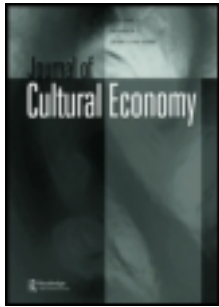


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## REVIEW ARTICLE

# 'TONY SOPRANO ON MANAGEMENT'

## The Mafia and organizational excellence

**Martin Parker**

Behind every great fortune, there is a crime. (Balzac, epigraph from Mario Puzo's best-selling novel *The Godfather* 1969)

### Introduction

When the Mafia is compared with a business organization, it is often with a certain amount of hesitancy. The commentator makes the 'analogy' but then withdraws into moralizing, leaving 'real' business and the evil Mafia clearly separated. Of course, if the analogical status of a statement becomes forgotten, it might mistakenly be taken to be a fact, and then where would we be? Such confusions will clearly stand in the way of serious analysis. Because when the serious analysis is done, we might find that the Mafia is actually rather a conventional business organization.

This article uses a variety of cultural sources in order to advance a few claims. One is that the Mafia is a business organization, and that it is an organization that articulates a version of labour that appears to be widely admired. Unlike virtually every other private sector organization, the US Mafia has been widely celebrated in popular culture since the 1970s.<sup>1</sup> Its combination of work and leisure, a varied set of engaging tasks, intense belonging, charismatic leadership, great food, high pay and violence has much to teach the aspirant manager. But in order to understand something about the nature of the market that the Mafia operates in, I also need to make some claims about its major competitor, the state. The Mafia is an organization that trades in violence. This presents a problem, because it is the state that normally claims a legitimate monopoly on violence to further its interests, many of which are commercial too. Finally, I want to comment on the romance of the Mafia in the context of contemporary managerialism. There have been many attempts to enchant the economic, and using the cultural is a common strategy which suggests that we might learn rather a lot about capitalism by taking books like *Tony Soprano on Management* (Schneider 2004) seriously.

The attentive reader will quickly notice that I am extraordinarily careless with my sources, treating film dialogue, ghost written biography and a variety of historical accounts (based on sources of varying reliability) as if they were the all the same. Mixing these diverse ingredients with my own speculations hardly seems a methodologically rigorous way of representing my subject matter. But cultural representations and economic practices are blurred in some very odd ways here already. The distinction between representations of gangsters, and gangsters themselves, has never been very

clear. John McCarty's compendious book on gangsters in film (2004) documents well over a thousand films made between 1915 and 2003, a huge list of images of wise guys on mean streets, sharp dressers with unpredictable tempers. Even then, we can go back earlier, perhaps to D.W. Griffiths (1912) *The Musketeers of Pig Alley*, in which the underworld of New York was described in the colourful terms later popularized by Herbert Asbury in his chronicle *The Gangs of New York* (2002[1927]).

Paralleling this parade of culture are endless stories about the ways in which gangsters would imitate the models of urban masculinity they saw on the screen, and screen actors would 'research' what the gangs did in order to provide realism to their acting. For example, Joe Browne, who starred in several silent films, was a gangster and friend of Capone. Or 'Crazy Joe' Gallo, a member of the Profaci family in the 1950s, who 'grew up wanting to be like movie gangster George Raft. He would stand on street corners flipping a half dollar and talk without moving his lips. He also affected the black shirt and white tie of Richard Widmark in the film *Kiss of Death*' (Balsamo & Carpozi 1997, p. 371). Indeed, Raft (himself an ex-hood) claimed that gangster movies taught gangsters how to speak. These boys were often infatuated by stardom, it being another version of respect that a man of honour might understand. 'Lucky' Luciano always felt his story was destined for the movies, and his point man in Hollywood, 'Bugsy' Siegal, used to hang around with George Raft, Gary Cooper, Cary Grant and others. Bugsy even had a screen test at one point, but then dropped the idea and had glossy signed photographs made up instead (McCarty 2004, p. 242).

So when Mario Puzo's book *The Godfather* came out in 1969, it was building on a long tradition of well-researched fictional representations that had a habit of becoming facts. Some Mafiosi resented, or claimed to resent, these slurs on ordinary hard working law abiding Italian Americans. Jo Columbo, then the leader of the Profaci family, began the 'Italian-American Civil Rights League'. He allegedly got the words 'Mafia' and 'Cosa Nostra' dropped from the script of the *Godfather*, but this did not stop the film and its sequel from being massively influential. As Balsamo and Carpozi put it, from the 1970s onwards 'if your name ended in a vowel, you were in the Mafia' (1997, p. 393). Henry Hill, an ex-Mafioso turned celebrity, wrote that the wiseguys loved it because 'it made them feel big-time . . . It just gave them a sense of empowerment' (2004, p. 40) and that they quickly started to use the words and phrases from the film. For example, shooting someone through the eye (as happened with Bugsy Siegal) became a 'Moe Greene special', after the incident of the same name in *The Godfather*.

