CREATING COUNTER-PUBLICS AGAINST THE ITALIAN MAFIA

CULTURAL CONQUERORS OF WEB-BASED MEDIA

BARIS CAYLI

Abstract

This study aims to develop insight into the new media's struggle against the Mafia in Italy using the *Libera Informazione*, an anti-Mafia civil society organisation established in 2007, as a case study. The article argues that the endeavours of the *Libera Informazione* are aimed at creating a public sphere for anti-Mafia entries in the media and subsequently renewing public culture through channels in the constructed public sphere. During this process, communication strategies aim to inform the public at the local and national levels to increase consciousness about the political-criminal nexus and activities of the Mafia groups. Drawing on anthropological, moral, and reformist models of journalism, the author asserts that such a struggle is attainable in the long run, as it requires a consistent effort and inspiration, which already exist in the struggle of anti-Mafia media establishments against the Mafia in Italy.

Baris Cayli is researcher in the Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research, School of Applied Social Science, University of Stirling; e-mail: baris.cayli@stir.ac.uk.

Introduction

Media contributes to the production and distribution of the culture (Bauman 1992). The anti-Mafia movement in Italy began in the early second half of the 20th century at the individual level but has intensified in the last three decades due to the initiatives of civil society (Jamieson 2000; Santino 2000; Schneider and Schneider 2003; Spina 2008; Iorio 2009). However, the institutionalisation of the media as a tool against the Mafia[1] in Italy was not consistently adopted by civil society until the establishment of the *Libera Informazione* in 2007. The establishment of such an institution with the initiatives of a civil society lies behind the peculiar political history of Italy. The relationship between the media and the political history of post-war Italy offers a neatly regulated and yet bewildering social context to anyone who is curious about the politics-media nexus. The polarised party system began with the declaration of the Republic in 1946. The political landscape in the country had been divided mainly between the right and left parties. The Christian Democratic Party (DC) was the representative voice of the right-wing groups, while the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) were the prominent parties of the left-wing groups. Shortly after television was introduced to the Italian people in 1954, the majority of the houses in Italy adopted the new social life imposed by this new communication icon. While RAI, Radiotelevisione Italiana, played a dominant role during the 1960s and 1970s, its entertainment programmes drew more attention than did the political programmes.

There are myriad of reasons for this shift. The harsh competition between confronting political parties for power, diverse political subcultures, and widespread fragmentation, even within the same political groups, are prominent factors behind the hopelessness regarding politics and the apathy among dejected Italian citizens. Most importantly, distant, elitist, and complex discourses from the politicians on political television shows and, conversely, the preference of the media for drama and simplicity created a gap between the people and the political television shows of the 1970s (Marlotti and Roncarolo 2000, 202-203).

Silvio Berlusconi, an ambitious entrepreneur from Milan, did not miss the opportunity to invest in commercial television, in which RAI had the sole authority. The privatisation of the media ushered in a new phase that allowed Berlusconi swiftly to attain more power and to do so in a more profitable way by remaining neutral to politics while having close relationships with the politicians and with the foundation of TeleMilano, currently known as Mediaset, in 1974 (Ginsborg 2004, 19). The first period of his journey in media was a quid pro quo for more gains in the future. Accordingly, political conjecture was on the side of Berlusconi during the 1980s and early 1990s when the biggest Mafia trial, Maxiprocesso, ended in 1987 and more than 400 Mafiosi found themselves behind bars in prison. The most fortunate time for him, however, occurred when a set of political and corruption scandals came to the surface in the early 1990s with the *mani pulite*, clean hands, operation. The members of the established political parties from the DC, PCI, and PSI found themselves in the midst of these corruption stories as notorious accused figures. Tangentopoli, or bribesville, was the symbolic name of the decayed political class in the country that ushered in the watershed moment while paving way to the termination of the First Republic and the transition to the Second Republic.

The old parties were dissolved as new parties and alliances were being established, one-by-one, including Berlusconi's party, Forza Italia, which ruled the country in 1994-95, shortly after this political chaos.

Furthermore, this tense political era witnessed an explicit declaration of war by the Mafia groups, most particularly the Sicilian Cosa Nostra against the State. The bombings in Florence, Rome, and Bologna in the early 1990s and the assassinations of two anti-Mafia magistrates, Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, by the Sicilian Mafia in Palermo in the summer of 1992 were clear signs of this unrest. The institutional dysphasia of the State was unmanageable, social dissent was vehemently widespread, and the hopelessness among the people regarding their future tragically reached its peak in the early 1990s. There was a crucial need to do something to support the efforts of the politicians and the State apparatus.

