Universities in the fight against mafias Research, teaching and training

Edited by Stefano D'Alfonso and Gaetano Manfredi

Federico II University Press





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Universities in the fight against mafias. Research, teaching and training, translation of the book, S. D'Alfonso e G. Manfredi (edited by), L'università nella lotta alle mafie. La ricerca e la formazione, Donzelli Publisher, 2021, Collection «Mafie e corruzione», directed by Stefano D'Alfonso and Rocco Sciarrone

This book has been published in partnership with



Scientific committee

Antonio Acconcia, Giuseppe Amarelli, Luciano Brancaccio, Paolo Canonico, Vincenzo Caputo, Carolina Castellano, Stefano Consiglio, Daniela De Leo, Ernesto De Nito, Serena Forlati, Gabriella Gribaudi, Gaetano Manfredi, Gianluigi Mangia, Vittorio Mete, Giuseppe Muti, Michelangelo Pascali, Ferdinando Pinto, Maura Ranieri, Attilio Scaglione, Pasquale Sabbatino, Giovanni Starace, Andrea Tomo, Alberto Vannucci, Anna Maria Zaccaria

This publication is part of the research project co-funded by the Parliamentary committee of inquiry into mafia-related and other criminal organisations, including foreign ones, and the University of Naples Federico II as an implementation step of the memorandum of understanding signed by the Committee and the CRUI.

As indicated in the forthcoming pages, this research was conducted in partnership with the CRUI, the anti-mafia parliamentary committee and the ministry of University and Research when this was led by ministry and Professor Gaetano Manfredi.

The person in charge of this research project is Professor Stefano D'Alfonso and the activity has been developed within the operations of the interdisciplinary research lab on mafias and corruption (Lirmac) of the Department of Social Sciences of the University of Naples Federico II in partnership with numerous professors of other Italian universities.

The book cover shows a section of the fresco of the Federico II University Board Room from the early 1900s. The artist is Gaetano D'Agostino. The subject depicted is the great historical ride of 1615, with the University's move from the convent of San Domenico Maggiore to the Palace of Studies. The city enters the Academy.

The photograph on the cover is by Professor Isabella Valente, published in the cultural heritage portal (porbec.it), in the Federico II section – Università dell'arte.

This English edition has been translated from the Italian by Daniele Lombardi and Alessio Mirarchi.

Universities in the fight against mafias : Research, teaching and training / Edited by Stefano D'Alfonso and Gaetano Manfredi. – Napoli : FedOAPress, 2022. – 223 p. ; 24 cm.

Accesso alla versione elettronica: http://www.fedoabooks.unina.it

ISBN: 978-88-6887-145-1 DOI: 10.6093/978-88-6887-145-1

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Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II Centro di Ateneo per le Biblioteche "Roberto Pettorino" Piazza Bellini 59-60 80138 Napoli, Italy http://www.fedoapress.unina.it/ Published in Italy Prima edizione: ottobre 2022

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IV. Results

1. The role of academic research on mafias amid the academic community, institutions and society*

The planning phase of the work contained in this book was informed by the awareness that the Italian academic fabric includes elements that could, at least potentially, form a community of scholars strongly committed to the issue of mafias and, more generally, legality. We are talking about a diverse set of researchers who, in their scientific activity, interface with other subjects, who in turn are bearers of manifold professional experiences: at least at an embryonic level, one could speak of a true 'epistemic community', which associates the sharing of a common set of value beliefs and normative principles with the desire to apply the knowledge produced for reforming purposes. Some of the scholars have had the opportunity to collaborate scientifically and engage in public debates. On the contrary, most have exercised their commitment within the confines of their own discipline, with little or no opportunity to meet and exchange views with scholars from other disciplines. In fact, while in some of these fields - for example sociology, legal studies and history – a common sentiment for such topics has long been established, as shown by the significant number of co-authored scientific publications, this is not the case in most other fields. This is probably one of the reasons why the project to investigate the role of Italian university on the subject of mafias was greeted by all those involved with genuine enthusiasm.

The choice of authors was made in consideration of the scientific involvement and efforts in their macro-areas or in the individual scientific disciplines that we identified; in some cases, this choice was prompted by relationships that had

^{*} This paper has been written by Stefano D'Alfonso, Gaetano Manfredi, Rocco Sciarrone and Alberto Vannucci.

already been consolidated over time through collaborations of various kinds; in others, however, especially for those disciplines that are less familiar and close to us, we identified the scholars that were most involved in research on the basis of the scientific publications we had accessed through the Iris database. We were therefore forced to be selective, as we could only involve a relatively small number of scholars. This is perhaps our greatest regret.

