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The Mafia Power Between Hierarchy And Social Relations

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Abstract

The type of power that comes immediately to mind when studying the Mafia is the formal power, which derives from the hierarchical distribution of roles. Actually, leadership within the mafia organization can be understood in different ways and take on different meanings.

In fact, there is another type of power, equally important, that derives from the position that a subject occupies within the criminal relational system, which allows some affiliates to gain a certain advantage over others, thanks to which they can influence or determine the condition of others.

For these reasons it is proposed to investigate, through the methodological tools offered by Social Network Analysis, the manifestation of this second type of power within the clans of 'Ndrangheta – thanks to a similar relational data processing, in fact, it is possible to understand which nodes acquire greater relevance in the network or in part of it and, therefore, acquire greater relational power. The analytical objective is to individuate any difference or overlap between the power deriving from hierarchical positions and the power deriving from relational positions of affiliates.

Keywords: Mafia, power, Social Network Analysis

INTRODUTION

Generally, when we think of the power within the mafia groups, we immediately refer to *formal power*, that is the power that derives from the hierarchical position assigned to the affiliates through specific rituals. This form of power manifests itself in the relationship between the leaders of the clan and the affiliates of lower rank. This type of power presupposes an obedience born of the sharing of commonly recognized and accepted values and, therefore, perceived as a legitimate norm that the affiliates, in a certain sense, decide to respect.

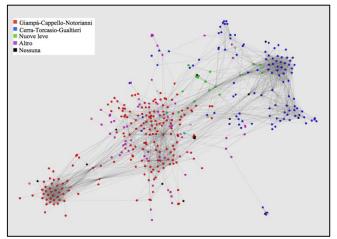
But there is a second type of power defined by the position that the subject covers within the relational system. We can define it as *relational* or *positional power* because it shows itself when a subject, thanks to his position within the relational network, gains an advantage over others - for example, the possibility of acquiring specific information or resources – and, for this reason, can influence the condition of others.

With these premises, the objective of this work is to analyze, through the tools of Social Network Analysis, the way in which the formal power and the relational power are combined within the mafia clans. Specifically, I propose the study of the Mafia relational network that dominates Lamezia Terme (a Calabrian city in the Catanzaro province) for many years witnessed a bloody family feud between two clans.

The reading of several court documents has allowed the reconstruction of the mafia network active between 2008, the year in which the boss of the main clan takes power, and 2012, the year in which the same boss decides to collaborate with justice.

This network is defined by the presence of three groups: the Giampà-Cappello-Notorianni clan composed of 49% of the subjects (the red nodes); the Cerra-Torcasio-Gualtieri clan composed of 26% of the subjects (the blue nodes); and, in a median position between the two rival clans, the Nuove leve (new blood) group composed of about 4% of the subjects (the green nodes).

This last group was born in a context of a temporary agreement between two leaders of the opposing clans, who authorize the formation of this semi-independent group composed of a few young affiliates of the two clans.



Graph 1: The mafia network of Lamezia Terme

THE FORMAL POWER IN THE CLANS OF LAMEZIA TERME

The 'ndrine – the Calabrian mafia clan – are well-structured groups from the hierarchical point of view, with defined roles and tasks and a high consideration of the chain of command. The power is formally defined with the writing of detailed codes that establish precise rules and a precise hierarchical order.

The Calabrian mafia «in a very modern and difficult balance between centralism of rules and rituals and decentralization of ordinary illicit activities» (Crime Judgment, p.37), presents itself as «a pyramid-like federative structure» that distributes power in a different way at the territorial level and at

the family level: in this hybrid organization of power, the tendency of democracy and independence adopted at an inter-organizational level, therefore, is accompanied by greater verticalization and interdependence at the level of the individual clans.

Also the clans of Lamezia Terme respect a specific distribution of formal power, only partially equal in the two clans.

The similarities between the two clans consist in the presence of a *capo società* (senior boss) and of a *commission*, that is, a collegiate body composed of five members who take the most important decisions and organize the distribution of the activities. Moreover, both clans are formed by the alliance of three biological families, among which ad hoc blood ties have been created, in order to symbolically reinforce these alliances. However, the distribution of power within the two command groups is different.