But it isn't simply a question of life imitating art, because the boundaries between life and art are simply unclear. For example, Jo Pistone (who spent five years undercover in the mob) thinks that most of the wiseguys read his book when it came out, and most of them quite liked it (Pistone 1987, p. 410). The film *Donnie Brasco* (1997) was written around the book, just as *Goodfellas* was written around Nicholas Pileggi's account of Henry Hill's life in the Mafia, *Wiseguy* (1985). Amazingly, *Wiseguy* was making Hill tens of thousands of dollars in royalties whilst he was still on the witness protection programme. Hill also alleges that Nora Ephron wrote *My Blue Heaven* (1990, with Steve Martin as a New Yorker in the witness protection programme) after talking to Hill because her husband happened to be Nick Pileggi.

In this context, historical truth is a difficult category to deploy, simply because the cultural so rapidly becomes the economic, and vice versa. Real life Mafia stoolies write 'treatments' of real life incidents for Hollywood projects – such as Henry Hill and Sal Polisi's

*Getting Gotti* (Hill 2004, p. 100). Actual incidents such as blowing up restaurants, digging up buried bodies, and so on, are re-written for the screen. Wiretapped conversations comment on the latest episode of *The Sopranos*; the actor who plays Tony Soprano's son is arrested for robbery on the Upper East Side; the actor who plays Paulie Walnuts in *The Sopranos* was arrested twenty eight times and nearly became a made man before becoming an actor (Gabbard 2002, p. 14). Even more bizarrely, Louis Esposito, an ex-policeman turned bit part actor in *Goodfellas*, writes an autobiography called *Mob Cop* that ends up many years later in his imprisonment on charges of murder on behalf of the Gambino family. At the time of writing, a screenplay of his life is planned (Winter 2006). This inter-textuality is beautifully played out in *The Sopranos* itself, where Silvio is often doing speeches from the *Godfather* films, to the general applause of the other mobsters. In one instance he even corrects another character when he gets the dialogue wrong. This character is Christopher Moltisano, a wiseguy who desperately wants his life to have some significance and so he attempts to write a gangster script and unsuccessfully pitches it to a Hollywood executive.

The culture industry and Mafia business operations seem to be very difficult to disentangle. Both will sell pretty much anything for money, but the latter is slightly more modest about its activities. Mafia members who forget *omertà* and sell their stories find themselves outside the organization, and possibly end up with a bullet in the eye. In this regard, it is remarkable that the boundary between legitimate capitalism and organized crime still manages to hold at all. Perhaps, as Rawlinson suggests, it is the very spectacle of the Mafia that gets in the way of the analogy becoming a serious comparison (1998). If the Mafia were more ordinary we would be able to see it as merely another form of capitalism, and *Tony Soprano on Management* as another example of the cultural dimensions of the economic.

### Just Business

TONY: I wanna know why there's zero growth in this family's receipts. You're supposed to be earners. That's why you got the top tier positions. So each one a you go out to your people on the street, crack some fuckin' heads . . . create some fuckin' earners out there. My uncle . . . the boss of this family, is on trial for his life. And what you people are kickin' up there is a fuckin' disgrace. You know how much lawyers cost? A major RICO like his? I'm the only one supportin' him. This thing is a pyramid, since time immemorial. Shit runs downhill, money goes up. It's that simple. I should not have to be comin' here, hat in my hand, remindin' you about your duty to that man. And I don't want to hear about the fuckin' economy either. I don't wanna hear it. Sil, break it down for 'em. What two businesses have traditionally been recession proof since time immemorial?

SILVIO: Certain aspects of show business, and our thing.

TONY: Now that's it. That's all I gotta say. (*The Sopranos* 'For All Debts Public and Private')

So our thing, *cosa nostra*, is both show business and street business. To treat it as either one or the other would be misleading. Tony Soprano's motivational speech could, with a few small modifications, refer to a company that sells or buys anything. Something comes down, and money goes up. But despite the timelessness of the model, there is something very modern in Tony's speech too. He speaks of loyalty and extraordinary

effort, of a form of commitment that (according to some) is a new thing in business (Parker 2009). Before, so the story goes, businesses were slow grey places populated by slow grey people. Now, as we hurtle into the new age of the turbo-global, we need passionate organizations populated by innovative and autonomous intrapreneurs. Move over Tom Peters, here comes Anthony Schneider's *Tony Soprano on Management*.<sup>2</sup>

In an age of economic uncertainty, corporate turmoil, anxiety and downsizing, leaders are being forced to work at warp speed with different methods, new systems and shifting teams . . . Leaders must step up and steer new courses to get companies back on track and regain public confidence. They must adapt to meet the challenges of today's business environments. And Tony Soprano is the surprising role model for this new breed of leader. His methods may appear unconventional, but we can all learn strategies and tactics from the way that he manages people, resolves conflict, negotiates and leads. (Schneider 2004, p. xii)

