

## Mario Puzo's "The Godfather" Reflection or Distortion of the Mafia?\*

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*"The trouble is all that damn trash in the movies and the newspapers.  
(...) You've got the wrong idea of my father and the Corleone Family"*

(Mario Puzo, 1969/1995: 362)

### 1. Introduction

Criminologists have generally regarded reporting on criminality in the mass media with suspicion. There are numerous examples of media distortion, of crime waves triggered by the media and of simple errors which make a substantive discussion in public much more difficult (see Bundesministerium der Justiz [German Federal Ministry of Justice], 2000). In this light the introductory quote above from *Michael Corleone*, one of the main characters in Puzo's novel, could also be an admittedly excited idiomatic statement by a criminologist. The fact that the mass media also have their difficulties with the *Mafia*, the Sicilian variant of the *Cosa Nostra*, is widely known (Paoli, 1999): Here a number of different things are lumped together into a rather thin *Mafia* soup. *Mafia* is not always inside, just because *Mafia* is on the label: Common examples are "the Russian Mafia", the "Vietnamese Mafia", the "Cigarette Mafia", the "Drug Mafia", the "Mafia" in City Hall and – dramatically – the "Quest for world-wide

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power”.<sup>1</sup> A brief survey of the book market (examples: “School Mafia”, “Lotto Mafia”, “Internet Mafia”, “Art Mafia”, “Child-Sex Mafia”) demonstrates that “*Mafia*” has in the meantime decayed to become a (high-sales!) synonym for illegitimate enrichment and organized behaviour, assuming that the term is still subject in colloquial usage to any delineation of meaning at all.

Thus if, with some exceptions, even journalistic sources can contribute little to a deeper scholarly understanding of the *Mafia*, why then should of all things the novel be in a position to do so, a literary genre characterized substantially by its fictional nature? And what’s more, a novel to which criminologists almost unanimously attribute responsibility for the “*Mafia* myth” (e.g. Manns, 1999: 268; Ohlemacher, 1998: 31 ff.; admittedly without further motivating the label “myth” and measuring it against a given reality)?<sup>2</sup> One reason justifying the assumption that “The Godfather” may entail criminological substance is the assessment of the novel by *Mafia* insiders, which could hardly be more varied. On the one hand we have *Antonino Calderone*, former member of a long-established *Mafia* family, who reports that “The Godfather” has received particular praise in *Mafia* circles for its highly realistic portrayal (see Vorauer, 1996: 10 ff.; Loeser, 2000: 118). And on the other hand we have *Pino Arlacchi*, Sociology professor and former vice-chairman of the anti-*Mafia* committee of the Italian Parliament, who in the meantime describes his previous assessment of the *Mafia* as a myth fed by superstition, the media and books like “The Godfather” as being a “blunder of intellectual arrogance” and has abandoned this view (Arlacchi, 2000: IX).

Thus we would like to take a look at this novel, a work which achieved worldwide success not only in book form but also as a three-part film winning nine Oscars. Ironically *Mario Puzo* (1920-1999) uses the quote on the representation of the *Mafia* in newspapers and films to raise the question of criticism itself and plays with it. Does he want to admit that he lays no claim to a realistic representation? Or, by emphasizing newspapers and films, does he want to exclude his own medium, the novel, from criticism? We don’t know, just as we don’t know from where he drew his knowledge of the internal life and structure of the American *Cosa Nostra*. However,

<sup>1</sup> Thus the subtitle “Griff nach der weltweiten Macht” (grasp of the worldwide power) in Sterling (1990).

<sup>2</sup> Most authors just refer to Hess (1993), whose study even uses the term “Mythos” in its subtitle.

we can say that with his novel, in 1969, *Puzo* already provides an approximate picture of the organizational structure of the *Cosa Nostra* which until well into the 1980s (as has been confirmed by subsequent statements by *Mafia* deserters) was unfairly doubted and refuted by scholars and the criminal justice system (cf. Neubacher, 2002: 44 ff.; see also Paoli, 1999: 425). A rare but serious case of reluctant recognition in academe! In the present treatment, the novel's depictions are compared with newer scholarly discoveries in *Mafia* research and contrasted with one another. The object of this comparison is in particular the representation of organizational structure, the code of behaviour and sources of income for the *Cosa Nostra*. Finally, based on the novel, a sociogram or organizational chart of the *Corleone* family will be presented in order to illustrate the structure of the *cosca*<sup>3</sup> and the *partito*, the network of relationships to politics and to influential followers.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. The "Cosa Nostra" - Terms and Histories

The term "*Cosa Nostra*" ('our thing') is used as a generic term for similar phenomena in various regions of southern Italy. The best known of these is the *Mafia* in Sicily; there are also the *Camorra* in Naples and Campania, the *Ndrangheta* in Calabria and the *Nuova Sacra Corona Unita* in Apulia. The respective numbers of "members" fluctuate; the Sicilian *Cosa Nostra* is sometimes estimated to have no more than 6000 persons, sometimes to have approximately 3200 members (with a population of approximately 5 million in Sicily; see Loeser, 2000: 93 ff.; Paoli, 1999: 426). Nevertheless, the *Cosa Nostra* unleashes considerable destructive social forces, since it controls entire regions and business segments by means of violence, using dependent front men and their political contacts.