The Giampà-Cappello-Notorianni clan is headed by a senior boss, who directs the group from prison by sending directives and messages through some family members authorized to meet him. After his arrest, he is supported in the operations of command by the son, who assumes the effective command of the group, acquiring the role of *boss in carica* (operative boss). Moreover, the operative boss is the main member of the commission, composed of four other subjects mostly related to the two bosses. Among these we also find the heads of families of Notorianni and Cappello families, absorbed by the most important Giampà clan.

Unlike the first, the Cerra-Torcasio-Gualtieri clan has a more oligarchic organization, in which the *commission* acquires the dominant role and it is more difficult to identify a subject that holds more power than the others. So, the decisions are taken collegially by members of the *commission* composed of three members of the Torcasio family and two members of the Gualtieri family. There is a senior boss, the oldest member of the Cerra family, but his decision-making power has been reduced over the years, becoming an intense form of respect by acolytes rather than remaining a real power.

Another interesting element of the hierarchical organization of this clan is the presence of a charismatic woman, related to all the members of the commission. She acts as a glue among families and holds a sort of unofficial power. The woman's unique command situation is generated by a combination of charisma and affectivity in relationships with the members of the commission.

THE RELATIONAL POWER IN THE CLANS OF LAMEZIA TERME

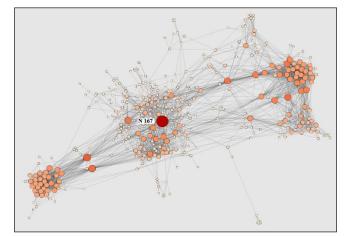
The leadership within a mafia group, however, emphasizes Scaglione, «is not resolved through the definition of precise rules and formal procedures for the recognition of legitimacy to govern» (2011, 166).

In fact, as mentioned above, there is another type of power that derives from the position occupied by subject in the relational system.

The study of the position of the nodes is a useful tool when one wants to analyze the dynamics and the distribution of social capital within the networks: «identifying the location of the individual nodes – explains Lin – allows to ascertain how much the node is closed or far from a strategic position, like a *bridge*, where the occupant has a competitive advantage for a possible access to more diversified and precious information. [...]In this approach, the idea that network location is a key element for identifying social capital is implicit» (2005, p. 33). The premise the bases of this perspective, explains Burt (2005), is that better connected subjects enjoy greater benefits.

In order to identify strategic roles and positions within a network, the concept of centrality allows us to distinguish important subjects from marginal subjects in the network: «in sociological terms - Castiello emphasizes – the analysis of centrality concerns power, pre-eminence and subalternity, domination, dependence, influence or prestige of the actors» (2015, p. 106). For this reasons, the analytical objective is to investigate the possible overlap between formal power and positional power: the intention is to identify the VIPs of the network, that is, important nodes that hold both types of power.

Starting from the *degree centrality*, which consists in counting the number of direct connections (the degree) held by the subjects in the network, we see, therefore, which are the most popular subjects renamed *stars* of the network.



Graph 2: The distribution of degree centrality

Among the ten subjects with the highest rank there are exponents of all the relevant groups in the territory: six of these hold positions of command formally recognized – in fact, there are two members of both the commissions and two leaders of the Nuove Leve group; the remaining four subjects present equally interesting profiles because they are recognizable, in a certain sense, as supporting subjects of the union among the different families. For this reason, even if they do not play a formal role, they assume importance from the symbolic point of view. In fact, they are wives and/or relatives of members of the two commissions and with their conjugal status maintain the alliance respectively between the Giampà-Notorianni families and Torcasio-Gualtieri families.

With 107 direct relations (about 4% of all network reports), N167, that is the operative boss of the Giampà family. Reading overall the degree centrality scores, we can see that the separation of the scores between one node and another is always very low and the values gradually decrease. This element is important because indicates that N167 is not simply the most popular of the nodes but is by far the most popular, a notation that allows us to recognize him as a potential *structural center* of the graph. As we said, in addition, the successive degree scores follow a progressive trend and there are no further fractures in their distribution, to indicate a sort of border that separates the central node from the others.

