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CHAPTER NINE

CRIMINAL MOSAICS

The Varied Faces of Organized Crime in Rome

Isabella Clough Marinaro and Federica Nappa

INTRODUCTION

Rome has long offered a rich social and economic terrain in which organized criminal groups aggressively pursue their interests. The capital's economic opportunities and political networks—that span from the very local to the global—have attracted outshoots of traditionally Southern mafias and simultaneously allowed local groups to build social and financial power across various neighborhoods. Indeed, Rome is unique in Italy for the sheer variety of mafias operating within it and the diversity of sectors and activities they engage in (Osservatorio, 2022). It is a complex criminal space within which no single grouping has achieved hegemonic control. Nevertheless, distinctions can be made between mafias that use the city's political and economic centrality to launder money and build networks of influence in legal sectors, and those that primarily invest in strengthening local territorial control through violence and illegal trades. The landscape is therefore in continuous flux, with groups creating alliances and sometimes conflicts, and occasionally mutating. This chapter explores this evolving field, where boundaries between legal and illegal sectors, as well as old and new criminal groupings, often blur.

Our aim is to identify some of Rome's social and governance vulnerabilities. Indeed, in line with contemporary research (Von Lampe, 2015), we argue that organized crime groups are not external parasitic actors that simply exploit opportunities within the urban context, but rather they develop in symbiosis with it: their internal interests and strategies are intertwined with the external opportunities they encounter (Sciarrone, 2021). Organized crime is thus both a product of the city's social and economic landscape and a force that conditions how other criminal actors and ordinary Romans operate. We focus particularly on the most locally embedded groups, seeking to map their socioeconomic trajectories. These are arguably the actors whose presence is most strongly felt by residents. The chapter first briefly introduces our conceptual framework and then outlines both the historical and contemporary landscape of organized criminal activity in Rome. We then tease out the features that enable so many to thrive within Rome's social fabric.

The data for this study was collected through a combination of various research methods. As Hobbs and Antonopoulos (2014) underline, no single method—ethnographic, law-enforcement-based, statistical, spatial or archival—is fully able to convey the multidimensional behaviors of organized criminals. This is a field that is plagued by "dark numbers": the impossibility of ever having complete and accurate data on what, by its very nature, seeks to remain hidden (Ferwerda, 2023). The obvious difficulties of doing fieldwork with criminal groups adds a further obstacle. This means that any mapping of a city's landscape must draw on a wide range of sources. First, we make use of what official documentation is publicly available. This includes recent reports published by the Lazio Region and the national anti-mafia investigative agency (DIA). To these we add local media reporting on current developments, and scholarly works that conceptualize patterns, processes, and strategies across groups. Much investigative material does not become public until trial, compounded by the slowness of the Italian judicial system. We therefore integrate published materials with interviews with investigators, experts, and residents of some of the most affected neighborhoods. Since mafias are context-laden, the sources selected here help to tease out the social, cultural, and geographical characteristics of the groups and environments we focus on.

CONCEPTUALIZING MAFIA POWER: INVISIBILITY AND EMBEDDEDNESS

Since no two organized crime groups operate identically, legislative frameworks addressing them need to be both univocal and broad enough to contain their inevitable diversity. Indeed, international law defines an organized criminal group (OCG) in very generic terms:

> A structured group of three or more persons, existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offences [those punished with four years or more of imprisonment under domestic law] in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit. (UN Convention on Transnational Organized Crime, Art. 2).

Italian legislation, however, makes a clear conceptual distinction between organized crime and "mafia." An organized crime group, or criminal association (*associazione per delinquere*: Art. 416, C.P.), reflects the international definition: it involves a minimum of three individuals working together to commit "crimes and with an internal permanent organizational structure" (Turone, 2007, 50).[1] Mafia-type association (*associazione di tipo mafioso*, Art. 416 bis, C.P.), which is punished more severely, refers to the use of the mafia method of intimidation to generate subjugation and the code of silence in the surrounding society.[2] This intimidation need not be explicit. A group's history and reputation can arouse enough local fear to ensure that it operates uncontested, allowing it to "easily control…markets and territories, somehow putting itself in competition with government institutions" (Turone, 2007, 50). Indeed, among the mafia toolkit is the ability to influence elections and political decision-making processes to its advantage. Many mafia activities are not in themselves illegal (they may involve legal trades or investments) but are nevertheless criminal if they are achieved through the method of intimidation.