In the early 20th century, immigrants from Sicily also enabled the development of the *Cosa Nostra* in several large cities and metropolitan areas of the USA (see Gude Hohensinner, 2001). Since then, in addition to familial contacts there have also been occasional operative contacts between the two continents, e.g., in drug trafficking during the 1970s and 1980s ("Pizza Connection"). Nevertheless, the families in the USA and Sicily remained organizationally separate from one another and differed from one another

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<sup>3</sup> Italian dialect: 'artichoke' (term for the immediate environment of a "family").

<sup>4</sup> The terms stem from Hess (1986: 83 ff., 91 ff.); see also Loeser (2000: 250 ff.).

in terms of their business practices and business rules. Thus the Sicilian *Cosa Nostra*, in contrast to its American sister-organization, still had not installed a *commissione* as an instance of arbitration and coordination until the end of the 1950s. Furthermore the Sicilians criticized their American “colleagues” for recognizing (and practicing) divorce, and a majority insisted, at least until 1980, that business dealings with prostitution, drugs and money-lending were dishonourable.<sup>5</sup> The Sicilian *Mafiosi* were much more traditional in these points; here Sicilian Catholicism, a rigid (and “double”) sexual ethic and a Mediterranean concept of machismo all played an equal role. In “The Godfather” *Puzo* introduces his main protagonist, Don *Vito Corleone*, as a tradition-conscious and prudish family head who sharply disapproves of sexual escapades and whose refusal to grant another “family” support in its drug business triggers a *Mafia* war (*Puzo*, 1969/1995).<sup>6</sup> In the meantime the Sicilian *Mafia* has “modernized” itself; the drug trade has brought large amounts of money into its coffers. Today the major difference seems to be that the American *Cosa Nostra* has succeeded to a large degree in expanding to legal sectors through money laundering and has concentrated its business activities there.

The words *Mafia*, *Camorra* and *'Ndrangheta* originate in Italian dialect. Their meaning is as puzzling and disputed as the historical origins of the *Cosa Nostra*, which are lost somewhere in the years before the 20th century. The explanation that the word *Mafia* has derived from an acronym based on the words “*Morte alla Francia, Italia anela*”, a battle cry from the 13th century remains dubious (Hess, 1986: 4, 103; Loeser, 2000: 89). Such attempted explanations express much more the desire for legendary and mythical formulations, for a historical and even pseudo-religious elevation of the *Mafia* which can only serve to enhance its reputation. This is also attested by the first verse of the old Calabrian song “*Ndrangheta, camurra e mafia*”; it relates the legend of Osso, Mastrosso and Carcagnosso, three Spanish knights, who are said to have founded the *Cosa Nostra* at the end of the 14th century:

*'Nta na notti di un tempo che fu / Tri cavaleri dda Spagna se partiru / Dall'  
Abbruzzi a Sicilia passaru / E poi cà in Calabria se firmaru / Ventun anni*

<sup>5</sup> Thus the reports from Buscetta (see Arlacchi, 2000: 63).

<sup>6</sup> This episode has a parallel to reality, in that in 1957 in New York there was an assassination attempt made on Frank Costello, who had forbidden his “family” to be involved in drugs and thus had brought down the wrath of Vito Genovese on himself.

*lavuraru sutta terra / Pè fundari li regoli sociali / Leggi d'onori e di guerra / Leggi maggiori, minori e criminali / E 'sti regoli di sangue e d'omertà / Da padre a figghju si li tramandaru / Chisti su i leggi dda società / Leggi cu signu 'nta storia lassaru // 'ndrangheta, camurra e mafia / È Società organizzata / 'ndrangheta, camurra e mafia / Sicilia, Napoli, Calabria onorata.*

*One night a long, long time ago / Three cavaliers took leave of Spain / And passed through Campania and Sicily / To settle down in Calabria / For 21 years they kept out of sight / To found the rules of their society / Laws of honour and of war / Major and minor, criminal too / Laws of blood and secrecy / Passed on from father to son / These are the laws of our society / Laws that have shaped history // The 'Ndranghetà, Camorra and the Mafia / Form this organized society / The 'Ndranghetà, Camorra and the Mafia / Honourable Calabria, Sicily and Naples. (Il Canto di Malavita, 2000, Track 2).<sup>7</sup>*

In the Palermito dialect of the 19th century *Mafia* means something like "beauty", "grace", "perfection" (cf. Hess, 1986: 1); and the origins of the *Mafia* can only be traced with certainty back to the 19th century. In the years 1862/63 in Palermo we find a comedy from *Rizzotti and Mosca* being performed with the title "I mafiosi della Vicaria", telling of prisoners who belong to a delinquent association with certain customs and hierarchies of rank. The success of the play spreads the term quickly throughout the entire country (Paoli, 1999: 425 ff.; Hess, 1986: 2 ff.). In his 1954 masterpiece "The Leopard", *Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa* depicts the downfall of a Sicilian noble family at the time of *Garibaldi*. The character of *Don Calògero Sedàra* portrays the type of a Mafioso upstart (Loeser, 2000: 260). The *Mafia* is expressly mentioned when conversation comes to "influential people" to whom the Prince must pay money in August 1860 for permission to pass, in order to be able to travel undisturbed "through the territory of the *Mafia*" to reach his estate (Tomasi di Lampedusa, 1958/1993: 67). These artistic references correspond to scholarly observations according to which the *Mafia* proceeds in greatly strengthened form from the Italian *risorgimento* ('resurrection', 'resurgence', referring to the unification of the Italian nation) of 1861. But its roots reach further back into the feudal structure of Sicily and in the lack of an effective central power, resulting in a situation for the country which the *Mafia*, represented by the *gabbellotti* of the time, readily exploited (see Loeser, 2000: 65 ff.). In his "Godfather" *Mario Puzo* skillfully integrates these historical begin-