These indications are useful for evaluating the level of centralization of the entire organization: the Mafia groups of Lamezia Terme act in a network that, although it tends to develop around a single fulcrum, is not defined as a strongly centralized network – on the other hand, thinking about the sociological specificity of the network, in a context of intense and declared conflict between two clans it would be strange to get a totally centralized network⁴⁸. The situation is clearer if we observe the graphic representation of the distribution of the degree centrality (graph 2): we can immediately notice the pre-eminence of the most popular subject (the largest red node) and also his spatially central position within the graph, but we can also note that the other popular nodes are distributed in a enough homogeneous way throughout the graph, to indicate only a partial centralization of the network.

Having a good number of direct connections is not the only way to acquire an advantage within a network, there are less evident relational mechanisms that it is useful to investigate in order to fully understand the functioning of a mafia network. For example, those subjects who are a short distance from a number of other nodes occupy a strategic position within the network: these subjects are more likely to interact without intermediaries with different areas of the network. There are nodes, then, that acquire importance and prestige because they have direct contacts with a certain number of popular nodes: in these cases, the advantage consists in using resources and information in a transitive way, therefore, we can say that these subjects acquire a sort of "reflex prestige". Both cases just hypothesized refer to the idea of closeness and can be investigated, the first, with the calculation of the *closeness centrality* and, the second, through the less known index of *eigenvector centrality*.

⁴⁸ Here we leave out the discussion on the different techniques to identify the degree of centralization of a graph, that is the measure of the level in which the cohesion of a graph is organized around specific fulcra (about the concepts of centralization and structural center see Scott 1991).

Most of subjects with the highest value of closeness centrality are important members of the Giampà-Cappello-Notorianni clan, that is, of the dominant clan. This aspect underlines the importance of the strategic positioning of the subjects in the network for the purpose of acquiring more power on the territory and, consequently, the importance of the study of the mafia networks through the tools of social network analysis.

The subjects with the highest values of eigenvector centrality are all members of the Cerra-Torcasio-Gualtieri clan and most of them are related women with different members of commission. So, these women acquire prestige thanks to the proximity to husbands and brothers important from the reticular and hierarchical point of view. This probably depends on the greater number of family ties present in this clan and on a different role of the woman within it.

This data highlights the relational role of women in similar contexts: the fact that there are few women *popular* or *strategically positioned* within the network, but many women who enjoy a *reflex prestige*, demonstrates the important but hidden role of women within the mafia organization. This role is realized in the care and communication activities carried out by women within the family and criminal context.

The last measure of centrality calculated is the *betweenness centrality*, elaborated around the concept of "local dependence": «one point is dependent on another if the paths that connect it to other points pass through it» (Scott 1991, p 128). In this sense, a node placed on the shortest path connecting pairs of other nodes exercises a control of the relations in which it interposes – for this reason the betweenness centrality is known as centrality based on the role of broker. This brokerage function produces a number of advantages in terms of controlling the relationships (Freeman 1979; Burt 2000), because they can influence the information flows, deciding on the transmission or not of a message (he can decide to exclude a subject from communication) or distorting or manipulating the message.

The mafia network of Lamezia Terme presents a single node with a relevant value of betweenness centrality: we speak again of the operative boss of the Giampà clan (N167). Around the time that he managed the *family business*, he has always personally managed the illicit activities more or less important, delegating only a few trusted affiliates and splitting the main business sectors with the other members of the commission. Its supremacy within the network is certainly an effect of these organizational choices.

This data is interesting if we think that for a long time the Mafia has been considered as an organization in which there is the rule of a strict compartmentalization which, in a certain sense, relegates leaders out of frequent relational practices.

CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

The data showed a *partial* overlap between formal power and relational power: the four subjects that reach the highest values in all the measures of centrality are all placed in the highest ranks of the mafia hierarchy, but not all top managers occupy relevant network positions.

Actually, this partial overlap could be a strategy adopted by the clans to give elasticity to their organizational structure and to ensure greater resistance to external attacks: in fact, the formally important members who are less visible in the network are also less exposed to investigative activity; so, they can replace other prominent members in case of arrest.

This *easy replacement* allows a rapid reorganization of the clan, which will be weakened but with more difficulty neutralized.

OFFICIALS SOURCES: COURT DOCUMENTS

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