1995) Conspiracy among the Many: the mafia in legitimate industries. In: Fiorentini G, Peltzman S (eds) *The Economics of Organised Crime*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp 116–36
- Gilligan G (1999) Organised Crime and Corrupting the Political System. *J Finan Crime* 7(2):147–154
- Godson R (2003) *Menace to society*. Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick
- Gounev P, Ruggiero V (2012) *Corruption and Organised Crime in Europe*. Routledge, London
- Holmes L (2015) *Corruption*. Oxford University Press, Oxford
- Jancsics D (2015) “A friend gave me a phone number”: Brokerage in low-level corruption. *Int J Law, Crime Justice* 43:68–87
- Klitgaard R (1988) *Controlling Corruption*. University of California Press, Berkeley
- Lacroce E (2020) *Il mondo di mezzo e la sua rappresentazione*. Phd thesis, University of Pisa
- Lambsdorff JG (2002) Making corrupt deals: contracting in the shadow of the law. *J Econ Behav Organ* 48(3):221–241
- Lambsdorff JG (2007) *The Institutional Economics of Corruption and Reform Theory, Evidence and Policy*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
- Lessing B (2021) Conceptualizing criminal governance. *Perspect Polit* 19(3):854–873
- Luo Y (2005) An Organizational Perspective of Corruption. *Manag Organ Rev* 1(1):119–154
- Magaloni B, Franco-Vivanco E, Melo V (2020) Killing in the Slums: Social Order, Criminal Governance, and Police Violence in Rio de Janeiro. *Am Polit Sci Rev* 114(2):552–572
- Maltz MD (1976) On Defining ‘Organized Grime.’ *Crime Delinq* 22(3):338–346
- Maltz MD (1985) Toward defining organized crime. In: Alexander HE, Caiden GE (eds) *The politics and economics of organized crime*. Lexington, Lexington Books, pp 21–35
- Martone V (2016) Mafia capitale: corruzione e regolazione mafiosa nel “Mondo di Mezzo.” *Meridiana* 87:21–39
- Mazzeo M (2015) Mafia capitale. Anatomia dei protagonisti. *Rivista di studi e ricerche sulla criminalità organizzata* 1(2):32–56
- Mete V, Sciarone R (2016) Mafia capitale e dintorni. *Meridiana* 87:9–20
- Mungiu-Pippidi A (2015) *The quest for good governance*. Cambridge University Press
- Newell J (2017) *Parties and democracy in Italy*. Routledge, London
- Pezzi MG (2019) Mafia Capitale’: judicial and symbolic constructions of the new Italian corruption. *J Mod Ital Stud* 24(3):512–530
- Philp M (2015) The definition of political corruption. *Handbook of political corruption*. Routledge, London, pp 17–29
- Pignatone G, Prestipino M (2015) *Le mafie su Roma, le mafie di Roma*. E. Ciconte, F. Forgione e I. Sales (eds.) *Atlante delle mafie*. Soveria Mannelli. Rubbettino
- Ravenda D, Giuranno MG, Valencia-Silva MM, Argiles-Bosch JM, García-Blandón J (2020) The effects of mafia infiltration on public procurement performance. *Eur J Polit Econ* 64(C):1–23
- Reuter P (1983) *Disorganized crime*. MIT Press, Cambridge
- Rothstein B (2011) *The quality of government*. Chicago University Press, Chicago
- Sberna S, Vannucci A (2019) Mafia and political corruption in Italy. In: Allum F, Marinaro IC, Sciarone R (eds) *Italian mafias today*. Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, pp 92–110
- Schelling T (1984) What is the business of organised crime?, in *Choice and consequence*. Mass, Cambridge
- Sciarrone R (2009) *Mafie Vecchie, Mafie Nuove*. Donzelli, Roma
- Sciarrone R (2017) *Politica e corruzione*. Donzelli, Roma
- Sciarrone R (2019) The economic dimension of mafias, social capital and the “grey area.” In: Allum F, Marinaro I, Sciarrone R (eds) *Italian Mafias Today*. Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham, pp 76–91
- Sergi A (2016) A proposito di Mafia Capitale. *Rivista Di Studi Sulla Criminalità Organizzata* 2(1):96–116
- Sergi A (2019) Constructing the mafia concept on the bench. The legal battles in the ‘Mafia Capitale’ case in Rome. *Int J Law, Crime Just* 58(3):100–112
- Sergi A (2019) Meet the in-betweeners. In: Hufnagel S, Moiseienko A (eds) *Criminal Networks and Law Enforcement*. Routledge, London
- Vannucci A (2016) Tra area grigia e mondo di mezzo: Anatomia di Mafia capitale. *Meridiana* 87:41–63
- Varese F (2010) What Is Organised Crime? In: Varese F (ed) *Organised Crime*. Routledge, London, pp 1–35
- Varese F (2011) *Mafias on the Move*. Princeton University Press, Princeton

- Visconti C (2015) A Roma *una mafia c'è*, e si vede. Diritto penale contemporaneo. 1–6. https://archivio.dpc.dirittopenaleuomo.org/upload/1434314438VISCONTI_2015.pdf. Accessed Dec 2023
- Yu K-H, Kang S-D, Rhodes C (2020) The Partial Organization of Networked Corruption. *Bus Soc* 59(7):1377–1409

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.