Schneider's book might do little more than re-brand the self-righteous certainties of the upwardly mobile, but he has hit on an interesting issue. What can the Mafia tell us about organizing? In 1986, according to the President's Commission on Organized Crime, the US Mafia was turning over \$65.7 billion tax free. This made it second only to the oil industry in terms of size (Durdin Smith 2003, p. 202). In Italy in 2005, excluding drugs and arms, the Mafia was estimated to have a revenue of about £61 million a day, roughly the same as Fiat.<sup>3</sup> This is, by conventional measures, a real success story – whether in terms of profitability, number of employees, historical durability, geographical spread, product and service diversification and so on. Balsamo and Carpozi claim that 'today's underworld take refuge in the self-respecting guise of legitimate entrepreneurs; they have ably organized themselves in much the same manner as giant corporations' (1997, p. vii). A corporation which, as Arlacchi puts it, has a three pronged business strategy – discourage competition, hold down wages and ensure that you have liquid capital (1988, p. 89). The Mafia deals, or has dealt, in lemons, security services, trade union arbitration, gambling, entertainment, alcohol, cigarettes, drugs, construction, fuel, laundry services, trucking, restaurant supplies, waste disposal, soft drinks, garment manufacturing, fast food, banking, religious relics, candles and holy objects. Legitimate companies also trade in all of these products and services (perhaps with the exception of certain drugs). Hill suggests that the relationship between the Gambino and the Lucchese families was like a competitive partnership – 'like General Motors and Ford' (2004, p. 100, see also Gambetta 1993, p. 100). The profits that were made would then find their way back into the pockets of US businesses and consumers through legitimate US banks.

My point is that much Mafia business is just ordinary business, and that the dividing line between Mafia business and some other 'uncorrupted' business is actually rather difficult to see. 'Business' (whatever it is) must include Enron, Shell in Nigeria, Union Carbide in Bhopal, Firestone in Liberia, Ford's decision about the Pinto, the Exxon Valdez oil spill, the Zeebrugge ferry sinking, the Piper Alpha oil rig fire, the Banco Ambrosiano, and so on (Sutherland 1983, Punch 1996). When Balsamo and Carpozi describe the Mafia as a 'conspiracy which, for the most part, is run like many diversified industries or businesses' (1997, p. vi) the reversibility of that metaphor is actually rather helpful. Some of the old Mafiosi have become the new robber barons, pillars of the community, with pasts that can be laughed away, and connections to power that are as invisible as social class. Or, as in Martin Scorsese's *Casino* (1995) the gangsters have become gambling and

entertainment corporations, and the locations of the graves in the desert are simply forgotten.

So how is the Mafia organized? Since the 1860s in Sicily, there seems to have been a generic organizational form, though (like many other businesses) there have been different periods of centralization and decentralization, different terminology, and different structures within (and relationships between) Sicily and the USA. In the broadest of terms, each Mafia family is led by a boss (*capo*), perhaps assisted by an underboss (*sotto capo*), or advised by a counsellor (*consigliere*). Reporting to, and paying for, this strategic apex will be several mid-ranking Mafia members (sometimes termed *capodecina*, or head of ten), and beneath them the soldiers (*soldato*). Each soldier, or 'made man', will also have a network of 'connected' guys who aren't actually Mafia members, but who might be involved in Mafia business. However, each family is often also represented at some sort of higher organizing body, governed by the boss of bosses (*Capo di tutti capi*), and variously referred to as the commission, syndicate, combination, outfit or organization. According to many Mafia histories, in the early 1930s Lucky Luciano divided New York into the 'five families', then centralized the US Mafia on New York. This brought the warring families under the governance of his commission. However, there is also evidence that, both in the US and Sicily, there were already long-standing arrangements that existed to resolve collective disputes, agree on territories or business domains, and issue contracts on problematic members.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, there is a certain managerial mythology around Luciano. Clare Sterling describes him as 'a clear-sighted corporate executive with a rare gift for rational organization, the Lee Iacocca of organized crime' (1991, p. 100). As he put it himself –

All us younger guys hated the old mustaches and what they was doin'. We was tryin' to build a business that'd move with the times and they was still livin' a hundred years ago. (in Sterling 1991, p. 63)

In order to modernize the Mafia, Luciano and Meyer Lansky also established a contract killing agency – later called 'Murder Inc' by the press. As a contemporary associate put it 'If they had been President and Vice-President of the United States, they would have run the place far better than the idiot politicians' (in Durden Smith 2003, p. 71). Murder Inc was credited with 1000 killings between 1935 and 1945, and was managed by a board of Directors who had to vote on contracts. The managers of Murder Inc would then allocate one of their staff to carry out the contract, but they in turn often sub-contracted these operations to freelancers. As McCarty describes it 'Gang murder was put on an organized, assembly line basis. Operating like a modern big-business enterprise...' (2004, p. 210).

