



# Cooperatives and the Historical Anti-mafia Movement

## The Anti-mafia Movement: a brief history

Enclaves or not, co-ops have histories, and cooperativism in Sicily has a fascinating history intertwined with the anti-mafia movement. This chapter is therefore concerned with how the anti-mafia movement has been linked with cooperativism in rural western Sicily, looking at the processes in which their actors have overlapped through time. Historicised, the relations between mafia, anti-mafia and cooperatives can be understood by recognising continuities of practices and, equally, in grasping their transformations. The form this narrative takes is both historic and ethnographic, providing an explicatory overview of the rise and development of the rural anti-mafia phenomenon.

The chapter's aim is twofold: firstly, to identify the key moments of reference in the history of the anti-mafia movement for contemporary anti-mafia cooperative members, building a historiography from below and within my research participants' paradigms. Secondly, it aspires to examine specific readings of history regarding these key moments by current anti-mafia actors, in order to assess the movement's legacy and embed the contemporary cooperatives within a framework of ideas largely indigenous to Sicily – ideas that resonate today with both urban civil mobilisation and rural cooperativism ('legality' and 'anti-mafia' itself). In this way, the chapter historically contextualises the dynamic interactions between peasant politics, state, mafia and anti-mafia as these emerged in Spicco Vallata.

The chapter therefore traces the historical points of reference for current actors of the anti-mafia movement of Sicily; aiming to explore the genealogy of the anti-mafia notion, it follows peasant mobilisations, assessing the impact of this tradition on current anti-mafia cooperativism. The selective ways contemporary co-op participants reflect on the anti-mafia movement's history, commemorating it and updating its meaning today, illuminate current meanings of 'anti-mafia' (Santino 2006; Scolaro 2008).

Cooperativism in Spicco Vallata has had varying meanings at different times. As discussed, a historical ethnography of cooperativism needs to give an account not only of its broad manifestations but also of its actors' particular social relationships on the ground. Thus I see cooperativism as a notion that is contextualised locally and historically, possessing certain core characteristics but changing in form and content in relation to the specific contexts in which the 'module' is developed and deployed. In that way, cooperativism, like most notions, acquires the modularity that Benedict Anderson ascribes to nationalism, a cultural artefact that came into historical being in specific circumstances and

became 'modular', capable of being transplanted, with varying degrees of self-consciousness, to a great variety of social terrains, to merge and be merged with a correspondingly wide variety of political and ideological constellations. (Anderson 2006: 4)

Cooperativism, similarly, is a general notion able of portability and distillation in new contexts. Contemporary Sicily, undergoing changes influenced by the ensemble of mobilisations dubbed 'the anti-mafia movement', is an ideal site to explore how cooperativism relates to social change (Fiume 2006). Locating this question in historical time helps explore how the interrelationship of mafia and peasant struggles has been negotiated in the context of the island's ongoing experience of change. In this social change, the different meanings and practices of 'anti-mafia' are a major vector (Davis 1996; Schneider and Schneider 2006).

Earlier I mentioned how the Schneiders' points on 'cultural codes' might still retain some relevance, in light of the overall tremendous contribution of these anthropologists to the island and the discipline. But accounting for social change would mean challenging the last remaining assumptions about Sicilian tolerance for mafia values rooted in 'cultural codes', as Michael Blim has suggested in a review of Schneider and Schneider's older work (2006: 10). In their monograph on Sicilian demography however (1996), the Schneiders had admittedly already traced and highlighted, mostly among artisans, a not necessarily 'anti-mafia' but certainly 'alternative' set of 'enlightened' social sensibilities (2006: 76). As they acknowledge in a self-reflective chapter, the importance of the movement escaped them in their first Sicilian fieldwork, situated in a rural community (2006: 75). Later fieldwork in Palermo produced a monograph where the anti-mafia movement is rigorously discussed as at once a prism, a vector and an outcome of social change in the island (2003). The researchers acknowledge the peasant roots of the movement (1997) and suggest its gradual transplantation from agrarian to urban settings

(2002b). In this direction, the work of Umberto Santino should also be considered, despite the analytical framework based on class relations that suggests an evolutionist prospective as well as a pessimistic political suggestion that the movement lost its historical significance when urbanised (2009).

These works, suggesting the move from rural to urban settings – and to an extent the corresponding stress on class configurations (and shifts in work and labour patterns, as per Cole 1997 and 2007) – grasp a sense of continuity alongside transformation (which serves as a grounding for the notion of modularity). They call also, however, for complimentary research on the material and symbolic legacy of the anti-mafia movement's roots in rural environments today, which can benefit by conceptualising the interrelationship of political commitment and relations of production in Sicily and Italy at large. After all, the problematics of social change facing long-standing structures of state bureaucracy and clientelism are an ongoing feature in research concerning Sicily (Palumbo 2016). To this direction, reassessing the rural anti-mafia movement today relocates the historical, ideological meanings of legality from civil society into agrarian production and distribution, building on previous points on Sicily's dynamic, plural cultures (Schneider and Schneider 2005).

Specific circumstances on the ground (mafia activity and the peasant movement's anti-mafia responses) have rendered peasant cooperativism a practice both distinct in its Sicilian specificities *and* contextualised in two different moments in Spicco Vallata's modern history. The first set of circumstances relates to communalist worker-based cooperativism in the 1940s; the second, to post-agrarian-reform producer-based cooperativism, premised on small-proprietor viticulture. The cultural meaning of cooperativism in Sicily derives from circumstances in these two different periods, both of which were informed by anti-mafia commitment. In that respect, the chapter will explain how cooperativism became a model of economic organisation and a political ideal of organising to avoid the mafia, alongside exploitative landlords and distant urban markets. In the final section, I shall examine and analyse, via primary data gathered from ethnographic fieldwork, how this history has been 'transplanted' in the current configuration of anti-mafia cooperatives to form a third manifestation of cooperativism.

