4 Organizational Orders and the Use of Violence

4.1 Conflict and Violence

Even if conflict is present in every organization, the few studies of conflict within and between organizations have principally, if not exclusively, regarded legitimate organizations (Ackroyd 2009). There are many reasons for conflict in organizations: for example, tension between organizational subunits arising from different perceptions on the priority to be given to organizational problems and the different solutions proposed, or from attempts to control scarce resources. Another source of organizational conflict is the situation in which two subunits have common responsibilities for the same set of tasks, or where people further down the organizational hierarchy try to climb to higher positions in search of status, prestige, and monetary rewards.

Whatever the reasons that give rise to conflict, or the form it takes, its source is always located in some perceived or real divergence of interests (Morgan 1986, 155). Conflict in organizations grows, therefore, when individuals or groups perceive the differences in their preferences involving decision outcomes and make use of the power they have to try to promote their own preferences over those of others.

Sociological studies of conflict have analyzed a wide range of individual and relational factors that account for violent and criminal activities (Collins 2010). Studying a Chicago youth gang named Vice Lords, Keiser (1969) analyzed the use of violence and retaliation, and the reasons for it. Vice Lords were a structured gang with a division of labor and different hierarchical levels, and Keiser identified two types of conflict: intraorganizational conflict, within the gang, and interorganizational conflict, between the gangs and other gangs. Intraorganizational conflict consisted mainly in several feuds among various subgroups within the federation, some between different branches, others within the same branch, due to competition for leadership. When senior leaders were arrested, the resulting vacancies at the top encouraged attempts by younger members to launch internal power climbs.
Of particular interest are the interorganizational conflicts, involving the Vice Lords and other gangs. For example, if a Vice Lord was beaten up by members of another gang, retaliatory raids became highly probable. The likelihood of such violent events was linked to several factors, first, whether tension had already existed between the Vice Lords and the gang involved (arguments, individual fights). A second set of reasons had to do with the internal dynamics of the gang, especially in terms of the competition for leadership: if someone aspired to climb to a better position in the hierarchy, retaliation was an opportunity to show the group his skills and value. Strong competition increased the chances of retaliation, therefore, while lack of competition decreased these chances. Finally, a third factor concerned the status of the person involved: if the position held was not important, retaliation was not inevitable. Conversely, if the person held high positions in the organizational order of the Vice Lords, or was a member of prestige and influence, then retaliation was certain. The higher in rank the person involved, the greater the involvement of the organization. The fact that the threat of violence by another gang increased solidarity within the threatened gang was seen in different gangs (Decker and van Winkle 1996).

Retaliation and vengeance have moral legitimacy in most tribal societies, while they are outlawed in modern societies with formal legal systems (Boehm 1984). In some situations, there are rational motivations for revenge. Mary Durham (1928) relates the story of a tribal leader who failed to take revenge and, as a consequence, lost his right to speak in a meeting of the tribe. Members of many tribal societies, Boehm affirms, consider it “to be a legitimate moral prerogative of an individual or group to take homicidal revenge for the death of a close relative” (1984, 65).

The type of market in which the illegal organization operates also plays an important role in the genesis and dynamics of conflict. For example, of illegal markets, the drug market appears to be one of the most violent. However, certain recent research studies have produced results of a different kind. Analyzing 31 police investigations in the Netherlands, Soudijn and Reuter (2013) show a variety of nonviolent dispute resolution methods in drug retailing. They found data on 33 incidents involving failures in transactions related to cocaine smuggling and the subsequent outcome. In many cases, the methods of dispute resolution (for example, following a failure to deliver a load of drugs or its loss) are similar to those used by legitimate businesses. Criminals initiate an investigation to check whether the balance of evidence favors an interpretation of bad luck or incompetence as opposed to an effort to defraud. The result of these investigations in most disputes is that they are resolved with neither threats nor violence. However, when
negotiations break down, because there is evidence that someone stole drugs or was guilty of deliberate betrayal, then threats and violence are often used.

Recent studies of violence have brought to the fore the importance of moving from a focus on the individual determinants of crime, to the analysis of its relational and social network basis. Gould (2003) argued that interpersonal violence is a property of relations, and most often emerges from disputes over dominance, demonstrating how conflict is more likely to occur in symmetrical relationships, in which there is ambiguity concerning the relative status of the contenders, than in hierarchical ones. Papachristos (2009) applied this relational approach to the study of organized crime, explaining the spread of violence in gangs through the patterns of interaction and conflict among gang members. While this scholarship has successfully documented the role of interpersonal relationships and social networks in explaining violence in organized crime, in this book the focus is switched to the formal organizational structure of criminal organizations – their organizational order.

Given that it is impossible for mafias, as it is for other criminal organizations, to resort to the legal system, violence is the method frequently employed to enforce contractual agreements and resolve disputes. The use of violence in the mafia is heavily dependent on the type of organization adopted, whether clan-based or clan-based federation. Clan-based federation organizational order is characterized by collusion between criminal organizations, while clan-based organizational order is characterized by competition. It follows that a high degree of violence is an indicator, not only of conflict, but of a high degree of competition in a criminal system, while a low degree of violence indicates the prevalence of collusion between the clan members of the criminal system. There are obvious advantages in practicing collusion. In a situation of oligopoly, in which there are few companies present, agreement is preferable, with a sharing of the market, especially if the takeover is complicated and very expensive to implement. In criminal systems that practice collusion, “clients” are prevented from turning to other suppliers, and competitors are prevented from entering their territory to provide services. In addition, the cost of conflict is minimized, with enormous savings in terms of people and resources, and time and money can be dedicated mainly to maximizing business. All this produces organizational stability and longevity; it is not, however, always possible.

The conflicts in Mexico between cartels of drug traffickers and in El Salvador between gangs are very eloquent with regard to this (Wainwright 2016). There is a high level of competition among the drug dealers in Mexico to control access to the limited border crossing with the United States.
States. Agreement between them is extremely difficult, as some passages are very profitable (70 percent of the drugs that enter the United States go through Juárez), and it is therefore hard to divide the market equally. In contrast, in El Salvador, the two most important gangs, Mara Salvatrucha and Barrio 18, managed to sign a truce – temporarily – in 2012, after years of feuds and murders (with about 50,000 people killed in the 1990s), reducing the number of deaths by an average of 15 a day to 5.¹

Competition and collusion may be favored by endogenous factors, arising from within the criminal system, or exogenous, arising from outside, law enforcement action, for example. In the cases of Mexico (competition) and El Salvador (collusion), external factors were prevalent, with the role of the police – whether intentionally or unintentionally – decisive. Paradoxically, in Mexico, the more law enforcement agencies obtained results by limiting the number of accesses to the United States, the more the violent competition between criminal organizations increased in order to take control of the remaining channels.² In addition, the extremely ragged and complex structure of law enforcement agencies, from the federal level to the local level, prevented the effective coordination and unity of action. In the case of the Salvadoran gangs, on the other hand, the government played a role (flirting with the limits of legality) in facilitating the cease-fire, “softening” the prison conditions of gang leaders and moving them from top-security prisons to facilities where they could communicate with their members, so that they could work out a possible way to form a truce with the rival gang. Endogenous factors, too – those generated within the criminal system itself – influence and determine situations of collusion rather than of competition; each solution is influenced by both types of factor, but the main factor is still identifiable.