So successful was the US Mafia in the 1930s that their interests began to move West, particularly into Las Vegas, with the opening of Bugsy Siegal's casino 'The Flamingo' in 1947. It also had increasing influence back in Sicily, assisting to establish a commission there in the 1950s, and along the way bringing 'new management techniques' to the island (Durden Smith 2003, p. 114). The Sicilian Mafia had tended to be territorially based, and not functionally organized with different families concentrating on different industries as it was (partially) in the USA. The US Mafia also encouraged diversification into areas such as drugs and prostitution that would have been unthinkable to the old men of respect (Lewis 1984, p. 96). So well did the Sicilians learn their lessons that, by the 1970s and 1980s, the Sicilian Mafia were no longer the country cousins. Instead, thanks to their control over the heroin and cocaine supply lines, they were now using the US Mafia as

distributors for an operation that was bringing huge profits back to Palermo (Sterling 1991). Imported Sicilians or 'Zips', without social security numbers, fingerprints on file, or the desire to write a book, were now replacing the increasingly flabby US Mafia at the cutting edge of Luciano's business, still moving with the times.

So just why has the Mafia been so successful? Always at the forefront of management thinking, this multi-national business has operated a paperless office for nearly 150 years. Communication was 'by voice. Nothing is written in the Mafia.' (Balsamo & Carpozi 1997, p. 436). This is an organization that thrives on interpersonal relationships, and refuses the vulgar simplicities of clarity. Even business conversations often involve oblique references of the 'you know that thing we talked about' variety, just in case someone else was listening in. In order that an instruction is communicated, each link in the chain must have a private conversation with each other link in the chain. Joe Pistone, the cop who went undercover as Donnie Brasco, notes that he had to remember everything that had been talked about until he could call in a report to his FBI contact agent (1987, p. 104). Indeed, talking too much is sometimes regarded with suspicion. The Sicilian word *omertà* conveys this sense of a manly silence and, perhaps because of its similarity with the Sicilian for 'humility' (*umirtà*), a certain self-righteous piety too (Lewis 1984, p. 33). Unlike brash attempts at corporate branding, this is an organization that attempts not to leave any traces, and that covers its tracks. As Henry Hill noted 'we paid cash for everything. This way, there were no records or credit card receipts' (2004, p. 35). More recently, after the arrest of Bernardo 'Tractor' Provenzano in 2006, many tiny scraps of paper – 'pizzini' – were discovered which referred to his various business associates by number. He was number 1, and the numbering went up to 163. According to Longrigg and McMahon (2006), 'the ghost of Corleone' never used mobile phones, and 'believed in keeping the organization out of sight, the better to do business'.

The Mafia attempts to leave no footprints, no noises. Its history is vague, its present is undocumented, and its fact and fiction are deeply intertwined. Unlike the noisy PR of General Motors and Ford, members deny that the organization exists at all. Don Calò Vizzini, a Sicilian Mafia Don, was being interviewed by a newspaper journalist in the 1950s.

DON CALÒ: The fact is that every society needs a category of person whose task it is to sort out situations when they get complicated. Generally these people are representatives of the state. But in places where the state doesn't exist, or is not strong enough, there are private individuals who . . .

INTERVIEWER: Mafia?

DON CALÒ: The Mafia? Does the Mafia really exist? (Dickie 2004, p. 253)

Let us take that at face value. Perhaps Don Calò was inadvertently asking a rather interesting ontological question about organizations in general. We imagine they exist, because they constantly tell us that they do, but what is an organization but a moving network of people and things? This certainly seems to fit with contemporary ideas about the death of bureaucracy, and the growth of a network society. Indeed, from the 1980s onwards, much of the literature on Post-Fordism and the third Italy stressed that the success of industrial districts was about semi-visible informality, not the gigantic apparatus of the contemporary corporation.<sup>5</sup> The sort of words and phrases that attempted to capture this rotated around the idea of a network of family run firms, hence 'cohesion', 'inter-firm linkages', 'trust', 'co-operation' and so on. In this post-Fordist world, written contracts were rare, but senses of loyalty and inter-dependence with other organizations

were high. Sterling notes that the Mafia also entered into partnership arrangements with the Camorra from Naples, the Calabrian 'Ndrangheta, the Hell's Angels, various US based Latino gangs, the Chinese Triads, Caribbean gangs and so on (Sterling 1991, p. 386). This seems a sensible business model for all concerned.

Perhaps Don Calò was right. The Mafia does not really exist, any more than General Motors and Ford really exist. There is a network of people doing business, money is going up and shit is coming down, but the distinction between culture and economy, informal and formal, makes little sense.<sup>6</sup> So, the line that divides the Mafia from real business might be less about some sort of description of what a business organization looks like, or what the Mafia looks like, and more about its methods of doing business.

