

## ITALIAN MAFIA: A FOCUS ON APULIA MAFIA WITH A LITERATURE REVIEW

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### ABSTRACT

*The goal of this paper is a systematic literary review that analyzes the differences between the main Apulia's Mafia organizations and their distinctive murder methods. In homicides committed by criminal organization, the method used intends to be an admonition to other persons. We analyze the criminal organization named "Mafia of Gargano", that is a promontory of Apulia Region, in South-East of Italy. We analyze its homicidal mode, the type of weapon used in murders, the drawn body sites and the action recurrence. Previously named "Faida" of Gargano, the "Garganic Mafia" was certified by legal court as an inveterate mafia system only in 2009. In fact, in the Garganic area an archaic and violent mafia arise for theft of animals; subsequently, the most profitable activities of these clans became drug and weapons trafficking. The "Garganic Mafia" is an extremely traditional Mafia, like "Camorra", with particularly practices of cadaver concealment. Very often, utilizing natural conformation of Gargano promontory, the criminals throw away the bodies into natural canyons. In this manner, the cadavers are discovered after many years accidentally: this method was classified as "Lupara Bianca". Another kind of Apulia's Mafia is the so called "Sacra Corona Unita" (SCU). Originally it was founded by the Camorra's boss but it's inspired by Calabrian 'Ndrangheta: both these mafia associations was found in south of Italy, Camorra in Campania Region and 'Ndrangheta in Calabria Region. In the murders committed by the SCU was frequent the recourse to deception to attract the victim, the use of the gun and the method of "Lupara Bianca" with the burning of the body. As previously described, the kind of the murder represents the signature of the mafia organization. These finding are very useful for investigations, helping to identify crime's motivations and the correlation with suspects.*

**Keywords:** Italian mafia, Garganic Mafia, Apulia, Sacra Corona Unita, Lupara Bianca, Shotgun.

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### Introduction

Historically there were four Italian Mafias, i.e. "Cosa Nostra" in Sicily, "Camorra" in Campania, "Sacra Corona Unita" (SCU, United Sacred Crown) in Apulia and "Ndrangheta" in Calabria<sup>(1)</sup>. But nowadays a new Mafia organization, named "Garganic Mafia", is born in the South of Italy (Apulia region), more precisely in the Foggia's

area. This criminal organization dominates North Apulia area completely.

Sicily (16.9%), Campania (14.8%), and Apulia (14.2%) represent the Italian regions with the highest rates of unemployment<sup>(2-3)</sup>. This report have demonstrated a correlation between unemployment and involvement in Italian organized crime, in accord with other Italian studies<sup>(4-5)</sup>.

Frequently, criminal organization kills enemy affiliated to other mafiosus families: the method used as well as the positioning of the body follow a macabre ritual laden with significance with the purpose to admonish the other persons. For example, the “Ndrangheta” used cover the bodies with burnt limem, traditionally used in the burial of bodies in open graves, to hide the smell of decomposition. Prolonged exposure of the skin to this substance causes several types of skin reactions from mild irritation to full thickness burns. Hands, are usually covered with gloves, to consent the identification of the victims by their fingerprints<sup>(6-7)</sup>.

In Apulia, SCU and “Garganic Mafia”, use to cover the murders, concealing victim's bodies: utilizing the natural conformation of Gargano promontory, the criminals killed the victims with a gunshot and after, they throw away the bodies into natural canyons, called “cave”. This technique is called “Lupara Bianca” (white lupara): “lupara” is a gun with a sawn-off barrel with a high lacerating power at short distance, “white” means a “murder with disappearance of the body”<sup>(8-9)</sup>. Apulia has one of the highest rates of death by firearm than many other Italian regions. The murders are related to conflicts among local gangs who are in constant struggle for control of illegal business activities<sup>(6)</sup>. The young age of victims may be related to their unemployed status, and might possibly explain their willingness to engage in criminal activities, using violence against rival groups. These mafia murders, on one hand, are intended to portray a particular group's power and ability to control Gargano's territory; on the other hand, these are a means to kill individuals that represent obstacles for the organization<sup>(10-12)</sup>.

Garganic Mafia: Actually three mafia's groups are recognized in Foggia's area: The “Foggia Society”, the “Garganic Mafia” and “Mafia of Cerignola”.

Mafia's historians traced back the origins of “Foggia Society” at 5th January 1979, when the main criminal leader of the area was in a meeting at the “Hotel Florio”<sup>(13)</sup>, on the road from Foggia to San Severo. Godfather of the occasion was Raffaele Cutolo, Neapolitan Mafioso of “New Organized Camorra”. He arrived in Foggia in exile: in this occasion, he explained the dynamics of organized crime and affiliated the local gangsters. He also explained the Mafia method and created the “Foggia Society”.