Libera was founded during such a sea-change in the nation. The idea was first introduced in 1993 with the unflinching support of certain volunteers who believed that a bottom-up initiative must be implemented to renew Italian society and to fight against the Mafia and all of its components. Libera was officially established in 1995 under the guidance of its prominent leader, Luigi Ciotti, a priest. In a short period of time, the institution expanded throughout the country and opened dozens of branches such that it is not improbable to find a branch of Libera in any small Italian town. Today, Libera is the largest anti-Mafia, not-for-profit organisation in Italy. Accordingly, Libera aims to inform the public about the notorious activities of the Mafia groups and to produce a counter-culture by reforming the current one from which the Mafiosi culture stems.

Libera Informazione was established as the last sector of Libera in 2007 because of the need to spread information and news concerning the Mafia and mobilise more people through alternative media. This new means of informing the public is based on the effective use of web-based media. Eventually, *Libera Informazione* became the youngest of the five main sectors of *Libera*.[2] *Flare Network* and *Bright Magazine* are two similar electronic media initiatives, which were established shortly after the *Libera Informazione* and were inspired from its works. Finally, *Narcomafie* is an important electronic forum and monthly magazine. All three anti-Mafia web-based media models collaborate with *Libera Informazione*.

This study aims to fill a lamentable void by demonstrating the role of web-based media, a cultural/political frontier and reformer, in the anti-Mafia struggle of Italy. Political and legal campaigners demonstrate 'the power of cultural forces' throughout the criminalisation process by manipulating the legal and political structures. Even more importantly, 'structures of mass symbolism' can play a significant role in influencing the campaign of public support with the endorsements of moral entrepreneurs and political campaigners (Ferrell and Sanders 1995, 6). In this context, *Libera Informazione* has embraced the same aim, that is, to fight against the Mafia groups and Mafia culture in Italy using web-based media as a significant instrument. Therefore, the organisation has created a public campaign against the Mafia groups in Italy and is simultaneously defined as a moral entrepreneur in this article.

There are three primary contentions of this study. First, I claim that the *Libera Informazione*'s struggle primarily aims to promote a new culture in society and to relegate to the former culture that has provided a certain level of success to the Mafia groups in Italy. Such a transformation not only requires a basic change in

cultural terms but also questions the current political sphere with respect to the political-criminal nexus that fosters the effectiveness of the Mafia groups and their culture (Seindal 1998, 92; Paoli 1999). Thus, the new culture posed by the *Libera Informazione* also challenges the political spectrum such that, eventually, its intent may gain political importance. Second, I argue that if the 'enemy' exposes certain social, economic, and cultural perils to the democratic advancement of society through its political networks, violence and other measures, new reflections into the public sphere and cultural discourses can mitigate the power of these perils. The information and its articulation in the media is an auxiliary force intended to increase the conscientious level of the public and to take action against the antagonist, both of which are evidenced throughout this study by the anti-Mafia struggle of the *Libera Informazione*. This new reflection, which considers the present article's principle contentions simultaneously, is premised on three primary contentions. The main function of the *Libera Informazione* is to create a public sphere against the Mafia. Second, the primary goal is to renew public culture in the constructed public spheres. Finally, the study attempts to advance web-based media studies by introducing 'public domains of the society' and 'public domains of the state' concepts as the benchmarks of our theoretical inquiry. Thus, these three principal arguments set forth the primary concerns discussed throughout this article.

Based on a critical review of the literature, this study introduces a theoretical framework to explore the struggle of *Libera Informazione* from the counter-public perspective. The perceptions of *Libera Informazione* and its positions on certain issues are examined in two sections: (1) background information and the foundation of the *Libera Informazione* and (2) the functions and goals of the *Libera Informazione*.

Counter-publics in Action through a Web-based Cultural Renaissance

The power of new media has evolved over the last decades with the impact of globalisation, which has provided a certain level of sovereignty to this new media (Volkmer 2007). This power has been exercised between radical political groups to produce 'public spheres' and 'counter-public spheres' (Curran 1991; Downey and Fenton 2003). Perhaps, more notably, web-based media is the most popular and influential part of new media as the Internet can touch our daily lives in advanced economies or can mobilise the masses of the developing world. For this reason, the social potency of web-based media bridges the disciplines of anthropology and social change. However, little effort or thought has gone into web-based media and its relationship with social anthropology. Rather, the studies have focused on the importance of mass media due to its impact on cultures as cultural products (Spitulnik 1993; Wilson and Peterson 2002). In addition to these arguments, not only can the impact of web-based media on social change but also the reason of its emergence can be inspired through social anthropology. For instance, the establishment of *Libera Informazione* was written by its volunteers whose practices were based on ethnographic methods.