Italy's historical Southern mafias—'Ndrangheta, Camorra, and Cosa Nostra—are now widely known to the Italian public thanks to large-scale criminal trials since the 1980s, intensive news coverage, and representations in popular media (Allum et al., 2019). However, whether other, more

recent groupings can also be defined as mafias is only determined at trial and the decision can be fiercely contested. The case of a Roman group widely known as Mafia Capitale is a notable example. The investigation acquired national historical significance as prosecutors sought to demonstrate that a local criminal network, without strong links to traditional Southern groups, had taken on the intimidatory force of a mafia in the capital. The group's existence became publicly known in 2014 when the first trial began against a network led by Massimo Carminati—a former right-wing terrorist and member of Rome's Banda della Magliana crime group—and Salvatore Buzzi, founder of a network of cooperatives that received public funding to carry out multiple social projects. Investigators demonstrated that the group had systematically corrupted a wide network of political and business actors to commit fraud, divert public funds, and obtain preferential access to public works contracts (Savatteri & Grignetti, 2015). However, members had also committed extortion and loansharking: actions that are typically used by mafias to intimidate local populations. Indeed, these activities have historically characterized Roman criminal groups that have exploited the city's economic structure of small business to subjugate entrepreneurs and achieve territorial control and political influence (Martone, 2017). The prosecution argued that the group had used the mafia method, capitalizing on Carminati's criminal reputation to instill fear in its interlocutors. In its 2017 verdict, though, the Court of Rome did not recognize it as a mafia association, although it did find many individuals guilty of criminal association, corruption, and other individual criminal acts. The following year, however, the Court of Appeal ruled that it was in fact a mafia-type organization, arguing that although it did not have subjugating power over the broader population, it was still able to intimidate its targets to achieve its business interests. This verdict was then overturned again, in 2019, by the Supreme Court of Cassation—Italy's highest court—which confirmed the first court's judgment that two separate non-mafia groupings were involved: one dedicated to local extortion and one aimed at corruption in the public sector (Sicignano, 2021).

In addition to provoking widespread debate about what constitutes a mafia and revealing the capillary influence of criminal actors across many sectors of Roman business and public institutions, the case was

important in highlighting the extent to which the city is vulnerable to OCGs at all social levels. Its members relied on networks in high financial and political sectors while also making their presence felt territorially, especially among small businesses. Traditionally, scholars have tended to differentiate between enterprise syndicates—those primarily aimed at making high, often legal profit—and power syndicates which are more concerned with maintaining control over local territories to influence economic, political, and social life (Block, 1980). Mafia Capitale is one of many Italian cases in which the two sets of goals and methods in fact coexist.

Some further debates in the literature are also helpful in conceptualizing the mafia groups discussed below. One element is mafia expansion (dalla Chiesa, 2016; Martone, 2017; Sciarrone, 2021). That is, how and why mafias with deep-rooted power in one geographical context then choose to penetrate new social environments. Some groups opt for what Sciarrone (2021) defines as *infiltration*, investing in the new economic space and taking advantage of a vast *gray area* of collusive professionals (lawyers, accountants, tax consultants, etc.) to pursue their business interests without attracting the attention of local communities. Invisibility in the new location is a strategic choice: the subtlety and complexity of their operations—which often hide among apparently legal actors and companies—helps avoid police scrutiny. Others instead seek to become more fully *embedded* in local social structures (Kleemans, 2014). They build extensive networks in communities, ensuring cooperation by simultaneously fostering trust and fear among residents and businesses.