### Business Ethics

From the funeral notices of Don Calò Vizzini, who died in 1954:

He showed with his words and deeds that his Mafia was not criminal. It stood for respect for the law, defence of all rights, greatness of character: it was love. (in Dickie 2004, p. 122)

Wise, dynamic, tireless, he was the benefactor of the workers on the land and in the sulphur mines. Constantly doing good, he won himself a wide reputation in Italy and abroad. Great in the face of persecution, greater still in adversity, he remained unflinchingly cheerful. (in Lewis 1984, p. 21)

Setting aside the cartoon maniac, most bad guys have good reasons to do what they do. In fact, they are often the same sort of reasons that 'good' people use to justify what they do (Matza 1964; Ruggiero 2000). For the Mafia, this appears to be organized as an account that makes business rather central. Indeed, looking after your own, and looking after business, are condensed into pretty much the same things. Of course, sometimes this involves violence, but not always, because there is no business reason for too much violence. As Virgil 'the Turk' Solozzo put it in the original *Godfather* novel 'I don't like bloodshed. I'm a businessman and blood costs too much money' (Puzo 1969, p. 91). Even his competitor agrees with this. Sonny Corleone, despite wanting revenge on Solozzo, understands that 'his knocking off the old man is purely business, nothing personal' (p. 96). And business, in this context, means looking after your interests, and the interests of those who are close to you. Don Calò and Don Corleone's power come from their reasonableness, their capacity to listen carefully, and then 'make you an offer you can't refuse'. This might involve threatened or actual violence, but it might not. Such businesslike behaviour brings understanding, even among those who end up losing the game. In *The Godfather Part II*, after attempting to betray Michael Corleone, Sal Tessio is being gently but firmly taken away to be killed by Michael soldiers. After asking if there is anything that he can do, Sal says to Michael's *consigliere* Tom Hagen 'Tell Mike its only business. I always liked him'. We never see Sal again.

It is important to get this clear. The Mafia is an ethical business, if by ethics we mean that it is run according to certain widely shared moral codes. The participants understand that other people might not share these codes, but that fact doesn't make them any the



less binding on the people who play the game. Indeed, this can even be articulated as something like a duty, with certain associated rights and responsibilities.

TONY: We're soldiers, you know. Soldiers don't go to hell. It's war. Soldiers, they kill other soldiers. We're in a situation where everybody involved knows the stakes, and if you're gonna accept those stakes... you gotta do certain things. It's business. We're soldiers. We follow codes. Orders. (*The Sopranos* 'From Where to Eternity')

But this duty can extend more widely too. There is a demonstrable market amongst many consumers for Mafia products and services (Rawlinson 2002). People want drugs, prostitution, gambling and protection, and it is quite possible to argue that supplying these items at reasonable prices and with a certain predictability is in itself a public service. When Frank Falcone, the fictional Don of Los Angeles in Mario Puzo's *The Godfather*, is debating whether the families should get involved in the drug trade, he argues that –

At least if we control it we can cover it better, organize it better, make sure it causes less trouble. Being in it is not so bad, there has to be control, there has to be protection, there has to be organization, we can't have everybody running around doing just what they please like a bunch of anarchists. (1969, p. 292)

To which Don Corleone replies 'We have to be cunning like the business people, there's more money in it and it's better for our children and our grandchildren' (p. 295).

Of course, if one were to be symmetrical, this could in itself become a wider moral judgement about legitimate business organizations too. The Mafia do not have a corporate social responsibility statement, but does this mean that they are an irresponsible organization? More irresponsible than organizations that trade in alcohol, cigarettes, semi-automatic weapons or burgers that give people heart disease? In Stanley Kubrick's *The Killing* (1955) the financier of the heist suggests that 'Crime is nothing more than a left-handed form of human endeavour' (McCarty 2004, pp. 42, 101). It was only a few years previously, in the wake of the 'robber barons', that Edwin Sutherland coined the term 'white collar crime' in a 1939 address to the American Sociological Association. His now classic 1949 book contained a sustained comparison between organized crime and 'respectable' crime. For Sutherland, the underworld and the business world appeared to share a similar attitude to ethics and law amongst legitimate and illegitimate entrepreneurs (1983; see Rawlinson 2002). This is obviously a conclusion that might outrage contemporary business ethicists but, to be fair, we should simply say that all business people have their 'ethics'. As Al Capone said 'All I do is supply a demand, capitalism is the legitimate racket of the ruling classes' (in Southwell 2006, p. 7).

### Dealing with the State

MICHAEL CORLEONE: My father is no different than any other powerful man, any man who is responsible for other people. Like a senator or a president.

KAY: You know how naive you sound?

MICHAEL: Why?

KAY: Senators and presidents don't have men killed.