The founders of *Libera Informazione* organised a long-term trip to the Southern regions of Italy and interacted with local community to define and face the problems of the local people who are forced to live in the grim reality of the Mafia's tyranny. These robust interactions aimed to design the *Libera Informazione*'s future

policies before the establishment of the institution. Consistent with these trips, their communication with the local people has continued after its foundation through yearly conferences and workshops in different cities across the country with an articulated symbolic interaction. In this regard, Silverstone (2007) highlighted the crucial importance of the media as a moral force both at the local and the global levels. Furthermore, 'moral journalists' have recently come to the fore as a new form of journalism through "witnessing the events and involving the suffering of the others" (Wiesslitz 2011). How symbols, emotions and subjective influences nurture the organic connection between the organisation and aesthetics is emphasised (Strati 1999). Our case is a good example of this because when the symbols of the *Libera Informazione* are articulated in the realm of both emotional and moral counterattacks, the struggle of the organisation, in the name of their ideals, becomes stronger. As a result, this impact renders the organisation more solid and durable on its long and thorny path to attain its ideals. From this perspective, if I define the relationship between web-based media and the struggle of the *Libera Informazione*, it is a story of public engagement and a participatory reformist culture in which both cultures co-exist and collaborate to reconstruct the public spheres in the name of an ideal: creating a new public culture as a moral force by spreading radical information and eliminating the ravages of the Mafia groups over the society. From this vantage point, this particular journalism is a product of anthropological approach/practice and is an evolution of ethical principles through web-based media.

According to Warner (2002, pp. 49-50), "A public is a space of discourse" and "the public is a kind of social totality." Therefore, the counter-publics are the "sites that develop critical oppositional discourses" (Palczewski 2001, 161). More to the point, the counter-public is articulated through the clash of the adverse reactions of the agencies, and the major contestation is activated by the dominant publics. This is the reason that counter-publics are perceived as rationalised attempts to break the power of the dominant agency palpably through a set of contested actions and events. In doing so, the counter-publics turn to significant attacks to realise a greater democracy in stratified societies (Fraser 1995, 291-292). As Splichal (2009, 102) aptly demonstrated, "the principle of publicity was originally conceived as a critical impulse against injustice based on secrecy of state actions and as an enlightening momentum substantiating the region of human liberty and making private citizens equal in the public use of reason." Accordingly, the counter-public is perceived as a response to the decline of trust in democracy at the helm of modern globalisation (Fenton and Downey 2003). Consistent with this argument, artists and musicians have rejected awards given by the government and organised to perform public counterattacks via alternative coverage in the media (Farrell 1998).

Habermas (1991) uniquely demonstrated that the interaction between civil society and the public sphere is a dynamic accumulation of so much tension that those interactions foster the transformation of the public spaces. Calhoun (1993) goes one step further by adding new theoretical entries to the interactions between civil society and the public sphere in which he embraces the idea that independency of the civil society is not sufficient to attain a "rational-critical" public sphere as its emergence greatly depends on the "favourable organisation of the civil society." Similarly, Fuchs (2010) draws attention to the alternative critical media in which communication plays an arbiter role in the counter-public spheres so "advancement of co-operative society" can be attainable through the channels of alternative media.

The ethnographic work of *Libera Informazione* is the *sine qua non* for challenging the conventional journalism and the Mafia groups' influence in the local territories. Indeed, *Libera Informazione* moves from broad canvas in anthropological works to the specific activities as a moral entrepreneur.

Method

The interview was held with Gaetano Liardo, the representative for the *Libera Informazione*, who responded to the questions on behalf of the institution. The interview was conducted in Rome at the office of the *Libera Informazione* on January 5, 2011, and consisted of open-ended and semi-structured questions. Twenty questions were asked to measure the perceptions of the *Libera Informazione* in two main areas: (1) the story of its foundation and reasons for establishing such an organisation, (2) the functions and goals of the institution. The first series of questions aimed to elucidate why the support of media is necessary for the country, which solely focuses on the Mafia and illuminates the relationship between the Mafia and the media. The second series of questions were asked to analyse the role of the organisation and its functions to clarify their goals.

Five different methods were applied in this study: (1) a qualitative analysis of the interview; (2) a statistical, quantitative analysis of the transcribed text; (3) a web-based investigation about the activities of *Libera Informazione* for each region in the country and the comparison of the findings with the presence of the Mafia; (4) an analytic reflection on the usage of social media, Twitter and Facebook, by *Libera Informazione*; and (5) an analysis of the visual material. In the content analysis, I explored the perception of *Libera Informazione* regarding the Mafia phenomenon, the media's role with respect to the Mafia groups, the risks that they must bear and, finally, the opportunities that motivate and inspire them. Moreover, the meanings, symbols, images and values that are important to the *Libera Informazione* were (re)constructed and examined throughout the transcribed text by using a variety of methods. First, using qualitative analysis I examined the content by coding and categorising the terms using the QDA Minor computer program. I analysed the entries of *Libera Informazione* on Facebook and Twitter by taking in account the presence of the Mafia in each region. Moreover, I classified each entry according to the types of the concerns of the organisation and presented the comments of the followers of the organisation on Facebook to determine the perceptions of the public. Finally, an analysis of one image and one poster, which were acquired by *Libera Informazione*, was used to elucidate the visual panorama of the risks that they must bear and methods that they use to mobilise people, respectively. Using these methods, I aimed to shed new light on the milieu of 'anti-Mafia movement' and 'web-based media.' Hence, the relationship between these two milieus is echoed in this article to illustrate the transformation of those milieus into a strategic tool. In doing so, I aimed to show the influence of employing web-based media to create a public sphere and renew the public culture in Italy.