We focus on the nature of the social capital that different groups nurture and exploit in Rome. For Southern groups, social networks tend to be more extensive and diversified than in their areas of territorial control (Sciarrone, 1998), drawing in Roman actors who can benefit economically from the groups' capacity to distort markets (Varese, 2011). For more recent, locally grown mafias, there is a need to build a brand identity to ensure that their members are recognized in the population through their language and demeanor, becoming a feature of local life. In many cases, though, this brand visibility is built through *imitation*, whereby local groups "pattern their conduct and organization after the traditional mafias" (Sciarrone & Storti, 2014, 46). The consensus they build is

certainly intimidatory, but it must also be maintained through positive social capital: establishing a perception that they are a governance force, able to provide jobs and welfare. Just like coercion and consensus are two sides of the same coin, so are legal and illegal activities; not antagonistic but rather collaborative and reciprocal (Van de Bunt et al., 2014; Ciconte et al., 2012).

PAST LEGACIES IN TODAY'S CRIMINAL LANDSCAPES

Before focusing on Rome's contemporary criminal geographies, we briefly unpack some elements of a criminal history that continues to play a role in the city. As Ciconte outlines (2021), Rome has attracted criminal actors since it became the national capital in 1871. The city's massive growth in the post–Second World War period coincided with an intense rise in wealth and power first in Sicily's Cosa Nostra and later the Neapolitan Camorra groups. Not only did the capital offer opportunities for reinvestment of criminal profits, it was also the obvious environment for nurturing the political alliances whereby mafias exchanged packages of votes for public institutional acquiescence or support. Moreover, from the 1970s, Rome became a thriving hub of drug consumption (Ciconte, 2021). Both elements motivated some Cosa Nostra and Camorra individuals to become permanently present in the capital from then onwards. There they built alliances with what emerged as Rome's first citywide organized crime group: the Banda della Magliana (BDM). The organization brought together previously separate neighborhood gangs and soon dominated its drug markets (Capaldo, 2013). It served as the lynchpin connecting the Cosa Nostra and Camorra drug wholesalers to the retail level in the working-class neighborhoods where its members had their extensive social capital (especially Trastevere, Testaccio, and Magliana). At the same time, its far-reaching political contacts enabled it to be present in elite environments. It thus traversed the city's social classes and its spatial geographies. Although the BDM was largely destroyed in the mid-1990s thanks to internal conflicts and a heavy judicial campaign against it (CPA, 2011), it has left some traces in the city's criminal fabric. Mafia Capitale's leader, Carminati, for example had maintained contacts with some of the Banda's former members and used his historical association

with the notorious group to build his intimidatory reputation. Some local groups still active today also have roots in the Banda, while various contemporary Camorra members first entered the city through alliances with its former members (CPA, 2011; Del Rosso, 2015).

ROME'S ORIGINALLY SOUTHERN MAFIAS

'Ndrangheta, Camorra, and Cosa Nostra all have active interests in the capital today, although they differ in how they use the city and how much is known about them. Historians have traced the presence of Cosa Nostra members in Rome especially between the end of the Second World War and the early 1990s (Ciconte, 2021). Since then, the organization has been operating more covertly and has tended to focus on infiltrating legal sectors (Osservatorio, 2022). Three segments of Rome's economy have proven particularly attractive: restaurants and bars, the wholesale fish trade, and legal betting. Scholars widely consider these to be among the most appealing areas of mafia investment (Ciconte et al., 2012; Eurispes, 2019; Sciarrone et al., 2023). They generate a fast and often cash-based turnover, making it easy to falsify accounts for money-laundering purposes. At the same time, they are low-tech and operate through tight social ties that are personal and trust-based. Investigations indicate that Cosa Nostra has recently invested in restaurants and bars primarily in Testaccio and Trastevere: two neighborhoods that have seen intensive gentrification and have become lucrative nightlife hubs. Thus, the organization generally avoids territorial visibility in Rome, adopting it as a safer destination for its wealth than Sicilian firms more subject to investigative scrutiny.