This chapter then contributes to the regional scholarship of Sicily and specifically to the anti-mafia movement's history in three ways: firstly, by elucidating how peasant movements in western Sicily were organised around anti-mafia in terms of cooperativist claims and practices; secondly, by framing the meanings of anti-mafia politics into peasant

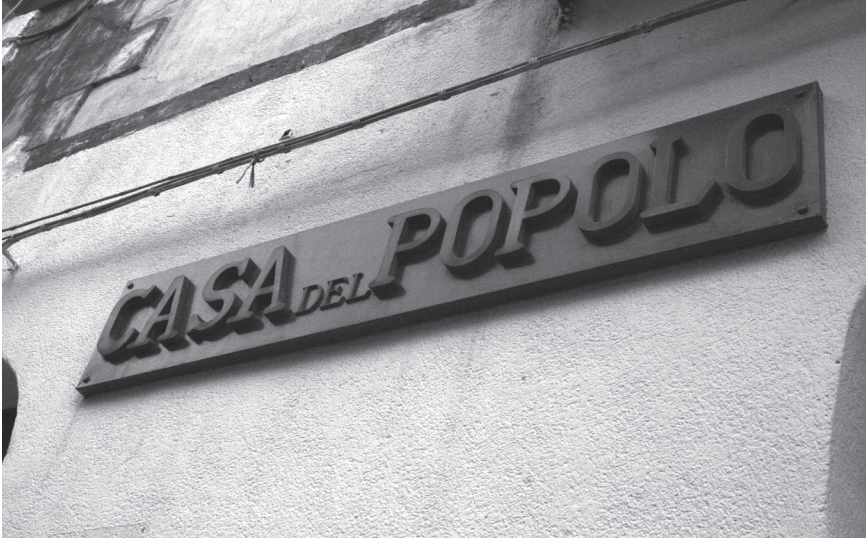
mobilisation; and thirdly, by underlining interactions between gaining a livelihood and struggling against the mafia. These elements interacted with each other in various ways, to the point where in certain instances they became intertwined, producing ideological specificities unique to Sicily that still resonate with contemporary developments. Explicit or implied ‘anti-mafia’ policy is an aspect of peasant mobilisation particular to Sicily’s peasant cooperativist history and is central to assessing how moral economy elements in contemporary agrarian movements are rooted in specific readings of historical data (Edelman 2005). The lens through which I review this history and assess the ways it resonates with contemporary actors is by approaching anti-mafia peasant sensibilities and cooperative organisation as modular schemes guided by peasants themselves but framed in broader configurations of political economy that peasants can influence only to an extent, as they are otherwise shaped by political institutions removed from rural Sicily (McMichael 2008).

### ***The Fasci Movement (1892–1915): The Birth of the Anti-mafia***

Our narrative begins with the Fasci Siciliani dei Lavoratori (Sicilian Workers Leagues, henceforth Fasci) of the 1890s peasant movement. This is for both historical and ethnographic reasons. The first is informed by the existing historiography of peasant mobilisation in Sicily; the second is based on my ethnographic observation of how people historicise the anti-mafia movement’s past today. On the one hand, the Fasci contributed to a seminal change in the way agrarian labour relations are legislated in Sicily and Italy, as well as to a reformulation of the island’s relationship to the nation, one generation after Unification. The ‘Corleone agreements’, the first trade-union collective contract in Italy and an outcome of this mobilisation, confirm the Fasci’s centrality in modern Italian history. The Fasci moment has moreover been hailed as ‘the birth of the anti-mafia movement’ (for instance, Santino 2009: 16; Scolaro 2008).

On the other hand, the choice to locate in the Fasci a ‘big bang’ of anti-mafia mobilisation relates to the opinions of my oldest informants in fieldwork, men between sixty and eighty years old who were sympathetic to the anti-mafia cooperatives. In discussions, they would stress that among moments in the history of the anti-mafia movement, the Fasci, the post–World War II land occupation movement and the 1960s cooperative movement reigned as most important.

In Spicco Vallata, the Casa del Popolo (People’s House), a social centre in the village of Cembali, five kilometres from San Giovanni, was most active in the salvaging and shaping of local historical narratives, espe-



**Illustration 3.1:** The entrance to the Casa del Popolo at Cembali.

cially regarding agrarian struggles. The progressive political culture of the village allowed for constant re-negotiation of the past aimed at constructing collective memory (Connerton 1990; Fracchia 2004), which I traced in oral accounts.<sup>1</sup> Early in my fieldwork, trade unionists and members of the anti-mafia cooperatives had advised me to visit the Casa to hear ‘the old men and their stories’ (*i vecchi e le loro storie*). Constructed in the 1950s, the Casa was a welcoming place, ‘filled with history’, as a resident described it. Socialist realism-style paintings resembling the Mexican muralists or the Sicilian communist artist Renato Guttuso hung on the walls, depicting mothers working in fields alongside their children and moustached men waving red flags over grain piles. A fascinating banner from the 1930s celebrated early feminist agrarian socialism (see illustration 3.2). In the dim light, across tables scattered in the main room of the Casa, old men played cards, read the paper and chatted.

When I asked what period the murals and paintings depicted, a man simply explained that Sicilian *braccianti* and *contadini* (peasants) had been involved in so many struggles that it would be misguided to identify the paintings with any one specific historical event. The men present, all between fifty and eighty years old, then debated what would be most important to portray: the Fasci<sup>2</sup> movement of the 1890s? The post-World War II land occupation movement? The 1960s cooperative movement? Everyone agreed that any of these historical moments was equally qualified for artistic depiction. ‘All of these struggles consisted of families



**Illustration 3.2:** A banner on a wall of the Casa. Notice the hammer and sickle surrounded by a heart, a symbol of the massive women's participation in the rural communist anti-mafia movement.

claiming land, forming cooperatives to manage it, occupying it to ensure it . . . [these were] communist struggles but also family struggles, with women and kids involved,' a trade unionist clarified. Evidently, the peasants' collective historical imagination was informed by their political sympathies and also encompassed the rich variety of actors in these struggles. Interestingly, despite the widespread and often violent rural unrest in Sicily throughout the nineteenth century (Aya 1976), none of the Casa points of historical reference went back to uprisings before the Fasci in the 1890s. This suggests that their historical awareness was mapped by the limits of genealogical narrative: their grandfathers had lived memories of the Fasci.