The Foundation of the Libera Informazione and Its Functions

In 2006 during the *Contro Mafie* event,[3] the *Libera Informazione* generated a project in response to the need to combat the Mafia aimed at increasing awareness of

it in the public. This initiative was institutionalised in 2007 and its activities have increased gradually throughout the last few years. The functions and policies of the *Libera Informazione* were structured around the contributions of journalists, freelance media workers, newspapers, radio, the citizens, and other civil society organisations that stand against the Mafia through using the media as the primary instrument. The primary aim was to provide a greater space in the media for news, policies, and information regarding the Mafia syndicates and any issue dealing with them.

The foundation story for the *Libera Informazione* occurred in the limited and risky atmosphere in Southern Italy, where the Mafia is traditionally more dominant and still vigorously active. Shortly after the establishment of the *Libera Informazione*, a trip was organised to identify and design the policies of the institution for the future. Liardo says:

> *When Libera Informazine was founded in 2007 … we began a tour in Southern Italy … to determine what can we do in Apulia, Sicily, Calabria, Campania, Basilicata … We saw that there are many similarities in these regions … Journalists could write but could not go in depth … The idea was also that creating a network via the Libera Informazione would give journalists the chance to write whatever they want freely, regarding, for example, the power of the Mafia groups ... its linkages … secret and masonic associations … especially the ones that exist in the region of Calabria …*

The journalists who write about the Mafia still face serious threats. Furthermore, their stories do not have an adequate place in the media. Consistent with such challenging working conditions for the journalists, Liardo highlights the danger for the journalists, which are utterly risky:
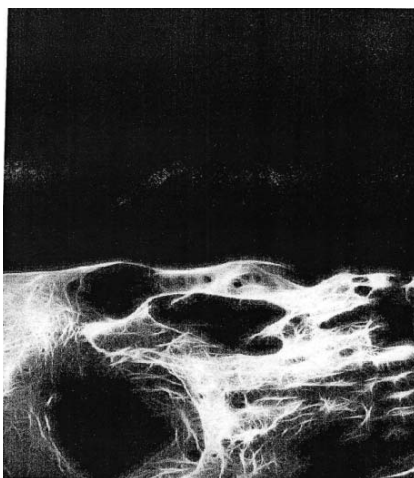
> *Bullets were mailed to a journalist as a sign that they may be killed if they continue to speak … some of them were also beaten … [sighing]*

The Mafiosi put a cut off lamb's head in front of the house of a local journalist, and they poured gasoline over the doors of the kitchen … These events all happened in the region of Calabria.

This statement clearly signifies that the Mafia groups in Italy are still applying traditional methods to deter any actors who are against them, in accordance with the perceptions of the *Libera Informazione*. Moreover, with regard to this risk, even the *Libera Informazione* was threatened. Its web-site was attacked and a photo of a skull was put on their webpage by hackers on April 19, 2010 (see Figure 1). Although the source of the attack is not known yet, police records suggest that it came most likely from Romania rather than Italy. The *Libera Informazione* has strong doubts that the attack might belong to the Mafia groups or its sympathisers. More to the point, local journalists fall grievously into the fear network of the Mafia groups that takes its deterrence power from its previous murders, which are still fresh in the minds of the local journalists. The most recent example is Giovanni Tzian who was threatened by the Mafia in January 2012 after his entries regarding two Southern Mafia syndicates activities; 'Ndrangheta and Camorra in Northern Italy. He is currently under 7/24 hour police protection (Toniutti 2012).

The *Libera Informazione* uses various tools, such as the dissemination of knowledge and information regarding the Mafia via the use of web portal, articles produced by journalists, newspapers and collaborations with other anti-mafia

Figure 1: The Skull Posted on the Libera Informazione's Website on April 19, 2010, when a Cyber-attack Occurred

stakeholders. Additionally, there are two important publications. The first is the newsletter *Verità & Giustizia*, which is published two times a month and whose recipients are primarily media professionals and experts, although citizens and associations also have access. The second is a bi-weekly publication by the ecologist newspaper *Terra*, which explores any avenue of inquiry to provide an updated picture of the Mafia in the country. Currently, 14,000 articles have been published which belong to the collaborator journalists from Sicily, Calabria, Campania, Puglia, Basilicata, Lazio, Abruzzo, Tuscany, Emilia Romagna, Lombardy and Piemonte. Finally, the functions of the *Libera Informazione* are categorised according to its duties over the following three issues: providing information to citizens, providing space to journalists and acting as a model for the foreign media.