MICHAEL: Who's being naive Kay? (*The Godfather*)

The biggest business problem that the Mafia has to face is not other Mafia families, or ethical outrage, but the power of the state. Many writers describe the Mafia like an octopus, or a cancer, that has somehow infiltrated into the state, but these metaphors bring with them the assumption that the ideal type state is a bureaucracy that operates without regard for persons, but is then is corrupted by organized crime. If we adopt a different image from Weber, that of the state having a monopoly of legitimate violence within a particular area, then it becomes possible to think about the state and the Mafia as competitors. As Weber put it 'today, the use of force is regarded as legitimate only so far as it is either permitted by the state or prescribed by it... The claim of the modern state to monopolize the use of force is as essential to it as its character of compulsory jurisdiction and of continuous operation.' (1978, p. 56). So the question is not violence or no violence, but who can use violence, and in what contexts.<sup>7</sup>

One of the earliest reports on the Mafia, Leopoldo Franchetti's 1877 *Political and Administrative Conditions in Sicily* (in Dickie 2004, p. 47), argued that the Mafia emerged as a result of the 'democratization' of violence. Not only could anyone legitimately use violence, but the boundaries between politics, economics and crime no longer made any sense. Violence was the key form of capital, but since the state was illegitimate, and often effectively non-existent, it wasn't owned by anyone in particular. In the violence industry that consequently emerged –

the Mafia boss... acts as a capitalist, impresario and manager. He unifies the management of the crimes committed... he regulates the way labour and duties are divided out, and controls discipline amongst the workers. (Discipline is indispensable in this as in any other industry if abundant and constant profits are to be obtained.) It is the Mafia boss's job to judge from circumstances whether the acts of violence should be suspended for a while, or multiplied and made fiercer. He has to adapt to market conditions to choose which operations to carry out, which people to exploit, which form of violence to use. (Dickie 2004, p. 53. see also Gambetta 1993)

In *The Godfather Part II*, a business meeting takes place in Cuba. With one long camera shot we pan down a meeting table, attended by men from General Foods, ITT, the Panamanian Mining Corporation, South American Sugar, Michael Corleone, representing tourism and leisure interests, and representatives of the pre-revolutionary Cuban state. Hyman Roth, the smiling and ruthless financier who has organized the meeting comments 'We now have what we have always needed – real partnership with the state'. Roth continues on to say that we are 'now free to make our profits', and that 'we're bigger than US Steel'. The point here is that the word partnership must be taken quite literally. In order to deal with the state, the Mafia must infiltrate it, must co-opt parts of it in order to ensure that its interests do not contradict with those of the Mafia. In 1987, one of the prosecutors in Palermo's 'maxitrial' concluded by suggesting that the Sicilian Mafia was 'a state within a state, an antistate, with its own government, army, territory, rituals, moral code and juridical order' (in Sterling 1991, p. 344).

In the US context, it was prohibition that allowed the Mafia to buy parts of the state. The Volstead Act, which lasted from 1920 to 1933, was partly an expression of bourgeois fears about the cultural impact of the beer and wine drinking masses. However, as an expression of the popular will, it was a huge failure that resulted in millions of ordinary Americans being criminalized for doing things that they enjoyed. As a result, the figure of the ruthless urban gangster mutated into a Robin Hood type smuggler who brought

simple pleasures to the people whilst the Keystone Cops bumbled around and fell over. This atmosphere made it much easier for the Mafia to buy favours from the police, politicians, administrators, legislators and so on. Under Warren Harding's presidency there were regular reports of drinking and other speak-easy leisure pursuits in the White House. The mythology of John Dillinger's lonesome 'gentleman bandit' versus J. Edgar Hoover's massive but inept Federal Bureau of Investigations must have seemed attractive when the morality of the state was so questionable.

In Italy, the weakness and corruption of the state has been endemic since the Risorgimento, most particularly in the poor south. As Lewis puts it 'The vendetta was the weapon ready to hand of the poor and otherwise defenceless in a society where law did not exist and justice meant the baron's court and the baron's torture chamber' (Lewis 1984, p. 29). Secret societies, or alternative forms of social order, were common in a land that was continually invaded, and where ordinary people were endlessly oppressed. However, by the late nineteenth century, the Mafia was being used as a security force in an alliance between feudal landowners, the church, local administrators, and vote-hungry politicians. At various points, all of them felt they needed strong-arm men to further their interests. Despite suppression under the fascists, the US Army effectively handed Sicily back to the Mafia in 1943 as they looked for strong local leadership that was demonstrably anti-fascist (Lewis 1984). This economic power, combined with a state recovering from destruction and occupation, established the conditions that pertained in Italy for the next half century. The Mafia's stranglehold over the Christian Democratic Party (in the person of Gulio Andreotti) was the most visible element of a conspiracy that articulated the interests of just about every key section of Italian society – from the Vatican Bank to the P2 Masonic Lodge. For example, the Ucciardone prison in Palermo became a rest home for 'retired' Mafia who ran their businesses from gaol, and had their meals sent in from the best restaurants in Palermo. This was 'a Mafia university' where poisonings and slips on the stairs were common (Lewis 1984, p. 204). Since the Mafia's politics are mobile, being largely concerned with business, more recently they have swung behind Silvio Berlusconi and his Forza Italia. When the power moves, so will interests.