The Fasci movement was a federation of *braccianti* – which had a mixed (socialist and Catholic) background. It aimed at the collectivisation of the latifundia and drew together landless peasants, as well as artisans, regardless of gender or age, to demand better work conditions. Fasci-coordinated groups of *braccianti* occupied landed estates, challenging Palermo-based proprietors' absenteeism, and formed improptu cooperatives to cultivate these lands. Leading Spicco Vallata trade unionists were imprisoned in 1894, after the movement was crushed by the state.

The Fasci have been described as socialist or even anarchist (Ganci 1977). Marxist-leaning scholars reject the idea that the movement was a 'spontaneous', *jacquerie*-type outgrowth, insisting on its crucial role in late nineteenth-century labour movement (Renda 1977: 328; Santino 2009). Kautsky hailed the Sicilian *braccianti* as 'the centre of the sympathies and thoughts of the international proletariat' (quoted in Romano 1959: 547). Labriola reported to Engels about the Fasci as a mixture of 'socialism, anarchism, business and mafia' (in Santino 2009: 33). Mafia and anti-mafia often mingled in the development of the peasant movement. Bernardino Verro, a leading figure of the movement in Tarini, the large interior town that was its centre of gravity, even joined the mafia himself (Dickie 2004: 171), hoping to provide impetus to the Fasci through alliances with *mafiosi* who were also opposed to the state. After martial law suppressed the Fasci in 1893, a massive peasant exodus from Sicily took place, largely due to fear of state and mafia retaliations. Verro, for instance, went to prison until 1896, although he subsequently became the town's mayor in the first elections after the introduction of universal suffrage. Capitalising on his Fasci involvement, he sought to establish agrarian cooperatives anew, but he was eventually assassinated by local *mafiosi* in 1915 (Paternostro 1994: 48).

Forming a 'historical bloc', the state soon after allied with the latifundists (Gramsci 2005: 67). Predicting the violent demise of the Fasci, the mafia opportunistically joined the alliance, solidifying the bloc, despite having temporarily allied with the peasant movement just previously (Lupo 1981). The example of Verro illustrates the Fasci intricacies (and contradictions): the fuzzy conceptual and practical boundaries between mafia and anti-mafia led to mutual development and eventual cross-fertilisation, particularly in times of social turmoil against a conservative state, regarding widespread claims for resources. Equally, the mafia arose within peasant mobilisation before turning against it. Specifically, before they resorted to violence, *mafiosi* incorporated and emulated the social alliances they could not control. This has been a key reason for the relative social consensus the mafia has historically enjoyed.

## **Revolutionary Legality (and Violence) before and after the War**

Hobsbawm's take on the mafia might be disagreeable, but his point on the 'entrenched legalism of peasant land invasions' (Hobsbawm 1974: 124) does stand for the immediate post-war period as experienced in Spicco Vallata. In spite of the reputed fascist state's opposition to the

mafia (Duggan 1989), fascism did not challenge the latifundo system's vested interests in maintaining the *gabelloti*, the mafia patrons at the time – middlemen in the agrarian labour market. Local fascists were affiliated with *mafiosi*, and so the latifundia protection (which relied on *gabelloti*) was left intact. *Gabelloti* landholding was a service to the absentee landowners of the big Sicilian estates; in that respect, they occupied middlemen positions between different levels of power, local and broader reaching, securing the landlords' profits through violent means of controlling the local agrarian landless workforce (Blok 1974: 33).

The reproduction of the agrarian bloc within fascism obviously suggests mutual interests of state and mafia (Lupo 1981). Mussolini's 'commitment' to eradicating the mafia was therefore mere rhetoric. Affluent *mafiosi* actively participated in disbanding agrarian cooperatives alongside the fascist police. On a wider scale, anti-socialist sentiment shared by fascists and *mafiosi* aggravated mass labour emigration abroad or to northern Italy, especially for the radically politicised in the *braccianti* movement (Schneider 1990).

Toward the end of World War II, the mafia capitalised on historical changes. Some claim that *mafiosi* assisted the Allied invasion of Sicily (summer of 1943) via flows of intelligence from mafia to the US Navy (Follain 2005), while most dispute the reliability of this story (Lupo 1997; Lupo 2015: 93–112; Mangiameli 2004). The widely held assumption that the US Army reciprocated for this cooperation, assisting mafia political influence across the island during the 'transition to democracy', is definitely debatable (Lupo 2011: 21–33). One thing we cannot afford to overlook, though, is that Cosa Nostra did help contain the reach of communism to Sicily after the leftist Resistance to fascism spread in northern Italy (Robb 2009: 125).

In the meantime, the Spicco Vallata *braccianti*, influenced by the PCI (the Italian Communist Party), took to the fields en masse, occupying the estates under the slogan 'Give the land to those who work it'. This struggle contributed to the latifundo's collapse (Blok 1974: 83). The political future that *braccianti* demanded was nothing less than the collective ownership of the latifundo. The post-war impetus allowed peasants to seize land and transform the exploitative latifundist production system. Events such as the occupation of the Spicco Vallata Drago estate in October 1946 by four thousand peasants, who formed cooperatives to cultivate it, are typical of the movement (Di Matteo 1967: 484). (In an important symbolism, the estate is now cultivated by an anti-mafia cooperative).

Immediately following World War II, the *braccianti*, in a revival of the Fasci, organised communitarian uses of land on the occupied latifun-



dia (Santino 2009) despite ‘the anti-bolshevik crusades’ of mafia patrons and their co-opted bandits, like the infamous Salvatore Giuliano (Dickie 2004: 210). These land occupations and workers’ cooperatives lasted in Spicco Vallata from the Liberation (autumn 1943) to the Portella massacre that took place in Spicco Vallata (spring 1947). The movement’s legalist claims found a response and basis for actions in the Gullo Decree Number 279 (‘concessions of uncultivated land to farmers’, 19 October 1944). The decrees represented a basis for peasant mobilisations and cooperativism that corresponded to the peasantry’s ‘legalist sense of justice’ (Rossi-Doria 1983: 114), as interactions between peasants and political power centred on legislative procedures.