The first significant function of the *Libera Informazione* is illuminating the public by informing the citizens and making information regarding the Mafia available on its website and in newspapers. This is an attempt to create a public culture through information that aims to foster a citizen stance against the Mafia. Liardo highlights the crucial importance of such information:

> *If you have free information, you see…you hear…and you know the corruption because right now people who belong to the mafia are directly involved in politics … Exchange of votes in the provinces of Campania and Casentino are still so common. At least the people have the opportunity to react … or not to react … it is up to them, but we provide this opportunity for reaction by fellow citizens against the Mafia.*

Above all, the primary function of the *Libera Informazione* is also the basis for its establishment, which is to give more space to both local and national journalists, making information about the Mafia and its networks available in the media and offering the opportunity for a transparent society. For now, these functions provide a shelter for coping with the certain risk that the journalists endure when their articles and entries deal with the Mafia groups.

Perceptions and Risks

First, the frequency of the most used terms during the interview was measured to demonstrate the importance of such terms to the interviewee. In this regard, the 15 most important terms were chosen and classified, including each word and its synonyms, according to the set of terms that were categorised. It was found that the terms that had the highest frequency are the Mafia, journalist(s), and the people, in that order (see Table 1). These three largest files signal the importance of these words to the interviewee and were sorted according to the following three criteria: (1) who is the antagonist, (2) who is the activist in the fight against the antagonist, and (3) what is the common target population that the antagonist and the activist focus on to realise their goals. Thus, the responses to these questions are evidenced as the (1) Mafia, (2) the journalists and (3) the people, respectively. Finally, it is worth noting that 'the journalists' are second, between 'the Mafia' and 'the people' as the ranking of the journalist file signals that they play a strategic bridging role to transmit the information to the third ranking file, the people, to mobilise them against the first ranking file, the Mafia (see Table 1).

Table 1: Frequency of the Most Often Used Terms in the Interview with Gaetano Liardo (N = 6,336 occurrences)

Terms	Occurrences	
	n	%
Mafia	76	1.2
Journalists	70	1.1
People	32	.5
Judges	19	.3
Politicians	19	.3
Berlusconi	13	.2
Newspapers	13	.2
Editors	6	.1
Citizen	6	.1
Bosses	6	.1
Individual	6	.1
Magazine	6	.1
Public	3	.05
Culture	3	.05
Change	3	.05

Libera Informazione also uses posters on their web-sites and at the public events that they organise. The expressions from the images and the messages given via the posters reflect the aim of the institution, which is to inform and alarm citizens regarding the importance of their rights as these rights are under dangerous threat from the Mafia. The *Libera Informazione*'s poster poses such a meaning and message (see Figure 2) as a young girl, whose mouth is taped in the poster, says, '*Non provateci ad imbavagliarMI vogliama la liberta di Informazione,*' which means 'Don't try to gag me. I want the freedom of information.' In this respect, as evidenced by the poster

from the *Libera Informazione*, the persuasion impact of emotions should be realised publicly not only by illustrating emotions of the criminals but also the victims.

Figure 2: The Poster Displayed at the *Libera Informazione* Events

Presence of the Mafia, Web-based Information and the Social Media

The data show that the *Libera Informazione* concentrates on spreading news concerning the activities of the Mafia groups and their initiatives primarily in Sicily, Calabria and Campania. These are the regions where the Mafia groups, the Sicilian Cosa Nostra, Calabrian 'Ndrangheta and Neapolitan Camorra from Campania, are traditionally strong. What is more, the fourth biggest Mafia group is Sacra Corona Unita from Apulia, which increased its activities after the late 1970s in the region. However, Apulia comes after the Lazio and Lombardia regions in the rank of total entries posted by the *Libera Informazione* on its website. This is due to the increasing activities of the Mafia groups, which have been striving to transplant into the northern regions in the last years. Therefore, Lombardia, which is the most industrialist region of Italy, must be categorised as a potential high risk region. Although Lazio could not find as much public space as the northern regions in the media regarding Mafia infiltration, it is a location infested by various Mafia groups. Accordingly, it was found that the *Libera Informazione* gave more space to Lombardia and Lazio on its website even though the presence of the Mafia is greater in Apulia than Lombardia and Lazio. Moreover, Emiglia-Romania, Piemonte, Liguria, Toscana and Basilicata are considered moderate risk regions as the presence of the Mafia still poses serious risks to the social and economic life. Low-risk regions in terms of the presence of the Mafia are Umbria, Abruzzo, Friuli Venezia Guilia, Veneto, Sardegna, Molise, and Trentino-Alto Adige. In contrast to this data, Umbria and

Abruzzo are the regions where the most news was posted by the *Libera Informazione* on its website. Accordingly, the interest of the organisation in these two regions must be well analysed because the public influence of the Mafia and its physical presence in the regions are two different entities that cannot be measured by the same method. Nonetheless, both of these two entities send perilous signals that Abruzzo and Umbria can be potentially vulnerable regions where the presence of the Mafia is receiving less attention, but its public influence is sparking fear of an escalation in the power of the Mafia. As a result, the presence of the Mafia in each region and the total entries in the *Libera Informazione* related with each region are, for the most part, in alignment, with the exception of Lombardia, Lazio, Umbria and Abruzzo (see Table 2).