The 'Ndrangheta seems to operate in a similar way, although on a larger scale, with more criminal families involved and wider webs of relations in the urban economy (DIA, 2022). On the one hand, numerous investigations have shown that the organization invests in restaurants, food shops (*La Stampa*, 2022; RAI, 2023a), real estate, and many other legal businesses, using straw men and collusive professionals in the gray area to manage their finances.[3] On the other hand, it is a core wholesale supplier of drugs, working with the many criminal groupings that sell the product in Rome's neighborhoods and hinterland (Nicolini, 2023a). Its drug interests are such that it also controls some major drug-dealing

hubs, especially in the northern and eastern parts of the city (Marani, 2019; Tata, 2022; Di Corrado & Mozzetti, 2023). Consequently, unlike Cosa Nostra, various Calabrian clans have established an embedded presence in Rome. Recent events suggest that in some cases this is becoming even more pronounced, with at least one grouping (Alvaro-Carzo) taking on a more explicitly Roman status. In 2022, investigators identified what they consider an autonomous, Roman chapter (*locale*) of the 'Ndrangheta, in existence since 2015, with many of its activities centered in the beach towns south of Rome, as well as in its peripheries (RAI, 2023b). Its members employ the same rites and rituals, terminology and intimidation tactics cultivated in their Calabrian territories, in ways that were previously avoided in the capital. Prosecutors view this as an unprecedented attempt to *colonize* the capital by fusing the group's entrepreneurial interests in Rome's legal economy with the enhanced intimidatory capacity of high-ranking actors directly from Calabria (Calò, 2024). Police wiretaps confirm that they have forged alliances with numerous other crime groups; local ones as well as Camorra and Cosa Nostra (ibid.).

One of the realities members of the 'Ndrangheta need to contend with is the presence of Camorra clans that have been rooted in Rome since long before the 'Ndrangheta began targeting its economy. Camorra members began moving into the capital during a major clan war in Naples in the late 1970s. Some were already collaborating with the Banda della Magliana, supplying them with drugs but also using those contacts to penetrate legal sectors, especially the booming housing market (Clough Marinaro & Borselli, 2019). From the 1980s onwards, various clans expanded further. Some—like the Contini family—focused on infiltrating legal businesses: shopping malls, supermarkets, and other food-related activities (Scafetta, 2013).[4] Others have become fully fledged power syndicates, visibly dominating street crime through drug dealing, illegal gambling, and extortion. The most formidable of these is the Moccia/Senese alliance which has managed to achieve both types of presence in this competitive environment. The Moccia family are a major criminal force in Naples (Brancaccio, 2017), although various members now live between there and Rome. Their extreme wealth has implicated them in numerous investments in Rome's legal economy, especially high-quality restaurants in the historic center (Fagnani, 2021; *Roma Today*, 2023), and they appear

to also be expanding their drug-dealing interests into central areas (DIA, 2022). This suggests they are diversifying beyond their stronghold in the eastern district of Tor Bella Monaca, where they are very visibly present not only through their drug dealers but also through allegedly buying up failing shops and bars and controlling part of the public housing stock (Marceca, 2021; Cifelli, 2021). Recently, some members have asserted their local strength through public gun violence, against which few locals have been willing to testify (Nicolini, 2022). One boss also ostentatiously drove past the home of an anti-mafia activist on his release from prison (Nicolini, 2023b). Such behaviors arguably serve to signal their territorial power in a neighborhood believed to be home to eleven separate drug-dealing organizations (RAI, 2023c).

One of the original Moccia clan members to move to Rome in the early 1980s, Michele Senese, has built an autonomous organization that is widely defined as a "Roman Camorra": a fusion of Camorra methods and brand reputation with resources developed locally and calibrated to the city's norms and criminal boundaries (Clough Marinaro & Borselli, 2019). Senese's group long coordinated much of the urban drug market and played a historically key role in mediating peace between other mafias. It also established a power syndicate role across much of eastern Rome through extortion and loansharking. Although Senese is now incarcerated, his group continues to be violently present, with other Camorra actors taking up part of his dominion in the Tor Bella Monaca drug markets, as well as the Tuscolana neighborhood. Nevertheless, his absence has also opened up space for other groups in the large and densely populated southeast quadrant of Rome, where they have to compete with a powerful home-grown rival: the Casamonica clan.