The decrees were laws initiated by Gullo, the communist minister of agriculture in the Italian coalition government formed in April 1944<sup>3</sup>. The minister’s policies were embraced by the southern peasantry. Delighted with the cooperative movement, Gullo and his party thought that the extension of cooperative property might offer an impetus for communist influence in Sicily. In the fifth PCI Congress, Gullo and Grieco (prominent MPs in the Constituent Assembly) proposed that ‘at all costs, we have to direct the activities of the cooperatives towards collective forms of management. . . . We always have to search cooperativist forms, to encourage the peasants to renounce the constant fragmentation of land [that a reform would bring about]’ (in Renda 1977: 60).

A delay in implementing the law angered *braccianti*, who started applying it de facto, occupying the latifundia and forming cooperatives to manage them. The communist minister Gullo’s law proposal, expressing solidarity with the rural poor, aimed to capitalise politically on the peasant movement’s legalism and supported cooperativist management of land in Sicily as a projection of a collectivist future.<sup>4</sup> The revolutionary legality of the landless peasants was coupled with the most progressive agricultural law in Italian history, allowing *braccianti* to impose, through activist means, legislation suspended by the Italian state.

## Blood in Portella

In the regional elections that took place in Sicily on 18 April 1947, the People’s Block (Blocco del Popolo, a coalition of the PCI and the socialist party), came first, gaining 30.4 per cent of the vote, and shook the political system. The peasant movement’s militancy, coupled with parliamentary representation, aimed to establish a fair agrarian reform that would promote cooperativism.

Signor Nicosia from the Casa del Popolo, who was a twenty-two-year-old *bracciante* at the time of the elections, had joined the communist party and voted for the Popular Block and felt that ‘the world had started to make sense at last’. I was struck by his passionate will to share his experience; we sat at the table where he and his friends, such as Signor Schirò, passed most of their day. They were eager to discuss contemporary politics, enjoying the company of the young, and noted that many youngsters’ interest in the peasant movement was ‘boosted by the [contemporary] anti-mafia cooperatives, which do a good job in keeping our history alive’.

Nicosia then told me about the events at Portella on May Day 1947: as the crowds of largely landless peasants gathered to celebrate a day of rest and post-election political euphoria, gunfire into the crowd of *braccianti* families caused mayhem. Thirteen people from the three villages that led the peasant movement were killed or wounded. People scattered, running across the hills and back to their villages. No one could tell at that point who was shooting: ‘bullets came from all sides’ (Casarrubea 2005: 250). That the action was promoted by a combination of state secret services, Giuliani’s bandits and *mafiosi* is yet to be proven, but this theory is widely held in Spicco Vallata today – as much as the belief that Portella was a warning to the peasant cooperativists to restrain their radicalism. Indeed, the final blow to their political ardour came soon after with the long-awaited 1950 agrarian reform.

Many in the Casa del Popolo were Portella survivors, but they let Signor Nicosia narrate, as his storytelling was most vivid.

We had won at the eighteenth of April [elections]; we took part in the elections with the Blocco del Popolo, under the flag of Garibaldi. And we took to the street for only the third time after so many years of fascism, to celebrate our victory and the first of May. And Barbato’s rock [explained later] was approachable for the first time. That piece of granite stood there in the midst of the place and had become a symbol for the demonstrations. Before and during the early years of fascism the *braccianti* who demonstrated along with their families went there to eat. So we reached that and, as in the days of our fathers, set to munch the bread and onion. And then there was the havoc. The shootings and the running . . . all of a sudden. People started fleeing the place. I was scared. The most incredible thing was the horses’ screams . . . like sirens from everywhere around; a hellish sound, very frightening. And we saw horses covered in blood. . . .

[Signor Schirò (interrupting):]

We were the three revolutionary villages. And we took it [to Portella] in Mayday; landless peasants. We made our way to Portella, all hugging each

other, [people] from San Giovanni, from San Turiddu, on the first of May and other occasions. To celebrate the memory of the Fasci. . . . And in '47, I was, when they started shooting, right by Barbato's rock. I was ten metres away from my uncle who was holding the socialist flag all this time, as people rose from eating and started running around. And in the end there were like six of us [from Cembali] and five from San Giovanni and two from San Turiddu who were shot.

Many of those present in the Casa del Popolo agreed that 'the dead of Portella call for justice; they ask who armed the Portella killers'. An ex-communist, who had fled Sicily for Australia immediately after Portella, told me, 'Not a single president of the republic came over to apologise and honour us for the first massacre of the state [*strage di Stato*] in modern Italian history'. It is widely believed in Spicco Vallata that Portella was the first of many ambiguous violent eruptions in which the state's secret services were involved. Interestingly, people today do not recognise historical borders between mafia and state violence in events like Portella. There is debate among historians about whether the massacre was an ambush of the demonstration by *mafiosi* (Manali 2001) or by the infamous Giuliano gang recruited by *mafiosi* (Dickie 2014; Lomartire 2007) or by an alliance of neo-fascists and US secret services working closely with mafia (Casarrubea 2005: 251). Relations between mafia and banditry in specific moments of historical tensions have also been discussed (Hobsbawm 1965; 1972).

My interlocutors, however, do agree on Portella's solemn commemoration as a site of the 'most dearly felt' May Day celebrations in Sicily – and one of the most important in Italy. The site is visually remarkable. Thirteen rocks lie in symbolic representation of the thirteen people shot dead in the tragic event. A sad poem in the Sicilian dialect is carved on a fourteenth rock, the so-called 'stone of Barbato'.