In the case of the Italian mafias, we will see how, for some, an endogenous strategy, built through the establishment of higher-level bodies of coordination, is particularly important in controlling conflict.

¹ The truce was signed thanks to the support of politicians and police. In 2016, however, the government arrested many of the truce mediators, including top officials in the previous government, with requests for the impeachment and suspension of immunity of MPs and ministers who were accomplices to the negotiation. The accusation was that the truce was used by the gangs to regroup and increase their illegal trafficking (A. Arce, “El Salvador throws out gang truce and officials who put it in place”, The New York Times, May 21, 2016). The cost for Salvadorans of extortion and criminal activities of gangs is about 3 percent of GDP for a total, including the amount households spend on extra security and the lost income of people deterred from working, of nearly 16 percent of GDP (Source: Central Bank of Salvador and UN Development Programme; “The gangs that cost 16% of GDP”, The Economist, May 21, 2016, 29–31).

² Reuter (2009) shows how action aimed at fighting drug trafficking can generate violence by creating instability among the participants.
One major difference in the use of violence is very clear: homicides involving high-profile figures. In some mafias this is strictly prohibited and very rarely occurs (the American Cosa Nostra, the Yakuza), while in others, especially certain Italian mafias, it has been a characteristic feature of the use of criminal violence.

The Mexican cartels, for example, have made, and continue to make, use of violence against high-profile figures, even though they try to avoid using violence against U.S. military or police, in order to prevent significant retaliation. As mentioned in Section 2.8, in 2011 a serious violation of this unwritten rule was committed, with the killing of Jaime Zapata, a special agent of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The devastating consequences for the life of the cartel clearly outweighed any benefits deriving from the elimination of the threat posed by Zapata’s activity.

In gangs, using violence plays a significant role from the initiation, which marks the entrance into these organizations, onward. The use of violence conveys a message to both gang members and nonmembers: violence is a constituent part of gang life and the members are unafraid to use and to undergo it (Padilla 1992). Violence, moreover, increases solidarity between members of the organization, reinforcing the boundaries between those who belong and those who do not. Some gang studies have highlighted the relationship between the level of organization of a gang and the use of violence, particularly homicide. Examining gang homicides during their peak in the mid-1990s in St. Louis, a city with high homicide rates and large gang problems, Decker and Curry found that

well-organized gangs (e.g., groups that function in corporate-like fashion) will engage in relatively few acts of homicide against their own members, preserving group solidarity and cohesion. For such groups, cohesion, solidarity, and leadership mitigate against internecine violence. Correspondingly, gangs with low levels of internal organization are expected to experience higher levels of intra-gang homicide. It is likely that the inability of these groups to control the behavior of their members may reflect a lower level of organization and control. (Decker and Curry 2002, 344)

In the Italian mafias, different organizational structures affect both conflict, in terms of magnitude and frequency, and homicides. Clan-based mafias, characterized by competition between clans, present significantly greater presence of conflict with respect to clan-based federation mafias, characterized by collusion between clans. The different organizational structures affect their capacity to contain internal conflicts, strategize, and react to external threats, and clan-based federation structures
4.2 Collusion or Competition? Italian Mafia Murders and Conflict Resolution

Analyzing the use of violence, particularly homicides, in the three Italian mafias, there emerge obvious differences in the homicide rate – significantly higher in some – and in the kind of homicide: whether they mainly concern organization members or figures who can threaten their existence (judges, journalists, etc.). While many observers relate these different outcomes to different strategic choices, it is argued here that they are due to variations in organizational order – that these differences, in other words, are due to different ways of organizing cooperation among the various criminal groups, and to the different organizational orders adopted.

As we have already seen, one form of structure is a clan-based federation characterized by collusion between the clans, with the presence of higher-level bodies of coordination able to define unitary, overall organization strategies and to limit conflicts and the use of violence. A second form of structure is the clan-based model, characterized by competition between clans, especially if they operate in the same territories, without higher-level bodies of coordination and therefore unable to define unitary strategies or to limit the use of violence. Unlike the clan-based model, the clan-based federation is characterized by the presence of a leadership able to speak on behalf of the organization.

are better able to contain violence and conflict. Available historical accounts support this idea. Table 4.1 reports the major conflicts that have occurred in the three Italian mafia organizations since the 1960s, distinguishing between interclan conflicts and intraclan conflicts.

The former include (a) mafia wars, which involve all the criminal groups in a bitter struggle between two opposing sides; and (b) feuds, which involve two clans in conflict with each other for the control of a specific territory, but do not extend to include other clans and other territories. Intraclan conflicts, on the other hand, are violent internal conflicts that may, in certain cases, lead to (c) division. The Sicilian Cosa Nostra has had three mafia wars (in 1962, 1981, and 1991) and very few other instances of conflict. The Camorra, in contrast, has had only one mafia war, but an extremely violent one (in 1979, with about 1,500 deaths). It has, however, had numerous instances of feuds between clans, internal conflicts, and divisions. The ‘Ndrangheta has had two mafia wars (1974 and 1985), and a number of clan feuds, though fewer than the Camorra, and practically no divisions.
Table 4.1 *Types of conflict in three Italian mafia organizations (a selection of the most relevant)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Conflict</th>
<th>Sicilian Cosa Nostra</th>
<th>Camorra</th>
<th>‘Ndrangheta</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| **Interclan Mafia wars** | 1962–9: Barbera Torretta vs. Greco et al.  
1981–3: Bontade, Inzerillo, Badalamenti, Buscetta, vs. the Corleonesi (Leggio, Provenzano, Riina, Bagarella)  
1985–91: De Stefano, Libri, Tegano, Barreca, Paglaniti, Zito clans vs. Imerti, Condello, Serraino, Fontana, Saraceno, and Rosmini clans |
| **Feuds** | 1962–3; Barbera vs. Greco  
1998–9: the Secondigliano Alliance (Contini, Licciardi, and Mallardo) vs. the clan alliance (Misso, Mazzarella, Giuliano, and Sarno); Rinaldi vs. Mazzarella; Misso, Pirozzi vs. Tolomelli, Vastarella, Mariano, Di Biasi, Giuliano, and Misso clans | e.g., Palamara vs. Mollica; the S. Luca feud: Nirta and Strangio clans, vs. Pelle and Vottari clans |
| **Intraclan Divisions** | 2004–5: the Scampia feud: the Di Lauro clan vs. the “Separatists” or the “Spanish” (former Di Lauro clan);  
2006: the Sarno clan; the Misso clan; the Mariano clan in Naples; the Bidognetti clan, with the separation of the Setola group | 2012: Abete, Abbinante, Notturno clans vs. Mennetta, Magnetti, Petriccini clans |  |
These are, then, two different organizational structures that give rise to different responses and strategic actions. Without necessarily sharing a deterministic idea of social and organizational structures, it is clear that the range of possible strategies is limited by the structure of an organization. Without proper structure, a strategy could not be realized. Therefore, strategies that involve the elimination of high-profile people, due to the complexity required to perform the action, and to contain the repression that results as a consequence, are in some way conceivable and achievable mainly by organizational systems characterized by a clan-based federation model, with collusion prevalent between clans. Of course, organizational structures are artifacts; they are not born and do not modify themselves naturally – they derive from specific and conscious choices of strategy.