ROME'S HOME-GROWN MAFIAS: CASAMONICA AND SPADA CLANS

By early 2024, three of Rome's local criminal organizations had been declared fully fledged mafia-type associations due to their use of violence, intimidation, and territorial control: the Fasciani and Spada families based in the seaside neighborhood of Ostia and the Casamonica clan operating across much of southeast Rome (Quadraro, Porta Furba, Romanina, and

Tuscolana). The latter two families are closely intertwined through kinship, using strategic marriages to maintain the traditions of their Roma lineage. In fact, their arrival occurred simultaneously when a married couple—one a Spada and the other a Casamonica—moved to Rome in 1939, followed by other relatives. Spada family members initially operated as violent enforcers for the Fasciani clan who dominated Ostia's drug, extortion, and loansharking market from the 1970s, with close alliances to the Camorra (Martone, 2017). However, as the Spadas became more established, they started challenging the Fasciani and eventually took over territorial control (Ciconte, 2021). The Casamonica instead built a reputation for extreme violence in southeastern neighborhoods. The presence of their opulent villas and their visibility in the streets, especially in Romanina, have contributed to their notoriety and social power.

As various interviewees underlined:

> [Both groups] adopted the mafia model from the traditional mafias. [...] Even though the territories they occupy are somehow small, they have the control. (Anti-mafia prosecutor)
>
> [T]here are areas that are completely, totally controlled. Examples are Romanina, Tor Bella Monaca, San Basilio, some parts of Ostia. There are whole neighborhoods with tens of thousands of residents that live under mafia influence like you would find in Ballarò, in Palermo. Even more than in Reggio Calabria. (President of civil society organization)
>
> They manage the neighborhood as if they were governors, everything must go through them. Anyone who wants to do something in their neighborhood must ask them for permission. Or pay a fee, or just do whatever they say. (Police investigator)

Despite their clear territorial presence and legal definition as mafia-type associations, the Casamonica and Spada clans are widely underestimated by Rome residents and authorities (Libera, 2020; DaSud, 2020), seen primarily in terms of their ethnic minority status or considered a folkloristic feature of a few underprivileged neighborhoods (Trocchia, 2019). This has weakened the fight against them in two ways. First, it has meant that judicial action has come relatively late,[5] long after their organizational structure and illegal activities were first uncovered. Second, it

has prevented institutional recognition that they are a social phenomenon that responds to structural needs in the population. Thus, public policy has remained largely unaffected by their exposure.

Both groups operate through explicit violence. For example, members have been arrested for attacking journalists investigating their criminal activities; in one case, the assault was filmed and made national headlines.[6] In April 2018, two Casamonica members destroyed a bar in Romanina and beat up the barmen when they were not served immediately. They reportedly left the shop shouting "we are the bosses here, either you do what we tell you or we will kill you!" (Vincenzi, 2019). These are just two emblematic examples of both groups' performative use of violence, which serves to ensure that they are publicly recognized and feared, and their territorial governance affirmed. This geographical ownership is continuously reinforced. For example, interviewees living in Quadraro have repeatedly witnessed clan members committing small deviant acts, such as double parking or cutting the line in shops. When someone tries to confront them, they are threatened with a set of intimidating phrases: "You don't know who I am," "Stop it or I'll kill you and your family."

In those neighborhoods, there are distinct locations—bars, shops, gyms—where members meet and make their presence visible. The reputational capital they thereby build ensures *omertà*: witnesses often refuse to come forward or change their testimonies once in court. One prosecutor told us:

> During both the Spada and the Fasciani trials, there were no police reports against them [...] during the trials, victims were terrified to the point that when we confronted them with wiretap recordings of them being exploited or threatened, they would deny that was their own voice. They would deny the obvious. (Anti-Mafia Prosecutor)

It should be underlined here that not all residents of these large geographical areas feel the presence of these mafias. Indeed, civil society groups are pushing back against the media's frequent and automatic equation of their districts with crime (Libera, 2023). However, small businesses are particularly at risk of being targeted, as the organizations seek to extort them or trap them into corrosive debt relations. While such

crimes are not as lucrative as drug trades and legal investments, they economically tie neighborhood actors to the mafias, often long-term (Clough Marinaro, 2022). Extortion can go beyond demanding monthly payment of a protection fee to include a set of imposed services: "it is more like a request. If you want to add slot machines inside your bar, you must put mine. If you want to renovate the shop, I'll give you the materials. If you need to hire new employees, you must hire my affiliates" (Interview, mafia researcher). This way, the mafias can supervise and manipulate neighborhood economic affairs. Failure to fulfill these requests may be punished through arson and assault, or the acquisition of the business itself (Osservatorio, 2022).