The researchers from the many disciplines which dealt with the study of mafias and criminal organisations often do not know each other. This reinforces the awareness of the need to work on communication and exchange processes. In other words, the need emerges to exploit the partly unexpressed potential of interdisciplinary approaches and opportunities to exchange ideas. These approaches do not replace but rather complement scientific readings by single disciplines, which are evidently necessary insofar as they elevate sector knowledge and respond to specific needs for scientific knowledge and the acquisition of specialised skills.

This point deserves further reflection. The mafia phenomenon is multidimensional in nature and can only be studied and taught by considering the suitability or even, depending on the research objectives, the need for hybridisation between different analytical methods and approaches. Just as mafias are 'fluid', the Italian university should also promote dynamic forms of project and research collaboration between scholars in the various fields concerned, wherever they operate. It is indeed significant that research interest in mafia phenomena has been 'transplanted' into the academic reality of many other countries. Moreover, as argued in the introduction, faced with mafia's systematic and 'organised' manner of operation, efforts aimed at prevention and counteraction must also be guided by systematic methods, favouring forms of organised cooperation. Acting within this context, the academic world should aim to strengthen the already existing channels of communication and interchange with institutional antimafia actors (e.g., the judiciary, executive and representative bodies, including legislating bodies) and social antimafia actors, since it can provide support to their action in various ways through its research findings. Such support can take the form of contributing to the effectiveness of interventions and, more generally, to the development of a shared sensitivity and awareness.

Antimafia policies, instruments and actions are interconnected, sometimes integrating each other effectively, sometimes not, partly due to an inadequate understanding of their role. In some cases, this is due to a lack of knowledge, in others to distrust among the actors. Within this loose connective tissue, the

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'service' that can be offered by a body such as university, made up of individual researchers – who act in accordance with the specific rules of scientific, teaching and third-stream activities – may contribute to a greater extent to fostering the circulation of ideas and to enlivening the potential of these relationships. This is corroborated by the consideration that mafia, while not being value-neutral, must be approached and studied applying the rigorous criteria of the scientific method.

In order to better understand what is happening, as confirmed by our research database, the university 'deploys' the expertise of scholars from a wide range of disciplines, who have devoted their interest and thorough research not only to the many topics worthy of special attention, but also to the actions of antimafia actors and to their mutual interrelations. This is the case of more than a thousand scholars who have directly investigated mafia themes. These scholars belong to approximately one hundred academic disciplines and produced almost three thousand publications, particularly in the last twenty years (our time frame of reference).

Therefore, the reflection can fruitfully be placed within the broader discussion on the role of university¹. There are areas in Italy, particularly in the south, where despite the difficulties they are confronted with, universities represent for the younger generations one of the greatest opportunities for training and growth, not only professionally but also as citizens. University structures and the communities that operate within them take on, sometimes unintentionally, the role of 'garrison of legality in the territory', in contrast to criminal phenomena that have long been rooted there.

For these reasons, any effort that goes beyond the traditional repressive approach must be considered and valued. It appears necessary to bring the topic of mafias into the highest realm of scientific culture and university education, with lucidity and greater vigour. In particular, a more dynamic and organised academic effort is needed (see above, chp. I). This task cannot be entrusted merely to the often-praiseworthy efforts of individual scholars and of some groups, like the various research laboratories distributed throughout the territory and identified

¹ This reflection was recently developed by Gaetano Manfredi in the aforementioned work by D'Alfonso, De Chiara, Manfredi, *Mafie e libere professioni. Come riconoscere e contrastare l'area grigia* cit., pp. 125-8; 130-7, in which attention was devoted to the theme *Etica e legalità vs. mafie: il ruolo dell'Università* ("Ethics and legality vs mafias: the role of the University").

in our survey (see above, chp. II). While there should be appreciation for the level of commitment and consequent results achieved, particularly in the promotion of important pathways of education to legality and knowledge of mafias, corruption, and other structured forms of crime.

In this regard, it is to be hoped that the universities active in research on mafias and, more generally, on the many types of organised crime will promote forms of institutional cooperation, in particular through the creation of a network of encounters, communication and exchange of experiences and initiatives, that can serve as an agile infrastructure to elaborate projects, including supranational ones – and research initiatives.