4.2.1 Ordinary Murders

The different organizational orders have consequences for mafia behavior, namely, with respect to their capacity to govern conflict and contain violence. From this, the following proposition can be derived:

**Proposition 1** – There exists a correlation in Italian mafias between organizational order (clan-based federation vs. clan-based) and the frequency of conflict and violence: the clan-based federation order, due to the presence of higher-level bodies of coordination, should lead to fewer conflicts and homicides.4

3 The concept of structure is closely linked to that of strategy, in the sense of the determination of the fundamental goals and long-term goals of an enterprise, the definition of the criteria for action, and how to allocate the resources necessary to achieve the objectives (Chandler 1962). On the strategy–structure relationship there are three major characterizations: (1) structure follows strategy: structure is determined by strategic decisions; thus organizational form follows strategy of development (Chandler 1962) as its implementation tool, and organizational design is modeled according to the strategies; (2) strategy follows structure: the specific organizational structure influences strategic decisions, tending to condition and preselect them (Normann 1977; Hall and Sais 1980); (3) strategy and structure coevolve: due to accentuated environmental turbulence and the growth of competitive intensity; the strategy–structure relationship is configured more as a process of interaction and circularity between the different phases (Ansoff 1984) than as a rational design in one direction (from strategy to structure) or the other (from structure to strategy).

4 Data regarding homicides carried out by the three Italian mafia organizations began to be recorded by police forces and ISTAT (the Italian Institute of Statistics) in 1983. Only since 1982, in fact, has the legislature provided a definition of the concept of “mafia,” with the approval of a new article in the Criminal Code (416 bis), which identifies a new type of crime: criminal association with the mafia. For this reason, data relating to homicides prior to 1982 are not always reliable, because mafia homicides were not clearly differentiated from other kinds of homicide.
A problem common to both clan-based and clan-based federation organizations is conflict control and the use of violence – which is an instrument, a resource (Gambetta 1993), and not the objective, of these organizations. Violence is often used by mobsters to establish their reputation in their groups and in the area. In Triads, for example, “violence is used to build up and maintain a Triad’s reputation as a credible protector. Since Triads have established their reputation for violence, some people are able to use this ‘trademark’ to make profits” (Chu 2000, 39). As an instrument, this cannot be eliminated, but must be managed and contained in order to prevent (a) destructive conflict throughout the whole organization and (b) greater repressive action from law enforcement agencies following the escalation of violence. As we will see, the way conflict control and violence are managed (both within and outside the organization) differs between the two organizational orders, in both quantitative (the number of crimes) and qualitative terms (the types of homicides), and this depends on the presence, or lack thereof, of higher-level bodies of coordination. Following a similar line of argument, Leeson and Rogers (2012) argue that criminal organizations establish collusive interfirm institutions designed to internalize the externalities of violent criminal activity and, in so doing, increase the criminal profits of participating mafia families.

The control pyramid that characterizes all basic units of the mafias (family, clan, 'ndrina, ikka, etc.) makes it possible not only to manage and govern the organization, but also to manage and resolve intraorganizational conflict, which, if not dealt with in time, could undermine the organization’s effectiveness. For example, as indeed also happens in legal firms, those in charge of suborganizational units (captain, head of ten, etc.) might be tempted to pursue subgoals of their own unit, in terms of resources and prestige, even at the expense of the collective interest of the organization. The task of those who run the organization is to minimize these events, reducing the possibility of violent conflict. However, the intraorganizational hierarchy does not guarantee effectiveness in resolving interorganizational conflict between clans. That is why specific organizational units developed by some mafias are required: the higher-level bodies of coordination.

Mafia groups that are based on a clan-based federation order, thanks to the presence of higher-level bodies of coordination, should, in general, have greater capacity to speak with a single voice, to make collectively binding decisions, and to strategize, compared to mafia groups that present a clan-based order. This should increase their capacity to govern conflicts and contain violence, and to defend themselves better from external enemies. Paradoxically, the monopolistic tendency of organized
crime may bring about positive externalities compared to disorganized crime, because the monopoly over criminality guarantees greater control over violence (Buchanan 1980). Paraphrasing Adam Smith, “It is not from the public-spiritedness of the leader of the Cosa Nostra that we should expect to get a reduction in the crime rate, but from their regard for their own self-interest” (Buchanan 1980, 132). All organizations, both legal and illegal, try to maximize their profits in the environments in which they operate. Mafias accomplish this goal by providing illegal goods and services as well as operating in legal markets through illegal activities.

These considerations apply both to conflict within the mafia organization and to the use of violence toward the general population. The constitution of higher-level bodies of coordination not only makes it possible to increase power within the organization (Ocasio 2005), settling disputes and containing internal conflict (feuds between clans and attempts to seize the position of leadership within a family); it also makes it possible to increase the power of the organization (Mizruchi and Yoo 2005), exercised with regard to the external environment and in relation to other organizations. A clan-based federation mafia organization will have a strong influence on its territory and will not need to use violence to control the local population.

The formation of higher-level bodies of coordination makes it possible to control violence. Boulding (1964) affirmed that one of the main roles of hierarchy is to establish a mechanism for dealing with disputes that cannot be resolved at lower levels, and whose resolution is required for the organization to act. In mafia organizations, the control of internal conflict, violence, and homicides should depend, therefore, on the presence, or lack thereof, of higher-level organizational structures. The greater the intimidating force and authority of a mafia, the less need there is to resort to violence. As magistrate Giovanni Falcone stated:

The more the organization is centralized and clandestine, the greater the threat it poses, because it has the means to effectively control the market and maintain order in its territory, with only an extremely brief period between a decision being taken and the ensuing action. It’s a different kettle of fish when you’re dealing with a fragmented organization with a number of centers of power. (Falcone and Padovani 1992, 100)