Table 2: Number of Entries of *Libera Informazione* on Its Website for Each Region (in descending order)*

Regions	Population	First entry date	Last entry date	Presence of Mafia	Total number of entries
SICILY	5,043,480	23 November 2007	14 April 2013	260.90	2471
CALABRIA	1,954,810	23 November 2007	11 April 2013	230.78	1090
CAMPANIA	6,074,090	23 November 2007	13 April 2013	153.35	994
LAZIO	5,543,309	10 March 2008	11 April 2013	31.32	514
LOMBARDIA	9,739,990	28 July 2008	12 April 2013	19.78	388
PUGLIA	4,045,110	7 December 2007	31 March 2013	74.40	371
EMIGLIA-ROMAGNO	4,351,816	2 April 2008	10 April 2013	12.00	203
UMBRIA	884,642	23 June 2008	28 March 2013	2.42	170
ABRUZZO	1,307,565	28 August 2008	7 April 2013	3.85	168
PIEMONTE	4,363,520	15 July 2008	26 March 2013	19.27	145
LIGURIA	1,595,279	18 July 2008	18 March 2013	32.70	106
TOSCANA	3,677,054	6 November 2008	10 April 2013	13.87	91
BASILICATA	606,060	2 October 2008	18 March 2013	10.34	67
FRIULI VENEZIA GIULIA	1,218,475	31 October 2008	9 February 2013	2.19	37
VENETO	4,863,795	29 July 2010	23 October 2012	2.46	29
SARDEGNA	1,636,961	25 December 2007	29 February 2012	3.66	27
LE MARCHE	1,541,484	28 May 2008	28 June 2012	2.51	26
VALLE D'AOSTA	126,881	27 April 2009	1 February 2013	0.57	13
MOLISE	358,323	18 May 2009	31 October 2012	0.16	9
TRENTINO-ALTO ADIGE	1,035,540	1 April 2009	12 July 2012	0.73	9

High-risk regions: Sicily, Calabria, Campania, Puglia

Potential high-risk regions: Lazio, Lombardia, Emiglia-Romania, Piomente, Liguria, Toscana, Basilicata

Moderate-risk regions: Umbria, Abruzzo

Moderate-to-low risk regions: Firuili-Venezia Giulia, Veneto, Sardegna

* The Mafia data were derived from the Progetto Pon Sicurezza 2007-2013, Transcrime report, pp. 28, available at: (http://www.investimentioc.it/files/PON-Gli_investimenti_delle_mafie.pdf). The population is based on Istat 2012, Bilancio demografico mensile anno 2012 e popolazione residente al 30/09/2012 data, available at: (http://www.demo.istat.it/bilmens2012gen/index.html).

The *Libera Informazione* is actively using social media Twitter and Facebook to spread the activities of the Mafia syndicates, their power and impotence, their international collaborations among Mafia members, information about the Mafia abroad, particularly in Mexico and Columbia, the national tragedies caused by the Mafia, the corruption news and political-criminal nexus, and, finally, the anti-Mafia policies, information about the events and protests about the Mafia. The *Libera Informazione* has over ten thousand followers on Twitter and Facebook (see Table 3). However, there are only few comments on Twitter made by its followers. In contrast, there are more comments on its Facebook page. In the period between October 12, 2009, and April 15, 2013, I detected 177 comments altogether, excluding the comments of *Libera Informazione* to its own entry. The comments about the postings were classified into six categories according to the types of the posted entries by the *Libera Informazione*. The most commented entries, 42.3 percent, were directly related to anti-Mafia policies, events and protests promoted by the *Libera Informazione*, thus suggesting that the followers are integrated and more interested in anti-Mafia policies rather than in Mafia news. This is a promising result in terms of the eagerness and interest of the followers to contribute to anti-Mafia policies and to forestall reductionism in anti-Mafia policies. The second most commented posts, 27.6 percent, include corruption news, the political-criminal nexus and the infiltration of Mafia groups in the State institutions. The third category of comments addresses the assassinations and crimes that were committed by the Mafiosi and that led to a public panic in society, accounting for 12.4 percent of the comments. This outcome demonstrates that the organisation aims to remember the tragic events and the Mafia victims by creating a cultural memory. This effort received a considerable number of responses from its followers. It is known that the Mafia groups do not limit their activities to its own territories. Rather, they seek cooperation with other Mafia groups abroad or move to other countries. The news regarding international activities of the Mafia receive more attention by the public than successful police operations against the Mafia, as evidenced by the ratio of the comments where the former received 9.6 percent and the latter a mere 3.9 percent. Similarly, information regarding media programmes and television shows about the Mafia receive fewer posts, at 3.9 percent (see Table 4).