<sup>7</sup> The title of the CD ("La Musica della Mafia") has been chosen for commercial sales reasons; in fact the music in question is songs of the 'Ndrangheta.

nings of the *Mafia* in the plot. He introduces a Sicilian *Mafia* boss as *gab-bellotto*:

*"The gabbellotto, a sort of overseer to the estates of the rich, also guaranteed that the poor would not try to claim land not being cultivated, would not try to encroach in any way on the estate, by poaching or trying to farm it as squatters. In short, the gabbellotto was a mafioso who for a certain sum of money protected the real estate of the rich from all claims made on it by the poor, legal or illegal. When any poor peasant tried to implement the law which permitted him to buy uncultivated land, the gabbellotto frightened him off with threats of bodily harm or death. It was that simple."* (Puzo, 1969/1995: 323).

### 3. The Novel: The Story of Don Vito Corleone

"The Godfather" portrays the gradual rise of the *Corleones* to become the most powerful *Cosa Nostra* family in New York and in the United States. The focus is on the leadership of the "family business" by *Vito Corleone* in the times immediately following the Second World War. As in reality,<sup>8</sup> in the novel there are also five families fighting for predominance over the New York underworld. *Vito*, whose last name is actually *Andolini*, comes to New York as an orphan in the year 1901. He has had to leave his native village in Sicily, *Corleone*, because the local *Mafia* boss has killed his father and now wants to take *Vito's* life as well in order to prevent a blood feud (*vendetta*). But it is not because of this, but out of a sentimental connection to his home that *Vito* takes on the name *Corleone*. He coincidentally gets to know the petty criminals *Clemenza* and *Tessio*, who are later to become his *caporegimes* (Ital.: *capodecina*, a term referring to the leader of a group of simple members). But first the young *Vito* has to take care of himself, his wife, and his children through a series of small larcenous adventures which he carries out together with his two accomplices. He has lost his job in a grocery store because his employer, in order to please the *Mafioso Fanucci*, who is in control of the neighbourhood, has agreed to give someone else the job. As *Fanucci* again interferes with *Vito's* circle and demands a commission on the goods he is stealing, *Vito* kills him. From then on he is treated in the neighbourhood as an "honourable man" (as the *Mafiosi* refer to themselves). Neighbours ask for his protection and request favours of him, shopkeepers and the operators of illegal gaming

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Gude Hohensinner (2001): These are the "families" Morello/Terranova, Masseria, Luciano, Genovese and Gambino.

houses pay him voluntarily for his "friendship". *Vito's* rise begins, presented to the outside world in the guise of a flourishing olive-oil import company. Through his far-sightedness, his skill in negotiating and, when necessary, through the unrestrained use of violence, he gains an outstanding position of power which brings him the honorary title of a "Don" during the Prohibition years. There are now a large number of police and Justice department officials on his bribery rolls. Since he can "organize" votes in the Italian community, he quickly also becomes a factor in political power. At the end of 1945 he is shot by a hit man hired by a rival boss and survives, although seriously wounded. In the following conflict, his son *Michael* takes revenge by shooting and killing his father's rival together with a corrupt police officer. *Michael* then flees to a hideout in Sicily; his older brother *Sonny* is murdered. *Michael* can not return to New York for several years, when his father negotiates a truce and guarantees for *Michael's* safety with the other bosses in a conference (referred to as a "council"). *Vito Corleone* dies of natural causes in 1954; *Michael* restructures circumstances by assassinating the heads of all the other rival "families" in a single, large-scale campaign and thus leads the *Corleone* family to the forefront of power in the entire country.

When viewed from today, *Puzo's* choice of the name *Corleone* takes on additional significance, of which the author must not have been entirely aware in 1969. He presents the town of the same name, a "small poverty-stricken town" deep in the heart of Sicily as a Mafia stronghold in which, as a result of blood feuds (*vendettas*), hardly any men are left alive and which "had the highest murder rate of any place in the world" (*Puzo*, 1969/1995: 332). But *Puzo* could not have known at the time that the town of 12 000 not only would be seen as a Mafiosi town, but as *the* town of the Mafia (thus *Butta*, 1999: 65). The town is indeed the home of the *Corleonesi*, the powerful *Mafia* bosses (primarily *Totò Riina*, *Bernardo Provenzano*, *Leoluca Bagarella*), who have dominated the Sicilian *Cosa Nostra* since the *Mafia* war of 1982/83 and their victory over the "families" of Palermo.

At the beginning of his novel, *Puzo* gives a striking portrayal of the client system of favours, services and dependencies so typical of *Mafiosi* relationships, under which "even your basic rights become a 'favour'" (*Rossi*, 1984: 123), since ultimately even legal entitlements can only be asserted when one knows the right people in the right places. On the day of his daughter *Connie's* wedding, Don *Vito Corleone* holds an "audience":

While the festivities take place in the garden, the Don receives in his study the homages and concerns of his petitioners, who have come to him on a day on which he can refuse no request. As *Kay*, *Michael's* American girlfriend and later wife comments on the activity with the naive remark that *Michael's* father must have a good heart, *Michael* replies to her:

*"I guess that's the way it sounds, but let me tell you this. You know those Arctic explorers who leave catches of food scattered on the route to the North Pole? Just in case they may need them someday? That's my father's favours. Someday he'll be at each one of those people's houses and they had better come across."* (Puzo, 1969/1995: 43).