## The Agrarian Reform (and Brokerism Thereof)

Researchers regard the 1950 land reform in Sicily as a 'failure' (Schneider and Schneider 1996: 250–54), 'a failed land reform' that had 'political intentions' (Blok 1974: 79) or an 'anti-reform' or 'counter-reform' (Santino 2009). Since the late 1920s, the PCI had been critical of the long-awaited reform; as Gramsci pointed out:

The Turin communists . . . warned against 'miraculist' illusions in a mechanical sharing out of the big estates. . . . What can a poor peasant achieve by occupying uncultivated or poorly cultivated lands? Without machinery, without accommodation on the place of work, without credit to tide him



**Illustration 3.3:** The ‘stone of Barbato’ with a poem inscribed on it, at the Portella della Ginestra site. Photo by Francisco Calafate.

over till harvest-time, without cooperative institutions to acquire the harvest. . . . (1927: 5)

With the application of the Gullo decrees to the uncultivated and poorly cultivated lands, the swiftly constituted grassroots agrarian cooperatives managed land across more people, in comparison to the post-reform situation. Cooperatives in 1946 shared more than eighty-six thousand hectares among their fifty thousand members, while the social base of the state’s agrarian reform reached in 1950 was more limited



**Illustration 3.4:** Monument to the mafia's victims in San Giovanni: the intellectual, the peasant and the youth, under the Blocco banner, are portrayed in 'socialist realism' style, while a mother is protecting her wounded child.

in scope (around twenty-five thousand people). A smallholder economy substituted the cooperativist organisation that enabled peasants to bargain collectively in urban markets. The 1950 law aimed at shaping a small-proprietor class, offering land to individual families as opposed to collective organisations. It therefore discouraged the formation of workers' cooperatives and thus simultaneously deprived the locals of what had been their main means of political and anti-mafia organisation. Many peasants, bereft of credit facilities and of any machinery to cultivate the land, became vulnerable, resulting in another wave of mass emigration in the 1950s.

Fragmenting land into family tracts damaged radical *bracciante* cooperativism. Pratt makes a similar case for the 1953 reform in Tuscany,<sup>5</sup> where 'a class of family members emerged not through market forces but through the direct action of the state' (1994: 63), arguing that the de-radicalisation of the PCI-sympathetic ex-sharecroppers was the political aim of the land reform. Gaining not only access to markets but also bargaining power became the peasantry's aim in this new context; this meant sidelining brokers, the role that mafia had come to monopolise.

Anti-mafia mobilisation interacted with legal and policy frameworks and informed the shift from workers' cooperativism to producers' coop-

erativism. There has been a shift in the focus of political struggles regarding alliances, claims and agents, from struggles over land to struggles over markets, where *mafiosi* re-emerge as powerful middlemen in the role of market brokers (*sensali*), the pivotal, shifting moment being the agrarian reform legislation.<sup>6</sup>

### **'Sensali' Brokers and Cooperative Wineries (1960s)**

Peasant integration into broader structures took place through struggles to organise the vinification processes, after a gradual transformation from dry farming and pasture into wine grape cultivation. This was pivotal for political alliances and relationships against the local mafia. Mafia brokerage and the political commitment of some locals produced local paths towards cooperativism, as peasants sought to reach urban markets. The cooperative winery developed into the basic unit of production around which interests of various social groups and individuals overlapped, regarding political mobilisation and anti-mafia organisation.

Spicco Vallata viticulturists established cooperative wineries for grape processing and for engaging with the wine trade, as well as for integrating production and commercialisation processes. Viticulture peasants focused first on the process of transforming the grape into a finished product, identifying as the way forward common ownership of technological means to make wine at reduced costs and organising themselves collectively while retaining their families' economic autonomy. As the old (pre-agrarian-reform) co-ops gave way to a new module of cooperativism, cultivators continued the communitarian legacy of the *braccianti* movement while building on the new property dynamics instituted by the reform. The ideology of class was now linked to household sufficiency, as noted in Schneider and Schneider's historical ethnography of a Sicilian village's viticulture economy (1996; cf. Chayanov 1986).

With land reform, vine growers in Spicco Vallata experienced a fairly rapid transition from being *braccianti* to occupying unstable positions in new class formations formulated around small property and precarious livelihoods. In guaranteeing a piece of vineyard to each family, the reform had tackled only one economic grievance. The problem, which inspired cooperative wineries, was the speculative power that the mafia exercised in determining market price. Even in the latifundist period, a rising class had moved out of rent-capitalism to become middlemen (Blok 1974: 67), setting the price of grapes (Bandiera 2003a). Viticultivators needed to process the produce; the establishment of cooperative wineries came as an outcome of this concern.

These middlemen are called *sensali*, the Italian word meaning ‘mediator, agent, broker, matchmaker’, which is exactly what the Sicilian *sensali* did at the traditional animal fairs and in the markets for grain. The Schneiders call the mafia’s control over routes of grain and labour ‘broker capitalism’ (1976: 160). In Sicily, like elsewhere, broker capitalist activity was identified with the figure of the *sensale*, central to the hinterland’s integration into urban markets. As a technology of brokerism, the *sensalismo* is interesting: it overlaps with mafia but maintains degrees of independence from it.

The term is not native to the area; although I have not encountered it in sustained usage outside the valley and western Sicily, the phenomenon is in no way unique to the region of my concern, and certain comparisons can be drawn with other Italian cases (cf. Pratt 2007; 2014). However, the association of *sensali* with mafia and co-ops that tackled them with anti-mafia is a Sicilian particularity that in Spicco Vallata has a specifically pronounced resonance even today, and it is central to comprehend structures and agents of dependency in the region.

The *sensali* worked (‘and still do!’, as many informants complained) for wine merchants in Palermo, Rome or abroad, buying the harvests of independent producers at low prices. Creating a relative degree of consensus and coordination with each other, they became systemic to the commercialisation of wine. Thanks to this coordination, different mafia clans could guarantee efficiency for their brokerage, evoking Cosa Nostra. In other words, after the agrarian reforms, *mafiosi* clans<sup>7</sup> and their affiliates shifted from controlling people’s labour to acting as middlemen between producers and the market.

Threatened by low prices and no bargaining power in the late 1950s, peasants, who themselves or through their broader families (genealogically and laterally) were aware of previous *bracciante* struggles, faced new forms of dependence induced by *sensali* control of prices and markets. This gave rise to further struggles that aimed to address market insecurity. The peasant movement recovered, within a generation, the experience of *braccianti* mobilisations. The winery replaced land as the strategic resource around which peasants’ collective claims were formulated: the peasant movement transformed itself into a massive social cooperation grounded in reaching urban markets and avoiding *mafiosi* brokers.