The comments on Facebook are divided into two main sections. The first type of comment reveals widespread dissatisfaction with incumbent political actors and the social situation that has been convulsing the country. On the other hand, the second type of comment invokes the public solidarity while inciting people to show a direct and yet abiding resistance against the Mafia. One of the commentators addresses the political-criminal nexus by stating that, the "Mafia is powerful especially if the politicians are complicit." Many Italians are content living in a country where the historical influence of the Mafia phenomenon is so entrenched in the cultural formations. What is more striking is that this entrenchment structures the beliefs and determines the judgements toward tragic events that occur in the country. One of the most recent examples of such a catastrophe occurred on 4 March 2013 in the "Città della Scienza" (City of Science) in Naples when a fire destroyed the foundation. Conspiracy discourses suddenly appeared in the social media as well as on the webpage of the *Libera Informazione*. The commentator stated, "It means that they (the Mafia) feel they do not have the freedom they had before. They at-

Table 3: Number of *Libera Informazione* Followers and the Total Number of Entries Posted on Its Facebook and Twitter Webpages

Social media	Total number of followers	Total number of posts	First entry date	Last entry date
Facebook	11,724	1,577	12 October 2009	15 April 2013
Twitter	12,106	1,631	28 October 2011	12 April 2013

Table 4: Types of Posted Entries and the Percentage of Comments for Each Type of Posts (October 12, 2009, to April 15, 2013; 177 comments in total; comments of *Libera Informazione* to its own posts not included)

Type of entries	Frequency of comments (in %)
Media (television, radio, magazines, newspapers, and blogs) entries and programmes about the Mafia	3.9
Police operations against the Mafia and court decisions about Mafiosi	3.9
International news about Mafia groups abroad and collaboration between Italian and foreign Mafia groups	9.6
National tragedies, assassinations and terror events held by the Mafia and by radical groups	12.4
Corruption, political-criminal nexus and infiltration of the Mafia into state institutions	27.6
Anti-Mafia policies, information about events and protests of Libera Informazione	42.3

tack because they want 'their hands in the city.'" These comments reflect the deep reaction to the dramatic incidents in the country and the political deadlock about finding a solution to the notorious Mafia problem. Nevertheless, the followers of the *Libera Informazione* on Facebook are not totally hopeless about their future, or at least, they are more prone to take a direct action rather than wait for a virulent and devised response by the politicians. This is why strong symbolic interactions among the followers of the *Libera Informazione* foster the belief to unite and publicly fight against the Mafia. The comment "we are part of this big family, united to continue to believe and hope that there is no injustice anymore and that light will shed on the past," clearly reflects this impression. Furthermore, the social alliance and unity among the followers trigger enduring attempts in this fight against the Mafia. Accordingly, one of the commentators claims, "We must not remember them only on the 21st of March every year because not all people sacrificed their lives as honest magistrates and the others did ... so we must always remember them." The solidarity among the followers of the *Libera Informazione* surges when a risk or threat is directed by the Mafia toward anyone who is fighting against the Mafia. One of the most recent examples of this threat made the headlines of newspapers when anti-Mafia prosecutor Giuseppe Lombardo received an envelope containing gunpowder. The threatening note in the envelope clearly showed the level of risk to the anti-Mafia prosecutor who works against the Calabrian Mafia group, 'Ndrangheta. The threat warned, "If you don't stop it, another 200 kilogrammes are

ready" (gunpowder sent to R. Calabria prosecutor 2013). Public reactions appeared immediately on the Facebook page of the *Libera Informazione*. One of these reactions stated, "Maximum solidarity with the Magistrate Lombardo ... I am against any criminal power wherever its destination." Thus, the dichotomy between these two types of comments demonstrates that the creation of the counter-publics against the Mafia is an ongoing process, which is promising for the future. Yet, an absolute victory over the Mafia has not been achieved.