Calvin Coolidge (another prohibition president) asserted that 'the business of America is business'. He would have approved then that, after prohibition ended, the big bootleggers used their expertise to set up legitimate businesses – Seagrams, Capitol Wines and Spirits, Alliance Distributors and so on. Tony Montana, the sociopathic gangster in Brian De Palma's remake of *Scarface* (1983), puts it rather more graphically – 'You know what capitalism is? Getting fucked. The fucking bankers? The politicians? They're the bad guys. They'll fuck anything and anyone for a fucking buck'. De Palma claims (in his commentary on the film) that it represents 'the capitalist dream gone bizarre and beserk', but the evidence seems to suggest that the bizarre and the beserk are a fairly normal part of the dream. Whether dealing with organized crime, or organized business, representatives of the state often take their percentage – whether as taxes or bribes. Balsamo and Carpozi, in another moralizing moment, suggest that innocent US citizens are unknowing victims of organized crime, 'made a helpless sucker by the common denominator of greed and avarice upon which this invisible government gorges itself' (1997, p. vi). They might well add that the visible government often does the same thing, to which needs to be added the activities of organized business.

So where does the straight end and the crooked begin? Or, where does the state end and crooks begin? In many areas of the economy, some of the money being

generated by 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' business operations is being reinvested to buy off the state, and ensure that business goes on as usual. Whether we call them gifts, campaign contributions, lobbying, bribes, taxes, or the World Trade Organization – the point of these exchanges is to ensure that business can do business without too much conflict with the powerful groups that operate on behalf of the state (Dickie 2004, p. 2). Business groups like the Confederation of British Industry or the Mafia's Commission look after the collective interests of their members by conspiring against the suckers who pay the bills. As Hyman Roth understands, it sounds better if you call a cartel a 'partnership'. That way, everyone seems to be winning.

### In Memoriam: Don Calò

TONY: When America opened the flood gates, and let all us Italians in... what do you think they were doing it for? Because they were tryin' to save us from poverty? No, they did it because they needed us. They needed us to build their cities and dig their subways and to make 'em richer. The Carnegies, and the Rockefellers, they needed worker bees, and there we were. But some of us didn't want to swarm around their hive and lose who we were. We wanted to stay Italian and preserve the things that meant somethin' to us. Honour, and family and loyalty. And some of us wanted a piece of the action. Now, we weren't educated like the Americans. But we had the balls to take what we wanted. And those other fucks, those other, the G. P. Morgans, they were crooks and killers too. But that was their business, right? The American Way. (*The Sopranos* 'From Where to Eternity')

Don Calò Vizzini would probably not have approved of the American Way. Tony Soprano is far too noisy for that old Sicilian man of respect. Like his earlier Italian ancestor, Cosimo de Medici, Don Calò was a sphinx like man, a man of few words who shaped the destinies of those around him through a Machiavellian indecipherability (Padgett & Ansell 1993).<sup>8</sup> Albert DeMeo, the son of Roy DeMeo of the 'Murder Machine' crew, was given a copy of Machiavelli's *Prince* by his father on his eleventh birthday (DeMeo 2003, p. 95). For Machiavelli, grandiose displays of power and wealth were not really necessary. Roy DeMeo was unimpressed by Paul Castellano's huge white mansion on Staten Island. 'Big Paul wanted people to think of him as an executive, a white-collar corporate leader. If you really had power, my father told me, you didn't need to show off' (DeMeo 2003, p. 97). Roy compared Castellano unfavourably with Aniello Dellacroce, a Gambino underboss. 'That old man can do more with a wink or a nod than Big Paul ever did' (DeMeo 2003, p. 97). But his taciturn manner hid the fact that Dellacroce was a tired old man. He was taped in 1985 saying 'Things change now because there's too much conflict. People do whatever they feel like. They don't train their people no more. There's no more... there's no more respect. If you can't be sincere, you can't be honest with your friends, then forget about it. Ya got nothin'' (Balsamo & Carpozi 1997, p. 459).

This nostalgia, this tiredness, seems an appropriate place to end a paper that attempts to dissolve a boundary between the romanticism of organized crime, and the dull world of conventional business organizations. 'The old Mafia bosses who've survived the dramatic changes over the years are today very much tired corporate executives' (Balsamo & Carpozi 1997, p. 269). Pino Arlacchi (1988, p. 126) and Claire Sterling (1991, p. 76) both note that every generation of the Mafia complains that there were rules and

respect in the old days. Now, as Pistone (1987) puts it, 'our thing' is becoming 'my thing'. Watery-eyed mobsters lament the passing of the good old days. Honour is a thing of the past, and everyone uses drugs. Even Henry Hill, now off the witness protection programme, complains that everyone is an informant nowadays (2004, p. 35).