In Spicco Vallata, the cooperative winery Santoleone, established in 1968 and located on the outskirts of San Giovanni, was the main achievement of the cooperative movement’s mobilisation. The offspring of a vanguard commitment of local communist peasants, with immediate experiences of mafia violence and family memories of the Fasci, Santoleone began as the cooperative attempt of a few families and spread

through kinship and friendship ties (Terranova 2006). It started to grow in the early 1970s, largely due to the Communist Party's pressure and influence. Attracting state funding, it aimed to incorporate peasants into the political system and contain the mafia's influence. This was partly due to the alliance with the village branch of the CGIL (General Chamber of Labour) union, which lobbied the PCI for support. The cooperative thus had grown *out of* a political movement, established itself *through* political institutions and played a central role in integrating people *into* political parties.

At the time of fieldwork, the Santoleone winery had eight hundred members. Trade unionists I spoke with described this huge enterprise as 'the FIAT of our area' – 'the main source of income for locals' as well as social integration through labour. The winery became, for people in Spicco Vallata, a means of community building and policy making, which also influenced their political representation. The cooperative movement and, with that, the anti-mafia mobilisation of the peasantry peaked in establishing the Santoleone. Giulio Rillo, the middle-aged incumbent president of Santoleone, spoke to me of its origins:

The Santoleone winery comes from the sixties. . . . It gathered around it the communists of the area; my father was also there. Pino Talano,<sup>8</sup> together with thirty other people, communists and not, created this cooperative because in the area there were people buying grapes from the producer to determine its price, directing everything. . . . There were those people of the area, we call them *i sensali* [this is how the word is pronounced in the area] . . . today they call them brokers. . . . Well, the famous *sensale* decided the price. . . . The word [*sensale*], translated from Arabic, means 'people roaming like this', tradesmen. So, they always decided who acquired the grape – most often they were linked to the mafia, they were *mafiosi*. This is the reason people made the co-op, basically, to avoid the *sensali* activity.

The actual mechanics of co-op wineries are simple: each family harvests their own grapes which are amassed to make wine on a collective vinification site. The integration of producers (around eight hundred members during the 1980s and to this day) into cooperativism generated representatives within the peasant movement who translated this momentum into political power as cooperative wineries have been led by people with explicit political commitments. Nationally, the cooperative movement developed through two opposed routes: 'red', supported by Legacoop and the PCI, and 'white' cooperatives, sustained by Unicoop and the DC. What is distinctive about the Santoleone cooperative is that, by pursuing links to PCI political patronage, it also sought protection against the mafia. In this way, peasants sought to de-provincialise their mafia-related con-



cerns, making sure these were represented on the state level. Thus, with Santamaria, the anti-mafia movement's politics signified a withdrawal from immediate post-war claims to revolutionary transformation and collective use of land.

In 1994, a local mafia clan burnt the cars and country homes of the Santoleone managers. Local unionists insisted this represented the mafia policy of destroying the efforts to form a cooperative winery, undertaken in order to sideline the mafia *sensali*, gain direct access to markets and consolidate political alliances capable of guaranteeing long-term security against mafia. These responses affected both cooperativism and anti-mafia politics and constituted a backdrop against which anti-mafia cooperatives still operate today, and to which my informants made constant references.

### **The Contemporary Context: Land Confiscations and Anti-mafia Cooperatives**

Members of the anti-mafia cooperatives locate the 'deep historical origins of the anti-mafia movement' in the history of the Sicilian Fasci. I participated in one public commemoration of anti-mafia history held in memory of Bernardino Verro, which took place in front of his statue in Tarini's main town park. People working the confiscated land for the anti-mafia cooperatives<sup>9</sup> told me that it was an 'annual event in memory of a peasant leader who paid for his anti-mafia commitment with his life'. Amongst the attendees were Tarini's mayor and trade unionists. They commemorated the Fasci leader Verro without mentioning his one-time mafia affiliation, indeed stressing his 'sacrifice' in the struggle against the mafia. Tarini's mayor read out a list of people who had been assassinated by local *mafiosi* because of their anti-mafia activity. In a narrative genealogy commencing with Verro, 'the anti-mafia forefather', the list included people as diverse as Placido Rizzotto (a communist trade unionist) and Carlo Alberto Dalla Chiesa (a military police general and the prefect of Palermo).

This commemorative event illustrates how the anti-mafia legacy is renegotiated today. Current anti-mafia activists separate historical actors from their time's messy contingencies to construct a genealogy of names retrospectively cast as 'those sacrificed in the anti-mafia movement'. Today's anti-mafia cooperatives see themselves as the movement's continuation and their unique heirs, able to revisit and represent its legacy. Activists, in such commemorative narratives, evoke a 'selective tradition' comparable to the cultural expressions used by labour aristocracies, as

Gavin Smith notes, to ‘represent’ the ‘cultural survival’ of working-class traditions and struggles (1999: 30). The far-right Tarini mayor’s position is indicative: he privately told me at the Verro event that he felt isolated, as his anti-mafia commitment derived from the ‘fascist anti-mafia struggle’, while contemporary anti-mafia cooperatives identified with the communist peasant tradition of Spicco Vallata.

There are reasons to qualify the picture of the historical process peaking in the contemporary cooperatives. As discussed in the book’s introduction, the Falcone was established in 2001 and the Borsellino in 2006, while the Lavoro e Altro dated from earlier, even before the Consortium itself, having been set up in 1998. They all drew inspiration from the anti-mafia movement of the past.

Overall, despite the claims to ‘continuity’ with the struggles of the anti-mafia peasant movement, this inspiration was ideological rather than direct. None of the many people who had been involved in previous social or specifically anti-mafia struggles was involved in the newly created cooperatives. However, Santoleone people like Rillo supported the new cooperatives, as did most trade unionists. Their inspiration from ‘red’ rather than ‘white’ cooperativist models came specifically from their administrators’ ideological sympathy with the historical peasant movement, their present-day collaboration with ‘red’ consumer co-ops in Emilia (northern Italy) and involvement in progressive Palermitan civil society. As a proportion of the local population, participation in the cooperatives was small (some 150 people’s livelihoods were immediately associated to income from the cooperatives, when in San Giovanni only, the permanent population was approximately 4,500 people). Unlike the history they drew from and referred to, the anti-mafia cooperatives could not accommodate massive popular participation and were not grassroots organisations. But akin to that history, their existence was interlocked with mafia in a number of ways.