In Cerignola clans (Mafia of Cerignola), inspired to the “Camorra”, don't exist any hierarchy. The local crime is very active and infamous, especially for the presence of groups dedicated to the armed assaults and robberies, drug trafficking, extortions and car thefts.

The “Garganic Mafia”, in the district of Foggia (the boot spur), is the oldest crime organization. It started in the 70s and has long been called “Faida” of Gargano but only in 2009 was certified by a legal court as an inveterate Mafia system consisting of very powerful clans.

In fact, in the Gargano there is an archaic and violent Mafia: born between shepherds for animal thefts, nowadays it becomes an association dedicated to the most profitable activities as drug and weapons trafficking. Two Clans are fighting a never-ending feud, and another clan, the third, has joined in this scenario. All the Clans involved use extreme violence and, although of rural origin, control their territory with Mafia-like methods: racket, extortions, deep penetrations in the political and economic sectors (especially in the tourism and construction industries), employing the usury to control legal business structures. Finally, they use a ruthless executions, usually with sawn-off shotguns, both to confirm their leadership, both to eliminate individuals that represent obstacles for the organization.

The “Garganic Mafia” at the beginning was prevalent in the inland villages such as Monte Sant'Angelo, San Nicandro Garganico, San Giovanni Rotondo, San Marco in Lamis and Rignano Garganico, later has spread downstream along the coast of the Gargano, and specifically in Vieste, Manfredonia and Mattinata. In Gargano's area, in most murder cases, the causes of death are cranio-encephalic injuries and often, there is the presence of the “coup de grace”. Preferentially, the Clans of Garganic Mafia use the shotgun as weapon, maybe due to the aforementioned rural origins of the affiliates.

In the Garganic Mafia ritual, the victims are burn or bury. There are Mafia's cemeteries scattered throughout the territory. The “Garganic Mafia” tries to erase the memory and the image of the victims. This is the reason because criminals give the coup de grace by shooting the victim in face. It is a cruel phenomenon, deeply rooted in the territory. The “Garganic Mafia” doesn't bury the corpse, it is thrown away into a cave, to cancel the memory of killed person. Cemeteries, in fact, are the caves of

Garganic area, where the bodies are collected in a sack, thrown and forgotten. This method, classified as “Lupara Bianca” (“white shotgun”), is one of the most employed by “Garganic Mafia”. In fact they used the caves to throw away the bodies in 12 murders (or more which we don't know yet), committed between the 2000 and the 2016. Two camorristas' bodies were found in 1993 in the cave called “Palla Palla”, in San Marco in Lamis (a town near Foggia). Few years later, in 2009, in the cave called “Zazzano” (in the same area) some speleologists discovered four bodies belonging to a “Garganic Mafia” family<sup>(8)</sup>. These findings lead investigators to the conclusion that the car is the usual method for transporting corpse, before throw away it. Moreover, covering the bodies with plastic bags is probably the method utilizing for avoid the bleeding from wounds during the transportation. Probably these are the reasons why the “Lupara Bianca” is one of the primary manner used by members of the “Garganic Mafia” to let disappear the bodies and the tracks of murders. In addition the choice to conceal the cadavers in an isolated area containing numerous grottoes, valleys and caves situated hundreds of meters underground and far from the urban area, is a means to evading prosecution<sup>(8)</sup>.

Sacra Corona Unita: The Sacra Corona Unita was originally founded with “Foggia Society” by Camorra's boss named Raffaele Cutolo. However, few years later, with Cutolo's downfall, the organization began operating separately, inspired by various “Calabrian ‘Ndrangheta” leaders, imprisoned in the Trani jail, on the North coast of Bari, the capital city of Apulia region. At the first, the principal business were olive oil and wine industries; subsequently, the group kept busy with fraud, gunrunning and drug trafficking, joining forces with international criminal organizations. The SCU is made up of three district groupings or levels. Members can “graduate” from one level to the next one by going through “riti battesimali” (baptismal rites). The religious symbolism is probably leftover from the SCU's association with the Camorra. The lowest level, the “Lower Society”, is made up of lower-level criminals who can achieve street-level activities. The second level, the “Major Society”, is made up of members who can form their own crew of “picciotti”, known as affiliates. The final level is the “Secret Society”, the core of the organization where key decisions are made.

Decreasing the importance of the Adriatic corridor as a smuggling canal (thanks to the normalization of the Balkans area) and thanks to the successful police and judicial operations, in the recent years the SCU power was reduced, in relationship to the power peaked around the mid-1990s.