#### 4. Territory and Sources of Income

Territory is the spatial area which a "family" controls because it can gain the upper hand. This sphere of influence, somewhat like turf, is watched over jealously and defended against intruders. This is even more so the case since the territory, the basis of power, is only respected as long as a "family" can prove that it is strong enough to lay this claim; otherwise it will be taken over by other "families" together with the associated "clientele". Territories may be of differing sizes, an entire city, a particular part of town or even individual streets. Palermo for example is divided along invisible boundaries into comparatively small territories; at times nine "families" had divided up the city among themselves. In Corleone on the other hand, only one single "family" has always exercised control and continues to do so today.

The significance of territory becomes clear when we consider that it is only possible to do business there with the approval of the "head of the family". This also applies for members of competing "families", who, if they would like to avoid conflicts, would even address the local bosses in advance if their intent were murder. Primarily the territory guarantees a family's income. It is as a rule the location of the legal business, e.g., a workshop of some sort, a construction company, etc., which serves as a facade for the "family's" illegal business. Of these, in particular extortion of protection monies is directly bound to a "family's" own territory.

In "The Godfather" *Vito Corleone's* legal businesses are an olive oil import company, a realty agency, and a construction company; he later enters into the legal casino business in Las Vegas. His territory is located in the Bronx and in Brooklyn, where his men pursue the following illegal activities: gambling, also in the form of illegal betting offices and lotteries, loan-



sharking, and extortion of protection monies. In addition, the Don boasts of his control over the labour unions; a large part of his assets stems from participation in alcohol smuggling and sales during the prohibition years (1919-1933; cf. Puzo, 1969/1995).

In addition to the quantity and quality of personal relationships to influential persons in the worlds of politics and business, territories and assets are the principal components of the power of a "family head"; these factors are also interdependent, since as a territory represents the basis for the attainment of assets, retention and enlargement of the assets requires "good relationships" whose maintenance again requires utilization of monetary resources or other valuable favours.

## 5. Codes of Behaviour and Honour

Because of the existence of the *Mafia* over many long years and its embedding in everyday Sicilian life, it is appropriate to consider tradition and culture in the sense of attested, transmitted rules. This tradition is maintained through ritual and symbols, including a certain number of songs which provide an interesting impression of the self-image of the *Cosa Nostra*. The *Cosa Nostra* sees itself as a federation of honourable men into which one is initiated through a baptismal ritual (cf. Paoli, 1999: 427). This lends the entire procedure a quasi-religious meaning which is emphasized by the following verse of the song mentioned above:

*Dda c'era nu casteddu ccu tri stanzì / Undi la prima puzzava infamità / Tri gucci di sangu 'nta secunda 'nci truvai / Mentri 'nta terza nu corpu di società / Degnu e meritevoli fui arricanusciutu / Sutta l'arberu da scienza abbattiatu / Onoratu circulu a tutti vi salutu / Finu a la morti a vui su vinculatù / Io fazzu l'omu pì sangu e onori / E pì scacciari l'infami e tradituri / Mentre e perdunu nuddu ha pietè / Chistu m'imponi 'stu corpu e società // 'Ndrangheta, camurra e mafia / È Società organizzata / 'Ndrangheta, camurra e mafia / Leggi d'onori leggi d'omertà.*

*On the island there was a palace with three halls / The first full of the stench of treason / I found three drops of blood in the second / And in the third a society gathered / Who took me as their own / And under the tree of knowledge I was baptized / Honourable circle, I greet you all / Together until death / I am one of your own for blood and for honour / To hunt down the unworthy and the traitors / We know no mercy and we never forgive / That is the way of our society // The 'Ndranghetà, Camorra and the Mafia / Form this organized society / The 'Ndranghetà, Camorra and the Mafia / Laws of honour, laws of secrecy.*

These lines reveal, in addition to the pseudo-religious reference, allusions to the vocabulary and practices of secret societies such as for example the Freemasons, who are strongly present in Calabria (Paoli, 1994: 235). Starting in the second half of the 18th century, the Freemasons exaggerated secrecy and mystification and in doing so distanced themselves from the original ideals of the first Freemason Lodges, i.e., equality and tolerance. An opaque system developed with diverse grades or degrees with which various levels of information and initiation in Freemason knowledge were linked.<sup>9</sup> Here such privileged knowledge is implied (at least by analogy) by the “tree of knowledge”. This term is a synonym for the *'Ndrangheta*, which is symbolized in pictorial portrayals by a large tree with branches, twigs and leaves (Paoli, 1994: 217). The verse’s “three drops of blood” refer to the rites of initiation which take place when a new member is accepted and which are practiced with some slight variation in form throughout the entire *Cosa Nostra*. Criminology has mistakenly ignored this ceremony for a long time and has even denied it.<sup>10</sup> The former *Mafioso* and deserter *Tommaso Buscetta* has confirmed the ceremony for the *Mafia*, as have others after him (Buscetta, 1999: 48 ff.; also Falcone & Padovani, 2001: 97 ff.; Loeser, 2000: 347 ff.). Furthermore the ceremony is attested for the *'Ndrangheta*, where it is referred to as baptism (Paoli, 1999: 427), and even for the American *Cosa Nostra* (see Gude Hohensinner, 2001: 83, 96). The acceptance of a new member essentially proceeds as follows: The new member is first introduced (after a long period of prior observation) to a *uomo d'onore* (“man of honour”) in the “family”. The “family’s” head then explains the rules and laws of the “honourable Society”. At the climax, the young man, who may not have any blood relatives with the police or justice authorities and who must have a good reputation, swears an oath of allegiance. After the head of the “family” (*il rappresentante*) has cut the initiate’s finger and dripped several drops of blood on a devotional picture, he then ignites the picture, and while throwing the burning paper from one hand to the other the new member speaks something like the following words: “My flesh shall burn like this devotional picture if I should ever break my oath”.