One striking way for my interlocutors to remember the anti-mafia movement and claim continuity was to recall instances of mafia violence – and indeed the local event of the Portella massacre. Therefore, similar to building on the Fasci tradition, the anti-mafia co-op members annually participate in the solemn commemoration of Portella della Ginestra. The demonstration to the Portella site is the most dearly felt May Day celebration in Sicily and one of the most important in Italy.

The site is visually remarkable. It is widely believed in Spicco Vallata that Portella was the first of many ambiguous violent eruptions that over the following decades expressed a hidden mafia-state coalition. On May Day 2009, alongside anti-mafia cooperative members, committed

unionists marched in the morning from Piana (four kilometres away) to the site. They were joined there by hundreds of families coming from Palermo in a convoy of cars, parked for a couple of kilometres along the main road linking San Giovanni to Piana. A local brass band played throughout, adding a suggestive note to the day. The celebratory feel peaked when anti-mafia activists walked to 'Barbato stone' to lay their commemorative offerings.

Contemporary anti-mafia cooperatives invest in projects of 'social tourism', which include visits to Portella. During the day, urban visitors sit next to Portella's rocks and hear a guide narrate the 1947 events. Young Palermitans seasonally employed as guides on day contracts by the cooperative Falcone narrate the Portella events by stating that 'the peasants were communists for a piece of bread'. This is characteristic of how contemporary anti-mafia cooperatives downplay issues regarding the 'revolutionary legality' of Spicco Vallata peasants in favour of promoting (and reading historical events through) a moderate political discourse, recognising the importance of employing legality (*legalità*) while de-emphasising the politically radical context in which it developed.

Some of the activity of negotiating the movement's legacy is rooted in the management of material possessions, including land. Today the Falcone anti-mafia cooperative owns the usufruct of a plot confiscated from a Tarinise *mafioso* in the Drago area, outlining a tangible continuity that links contemporary anti-mafia cooperatives to the anti-mafia movement's past. Local narratives claim that this tract of land was the very place where trade unionist Placido Rizzotto made a passionate speech to the gathered *braccianti* before they occupied the estate, faced with the mafia's *gabelloti* violence. The mafia assassinated him in 1948 (Paternostro 1994).

I visited the Drago in the summer to help there with the agricultural works in the wheat field. While there with Piero, a committed left-winger, I realised the poetic flair with which he reflected on the charged history of those land tracts as well as of the anti-mafia movement's history at large. After work, in the midst of the day, we stood at the side of the field, then golden and calmly bent by the soft summer breeze. Lighting a cigarette, his *coppola*, the typically Sicilian flat cap on his hand, he recited a small poem he had written which I have reworked to adjust to English rhyming:

Sicilian cities' light is distant and pale  
 at the dusk, while the winds exhale  
 among those great wheat fields of fair.  
 With a solemn move, I would lay  
 my *coppola* on my chest, and say:  
 'All that is solid melts into thin air'.

We should note the importance of leftist politics in forging this anti-mafia lived memory. In Italy, the PCI has assisted rural working-class people to develop a sense of citizenship and be integrated into Italian politics (Shore 1990; Li Causi 1993). In Tuscany, the PCI was ‘the movement . . . [that] produced an historic transformation of peasants into citizens, able for the first time to claim rights and participate in a political and civic culture . . . [and] should be assessed on the same terms as other civil rights movements’ (Pratt 2003: 85). The specificity of Sicily in this citizenship-building configuration, as regards rural communism (represented by *braccianti* unionists and backed by PCI politicians) is that it was co-articulated with the pursuit of ‘revolutionary legality’.

The emergence of ‘revolutionary legality’ is critical not only because it marks out how Sicily is different from other cases where occupations are self-consciously in defiance of a legal order (see, e.g., Sitrin 2012) but also because, although born in rural areas, it developed with the civic engagement of the urban anti-mafia later (Schneider and Schneider 2001: 432). Sicily in the late 1940s became a point of compromise, where leftist politicians managed to get a legal framework friendly to occupations and cooperativisation organised by landless workers, because conservative forces assumed that these would never be enforced; mafia was the on-the-ground force that ensured this. This signified an unusual situation where occupations were often at least ostensibly legal. This different orientation to legality in the Sicilian left is central to current anti-mafia configurations (Rakopoulos 2014a: 115).

Reflecting on the theme of continuity and transformation in the historical trajectory of today’s anti-mafia cooperatives, I should note that the contemporary cooperatives *are* expressions of some historical continuity in that they are both worker-based and producer-based cooperativist configurations. They also reflect a qualitative transformation in the anti-mafia movement in that today there are no mafia-related struggles over either land or access to markets. The social struggles of the anti-mafia movement today do not face outright mafia’s violence, although mafia agents are still active. Rather than having to face mafia patronage or brokerage, the cooperatives are *assuming the mafia’s control over* material resources. The struggle is now around the usufruct rights to land and the ways the land plots are managed vis-à-vis the local social arrangements around them. The struggles around usufruct are akin to the pre-agrarian-reform mobilisations, while attempts at commercialisation are akin to post-reform. Most importantly, struggles against the mafia now have different priorities. While in the past cooperatives were channels to *avoid* mafia influence (*gabelloti* patrons, *sensali* brokers), anti-mafia cooperativ-

ism today aims at *attacking* mafia: anti-mafia has become the end of cooperativism, not its means.

The negotiation of this legacy is tense. As Smith notes, activists ‘select out from and reformulate various patterns of tradition’ (1999: 188); this also characterises the anti-mafia cooperatives leaders’ depiction of the area’s cooperativism and anti-mafia history. Cooperative models in Sicily where cooperativism is mingled saliently with the anti-mafia movement are adaptable to local contexts – and give voice to inchoate local desires.