As regards teaching, the university, as an institution of high culture with a special place in the Italian constitutional framework, is called upon to reconsider its commitment, making it both more efficient and more accessible. This can certainly be achieved through traditional teaching approaches (e.g., lectures, seminars, doctorates), but also through new ones, such as Moocs with a soft-skills focus, i.e., aimed at transmitting transversal skills, also targeting students from different degree courses².

From this point of view, it would be appropriate to initiate a structured debate on certain concepts, explored in philosophical and legal studies among others, focusing on the very idea of 'legality' (or rather, 'participatory legality'), in its formal and substantive meaning. This concept is constantly evoked in the most diverse cultural, political, social and institutional venues. The university must ponder the need to enhance its functions and skills in the processes of social organisation, in a perspective of interchange between knowledge, skills and awareness. The role attributed to university by the Italian Constitution is central to any policy aimed at guaranteeing formal equality, and to any process of removing the obstacles that prevent substantive equality, enshrined among the fundamental principles of the Italian Republic by Article 3 of the same Constitution. Individual rights and participation in the democratic life of the country suffer from all kinds of restrictions on freedoms and, referring back to the subject of this paper, are inexorably threatened, curtailed and jeopardised by mafia-type associations, which, as stipulated in Article 416 bis (3) of the Italian Criminal Code, «A mafia-type organisation is an organisation whose members

² An example is the *Federica Web Learning* platform, created by the Federico II University. This is equally true for third-stream activities (see above, chp. II).

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use the power of intimidation deriving from the bonds of membership, the state of subjugation and conspiracy of silence that it engenders to commit offences, to acquire direct or indirect control of economic activities, licences, authorisations, public procurement contracts and services or to obtain unjust profits or advantages for themselves or others, or to prevent or obstruct the free exercise of vote, or to procure votes for themselves or others at elections».

The mafia phenomenon is not only limited to the criminal profile and the repressive action that can result from it, perceived on a daily basis through news about the significant results of investigative and judicial activities bolstered by the important, albeit cyclical, support of the legislative bodies. The phenomenon is evidently also social. It is rooted, nurtured and developed in the territories and communities, in the most diverse economic sectors, in intermediate bodies and even in institutions. This no longer true solely in the areas where mafias are traditionally established, but in a large part of Italy.

As mentioned, university researchers can contribute to updating knowledge about and vision of the phenomenon, so as to improve efficiency and awareness when planning and implementing policies, interventions and actions. Likewise, the university, as autonomous body and place of training for the new generations, must also cast its gaze inward. The research presented in this book is the first real attempt to monitor and verify the commitment of the Italian university system in producing knowledge that is useful in the fight against organised crime, standing alongside and collaborating with the institutions and the antimafia protagonists of civil society. Such commitment, to which we hope to have contributed with this work, will benefit from the proposals and constructive criticism that will follow.

Universities must fulfil the role of territorial guardianship, building an ethic and a culture of legality which is capable of spreading, through research, within the territory, society and institutions. We have described systematic antimafia, and it is within this 'system' that universities are called upon to intervene, aware of the privilege and at the same time of the great responsibility that every scholar and teacher bears towards students, in the long years that they will devote to education in university classrooms. It is worth reiterating that the university as a whole is called upon to contribute not only to the professional but also to the ethical training of the future ruling classes of the country and, more generally, of its citizens.

As stated above, for university researchers who decide to focus their teaching, research and third-stream activities on the topic of mafias, it would be desirable

to promote a stable and organised network of relations and exchanges, a space for cooperation that can include individual scholars and research groups. The aim should be to organise the various academic activities related to mafia and antimafia around a collective project, whose features would include the sharing of results and planning, and whose orientation would be towards interdisciplinary dialogue and debate.

Acknowledgments

This research, and the *Mafie e Corruzione* ('Mafias and Corruption') series in which it is published, are conceived as part of the season of cooperation initiated by the Italian university, represented by the Conference of Italian University Rectors (Crui), with the Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry into Mafia-related and other criminal organisations, including foreign ones.

In 2016, MP Rosy Bindi, the President of said Committee (established in 2013), and Gaetano Manfredi, then President of the Crui, signed a Memorandum of Understanding that for the first time made it possible to articulate and formalise a shared collaboration project.