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<sup>9</sup> For more see the chapter on Freemasonry and secret societies in Möller (1986: 213 ff., 218).

<sup>10</sup> For example in Hess (1986: 82); only reluctantly accepted in Hess (1993: 199).

In spite of contrary assumptions and speculations, the rules of the *Cosa Nostra* are not set down in written form, as is also the case of the words of the oath of allegiance (*il giuramento*). The rules are transmitted orally, e.g., in the initiation ceremony, and are apparently limited to a few essential rules, primarily the laws of honour and silence (*leggi d'onore e d'omertà*). The code of honour also requires the member to defend himself against attacks and insults, without the help of the police or justice authorities. *Omertà*, the code of silence, can be regarded as the most important rule of the *Mafia*. It categorically forbids not only any cooperation with the police or justice authorities; much more it requires that the member not speak about the *Cosa Nostra* outside of the organization. New members are told at their initiation that their society is called *Cosa Nostra* and not *Mafia*, and that its members are referred to as *uomini d'onore*. They then swear an oath of absolute confidentiality regarding the *società onorata*. This includes a requirement that the "man of honour" never identify himself as such or ask another person directly whether he is a "man of honour". Usually introduction takes place through a third party who knows both of the parties concerned as "men of honour". The formula for the introduction is then something like "He is the same thing" (Butta, 1999: 108; Falcone & Padovani, 2001: 98). In Puzos novel (1969/1995: 334), the words are "[being] a friend of the friends".

The drastic consequences associated with violation of the code of silence are the subject of a song bearing the title "Omertà":

*Mentri canta la lupara / Na carogna grida e mori / Chista leggi dura e amara / A l'infami spacca o cori / Nuddu vitti o sapi nenti / Cu vole a Dio mi prega i Santi / O culpevoli o innucenti / Ognunu faci lu mircanti // Omertà, omertà / Chista é leggi i società / Leggi chi non perduna / A cu faci infamità.*

*L'omertà é cumandamentu / Esti leggi saggia e giusta / Cu prestau lu giuramentu / Lu sgarrari assai ci custa / Occhiu tengu ma nun viu / Sugnu surdu e puru mutu / Sacciu i reguli di Diu / Ma restu sempri nu tambutu // Omertà, omertà / Chista é leggi i società / Leggi chi non perduna / A cu faci infamità.*

*Surdu mutu orbu sugnu / A l'onorata ci appartegnu / Società che 'nta nu pugnu / Ci cumanda tuttu u regnu / É l'omu chi parra assai / Si trova sempri 'nta li guai / Chi é surdu orbu e taci / Campa pi cent' anni in paci.*

*While the sawn-off shotgun sings / The traitor screams and dies / This hard and bitter law / Splits the traitor's heart / No-one saw or knew a thing / Whoever turns to God honours the Saints / Guilty or not guilty / Nobody*

*spoke a word // Omertà, Omertà / This is the law of our society / Laws that don't forgive those / Who break their silence*

*Silence is an order / A just and wise law / Whoever breaks his oath / Knows the price to pay / I have eyes but I see nothing / I am deaf and even dumb / I know the laws of God / And keep them to myself // Omertà, Omertà / This is the law of our society / Laws that don't forgive those / Who break their silence*

*Blind, deaf and dumb am I / I am one of the society / That is a clenched fist / And that rules the land / The man who speaks too much / Will never have it easy / But whoever is deaf and blind and mute / Will live in peace for a hundred years. (II Canto di Malavita, 2000, Track 12).*

Further important ground rules are unconditional obedience to the *rappresentante* of the member's own family and to his orders, as well as that the member must always tell the truth and keep his word when dealing with "men of honour". These rules are in no way intended simply to raise the level of general character within the society, but are rather meant to maintain the operability of the organization. The requirement of telling the truth is meant to avoid misunderstandings of this sort which could possibly have drastic consequences. Since these rules serve only for the protection of the organization, it would be wrong to assume that the individual could always count on conformity to these rules. If for example a member is to be killed, the job of the murder is given to someone who enjoys the trust of the member to be killed, possible even a blood relative. In order to get close enough to him, the relative will give the victim a false sense of security and will even lie to him if necessary. In Puzo's "Godfather", *Michael Corleone*, the new godfather, has his brother-in-law *Carlo* killed immediately after he has accepted the godfatherhood for *Carlo's* newborn son. In order to give *Carlo* a feeling of security immediately before the murder and to elicit an important piece of information from him, *Michael* gives him a little encouragement: "Don't be so frightened. Do you think I'd make my sister a widow? Do you think I'd make my nephews fatherless? After all I'm Godfather to one of your kids" (Puzo, 1969/1995: 432).