## Sharing History: Of Anti-mafia and Cooperatives

The historical case of cooperativism in Sicily shows that specific circumstances on the ground associated with mafia activity and the peasant movement’s anti-mafia responses have rendered peasant cooperativism a practice both distinct in its Sicilian specificities *and* contextualised in two different circumstances in the history of Spicco Vallata, before and after the agrarian reform. Contemporary anti-mafia cooperatives capitalise on *both* traditions described through the historical discussion above: the post-reform autonomous producers’ *and* the pre-reform workers’ cooperativism. They are workers’ cooperatives with an explicit anti-mafia stance, more akin to 1940s Spicco Vallata cooperativism. At the same time, they retain elements of producers’ cooperativism in that they are supported by the state (a configuration where politics has shifted against the mafia), hence resembling the cooperativism of the 1960s and onwards.

Cooperativism as a cultural construct and set of practices is thus, in Sicily, adapted to the circumstantial ideological weight it carried in these two different periods. Its practicalities were informed by anti-mafia commitment: cooperativism became a model of organisation (as well as an ideal of organising to avoid or confront the mafia), alongside exploitative landlords and distant urban markets. It has been ‘transplanted’ in the current configuration of anti-mafia cooperatives.

Their commemorations and general rhetoric draw on both of these traditions: their members speak of ‘thin red lines’, linking these experiences. The convergence between (most) peasants’ positive stance towards law as a means of change and (some) politicians’ support for the peasant struggles produced a form of ‘revolutionary legality’ that has, to a degree, been rejuvenated in today’s anti-mafia movement. Its actors’ claims to revolutionary legality, their rhetoric of ‘reclaiming the commons’ and the fact that they do not own the land they cultivate, having

only usufruct rights to it, strongly echo older developments of Sicilian anti-mafia cooperativism. This resemblance is, importantly, utilised ideologically by cooperative administrators. Anti-mafia mobilisation is based on a model of cooperativism akin to collectivism: the peasants set up *worker-cooperatives*, based on land owned by the state. This forms collectivist claims, which are unrealistic, as the Consortium restitutes land back to an imaginary ‘collective’.

Nevertheless, this (largely imagined) legacy has to be taken into account. What is more, there are particularities in the uncomfortable interrelationships in the modernisation of rural Sicily. These interlinked histories urge us to think of mafia and anti-mafia as not necessarily independent concepts across a strict dichotomy but as two sides of the same coin of Sicilian modernisation, where cooperativism has been present. The mafia’s continuity as an organisation and its strategic transformation from a pre-agrarian-reform, quasi-latifundist network of violent *gabelloti* patrons to a post-agrarian-reform nexus of coordinated *sensali* brokers was crucial for the intersections of political economy and culture in Spicco Vallata. Mafia activity and peasant organisation against it – as well as the local interpenetration of anti-mafia and cooperative formations – have conditioned local particularities of cooperativism and political culture. Contesting *mafiosi* shaped the peasant movement as *anti-mafia*, contributing to the establishment of local cooperative wineries and, through them, to wider political structures, such as the PCI. This reference to wider structures has an impact in anti-mafia cooperativism today, too, as will be seen in the next chapter.

## NOTES

Some of the material in this chapter has also been published as ‘Cooperative Modulations: The Anti-mafia Movement and Struggles over Land and Cooperativism in Eight Sicilian Municipalities’ (2014).

1. See Charlton et al. (2006) and Portelli (1991; 1997) for methodological issues in collecting oral accounts.
2. The Fasci Siciliani dei Lavoratori movement has nothing to do with Fascism. Mussolini appropriated this term from left-wing terminology of the 1920s when establishing his movement (Mack Smith 1983), much in the same way National Socialism was configured in late-1920s Germany.
3. In the coalition, the conservative Christian Democracy (DC) party was in the majority but the PCI also participated. The coalition collapsed due to Cold War tensions when the communists were thrown out of government in ‘the May 1947 crisis’ – partly induced by the dramatic events of Portella (Ginsborg 2003a: 111–13).

4. 'The cooperative is the cell of the future socialist organisation', noted Gullo (in Rossi-Doria 1983: 106).
5. Tuscany offers a well-researched case on politicised agrarian cooperativism at large, where the Communist Party had already been encouraging producers to cooperate since the 1950s (Pratt 1994: 71).
6. The scheme I suggest is not all-encompassing and allows for differentiated routes to development of collective action – as well as for its disintegration. For instance, the collapse of the regional association of left cooperatives (USCA) was due to corrupt practices internal to USCA rather than the outcome of mafia activity (Sabetti 2002: xi).
7. I take into account the attempt by historical anthropologists to see 'clan' as a male brotherhood, a horizontal coalition of men whose interests lie in controlling female production and reproduction (Tillion 1983; Goody 1983; 2000). 'Mafia' could be approached in a similar way, construed in different ways from setting to setting. The ways the *clan* category is used in historical anthropology by Europeanists such as Goody (1973; 1976; 1983) are different from its emic use in Italian public discourse such as the media. Libertà and other NGOs, and the two most militant anti-mafia newspapers (*Repubblica's* Palermo supplement, and the weekly 'S'), both left-leaning, use 'clan' to delineate male brotherhoods' horizontal, compact alliances as opposed to descent-based kinship relations. Italian state agents, such as the Consortium, tap into this discourse of the need for a move 'from the clans to the state' ('S' vol. 16). For an African example that suggests different lineage continuities, see Gray and Gulliver (2004). See also page 90 for a hint on the differences between clan and family.
8. As portrayed in the book-homage to him entitled *The Man of the Vines* (*L'uomo delle vigne*, Terranova 2006), Pino Talano, eighty-two when I met him, was still loyal to the PCI, which he thought was capable of anti-mafia struggle. 'He has the stubborn mind of a peasant', was the benevolent, yet somehow harsh, comment of Luca, when I asked him about Talano.
9. Referring to a plot as Falcone's or Borsellino's and so on is obviously not literally correct, as the confiscated plots belong to the state and are only leased for free. However, everyone I met used terms that implied ownership when referring to 'our cooperative's plots'.