Violence and intimidation are, however, often not enough to ensure territorial control. To secure long-lasting results, mafias must create social consensus by offering services and a welfare system that fills the gaps left by the state and other actors. Among Roman mafias, this translates into taking care of public gardens, resolving disputes among citizens, providing security in the neighborhood (Osservatorio, 2022). It also involves offering jobs—often as drug dealers—and providing financial support to members and stipends to the families of those arrested, just like traditional mafias do (Meli, 2018). This welfare role was at its most evident during the Covid-related lockdowns, when thousands of small business-owners and undeclared workers suddenly found themselves without their income sources and with little state support.[7] The pandemic worsened social inequalities, affecting low-wage workers the most (Carta & De Philippis, 2021). While wealthier individuals relied on savings to stay afloat, government financial support to those hardest hit was often slow and insufficient. Thus, while Italian mafias flourished (GI-TOC, 2020), residents of Rome's peripheries—such as those dominated by the Spada and Casamonica clans—struggled. As one of our interviewees put it, "Times of crisis give mafia groups an added value because, unlike the other entrepreneurs, they have money" (Police investigator). The two groups' great liquidity allowed them to provide immediate relief in the form of food parcels and medical supplies, and longer-term aid through loans or by buying up failing firms cheaply. In doing so, they advanced their social capital by presenting themselves as the protectors of their neighborhoods.

The Spada have been particularly effective in providing multiple services to Ostia residents. They bridge the underprivileged conditions of this institutionally marginalized district with its thriving seaside economy (Martone, 2018). The extent of their professional relationships with the city's administrative and entrepreneurial classes have been such that the municipal government of Ostia was placed under special administration between 2015 and 2017 for mafia infiltration. They also manage the racketing of public housing, obtaining apartments through fake titleholders and allocating them to affiliates, frequently forcing the legitimate inhabitants out (Imperitura, 2014; Martone, 2017). By interfering in the legal economy and the fair distribution of social services, they thus create a need for the very services that they then offer to those who become loyal to them.

A particular way the Spada family has built social capital is through sport. A boss and his wife owned a gym for over twenty years—Femus Boxe—where they taught boxing and dance. Many youths and families were allowed to join for free and it became known for social inclusion activities, also attracting people not associated with the clan (Martone, 2017). This investment in social capital was central to the clan's reproduction because it provided the ideal environment for recruiting youth for its illegal activities. A few months after the authorities definitively closed it in 2019, Spada and his wife asserted their territorial control by opening two new sports centers nearby (Angeli, 2017).

A core economic sector for both clans is Rome's lucrative and fast-growing drug market (Mozzetti, 2023). The sales mostly take place in scores of open-air drug markets (*piazze di spaccio*) that function 24/7. Many are in the city's southeastern quadrant and in Ostia, whose strategic position between the Civitavecchia harbor and Fiumicino airport makes it a key entry point for drugs (Meli, 2017). These tend to be highly organized environments, monitored by lookouts and even drones (Interview, Police investigator; Osservatorio, 2022), in which each actor has strictly defined tasks. The spaces are often set up to obstruct police access—such as using flowerpots as barriers to cars—and instructions relayed through graffiti (CROSS, 2021). Drawing on recent judicial reports, Rome's media outlets have developed maps to illustrate how the city's drug market is geographically shared out among criminal groups.[8] These clearly display

how multiple groups—Southern, local, and foreign—cohabit and cooperate in a stable way in many neighborhoods. Investigators in fact assume that the groups have reached explicit agreements to avoid conflict and maximize efficiency. As one interviewee put it:

> When are [criminal] organizations truly powerful? When they manage to create a relationship based on reciprocal criminal aid, when they back each other up. There will clearly be some that are doing better and others that are doing worse, but if they can all come to an agreement, then survival is guaranteed. (Police investigator)

While it is generally assumed that 'Ndrangheta are the main drug wholesalers, followed by Camorra and some foreign groups, the separation between the wholesale and retail sectors is not always clear-cut. Indeed, Rome's groups have begun to extend their tentacles up the supply chain. In 2018, for example, a police investigation discovered a Casamonica member working with other Roman groups to finalize a deal whereby Colombian traffickers would supply 7000 kilos of cocaine annually from Brazil (Interviews: Mafia researcher; Police investigator; CROSS, 2021). The Casamonica intended to manage the logistics and sell the drugs to 'Ndrangheta and Camorra groups in the city, upturning established dynamics.