My first proposition is that the type of organizational order, clan-based federation, as in the case of the Sicilian Cosa Nostra and the ‘Ndrangheta, or clan-based, as in the case of the Camorra, impacts upon the nature and frequency of homicides. Strong evidence in this direction comes from Figure 4.1, reporting the total number of homicides by mafia
In the period 1983–2016, the Camorra killed a total of 3,076 people,\(^5\) while the death toll for the Sicilian Cosa Nostra was 1,711, and for the ‘Ndrangheta 1,460. Of all the mafia-related assassinations (6,247) that have occurred in Italy since the 1980s, almost 50 percent were carried out in Camorra territory, while the remaining half were split between the Sicilian Cosa Nostra (27%) and the ‘Ndrangheta (23%).\(^6\)

\(^5\) It is important to point that the highest number of murders by Camorra clans were committed by clans with a low-level organizational structure (such as gangs and alliances), while the more highly structured clans have made a more economical use of violence. For example, the Casalesi federation committed a single murder between 2010 and 2015 (DNA, Direzione Nazionale Antimafia/National Anti-Mafia Directorate, 2016, Relazione annuale sulle attività svolte dal Procuratore nazionale e dalla Direzione nazionale antimafia e antiterrorismo, 80). However, when the more formalized structures come into conflict, the power unleashed is greater, and consequently the number of deaths is high, such as during the climb to the top of the Camorra by Cutolo or during conflicts within the Casalesi federation itself.

\(^6\) The recording of crimes reported by law enforcement agencies in Italy to judicial authority began in 1955, but the classification of the crimes (which drew on the Penal Code for titles and headings) did not make it possible to single out the type of murder.
The analysis of the data for each mafia organization over time provides additional insights in line with my hypothesis. Figure 4.2 shows the trend for the total number of assassinations by the Sicilian Cosa Nostra. On average, the number of deaths per year is 50. There is a peak in killings in the early 1990s, explained by two main events: first, the internal war within the Sicilian Cosa Nostra, due to the attempt of one group, the Corleonesi, to take over control of the organization, eliminating their adversaries, as in the violent feud in Partanna (Trapani), which lasted from 1987 to 1991; second, the Supreme Court’s confirmation in 1992 of the sentence of the Maxiprocesso (Great trial), which condemned many Sicilian Cosa Nostra bosses to life imprisonment, creating a series of power vacuums. This peak was followed by a steady decline, which was also due to severe repressive measures by the law enforcement agencies, culminating in the arrest of Totò Riina, boss of the Corleonesi.

Many statements by the Sicilian Cosa Nostra leaders highlight the importance of avoiding internal conflicts, in that they are opposed to the “common good,” the collective interests of the organization. It emerges, for example, in some statements by important bosses of the Sicilian Cosa Nostra such as Bernardo Provenzano (in 2001) and Matteo Messina Denaro (in 2004), who intervened to quell some internal conflicts between clans, which if not managed in time, could also have led to

From 1983 to the present day (1983–2003 survey model 165 Istat/Ministry of Interior, since 2004 Information System of the Ministry SDI) there appears instead the information “murders for reasons of mafia, Camorra and ‘Ndrangheta.” It is therefore possible to make use of the geographical location (available at a provincial level) to attribute the reported homicides to the various organizations.
violent wars. The so-called common good, “good for all of us . . . and our cause” (Pignatone and Prestipino 2013, 220), is more important, in the words of the bosses, than the violent resolution of the conflicts, precisely because of the negative consequences this could bring with it.

In contrast, in the case of the Camorra, the absence of higher-level bodies of coordination, the fragmentary nature of the organization’s clans, and the fluidity of alliances made it impossible for the conflicts to be negotiated and managed in a nonviolent manner within the organization. The principal enemy of a Camorra clan always remains the rival territorial clan, as shown by the high rate of homicides, 92 per year. The trend shows several peaks concomitant with various conflicts (Figure 4.3).

In recent years, in different parts of the city of Naples and especially in the municipalities of the province, a new phenomenon involving the use of violence has become popular, called the stese (knockdowns). Groups of at least four people, two per motorcycle, armed with pistols and machine guns, burst into opposing clan territory, guns blazing against buildings, shops, and other random targets, even in broad daylight, causing panic among residents, and, very often, innocent victims—a kind of camorrista terrorism. The perpetrators hired by the clan to carry out such actions are often minors, referred to as the “paranza babies”—in other words, a gun squad composed of youngsters barely older than children.7

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7 Dugato et al. (2017) apply the Risk Terrain Modeling approach to analyze and forecast the Camorra homicides in Naples. The approach is based on the identification and evaluation of the underlying risk factors able to affect the likelihood of a homicide. Their findings demonstrate that past homicides, drug dealing, confiscated assets, and
Finally, until the ‘Ndrangheta introduced higher-level bodies of coordination, a command structure capable of controlling disputes, there was a great deal of internal conflict, with numerous feuds and deaths. In 1985, the second war began between ‘Ndrangheta clans, a war triggered by attempts to control contracts and tenders and by one clan’s desire for territorial expansion. This conflict extended further, involving other clans and yielding around 700 deaths among members. Although the construction of HLBC had begun decades before (as we have seen in Figure 3.6, in the 1930s at least; Dickie 2012; Truzzolillo 2013), it was only in 1990–1 that such structures achieved effective institutionalization in their current form. Previous structures and coordination mechanisms had proved unsatisfactory and not capable of avoiding bloody feuds.

The power and autonomy of each individual ‘ndrina remained unaltered, but this superordinate structure made decisions regarding the most important matters involving the entire organization – in particular, with regard to control of violence. The Province, stated collaborator with justice Giacomo Lauro, established the principle that if disputes arise, of any kind and for whatever reason, between the different locali, there would be no recourse to arms before the disputes had come before the Commission for evaluation. This explains why, as of September 1991, all the wars in the province of Reggio Calabria ended. The ‘Ndrangheta had managed to find a unifying moment, a centralization of the power of command that was able to function and to enforce the rules and the decisions taken. (in Ciconte 1996, 151)

The special nature of this organism lay in the balance between centralization and autonomy: on the one hand, the controlling structure forced all the ‘ndrine to respect its decisions; on the other, they were allowed total autonomy with regard to the rest of their activities. This temporary solution then became a permanent one, beginning a process of progressive verticalization and centralization in the ‘Ndrangheta, with the constitution of the provincial Cupola, and in particular with regard to centralization relating to the most crucial and delicate decisions. The rivalries among groups made it possible to predict up to 85 percent of 2012 mafia homicides. They also identify city areas at highest risk. See also Brancaccio 2009.

The cause of the conflict was economic in nature, relating to the interest of the various clans in the public contracts concerning Villa San Giovanni (Calabria), in view of the proposed construction of the bridge that would connect Calabria with Sicily.

DIA, Direzione Investigativa Antimafia/Anti-Mafia Investigative Directorate, Ministero dell’Interno/ Ministry of Interior 2010b, Attività svolta e risultati conseguiti (Activities and final findings), (a: first semester; b: second semester), http://direzioneinvestigativaantimafia.interno.gov.it.
provincial level also became superordinate with respect to the structures operating outside Calabria. Thus, the process of centralization and the creation of superordinate bodies of coordination and conflict resolution had their origin in a violent clan war within the ‘Ndrangheta.