Claims such as the one that the *Mafia* would only act according to its own rules, for example that the *Mafia* would not kill women or children<sup>11</sup>,

<sup>11</sup> Only one of many counterexamples is the kidnapping and murder of young Giuseppe Di Matteo, whom Giovanni Brusca has killed after being held hostage for more than two years in January 1996, after his plan to prevent the father of the boy, aged 15 at the time of his murder, from cooperating with justice authorities had failed; see Lo-dato (1999, S. 144 ff.).

belong to the realm of the legendary just as much as the supposition that local *Mafia* bosses would selflessly, so to speak in a charitable manner, turn to one another for assistance. In general it can be said that, when necessary for retention of power or to gain a decisive advantage, the *Mafia* is prepared to break any existing rule. Even if it is true that until the 1970s a majority of the *Mafia* families (until the rise of the *Corleonesi*) had refrained from dealing in narcotics on a large scale, the contrast between a good, old, in essence, honourable *Mafia* with a brutal, new *Mafia* which has become unpredictable under the *Corleonesi*<sup>12</sup> is a transfiguring romanticization. In his Sicilian travel notes, the publicist *Joachim Fest* recorded a conversation on this topic which should be repeated here:

*"As I spoke about the meeting with the 'uomo di rispetto', everyone agreed that the resigned tone of my discussion partner was in no way feigned: The civil Mafia of the lawyers and dignitaries was in the process of losing its influence. Instead a type of syndicate was on the rise which was without scruples, violent and full of contempt for the atavistic moral concepts of the 'Society' of the old days. Reaching far beyond the island, with extensive international connections, the syndicate laughed at Sicilian provincialism and did its business in prostitution, smuggling and narcotics trafficking on a large scale. At the same time the syndicate is penetrating into state administration, is infiltrating the authorities with control of public funds, and is investing enormous amounts of money in construction companies and insurance firms. The old Mafia was not so interested in wealth as in brutal respect. And their extortionate activities could be seen more as taxation by a shadow government, as they understood themselves. They have now grown into a criminal investment company. Only Carmelo G., the fat professor, contradicted everyone. Even the distinction between an older 'Mafia' and a newer 'Cosa Nostra' would be wrong from the start. Anyone who believes that, he said, was the victim of a deceptive strategy aimed at nothing other than making the 'honourable society', which had never earned the title, appear more honourable. The same intent was behind the formula 'culture of the Mafia' which could be heard everywhere in the meantime. Everyone knows, he added, that not a word of it is true. But all of these sentimental Sicilians, in love with their own powerlessness, repeated what they heard without even thinking."* (Fest, 1996: 68 ff.).<sup>13</sup>

The assumptions in this context which emerge in *Mario Puzos* novel and which are aimed in the same direction are just as remarkable: He has *Michael Corleone* in his flight to Sicily meet a certain *Taza*, who tells him

<sup>12</sup> In this spirit see, e.g., Loeser (2000: 50 ff.).

<sup>13</sup> Just as critical of this "myth" Falcone & Padovani (1991: 104).

stories of the *Mafia*. Among other things, *Taza* explains that people go to the *Mafia* because they could not expect just treatment by the authorities; the *Mafia* on the other hand took from the rich and gave to the poor.

*“But what Dr. Taza did not add, what Michael learned on his own in the months that followed, was that the Mafia in Sicily had become the illegal arm of the rich and even the auxiliary police of the legal and political structure. It had become a degenerate capitalist structure, anti-Communist, anti-liberal, placing its own taxes on every form of business endeavor no matter how small.”* (Puzo, 1969/1995: 324 ff.).

## 6. Organization and Structure

Until well into the 1980s, research into the *Mafia* in Italy as well as in Germany was dominated by the controversial question of whether or not there was a uniform *Mafia* organization and about what could be said of its structure with a given amount of certainty. At present the claim is still made that the idea of a conspirative secret society equipped with a variety of command levels is a “mythical and mistaken” (Manns, 1999: 268).<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, as far as criminology is concerned, it can be clearly said that there is a particular organizational structure in the *Cosa Nostra*.

This structure consists at the level of the “family” of the simple soldiers (*soldati*) who are subordinate in groups to the *capodecinas*; the *capodecinas* are in turn responsible to the chief of the “family” (*rappresentante* or *capo*). This structure can be (but need not be) enhanced to include a *consigliere*, an advisor in legal and business matters, as well as a deputy (*vicecapo* or *sottocapo*). According to statements by *Buscetta*, in 1957 *Joseph Bonanno*, representative of the American *Cosa Nostra* from New York, suggested at a meeting with *Mafia* leaders in Palermo that a *commissione* should be established functioning as a family-independent body for moderation of conflicts and for coordination based on the model of the American *Cosa Nostra* (Arlacchi, 2000: 65, 69). The first *commissioni* were then set up starting in 1957. These are however local bodies (*commissione provinciale*) encompassing only individual provinces, e.g., Palermo; the corresponding inter-regional institution for all of Sicily (*commissione regionale* or *cupola*) did not go into operation until 1975 (cf. Falcone & Pa-

<sup>14</sup> Similar Hess (1986: V, 103 ff., 165) and Hess (1993: 197); contrary Falcone & Padovani (1991: 99 ff.); Arlacchi (2000: IX); Paoli, (1999: 428); Scarpinato (forward in Butta, 1999: 14); Loeser (2000: 275 ff.); Neubacher (2002: 45).