Of course, if the Mafia is just another job, just another way of earning a living, then perhaps the intense and intimate world of homosocial banter no longer exists either. Or perhaps, even worse, it never existed. Perhaps everyday life for a gangster was always more boring than that.

Unlike the images we got in movies like *The Godfather*, the Mafia in real life is repetitious. Conversations are mind numbing. 'What are we gonna steal today? How are we gonna steal it?' (Pistone 1987, p. 408)

I suspect that for the audience, and for Mafia members (clearly overlapping categories), the fantasy of the gangster is inevitably damaged by contact with everyday life. The boredom of hanging around with some fairly damaged people in poorly decorated social clubs only seems exciting because it can be imagined as an escape from 'real' work. Indeed, it is the articulation of everyday organizational lives as dull that helps us believe that being a wiseguy must be exciting, witty, sexy and just a little dangerous. But, take it from the son of someone who knows.

On screen, the life of the Mafioso is glamorous and exciting, filled with danger and intense, dark-eyed women. In the real world, the gangster is an exhausted middle aged man who comes home at dawn to a disillusioned wife and a dog dish that needs cleaning. (DeMeo 2003, p. 239)

The wife, the child and the dog dish. They are the other that has now (at least partly) been included in the post-*Godfather* world, most particularly the world of *The Sopranos*. Now molls, guns and banter have been supplemented by wives, sisters and children. This is very often funny, and frightening, and sad, but it does mean that the world of the lost boys is becoming more like *Death of a Salesman*. When the Mafia becomes everyday life, the magic must disappear. Tony puts it beautifully – 'cunnilingus and psychiatry brought us to this' (*The Sopranos* 'I Dream of Jeannie Cusamano'). He is a hard man gangster with bad dreams and rebellious teenagers, who sees a therapist for his panic attacks, and self-righteously justifies our thing as the American Way. Tony Soprano is merely 'an all American everyman, the prototypical struggling businessman' (Gabbard 2002, p. 28).<sup>9</sup> To go back to Schneider's book on Tony Soprano as a manager. Perhaps this is actually a deeply perceptive piece of cultural critique. Both because some people will pay \$14 for it, and because it will become a text that articulates the impossibility of escape as a fantasy of escape. Willy Loman can never really be 'way out there in the blue, riding on a smile and a shoeshine', but 'a salesman is got to dream boy. It comes with the territory.' (Miller 1961, p. 111) *Tony Soprano on Management*, and the thousand books like it, tells us more about the myths of management under capitalism than its author might realize.

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## NOTES

1. For detail on this rather condensed assertion, see chapter seven in Parker (2002). Note also that this paper is primarily concerned with the United States and Sicily. There are many other business organizations now referred to as 'Mafias', and many similarities and differences between their organizational structures and business practices.
2. In this sub-genre, see also *The Mafia Manager: A Guide to the Corporate Machiavelli* by the mysterious V.
3. This estimate comes from SOS Impresa in 2006, an Italian retail lobby group, and is based on government figures.
4. Though Nick Gentile, the boss of Pittsburgh from 1915 onwards, claimed that a 'council' arrangement existed before Luciano, as did the five families. He complained that the council was a place where eloquence was the key issue in resolving disputes, and not logic (Dickie 2004, pp. 219, 227). For organizational structures in Sicily, see Gambetta (1993, p. 100), though see Arlacchi (1988, p. 44) for a more decentralized view.
5. For an edited collection of papers that connect the Mafia, trust and economics, see Gambetta (2000[1988]).
6. It was only really after the invention of recording technologies, combined with the legally generous provisions of the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act, that evidence about the Mafia could become mobile, and effective in a judicial context.
7. The Mafia is a violent organization, responsible for many deaths. The Sicilian village of Corleone, which had a population of eighteen thousand, had 153 murders between 1944 and 1948 (Lewis 1984, p. 95). Forty years later, in the first six months of 1989, 428 people were murdered in Sicily. These are big numbers, but consider some others. In Bhopal, India on 13 December 1984, about 15,000 people were killed, and ten times as many injured, by a release of chemicals from the Union Carbide plant. In the USA, in 2000, 5,915 people were killed in industrial accidents, 100,000 from alcohol-related deaths, and 350,000 from tobacco-related deaths. These are bigger numbers.
8. See also the marvellous description of Don Fabrizio in Giuseppe di Lampedusa's novel *The Leopard*.
9. The opening shot of *The Godfather* has the undertaker Amerigo Bonasera pleading with Don Corleone for a favour. He begins 'I believe in America ...'.

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