A model of coordinated organization, with stable HLBC and specific rules applicable to the entire organization, is not, of course, as previously mentioned, even remotely similar to the model of a multinational company, with a CEO who gives orders and organizational units that carry them out. The closest model is always that of the “political arena,” with frequent negotiations between peer groups to reach shared decisions.

Thanks to this new organizational structure, the number of ‘Ndrangheta feuds and homicides (Figure 4.4) dropped sharply.

Moreover, the leading body decided to do away with kidnappings, which generated a low level of income compared with the severe measures of repression they triggered from the state. The existence of a guiding structure taking responsibility for issuing and ratifying decisions has been confirmed by recent law enforcement agencies’ inquiries. It should be specified that the unitary character of the ‘Ndrangheta cannot in any way be considered belied by the fact that feuds may periodically arise between the various gangs operating in a certain geographical area: on the one hand, because in any complex organization, and even more so in those that are criminal in nature (one only

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has to think of the events of the Sicilian Cosa Nostra, marked by severe “turbulence” and by the numerous homicides even during the years of the *pax mafia* organized by Bernardo Provenzano, there are pathological stages in which internal conflict and serious crimes can occur; and on the other because it is still a matter of incidents which, when they occurred ... did not call into question the overall equilibrium in the general terms that have been described so far.\(^\text{11}\)

While rates of homicides are the most compelling indicator of the capacity of clan-based federation orders to contain violence, there are other considerations that strengthen the argument advanced in Proposition 1. Namely, the average age of the Sicilian Cosa Nostra’s family heads is in general higher with respect to that of the Camorra (Gambetta 1993). This is an indicator of greater organizational stability in the Sicilian mafia and suggests, according to Gambetta, that the Sicilian Cosa Nostra bosses are older because their positions of power are acquired through a more organized selection process – one that discourages younger members from challenging the internal hierarchy. The main route for professional promotion in the Sicilian Cosa Nostra therefore passes through internal channels, not through direct competition in the market, with the selection of top leaders taking place largely according to a hierarchical logic and not through the violence of the marketplace. The presence of superordinate bodies not only reduces conflict *between* clans, or families, but also *within* the individual clans themselves, discouraging in-family disputes and attempts by the dissatisfied or impatient to seize power. As one Sicilian Cosa Nostra informant, Vincenzo Marsala, states:

> When disputes of various kinds between members come to the attention of the representative, if the latter cannot settle the matter himself, he turns to the district boss, who intervenes to find an agreement between the members and reach a decision regarding the particular problem. When the matter is a serious one that involves the entire family territory, the representative seeks the help of the district boss and the latter intervenes through the Provincial Commission of Palermo. (OSPA Stajano 2010, 102)

In the case of the ‘Ndrangheta, the family is a criminal organization based on blood ties and this relationship automatically dictates the chain of power, with a rigid succession through the direct male line. This is an important element of stability in the organization, given that matters relating to succession render mafia organizations vulnerable to conflict, fostering feuds, division, and internal wars. In the case of the ‘Ndrangheta, the issue is resolved through the principle of the family law of dynastic male succession.

Higher levels of coordination come about for various reasons. Regarding the ‘Ndrangheta, such levels were introduced to control conflict between clans and violent feuds, especially in the 1985–91 period. Where the Sicilian Cosa Nostra is concerned, however, according to the informant Tommaso Buscetta, the Commission was originally created in order to settle conflict within clans, and only thereafter to discipline the activities and possible disputes between families. The Commission was an arena, states the informant Antonino Calderone (Arlacchi 1993, 126 and thereafter), where it was possible to resolve such important matters as homicides or whom to support at political elections, and to decide punishment for those who made mistakes and violated the rules. For example, if a Sicilian Cosa Nostra family head disappeared for some reason, this would create a dangerous power vacuum that might generate conflict. The superordinate bodies would therefore intervene to make a decision regarding succession, bestowing stability upon the system. In the case of the Camorra, however, the disappearance of a clan boss would create a sense of opportunity both within the clan itself (with various members claiming power) and in neighboring clans. This behavior is not regulated by any superordinate force and can therefore break out into particularly violent conflicts, as shown in Figure 4.2. For all these reasons, clan-based federation mafia organizations, due to the creation of higher-level bodies of coordination, were overall more capable of containing conflict and homicides than the Camorra, as the history of the three organizations demonstrates.\footnote{Studying homicides committed by Italian mafias, Moro et al. (2016) show that there is a clear link between the structure of the political markets and the severity of violence. In particular, the authors argue that the fragmentation of the political market is negatively associated with the strategy of criminal groups to exploit violence. By contrast, single-party dominance and bipartisanship seem to lead to an increase in homicides, since these organizations have few opportunities to access the political arena.}

4.2.2 High-Profile Assassinations

As a response to repressive actions by law enforcement agencies, mafias resort sometimes to the killing of people in an institution or in the public sphere (magistrates, members of the police force, politicians, trade unionists, priests, newspaper reporters) whose activity in some way threatens the legitimacy and interests of the mafia organization. Different from the “ordinary” killings discussed in Proposition 1, these high-profile assassinations are more likely to be conducted by organizations with a clan-based federation order. In fact, the decision to eliminate such
relevant targets\textsuperscript{13} requires considerable strategic and operational capacity to be carried out, and organizational resilience to manage the consequences of the inevitable retaliation from the law enforcement agencies. The presence of higher-level bodies of coordination provides mafia organizations with the ability to strategize, identify external enemies, and coordinate action in response to external threats. This brings me to my second proposition:

\textit{Proposition 2} - The presence of higher-level bodies of coordination in the clan-based federation order increases the capacity to respond to the threat of law enforcement agencies, resulting in a greater number of high-profile assassinations involving figures from institutions, politics, and the public sphere.\textsuperscript{14}

Higher levels of coordination have been created to settle disputes and violent conflicts. However, in addition to conflict containment, the presence of HLBC in mafia organizations makes it possible to create organizational strategies and to identify and eliminate external enemies of the organization. This ability becomes significant when, for example, the state increases repressive measures in relation to mafia organizations. We therefore expect that, in the case of intense investigative activity by law enforcement agencies or public attack by members of the civil society (e.g., politicians, priests, newspaper reporters), clan-based federation mafia organizations will commit more high-profile homicides.

In theory, an alternative argument might be advanced: namely, that a well-coordinated vertical structure could represent a better partner for politicians and therefore foster collusion, thus reducing high-profile assassinations. However, this alternative hypothesis relies on the assumption that both actors involved (i.e., mafia organizations and the state) are unified actors, which act in a coherent and coordinated manner. While the Sicilian Cosa Nostra (after 1957 and 1975) and the ‘Ndrangheta (after 1991) were, in general, unified organizations, this has never been the case for the state (Lupo 2011a; Dickie 2012). At any point in time,

\textsuperscript{13} Excluded from this category are those who, though politicians or pertaining to the sphere of institutions, have been collaborators with, or associated with, a mafia organization. There are other types of homicide and criminal action that, due to their brutality, may also trigger state retaliation on a level similar to that caused by high-profile assassinations, such as bombs, mass murders, killings of children or women.