dovani, 2001: 101). The American *Cosa Nostra* has organized itself similarly, using however Americanized designations for the various positions. Here the simple member is referred to as a *button man*, the group leader as *caporegima* or *caporegime*. The American "men of honour" had already installed a *commissione* in 1932, after the heavy losses of the Castellamarese war (Gude Hohensinner, 2001: 81, 235; Cohen, 1999: 70). It is reported that the *'Ndrangheta* in Calabria has had a *commissione* since the 1990s (Paoli, 1994: 218; 1999: 426). In contrast to the Sicilian *Mafia*, it was unusual in the American *Cosa Nostra* (again represented accurately by Puzo in his "The Godfather") that a simple member would be able to have direct contact with his *rappresentante*; information and instructions are always passed on by the *caporegima*, who in doing so shields his boss.<sup>15</sup>

In Italy as well as in the USA, the *Cosa Nostra* has been successful for a long time in holding this basic structure in secrecy. Not until approximately 30 years after its introduction has it been revealed by a number of witnesses who had decided to cooperate with authorities. In Italy the revelations of *Tommaso Buscetta* in 1984 led to the so-called Maxi-Trial of 1987, in which the existence of a *commissione* was established in court for the first time. In the USA it was *Joseph Valachi* who in 1963 spoke to the *McClellan Commission* about the *commissione* and the internal structure of the *Cosa Nostra* (Gude Hohensinner, 2001: 80 ff., 360).

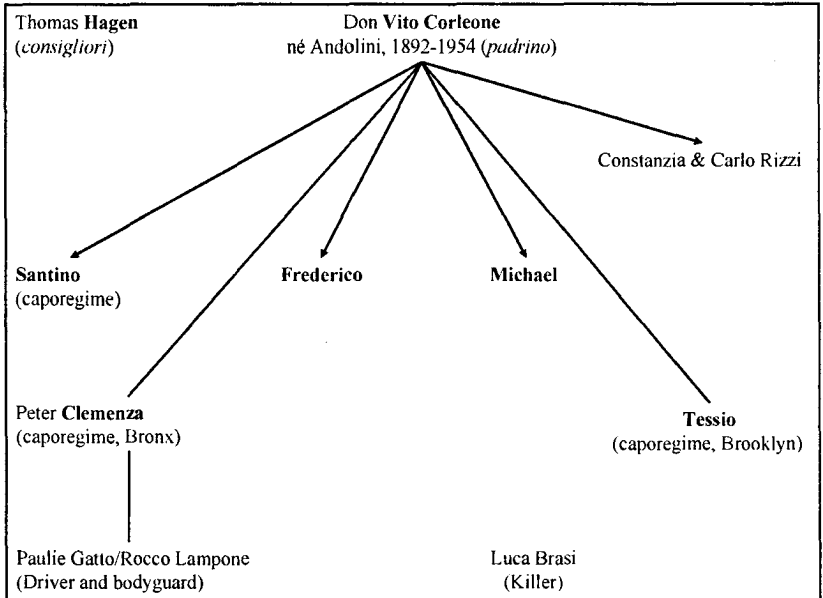
If in this context we apply *Mario Puzo's* representation of the *Corleone* "family" (see diagram), we again recognize the basic features of this structure. At the center is the godfather, *Don Vito Corleone*, and his three sons. The core of the "family" is thus a family related by blood, even though membership in the *Cosa Nostra* is not inherited. Immediately next to the Don, who has no deputy boss (when he is shot, his oldest son *Santino* takes over command), is *consigliere Tom Hagen* as his right hand man. *Peter Clemenza* and *Tessio* are under the direct command of the godfather and exercise the function of *caporegime* as does *Santino Corleone*. *Clemenza* is in charge of the Bronx territory, *Tessio* is in charge of Brooklyn. The *button men* underneath them in the hierarchy remain for the most part unnamed. The novel gives their number as at least 100; they are introduced as toughs or money-collectors. One exception is *Paulie Gatto* from the *Clemenza* team, who works as the Don's chauffeur and bodyguard. After his betrayal and murder he is replaced by *Rocco Lampone*, who later works

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<sup>15</sup> In agreement Arlacchi (1994: 64); Gude Hohensinner (2001: 90).

his way up to the rank of *caporegime*. Finally, the Don's hit man is also mentioned by name, *Luca Brasi*.

Figure 1: The "Family Tree" of the Corleones



In addition to these actual members of the "family", there are contacts to a large number of more or less influential *associates*, who make up the so-called *partito*. These people are not members, but work for the "family" for money or because they owe the "family" a favour. The paid collaborators are either continuously bribed or paid on a case-by-case basis, e.g., as informants. The Don's important political connections are on the other hand personally founded and, when he turns business dealings over to someone else, must be transferred to his successor in his own presence (Puzo, 1969/1995). The godfather maintains relationships of this type, e.g., with two congressmen, a senator, a general staff officer at the Pentagon, a bank director and with his godson, a singer, whom he has helped to achieve a successful career as an actor and movie producer in Hollywood. Among those who are paid for their services are "the most powerful man in the movie-making unions", two influential functionaries in the textiles unions,



a policeman in the New York Police Department, journalists and an employee at the telephone company.

