



D43 The Symbolism in Mafia Homicides: The “Violation” of Mafia’s Honor Code

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The goal of this presentation is to show how a mafia homicide, in which the brutality of the crime, is associated with a ritualistic symbol. Symbols and signs are used in many life and societal aspects. They are very important codes, especially in some criminal organizations where they become an advertisement and a warning for all and especially for the experts or “adepts.”

This presentation will impact the forensic community by illustrating a case which resulted in death that occurred in Palermo during the eighties. The victim, a male and an “uomo d’onore”, was well known in criminal circles. The victim was like a “u cantante” (singer) because his criminal activities were akin to a singer of melodic Neapolitan songs. The victim was found dead, in a little place in Palermo, with his genitals in his mouth. The autopsy showed that the victim was initially beaten than strangled and after he expired he was emasculated.

“Cosa Nostra”, as the Mafia is defined by “her adepts”, is a criminal organization which was born in Southern Italy, according to some authors, after the Italian unification in 1861. According to historical sources, in the South of Italy (Sicilia, Campania, Calabria), some criminal organizations were already present, originating from the Roman or the Arabian dominations. The progressive expansion of “Cosa Nostra” was increased by the application of new Italian laws. These laws, which forced those in agriculture to divide the fields between farmers, created a progressive malcontent amongst the farmers.

The farmers had to pay a tribute (the “*gabella*”) to the few owners of the fields for the privilege of working the fields. The collection of this tax was made by the “*campieri*”, unlike what happened in the other Italian regions. The progressive control of the economy and increased power of the privileged class was established by the relationships they formed with the Statesmen, who resided in their territory.

This first phase was followed by a crisis, during the Nazi-fascist domination between 1920 and 1940. After the liberation of Italy from Nazi-fascist control, “Cosa Nostra” reached its definitive organizational structure in the early seventies thanks to different economic operations (such as control of the drug market, tobacco smuggling, control of business contracts). In order to avoid conflicts of interest, in this phase, the Mafia took on a pyramidal business structure. At the base of this “Cupola” there were men well known as “*uomini d’onore*” (honor’s men, the old “*campieri*”): they are quite the soldiers, totally obedient to “*Capodecina*” a sort of a peripheral chief; all chiefs and soldiers composed the “*Famiglia*” (Family), that has some delegates, called “*Capimandament*.” These delegates gather to decide strategies and actions. Recently, because of the Mafia’s growth and the peripheral expansion, it has created the “*Commissione interprovinciale*”, in order to coordinate its many districts’ actions.

After the rituals of initiation, each member has to comply with some specific rules that constitute the “Codice d’onore” (honor code). The honor code states that they must respect the rules of the organization, respect the others (“*uomini d’onore*”), and uphold the obligation of silence about the Organization. Finally their duty to women, especially for those who uphold their family and children are likened to the “man of the state”, like policemen, judges, who have always been “untouchable”.

This presentation illustrates a case of death which happened in eighties in Palermo, in which a man, an “uomo d’onore” known in the criminal society circles like “u cantante” (singer) for his activity like singer of melodic Neapolitan song, was found dead, in a little place in Palermo. The victim was found with his genitals in his mouth.

The investigations did not identify the killers and the investigators believed that the murder was due to a “sgarro” (bad action) due to a courtship of a woman who was from another “family”, and thus was considered untouchable. The gesture of placing the genitals in the mouth was an expression of the will to make the facts known.

The goal is to show (or explain) the structure of Mafia’s organization, its rites and the symbolism used in the Mafia’s use of homicide. Other cases in which the symbolism was linked to the violation of a specific rule in the Mafia’s honor code will be shown.

Mafia’s Honor Code, Emasculation, Signs and Symbolism