\textsuperscript{14} Data regarding high-profile assassinations. Integrating different sources, from historical and official reports to websites, I have compiled an original dataset of high-profile assassinations, which goes back to the second half of the nineteenth century. For each murder, I controlled across multiple sources to verify its nature, ensuring that the victim was a recognized mafia enemy.
political and institutional actors (the state, magistrates, politicians, political parties, law enforcement agencies, etc.) acted in different ways, with some that, through fear or interest, preferred to collude with mafia organizations, and others that chose to fight the mafia (e.g., figures such as the politician and trade unionist Pio La Torre, General Carlo Alberto Dalla Chiesa, magistrates Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino). As a consequence, sometimes mafias made agreements with the former and killed the latter. To sum up, the fact that the state has always presented itself as a fragmented actor makes this alternative framework unlikely to apply to the Italian case.

The Sicilian Cosa Nostra and the Camorra have been targeted by law enforcement agencies and other institutions for a long time, while the ‘Ndrangheta has only been an object of attention in fairly recent years. Taking the value of the assets seized and confiscated from a mafia as an indicator, we can see that, in the 1992–2011 period, assets worth about 7.4 billion euros were confiscated from the Sicilian Cosa Nostra, assets worth 4.8 billion euros were taken from the Camorra, while assets worth only 1.2 billion euros were seized from the ‘Ndrangheta.\textsuperscript{15} The magistrate Giovanni Falcone (Falcone and Padovani 1992), mentioned earlier, believed that the ‘Ndrangheta, and to a certain extent the Camorra, given their clan-based organizational model, were less dangerous than the Sicilian Cosa Nostra. The ‘Ndrangheta was really recognized as a dangerous mafia organization starting from around the year 2000 – the most dangerous, indeed.\textsuperscript{16} Only in 2010 was the ‘Ndrangheta included in the Italian antimafia laws. Following this growing attention from law enforcement agencies, the ‘Ndrangheta recently initiated a reaction with a series of attacks on, and intimidatory acts toward, illustrious people.\textsuperscript{17}

My hypothesis is that the Sicilian Cosa Nostra was able, in particular from 1975 on, with the constitution of the regional level, the Cupola – precisely because of its organizational model with higher-levels bodies of coordination – not only to reduce and contain conflict (as we have already seen) but also to identify its true adversaries in the state outside its organization, or, rather, in that part of the state or civil society that refuses to cooperate with it (magistrates, politicians, public administrators, etc.). Figure 4.5 reports the number of high-profile assassinations

\textsuperscript{15} DIA, Direzione Investigativa Antimafia/Anti-Mafia Investigative Directorate, Ministero dell’Interno/ Ministry of Interior, 2012, Attività svolta e risultati conseguiti (Activities and final findings), http://direzioneinvestigativaantimafia.interno.gov.it

\textsuperscript{16} DNA 2010; 2011, Relazione annuale sulle attività svolte dal Procuratore nazionale e dalla Direzione nazionale antimafia e antiterrorismo.

\textsuperscript{17} DNA 2010, Relazione annuale sulle attività svolte dal Procuratore nazionale e dalla Direzione nazionale antimafia e antiterrorismo, 89.
carried out by the three organizations (1861–2016). In Table 4.2, the same information is presented, distinguishing among institutional, political, and public sphere killings. The Sicilian Cosa Nostra is the organization that has killed most high-profile people by far (237), the first dating back to the second half of the nineteenth century. The Camorra, in contrast to the Sicilian Cosa Nostra, has carried out a significantly smaller number of high-profile assassinations (49). In addition, more than half of them (33 out of 49) occurred in the eight years from 1975 to 1983, in which the Camorra was organized in a clan-based federation order. The fragmentary nature of the Camorra organization hinders the elaboration of unified strategies and makes it difficult to identify the entire criminal organization’s common enemies on the outside.18 Moreover, the Sicilian Cosa Nostra stands out as having killed a

Figure 4.5 High-profile assassinations committed by three Italian mafia organizations, 1861–2016
(Elaboration of data sourced from: DIA; Ministry of Interior; ISTAT)

18 Only the Casalesi cartel, composed of ten clans, is able to think in these terms. The informant Salvatore Venosa has stated that the Casalesi bosses Giuseppe Setola and Nicola Schiavone were planning the murder of high-profile people, such as magistrates and members of law enforcement agencies. The construction of a cartel with a leading
high number of magistrates, certainly the targets with greatest media impact, and the most costly in terms of state retaliation.

Finally, the ‘Ndrangheta, which until 2007–8 was not the focus of attention of the repressive action of the state, has limited itself to just 31 murders.

Further support for Proposition 2 comes from the analysis of the Sicilian Cosa Nostra’s high-profile assassinations over time. In the years before the creation of the Cupola (1965–75), the Sicilian Cosa Nostra killed “only” 10 prominent individuals, while in the following years (1976–86) the death toll of high-profile victims reached 56, a 560 percent increase. Moreover, while only 1 magistrate was killed in the decade preceding 1975, 6 were killed in the following ten years. The same considerations hold if we look at larger time windows: focusing on the 1957–75 window, which corresponds to the period in which the Sicilian Cosa Nostra had a

...group in command constitutes an attempt to control internal conflict and violence and makes it possible to identify external enemies who could cause problems for the organization. Up until today, this is a possibility limited to the Casalesi clan (“Gomorra. Il progetto stragista. Colpire magistrati e carabinieri,” la Repubblica, July 31, 2012).

Table 4.2 *High-profile assassinations committed by three Italian mafia organizations, 1861–2016*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutions</th>
<th>Sicilian Cosa Nostra</th>
<th>Camorra</th>
<th>‘Ndrangheta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Magistrates and professionals in the legal world</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law enforcement agencies</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officials pertaining to institutions</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political parties, social movements</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politicians (activists and elected)</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade unionists</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade unionists</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalists</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public sphere</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priests</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Elaboration of data sourced from: DIA; Ministry of Interior; ISTAT

provincial structure of coordination, the overall number of high-profile killings is 25, with only 1 magistrate among the victims. In the eighteen years after 1975, however, there were 82 high-profile assassinations, including 13 magistrates.

The importance of having higher-level bodies of coordination to carry out such notable killings has been repeatedly acknowledged. No murder of a significant person could be carried out without being authorized from the highest level. The informant Leonardo Messina has said:

If a normal person has to be killed, or if normal interests are involved, it’s enough for the town bosses to communicate this to the local mandamento. But if a journalist or magistrate has to be murdered, orders have to come from the Region. . . . Policemen, too, cannot be killed without orders from the Region. To kill a “man of honor,” you need an order from the Provincia. To kill a “head of ten,” you need orders from the Region. 20

No high-profile homicide can be carried out, then, without the deliberation and the order of the Commission, and anyone who violates this provision commits a serious violation of the basic rules of the Sicilian Cosa Nostra, with grave consequences within the organization.