Conclusions

There is a crystallised conflict between the two cultures in our case. The first culture focuses on the sphere in which the Mafia has become powerful through corruption, the prevention of an institutional 'trust' within society, and its social networks in the political-criminal nexus, which are echoed throughout the socio-economic history of the country. Hence, the current culture, which has evolved throughout the history of modern Italy, provides an appropriate social and political spectrum for the Mafia's power. However, the second culture, that of the *Libera Informazione*, is concentrated on and aims to erase the components of the dominant culture, the Mafia culture, and to replace it with a new culture. This new culture, which is fostered by the *Libera Informazione* and its supporters consists of transparency, lawfulness, deliberative democracy, justice, free information, and solidarity with the integration of an 'active citizenship' into the social life and policy spheres. Furthermore, these two cultural representatives are in competition with each other as the Mafia culture infiltrates the 'public domains of the society and state' whereas the anti-Mafia culture of the *Libera Informazione* aims to defy all fabrics of the Mafia culture from the 'public domains of the society and state' by embracing an ethnographic approach and utilising web-based media. The findings of this research aimed to open new discussions in the studies of the public sphere and the public culture in which the Mafia and the media arm of the anti-Mafia movement operate. Furthermore, I aimed to present a general panorama concerning the role of web-based media and its struggle against the Mafia. Despite this approach, there are certain limitations in this research that hopefully will serve as a spur to fill this gap through new studies in the future that explore the media, the Mafia, and the anti-Mafia media establishments. The first limitation is that the public perceptions and reactions of the followers of the *Libera Informazione* could not be fully deciphered and interpreted. The exploration of these factors may help us to measure public opinion regarding the anti-Mafia movement and to question critically why such an idealised web-based media entity could not mobilise more people. The second limitation is that this study particularly examined the *Libera Informazione* as its case study. We know notably little regarding the role of other anti-Mafia media establishments and the role of other media companies in the country that offer little or no information about the Mafia. A comparative study about the role of different media types in the country regarding the fight against the Mafia may open new gates in understanding the influence of the media in the success and failure of the anti-Mafia movement.

This article is the first to recognise the web-based media influence in the spheres of the Mafia and its prevalent culture in Italy by demonstrating the creation of a public sphere and the remaking of public culture by the *Libera Informazione*. This

study provides information regarding the field of web-based media and crime prevention by describing multiple methods that civil society embraces in the fight against the Mafia in Italy. Hence, the *Libera Informazione* is a role model for other countries where organised crime is still active and the media and civil society have not yet taken an active role against the threats. I suggest that there are lessons to be derived from the struggle of the *Libera Informazione* for those countries that are in the grip of organised crime and the political-criminal nexus, such as Russia, Mexico, Columbia, China, Turkey, and Eastern European countries. The journalists collaborating with the *Libera Informazione* are 'professionally radicals' because of their factually correct and dramatically written entries as they pose risks to their own lives. Conversely, they are 'culturally reformists' in their struggle because their ideals aim to change the existing Mafia culture in the society by mobilising and informing the citizens about the Mafia groups' activities and their collaborations with politicians and bureaucrats. Though the number of journalists and volunteers in the *Libera Informazione* is not sufficiently large to lead such a fundamental change in society, their goals are not unattainable in the long run because of their consistent and goal-focused strategies. All in all, the radical journalism and reformative culture of the *Libera Informazione* compete with the Mafiosi culture to dominate and regain the public domains of the state and society from the Mafia. These web-based media initiatives enable us to suggest that we should be hopeful regarding their roles to impede the Mafia's power. It is worth noting that erasing the Mafia from the country and setting up a new culture by developing an active citizenship concept cannot occur in a short period of time. Yet, web-based media can be an auxiliary force to realise the ideals of the anti-Mafia actors**.** However, it is important to be aware that the *Libera Informazione* and its passionate activists who show zealous support for the anti-Mafia movement are only cultural conquerors of the anti-Mafia media establishments. If they would like to permanently defeat the Mafia and renew the dominant culture, of which the Mafia is part, they must transfer the same passion and ideals to the wider publics. If they achieve a mass mobilisation that is empowered by the majority of Italian society then they will become the cultural conquerors of their own society. Thus, the elimination process of the Mafia depends on the level of mobilisation against the Mafia. Yet more than 10,000 followers, both on Facebook and Twitter, indicate that a considerable number of people have been integrated into this process. If one day the idealism of the *Libera Informazione* reverberates through the actions of the masses, then this limited but strong web-based media establishment will achieve its ideals. However, as this is a process of social change, the actors who promote such a change must maintain consistency in their efforts and inspire support for their goals, which already exist in the struggle of the *Libera Informazione* and other anti-Mafia media establishments.

Notes:

1. The Mafia is referred to the Sicilian Cosa Nostra historically, but here it is used as a term to refer to the Italian organised crime groups. There are four main mafia groups in the country, which have either loose or tight organisational structures: the Cosa Nostra from Sicily, the Camorra from Campania, the 'Ndrangheta from Calabria and the Sacra Corona Unita from Apuglia.

2. Libera has five main sectors: Libera Terra, Libera Sport, Libera Internazionale, Libera Formazione, and Libera Informazione. For more information, see http://www.libera.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/1

3. The first *Contre Mafie* event occurred in 2006 when Romano Prodi was the Prime Minister. The second was held in 2009, and President Giorgio Napolitano participated. This event was a discussion forum where the politicians, academics, journalists, civil society organisations, and citizens come together to discuss the future of the Mafia and anti-mafia policies in Italy. The event was organised by *Libera.*

4. Information was obtained through personal communication.

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