CONCLUSION: ROME'S STRUCTURAL VULNERABILITIES

The discussion so far has outlined how different groups strategically use the city, adopting varying degrees of visibility/invisibility and territorial control, depending on their interests and resources. Their decision-making is partly driven by the shifting internal dynamics and objectives of the groups themselves. Nevertheless, they also operate within and adapt to a range of contextual opportunity structures that Rome offers. Various patterns in the behaviors traced above help shed light on the vulnerabilities that make the city so appealing to many criminal actors.

Most obviously, as the capital, it is where political, institutional, logistic, and business flows intersect:

> Rome is the point of convergence of an unlimited number of interests. It is the capital of Italy, but it is also the city where a lot of organizations meet, even on a global level [...] Criminals just inserted themselves in this context by saying 'since the city is well suited for licit meetings and arrangements, we can also make it work for our needs' [...] they look for reference points, such as important institutional and economic environments. (President of civil society organization)

Rome's sheer geographical and population size fosters anonymity and facilitates disguising criminal financial flows within the larger economy. Yet many of its neighborhoods can be viewed as distinct villages within the metropolis, where community life and social networks continue to thrive despite the city's global status (Scarpelli, 2018). In the case of many peripheral, low-income neighborhoods, spatial disconnections from the centers of power are compounded by a history of institutional neglect and under-investment. Indeed, Rome is a highly fragmented and heterogeneous social mosaic, marked by intense inequalities of wealth and access to institutional resources. As Chapter 1 of this volume clearly shows, the city's main population growth of the last thirty years has occurred in car-dependent and underprivileged areas. Other maps by the same authors (Lelo et al., 2021a) bear a striking similarity to media-produced ones on organized crime's spatial presence. For example, Tor Bella Monaca, with its intense competition over drug-dealing hubs, is also the poorest neighborhood in the city. The eastern areas and Ostia—where mafias particularly make their existence felt territorially—are also the segments of the city with the lowest incomes and human development index (Lelo et al., 2019; 2021b).

This does not mean that poverty necessarily breeds crime. In fact, this chapter shows that great wealth can too, confirming that "it is a mistake to think that mafia-type organizations are confined only within 'marginalized areas' and are symptoms that can only be associated with poverty and unemployment" (De Leo, 2017, 217). The locations in which mafias invest in Rome's legal economy to launder and multiply their profits are primarily in the financially dynamic historic center and nearby gentrifying neighborhoods. However, the areas in which poverty

is concentrated—the "city of hardship" (Chapter 1)—are the ones that have been historically deprived of legitimate institutional resources. It is that void in territorial governance that mafias can fill with their own resources, financial but also social. Indeed, the mafia's speed of response to low-income residents' needs during the Covid-related lockdowns, in contrast to the state's slow and patchy distribution of aid, expanded a welfare role that was already rooted in some areas. Mafia loans, protection, and the ability to mete "justice" through resolving local conflicts then create dependency and indebtedness that further strengthens their ability to exert economic and social control.

Another structural vulnerability of Rome's economy is the size of its services sector (which constitutes 65.6% of registered companies) and ever-growing tourist industry (CCR, 2024). Small companies—sole-proprietor and partnership firms—make up 45.2% of its businesses (ibid.). Thus, it offers a high concentration of companies that have little global competition and financial oversight, as well as a fast and often cash-based turnover. It also has a lucrative real estate market, which offers high potential profits, as well as a rich supply of brokers, lawyers, bankers, and accountants potentially able to join the gray zone of collusion. Among other attractive elements are firms that are low-innovation, low-tech, and do not require particular training and skills from their employees, but are labor-intensive (Riccardi et al., 2018; Sciarrone, 2021). The food services sectors in which we have seen mafias invest offer precisely these features, which also enable them to expand their social capital by offering jobs in the legal economy to members of the community. Because of the high proportion of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), Rome's often undercapitalized entrepreneurs were also heavily hit by the economic crisis brought on by the pandemic, generating opportunities for mafias to buy up struggling firms at low cost. Such SMEs thus enable mafias to develop a capillary presence across the city which, with time, can foster social embeddedness.