The informant Antonino Calderone stated:

If . . . an important man has to be hit – a politician or policeman or judge – the decision has to come from above, from the highest level, namely from the Regional Commission . . . This is logical. A murder of this kind can cause harm to everyone. True, the killing is done in a given territory, but its consequences will be paid later by everyone. (Arlacchi 1993, 36)

The collaborator with justice of the Sicilian Cosa Nostra Tommaso Buscetta says:

When the Commission decides to commit a homicide, it is the Commission itself that forms the team that will have to carry out the decision; it is entitled to choose the participants in any one of the families without informing the boss. The organization of the crime, then, is exclusive to the Commission and should be unknown by everyone, except, of course, those called to do it. In practice, however, it may happen that a member of the Commission informs his most trusted collaborators of the decision, but this will not minimally affect either the design or fulfillment of the homicide. (OSPA Stajano 2010, 114)

Former Sicilian Cosa Nostra mobster, now collaborator with justice Antonino Giuffré explained how the mafia organization carried out a real kind of opinion poll before moving on to the execution phase of the high-

profile murders. It was a sort of “pulse check,” not of the criminal world but of those in contact with it (politicians, masons, businessmen) to evaluate their reactions to crimes of this sort: a “preliminary study” in order to understand the degree of “legitimacy” of the murder, to acquire elements that could provide a more rational assessment of the action (Di Matteo and Palazzolo 2015).

In general, the constitution of higher-level bodies of coordination gives the Sicilian Cosa Nostra and the ‘Ndrangheta’s leadership the right to speak, and act, on behalf of the organization (Zuckerman 2010). This not only enhances their capacity to carry out high-profile assassinations, but also ensures their ability to perform several important organizational functions (see Section 2.10 and Table 2.6): strategic, making decisions regarding the interests of the whole organization; control and organizational, such as the control of territorial division between the families; conflict containment, containing conflict in progress and preventing any that might arise; and business, identifying business opportunities that exceed the capacity of an individual family and fostering economies of scale.

4.3 War and Peace in Other Mafias

Mafias, as we have seen, have to manage and make use of violence in a skillful way. In such organizations, the opportunities for conflict abound. Nick Gentile (1963) has shown how, in the American Cosa Nostra, for example, a simple altercation could give rise to a long chain of revenge and conspiracy.

This mafia does not tolerate a “boss of the bosses” and the formation of higher-level bodies of coordination impacts upon the rate of conflict and the use of violence. For example, the Commission in the American Cosa Nostra was not a ruling council, but a tool for containing violence and mediating disputes that would otherwise strongly “disturb” the family affairs. The absence of major conflicts between the various American Cosa Nostra families is an indicator of the organizational rationalization achieved with the formation of the Commission and the consequent reduction in gang wars.

Prior to the formation of HLBC (see Section 3.1.4), conflict among the different families operating in the United States, particularly in New York, was very high. For example, the American Mafia rebellion (1928–31) originated in conflict over money and power (Maas 1968; Critchley 2006; 2009; Dash 2009; Hortis 2014; Raab 2016). It was not a “war,” given the, in a certain sense, “low” number of deaths (fewer than 20 in the period 1930–1, compared with an average of 76 per year from
1920 to 1930), but rather a gang fight over issues of power and money. The families were opposed to the dominance of Salvatore D’Aquila, Giuseppe Morello, Joe Masseria, and Salvatore Maranzano, who tried to become the boss of bosses, each one eliminating his predecessor and taking his place. Maranzano, in particular, designed an organizational structure that gave New York City’s five families noncompeting jurisdictions, either in territories or in spheres of operation (Gosch and Hammer 2013). The only problem was that he placed himself at the head of the whole system, thus relegating the bosses of the five families to the simple role of captains, since they would be responsible only to Maranzano. The four bosses were killed in just three years, in 1928 (Salvatore D’Aquila), 1930 (Giuseppe Morello), and 1931 (Joe Masseria in April and Salvatore Maranzano in September). To prevent further dangerous and destabilizing conflict, in the fall of 1931 the general assembly of the American Cosa Nostra abolished the title of “boss of bosses.” They decided that there would never be a “monarchy,” and that nobody would ever again assume the role of boss of bosses: giving this kind of title “to just one, could swell the head of the elected person and induce him to commit unjustifiable atrocities” (Gentile 1963, 119). No boss would ever be able to be a kind of dictator of all the families of the American Cosa Nostra. In place of such a role, a Commission was set up in 1931 composed of the heads of the various families, with a forum to discuss the major issues and to resolve disputes and conflicts. A few years later, the attempt by Albert Anastasia, boss of one of New York’s families, to assume greater power and to take on the role of boss of bosses, interfering with the affairs and decisions of individual families, ended with the killing of the aspiring dictator on October 25, 1957 (Hortis 2014).

Unlike the Sicilian Cosa Nostra, the American mafia generally did not target journalists or government officials, or other high-profile people. The first recorded mafia killings of important figures in America happened in Louisiana, on October 16, 1890, when David C. Hennessy, the police chief of New Orleans, was killed by two members of two Sicilian clans in conflict with each other for the control of the laborforce and import of fruit (Repetto 2004; Lupo 2008). Subsequently, in 1909, Joe Petrosino, head of the Italian team against mafia crime of the New York Police Department, was killed in Palermo. In 1933, an FBI agent and two Kansas City detectives were killed while they were trying to arrest a bank robber named Frank Nash, recently escaped from a federal prison in Leavenworth (Kansas). This event, called the “Kansas City Massacre,” attracted national public opinion to organized crime and its activities. In response to this growing attention from law enforcement agencies, which could hamper business, the national American Cosa Nostra Commission
decided that reporters and policemen would be off-limits (Repetto 2004). Former American Cosa Nostra mobster Tony Accetturo tells how during his initiation ceremony into the New Jersey faction of the Lucchese family of New York, he had been given a list of a number of organizational and behavioral rules, including the policy that police and other law enforcement agents could never be “whacked” – killed, in other words (Raab 2016). In fact, the American mafia’s history contains very few incidents involving high-profile murders. There were some rare exceptions, such as that of Carlos Tresca, an Italian-American newspaper editor, who was assassinated in 1943 (though it was never proven that he was killed by mafiosi), and Victor Riesel, a journalist, who was blinded by an acid attack in 1956 on gangsters’ orders. Another exception is the American labor movement: according to Jacobs (2006, 107–8), there are at least 34 homicides of low-level union officials and union dissidents that can be attributed to labor racketeers. On July 30, 1975, the former president of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters Jimmy Hoffa was killed by the American Cosa Nostra. This was probably the most important high-profile murder ever committed by the organization, even if Hoffa was not a union dissident, or an opponent of the mafia: he had, instead, a career-long history of alliances with organized crime groups.