The considerable momentum resulting from the meetings and the collaborations initiated in this institutional context have provided significant elements of innovation and at the same time increased awareness of the role of university. For these reasons, a special thanks goes to President Rosy Bindi.

With regard to the specific contents of this work, we must recall how the decision was made to create, for the first time, a research and teaching review, and the two databases on the basis of which the scholars involved in the research were able to describe the context of university commitment on the subject, and to consider its future perspectives. The decision arose from a discussion with parliamentary councillor Francesco Comparone, at that time secretary of the Parliamentary Antimafia Commission. From the outset, the discussion focused on how to identify new ways of systematising access to university scientific output, also in order to support institutional activities.

The construction of the registry would not have been possible without the ingenuity and commitment of Ms Elena Breno of Crui and Professor Attilio Scaglione, both of whom deserve sincere and heartfelt thanks, and the decisive contribution of Ms Emanuela Stefani, director of Crui.

The work was accomplished through a protracted effort, with the support of the Parliamentary Antimafia Commission and the University of Naples Federico II; the cooperation project not only made it possible to publish this volume in 2021 but also, in 2020, *Una questione di provincia. Criminalità e camorra tra età giolittiana e fascismo* by Carolina Castellano; in 2019, *Organizzazioni criminali. Strategie e modelli di business nell'economia legale*, by Stefano Consiglio, Paolo Canonico, Ernesto De Nito and Gianluigi Mangia, with interventions by professors Stefano D'Alfonso and Roberto Vona, and by the public prosecutor of Naples Giovanni Melillo; in 2018, *Mafie e libere professioni. Come riconoscere e contrastare l'area grigia*, by Stefano D'Alfonso, Aldo De Chiara and Gaetano Manfredi.

Attention to the project was also recently renewed and shared by the Parliamentary Antimafia Commission established in 2018, particularly through its president, Senator Nicola Morra, and its secretary, Councillor Daniele Piccione, who deserve our gratitude, and by the Ministry of Universities and Research, in the person of Minister Gaetano Manfredi himself.

Lastly, a well-deserved recognition for all those who participated in this publishing project, and in the challenging effort of synthesising the teaching and scientific commitment in a reasoned and critical manner: Antonio Acconcia, Giuseppe Amarelli, Elena Breno, Mara Chiara Calò, Paolo Canonico, Vincenzo Caputo, Carolina Castellano, Stefano Consiglio, Stefano D'Alfonso, Daniela De Leo, Ernesto De Nito, Federico Esposito, Serena Forlati, Orsetta Giolo, Giovanni Giuffrida, Gabriella Gribaudi, Francesco Introna, Gaetano Manfredi, Gianluigi Mangia, Giuseppe Muti, Maura Ranieri, Pasquale Sabbatino, Attilio Scaglione, Rocco Sciarrone, Giovanni Starace, Andrea Tomo, Alberto Vannucci, Antonio Vesco, Anna Maria Zaccaria.

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The commitment of Italian universities to education in the field of legality and to research on the subject of mafias is the main focus of this investigation edited by Stefano D'Alfonso and Gaetano Manfredi. For the first time, data is shown about the overall framework of teaching and research activities dedicated to this topic, with twenty-nine scholars from different academic disciplines and several universities who come together to reflect on the current situation and on the commitment of universities in the fight against mafias, highlighting both strengths and weaknesses of the system. The reflections illustrated here bring to light the dynamic nature of the local and cultural context where universities operate as well as the type of interaction that these institutions maintain with the national and local context. At the same time, it seems clear that great expectations are held at various levels in terms of what universities could do, especially with regards to the demand for knowledge about the best ways to fight mafias. This research reveals that Italian universities possess a considerable capital of knowledge which represents a 'hidden treasure' to be valued and used with the aim of promoting widespread awareness of their role in the anti-mafia field.

This book is the result of cooperation between many university professors and researchers, the Parliamentary anti-mafia Committee, the Conference of Italian University Rectors (CRUI) and former minister of University and Research Gaetano Manfredi, under the supervision and coordination of the interdisciplinary research laboratory on mafias and corruption (Lirmac) of the Department of Social Sciences of the University of Naples Federico II. This network of professionals and institutions enabled the construction of a significant database where teaching and research activities carried out by scholars from different universities can be identified, across about one hundred academic disciplines spanning from Sociology to Law, from History to Economics.

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ISBN 978-88-6887-145-1 DOI 10.6093/ 978-88-6887-145-1