A final element of attraction is an enduring sense of mistrust toward public institutions and the political establishment, especially in the traditionally neglected peripheries (De Masi, 2019). On one hand, that mistrust is fostered by widely known political corruption cases (such as Mafia Capitale); on the other, it is actively nurtured by the mafias, often by

intercepting public resources to then create demand for their own services. Mafias thrive where they can successfully compete with the state and civil society for territorial recognition and control. One positive development in Rome in recent years has been the growing visibility of anti-mafia initiatives by the state and grassroots associations. Lazio is one of the regions with the highest number of assets confiscated from mafias and Rome represents the lion's share of those (Riccardi et al., 2018).[9] Many of these have been allocated to projects for the collective good, such as sports and cultural centers. The rise in judicial attention, thanks to the work of a dynamic group of public prosecutors in the last decade, sends a message that mafias can be weeded out and structurally undermined. The fact that no mafia has become hegemonic and that their geographic control is patchy is a weakness that civil society groups and the state can exploit by making their own territorial presence more visible. As the other chapters in this volume demonstrate, Rome has a flourishing civic life, where residents and associations mobilize to reduce socioeconomic need and compensate for some of the city's governance voids. This capacity, however, needs to be actively encouraged and supported by local government through investments and network-building aiming to tackle the core inequalities in income and access to resources and social mobility that still plague the capital.

This chapter has shown that criminal activities cannot be separated from the social and economic environment in which they operate and whose opportunities and obstacles they respond to. Nevertheless, many of the developments traced here in relation to Rome are also symptomatic of the changing nature of organized crime internationally. As Holmes (2024) points out, many OCGs around the world are moving away from hierarchical structures and long-term memberships, embracing much more fluid and networked strategies. This involves a blurring of boundaries between different groupings and territories—producing alliances and tensions that move at much greater speed than before—as well as increased merging of legal and illegal businesses and actors. The case of Rome thus responds to growing calls for empirical data that bridges the unique urban contexts in which criminal groups are embedded with the powerful forces that influence activities at the national and transnational levels.

NOTES

1. The law also defines two specific sub-categories: drug trafficking groups (Law 309/1990, Art. 74) and human trafficking ones (Art. 416, para 6, C.P.).
2. "Mafia-type unlawful association is said to exist when the participants take advantage of the intimidating power of the association and of the resulting conditions of submission and silence to commit criminal offences, to manage or in any way control, either directly or indirectly, economic activities, concessions, authorizations, public contracts and services, or to obtain unlawful profits or advantages for themselves or for any other persons, or with a view to prevent or limit the freedom to vote, or to get votes for themselves or for other persons on the occasion of an election" (Art. 416-bis, translation in Turone, 2007, 54).
3. A study of assets confiscated from mafias in Lazio reveals that 'Ndrangheta has invested in a much wider array of business sectors than Camorra, among them information technology, insurance, and entertainment companies (Riccardi et al., 2018).
4. Assets confiscated from Camorra in Lazio are divided between the following sectors: 46.3% restaurants, 12.2% bars, 9.8% real estate, 7.3% construction, 3.7% storage and transportation, 3.7% retail (Riccardi et al., 2018).
5. The Supreme Court of Cassation confirmed Spada members as a mafia association in July 2023 and Casamonica in January 2024.
6. Roberto Spada's attack on a TV crew in November 2017 (*Roma Today*, 2017) was interpreted by judges as use of mafia method. The following year, four Casamonica members assaulted another TV crew in July 2018 (Riccio, 2023).
7. 2.2 million Italian companies suspended their activities and many were later forced to close down permanently (Auriemma & Iannaccone, 2020; Orlando & Rodano, 2022). In Rome, for example, about 30% of shops in Borgo Pio, near the Vatican, were unable to reopen once the tourists returned (Trapani & Cavaliere, 2020).
8. See, for example, Marani (2019) and Di Corrado and Mozzetti (2023).
9. See also https://www.confiscatibene.it/mappa

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