The murder ritual operated by SCU lead to find some bodies on the crime scene and others far from the scene, in the areas with difficult access, in wells or in public places not attended (abandoned farmhouses, agricultural land, streets). As usual in Mafia's organizations, each member had a nickname, and ritual symbolic objects often were found beside the buried bodies that referred to the victim lifetime, when this is the member of a clan<sup>(9)</sup>. The ritual to conceal burning or hiding the corpse of victims is a symbolic code, known by all the family members, and called “Lupara Bianca”. The typical murder manner of the SCU clans is the gunshot.

Cause of Death: As previously mentioned, both Apulian mafias used preferentially the firearm, but the main difference between them is the type of firearm: in the Gargano it's used the shotgun, in Bari it's used the gun. Clearly, injuries and causes of death are different.

The “Garganic Mafia” murders committed between 2000 and 2015 showed that the shotgun hit the skull frequently, while in a few cases, there were injuries of chest or abdomen. Furthermore, in many of these cases we found the so-called “coup de grâce”, given to kill or to scar victim's face. The post-mortem examinations of the bodies showed how in the majority of the cases the death was due to cranio-encephalic injuries. The macro and microscopic feature of the gunshot wounds let us to establish a close firing distance<sup>(14-16)</sup>. In the killings with thoracic or abdominal lesions, the main cause of death was hemorrhagic shock due to the injuries of internal organs. It is very difficult for medico-legal investigators to understand the cause of death in murder cases of “Lupara Bianca”, for the advanced stage of decomposition, therefore a multi-disciplinary investigation is necessary<sup>(17,18)</sup>; furthermore it is very important to collect the findings around the corpse and during autopsy<sup>(19,20)</sup>. In some cases the Rx examination is very useful because showed the presence of multiple fractures to the skull and to limbs, without signs of healing that probably have caused the death<sup>(21-23)</sup>.

In the SCU homicides the firearms were always used; in more than one-third of the cases the lesions were on the skull, and was the only lesions

found on the whole body. The cranio-encephalic lesions produced by gun were mostly localized in the occipital region, typical of “coup de grâce” while in the remaining cases there were mostly multiple lesions distributed over the chest, abdomen, arms and legs<sup>(24-47)</sup>. In other cases the lesions were caused by very powerful firearms, for example Kalashnikov. In the most “Lupara Bianca” murders operated by the SCU, the mode to delete the tracks of the murder was the burning of the bodies (Table 1).

Kind of Mafia	Geographical localization	Kind of firearms	Prevalent Injury	“Lupara Bianca”
Garganic Mafia	Apulia Region – Gargano area	Shotgun	Skull	Yes - prevalent
SCU	Apulia Region – Bari (capital city of Apulia)	Gun	1/3 Skull 2/3 multiple regions	Yes - not prevalent

**Table 1:** Features of Apulia Mafia, focused on Garganic Mafia and SCU.

**Conclusion**

The “Garganic Mafia” is, therefore, an extremely traditional Mafia in the murders behavior. In fact, the realization of an ambush, the use of considerable explosive force weapons, the shot in the head, are all circumstances in which you want to assert the power of intimidation as a “warning” to all who are opposed to wishes of the Clan. Mafia murders, can be committed in a sensational way (not only with the explosion of the classic “coup de grace”, but many times in public, in the presence of many people). It expresses the strength of the group and its affiliates, ruthless attitude to eliminate rivals with wild murders. These rituals, performed in impressive manners, don’t always refer to organized crimes (more people, equipped with high-powered weapons, who can surprise hitting their victims etc.) but show the cruelty and ruthlessness of those who run them. The crimes are previously prepared and not the result of impromptu decisions, with careful planning, use of valid weapons, study of the way out, division of roles, which make up what is the aggravating circumstance of premeditation. The prevalence, in these murders, of a specific “way to kill” that binds and defines them, at the same time, as “mafia crimes”, establishes the existence of a canonical procedure of preparation and execution of the criminal event. These elements characterize the “Garganic Mafia”.

Differently from “Garganic Mafia”, what really sets the murders committed by the SCU is the association of ritualism. It is only a SCU’s practice to allow the identification of the victim through the symbolic objects that the victim was using in lifetime.

The ferocity of the SCU members, the frequent recourse to deception to attract the victim, and the methods of execution of the sentence, are elements in common with the “Garganic Mafia”. The main difference between these two Mafia’s organizations is the type of firearm used: the “Garganic Mafia” prefers the use of shotgun, while the SCU usually uses the gun. This difference is not however recognizable in the elimination of traces and bodies; indeed, both use the method of “White Shotgun” with the burn or the burial of the body.

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