Of course, one must not think of the structure of this sort of "family" or of the organization as a whole as being too rigid. The *Cosa Nostra* has continuously proven its ability to change and adapt. Structure always follows function, and never vice versa. Although the character of an organization is beyond doubt, here we are not concerned with a state within the state, nor with a variant form of a criminal business operation. The consistent hierarchical organization needed for a national corporation is absent, as the relationships of subordination and authority exist in this form only within the individual families. In the interregional area the commissions exercise only the function of a moderating and coordinating instance, i.e., the chairman of the commission has no directorial right over the other heads or *rappresentanti*. As *primus inter pares* he is much more required to organize and direct the negotiations, which take place at irregular intervals and are only convened as needed. Furthermore it must be kept in mind that the "families" act independently in the selection and operation of their businesses and on their own behalf. It is also possible that individual members of a "family" may pursue their own businesses, with the approval of the own *rappresentante*. *Paoli* has thus accurately emphasized that "it would be absolutely incorrect to compare the decision-making bodies of the Mafia with the administrative or supervisory organs of large companies, or even to assume that the *Cosa Nostra* and 'Ndrangheta function as multinational corporations" (1999: 437).

The idea of a state within a state is also misleading, since it obscures what makes the *Mafia* so dangerous and what *Giovanni Falcone* has called "una organizzazione parallela" (Falcone & Padovani, 2001: 82). This refers to the ability of the *Mafia* to adapt to the respective condition of the state, to enter into alliances and make agreements with parts of local and national politics, with the police and justice authorities. In allegiance to the two levels of the *Mafia* already mentioned, the *famiglia* and the *commissione*, the Italian term used in public when referring to those in politics that have entered into political allegiance with the *Mafia* is *terzo livello*. A prototype here is the case of the seven-time Italian Prime Minister and senator for life *Giulio Andreotti*, whose intensive contacts to the *Mafia* were gradually uncovered in the 1990s and which are notorious in spite of the fact that *Andreotti* was exonerated from a variety of accusations in two criminal trials

in 1999<sup>16</sup> (cf. Neubacher, 2002: 46; Igel, 1997: 269 ff.; further Campisi, 1996).

## 7. Francis Ford Coppola's Film

The American director *Francis Ford Coppola*, whose family is from Sicily, based the first part of his film trilogy<sup>17</sup> in 1972 ("The Godfather") on the book by *Mario Puzo*. The plot in the first sequel "The Godfather II" (1974) had little to do with the novel except for the characters in the plot, and the second sequel "The Godfather III" (1990) had nothing more to do with the novel. The script in all three cases however is a product of the *Coppola/Puzo* team. And these scripts clearly orient the plot of the film towards authentic persons and events. While the novel contains corresponding allusions (e.g. the five New York "families"; the singer who becomes a success with the help of the *Cosa Nostra: Frank Sinatra*; cf. Gude Hohensinner, 2001: 317), "The Godfather II" and "III" make reference to historical personalities. In the wealthy casino and hotel-owner *Moe Greene* in Las Vegas we see *Gus Greenbaum* and *Moe Sedway*; the Jewish gangster boss who does business in Havana with help of the Cuban dictator *Batista* and his right hand man are called *Hillman Roth* and *Johnny Ola* in the film and point to the historic persons *Meyer Lansky* and *Vincent Alo* (Gude Hohensinner, 2001: 310 ff.).

In "The Godfather III", filmed in the year 1990, *Puzo/Coppola* establish a connection to Italy's recent history, especially the years 1978-1982. Among other things the plot deals with the financial scandal at the Vatican, with the sudden death of the new Pope and the banker found hanged under a bridge in London. *Puzo/Coppola* have *Giulio Andreotti* appear in the film in the form of a highly placed member of the government, perhaps the head of the government, named *Lucchesi* who maintains contacts to the highest levels of the *Mafia*. *Coppola* comments on the character as follows:<sup>18</sup>

*"Lucchesi (...) is the man I referred to earlier who was the gentleman with the thick black glasses and represents – I won't say his name – the highest level of political power at that time in Italy and only recently has been through many many inquiries regarding his association with the mafia"*

<sup>16</sup> The title of the book, "Lo zio Giulio" translates as: "Uncle Giulio", where "uncle" is a term used to refer to someone who belongs to the *famiglia*.

<sup>17</sup> See also Vorauer (1996: 114-130).

<sup>18</sup> Coppola's audio commentary on the DVD-version of the film (Coppola, 2001).

*which has all conveniently seemingly been dealt with but everyone knows the truth".*

## 8. Conclusion

The medium of film and the fictional novel make it possible to recount other or particular truths (here intentionally in the plural) than is possible in a formal legal proceeding. It is no coincidence that the strengths of these media are found here. The example of "The Godfather" shows that a representation cloaked in fiction can indeed reflect real events. The mass media in the news sector with their need to provide fast and up-to-date information, in danger of spreading fiction under the mantel of information, do not then have an advantage per se in terms of authenticity; the requirement of the sender and receiver of the information is primarily different.

Criminology, at least German criminology, must remain modest with regard to the topic of the *Mafia*. In part it has failed to recognize the statements of Italian investigators, witnesses and victims, or has not taken such statements seriously or, until well into the 1980s, has mistakenly worked with disinformation according to which a *Mafia* in the sense of an organization never existed in Italy. Perhaps it must first, like history as a science has, discover interviewing of contemporary witnesses in terms of *oral history* in order to be able to exploit the existing knowledge of willing conversation partners. Even a *Mario Puzo*, who has always denied association with the *Cosa Nostra*, must have received his information from somewhere.

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