When compared to other mafias, the Yakuza has always maintained a low rate of homicides, and indeed of particularly violent episodes in general. Given its status as a semilegitimate organization and the muted opposition offered by the state,21 there has been little need for it to carry out the elimination of high-profile people. According to Hill (2003a) this also depends on the mafia organization’s greater degree of maturity, which has led over time to higher organizational stability and consequently fewer internal conflicts: certainly never anything as sanguinary as happened with other mafias, especially the Sicilian Cosa Nostra.22 Thus, greater organizational stability has led to a reduction in internal violence, less attention from law enforcement agencies, and less need to eliminate judges or civil servants physically. The introduction of the anti-Yakuza law, the Bōtaihō, has further encouraged the Yakuza to search for diplomatic ways to resolve internal conflicts and to reduce certain violent activities, in order to preclude prosecution by law enforcement agencies.

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21 The arrests of Yakuza members are certainly consistent, with up to about 30,000 a year out of a total of 80,000 members in the various Yakuza groups. However, the duration of these arrests is not very long.

22 The Hachiōji war in Tokyo, which took place in February 1990, was one of the major conflicts in the Yakuza. There were “only” two people killed and a number of revenge shots fired (Hill 2003a, 140).
The Yakuza has demonstrated a high awareness of intraorganizational costs and of the high negative externalities resulting from the use of violence, and homicides in particular, both due to the loss of social visibility and to the increased repression by law enforcement agencies. As Rankin has noted:

In the late 1980s the Yakuza were responsible for 30% of Japan’s murders. Today they are responsible for 15%. During the first decade of this century, Yakuza gang members and Yakuza-connected persons were arrested in connection with an average of roughly 170 murders and attempted murders each year. Almost all Yakuza murder victims are civilians: according to the NPA, in the same period only 32 Yakuza were murdered by other Yakuza. These extremely low figures mean that the Yakuza are among the least murderous crime gangs in the world today.23 (Rankin 2012a)

Since 1972, to manage and resolve conflicts better, the Yakuza in Tokyo have established the Kanto Hatsuka-kai, an association comprising all of the groups in the capital, with the purpose of providing a mechanism for the speedy resolution of conflict and the prevention of misunderstandings. The members of all groups are prohibited to using firearms against each other (Hill 2004, 110).

As Rankin points out, the Yakuza generally specialize in non-violent forms of coercion. Yakuza land sharks put pressure on tenants by sending them unpleasant objects in the mail or playing music at uncomfortably loud volume outside their buildings. Yakuza enforcers and blackmailers scrawl obscenities on debtors’ doors or embarrass them at their workplace. Businesses that refuse to pay protection money may have their premises vandalized: emptying the contents of a septic waste truck through a window is a trademark tactic. (Rankin 2012a)

However, the continuous search for new sources of earnings, partly due to pressure from the police, increases the possible situations of conflict, at the same time reducing space for peaceful resolution. Moreover, the situation of instability increases internal tensions. In 2015 there was a major split within the largest of the Yakuza syndicate, the Yamaguchi-gumi, which gave rise to another syndicate, Yamaguchi-Kobe Gumu. This split originated with 13 groups of members who questioned some decisions made by the supreme and senior boss Shinobu Tsukasa: in particular, a nepotistic attitude in relation to career

progression, leading him to favor people in whom he had trust rather than in terms of merit, and the intention of moving the clan headquarters to his hometown. These choices were exacerbated by tensions within the Yamaguchi-gumi, due to pressure placed on clan members regarding the payment of membership fees and contributions toward the cost of the headquarters (water and basic necessities) or for gifts for the boss at parties and celebrations. All this further reduced the coffers of the federation clan.

It was a schism that alarmed the police, given that it could lead to conflict and even violence (unusual, as we have seen for the Yakuza), such as that which occurred in 1984, when, following another split inside the group, more than 25 people lost their lives and 70 others were injured as a result of a war between clans.

As for the Triads, studies and research on the use of violence are fairly rare and research into the homicides committed by these organizations has been very limited. Lacking real and effective higher-level bodies of coordination, incidents of internal conflict and clashes between triad gangs have increased (Lo 2010). For example, the largest triad society in Hong Kong, 14K, is relatively disorganized compared to other triad groups. Each subgroup is set up as a separate and independent triad society. With this lack of effective higher-level bodies of coordination, “gang fights among different sub-groups are not uncommon” (Chu 2011, 232). Peter Yam Tat-wing, director of operations of the Hong Kong Police, affirms that triad societies are a collection of loose-knit groups or gangs who operate independently. They are mainly local area gangs, each active in certain areas and activities. Their disputes sometimes result in fighting and it is not uncommon that gangs within the same triad society often fight with each other over a disputed interest or territory. (Chu 2011, 28)

In one of the few pieces of research on the subject, Lee (2004) conducted a detailed analysis of 95 triad-related homicide cases (124 victims) over ten years, from 1989 to 1998: they were about one in eight (11.9 percent) of all homicide events, involving 13.2 percent of all homicide victims recorded in the ten-year period. Triad homicide victimization averaged 0.206 per 100,000 persons in Hong Kong.24 The main reasons for these homicides were (399):

24 The homicide rate in the United States was 10.2 per 100,000 persons in 1980, 5.6 homicides per 100,000 in 2002, and 4.7 homicides per 100,000 persons in 2011, the lowest level since 1963 (Smith and Cooper 2013).
Turf war and status and honor contests among lower-rank triad gang leaders, members, and nontriads (47 cases, 49.5 percent).

- Competition among illegal syndicate entrepreneurs, syndicates, businessmen, and senior triad leaders (20 cases, 21.1 percent).

- Discipline of illegal trade customers (often also triad members, and resulting in status or honor contests), extortion of victims, theft of illegal services or goods (16 cases, 16.8 percent).

- Internal discipline within organized crime among illegal syndicates (7 cases, 7.37 percent), such as cases of dishonesty during transactions.

- Internal discipline within a triad gang as ordered by leaders (5 cases, 5.26 percent).

Lee (2004, 3) shows that more than half of the analyzed murders were not motivated by economic or profit motives (e.g., rational or instrumental), but derived from what Lee referred to as subcultural triad status and reputation/honor contests. The murders were more associated with notions of expressive motives (emotional or nonrational). Violence, then, was primarily status or reputation driven.

In any case, irrespective of the reasons, the Triads are characterized by a very low level of use of homicide (estimated today around one or two homicides a year), in particular if compared with the Italian mafia and especially given the high number of members (between 50,000 and 120,000) and when compared to the population (about 7 million inhabitants). The overall homicide rate in Hong Kong seems to be fairly low, 1.5 per 100,000 inhabitants. Finally, while there were a few assault and wounding cases involving high-profile people, such as politicians and journalists, nothing lethal has taken place in recent years.