



‘Familiness’ diversification and recognition: intergenerational changes in mobile ‘ndrangheta families in Australia

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Abstract

Mafia-type families, envisioned as intergenerational (criminal) dynasties or family-based criminal groups, are shaped by recognition in the ‘underworld’ and affected by changes in their *familiness*. In Australia, mafia-type families or dynasties connected to the Calabrian ‘ndrangheta have been successful at exploiting licit and illicit opportunities across generations and places also thanks to their recognition as well as reputation. In this article we explore how mafia-type families or dynasties experience familiness diversification, including intergenerational changes, transculturation, and external factors, and how this relates to their recognition in the underworld, by other criminal groups or by law enforcement. Based on document analysis and interviews, and building on a new analytical framework, we present four ideal-types mafia-type families in Australia: gatekeepers, holdovers, newcomers, and vanishers. This is the first study that considers how mafia organisations evolve in their most fundamental forms abroad, and some implications of such evolution go against mainstream understandings of mafia mobility studies.

Keywords Mafia · ‘ndrangheta · Mobility · Migration · Australia · Familiness · Diversification · Recognition · Reputation

Introduction

The ‘ndrangheta in Australia is one of the most interesting case studies of contemporary mobility of organised crime, mafia-type, groups. Awareness and knowledge of the presence of the ‘ndrangheta in the country has oscillated between oblivion and alarm for decades (Sergi 2017a). For over a hundred years, institutions and the public

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conscience have periodically learned of the presence of this mafia and periodically seem to look away (Sergi 2022). Crucially, the ‘ndrangheta is the only mafia, among the Italian ones, that has existed as a distinguishable criminal organisation in Australia, and this has been linked, not deterministically, to mass migration from areas of Calabria where ‘ndrangheta activity is dense (Sergi 2019a, 2022). The identity and traditions of Italian/Calabrian migrant communities in the country can be considered functions of a process of transculturation (Ortiz 2004; Ricatti 2018) that, over the course of a century – we argue – has influenced also the ‘ndrangheta and made it Australian in addition to its being Calabrian/Italian.

The ‘ndrangheta is considered Italy’s most powerful mafia (Sergi and Lavorgna 2016) and its mobility is one of the main aspects of its power. The term ‘mafia’ is used by social scientists to indicate a qualified form of organised crime. Besides committing serious, violent, and otherwise ‘organised’ criminal activities, mafia groups are typically backed by social prestige and are usually accepted and/or tolerated by their communities while they try to consolidate some form of economic or political power (Gambetta 1993; Paoli 2008; Sergi 2017a). Mafia groups are also social actors, with the capacity to manage social capital and realise strategic objectives also at the organisational level (Sciarrone 1998; Catino 2019). To both pursue power and profit, mafias (including the ‘ndrangheta) base their reputation on the capability to offer services and especially protection in highly uncertain contexts (Gambetta 1993; Sergi and Vannucci 2023).

The conceptualisation of, and approach to, mafias is constantly evolving and among recent theoretical effort is the one on ‘ndrangheta dynasties (Sergi 2021a), which places intergenerational family units at the core of an analytical understanding of this mafia organisation. This paper will start from accrued knowledge about the ‘ndrangheta and its mobility to investigate how mafia-type or ‘ndrangheta families (including dynasties) have evolved in Australia. The research questions are:

1. How has intergenerational evolution affected recognition and reputation in mafia/‘ndrangheta dynasties/families in Australia?
2. To what extent has intergenerational evolution across mafia/‘ndrangheta dynasties/families in Australia affected the success of these families’ business choices and activities nationally and cross-border?

This paper presents a typology of four ideal-typical mafia-type/‘ndrangheta families/dynasties based on both the diversification of family businesses and structures (‘familiness’) and the (social) recognition these families have enjoyed or still enjoy in the ‘underworld’, which goes hand in hand with their reputation. This paper argues that there are different types of ‘ndrangheta/mafia-type families in Australia: Gatekeepers, Newcomers, Holdovers, Vanishers. Crucially, not all of them are successful in contemporary days, criminally speaking: for example, the Holdovers are normally low-level criminal families, while the Vanishers have in fact disappeared. This latter point is a countertendency against the mainstream narrative about the ‘ndrangheta today, in Italy and abroad, which instead tends to see mafia families as homogeneously successful and dangerous.

Theoretical background: mafia mobility and 'ndrangheta dynasties in Australia

The presence of 'ndrangheta clans has been ascertained and reported in Italy, in European countries as well as in the USA, Latin America and Canada (Sergi 2022; Calderoni et al. 2016; Dagnes et al. 2019; Sergi and Rizzuti 2023). A process of '*ndranghetisation*' sees convergence of behaviours, isomorphism as well as imitation, observed for Calabrian criminal groups or with whom Calabrian associates collaborate (Sergi 2022). Outside Calabria, criminal groups with Calabrian links can benefit from the growing reputation of the 'ndrangheta (as a brand) and participation to oligopolistic markets, especially for cocaine trafficking in Europe (Rizzuti and Sergi 2021).

Studies on mafia mobility have focused on the activities and structures of criminal groups and networks, following what is essentially a spectrum of manifestations ranging from the *delocalisation* of criminal activities (where groups carry out all or part of their criminal activities elsewhere/abroad/cross-border) to the *colonisation* of territories (where groups replicate abroad criminal structures like those of origin) and their variants in between (Sciarrone and Storti 2014). Recent studies have looked at mafia mobility in different territories as the result of complex interactions of different dynamics, which was termed 'conditioned opportunism', with a focus on infrastructures and environments (Rizzuti and Sergi 2021) and 'functional diversification', with a focus on markets and actors (Campana 2011). Mobility is in fact conditioned by *push* and *pull* factors (Morselli et al., 2011; Arsovska 2016), of repulsion and attraction. Both the characteristics of the groups and the characteristics and contexts of the places of origin and destination countries must be considered (Varese 2011).

One of the characteristics of groups that can also be studied in specific contexts are the clans themselves, and in the 'ndrangheta specifically the families, some of whom are dynasties (Sergi 2021a). Mafia dynasties are those organised crime families where not only there is intergenerational (organised) crime involvement, but also there is a 'brand' associated to the family (sur)name, its values, its history, which contributes to both the conditioning of family members into crime and to the building and maintenance of a 'business strategy' in the family (Gambetta 2009). Such brand – often based on values such as honour, respect, and - is indeed an integral part of the dynasty's reputation and recognition in the underworld (Sergi 2021a, 2022).

Literature on intergenerational organised crime involvement has pointed out that transmission of criminal careers in families are facilitated by mediating risk factors, such as the inadequate parenting skills of the mother, the reputation of the father, deviant social learning and also structural factors linked to marginalisation and kinship dynamics (Spapens and Moors 2020; van Dijk et al. 2019; Moors and Spapens 2023; Jaraba 2023). Indeed, the vicissitudes of families influence criminal opportunity structures.

In intergenerational mafia-type groups of the 'ndrangheta, '*familiness*' contributes to both business structures and criminal enterprise culture (Sergi 2021a), effectively building an organised crime brand. By *familiness* we indicate the bundle of idiosyncratic internal resources that come into existence due to the involvement of the family in a business/firm (Habbershon and Williams 1999; Habbershon et al. 2003).

‘Ndrangheta clans build their reputation on the weight that their *familiness* carries; they are recognised by other dynasties in the same organisations and other criminal actors outside their circles also because of their *familiness*. Because of such recognition and the reputation accrued across generations, the danger they pose to society, if successful, might be amplified. Additionally, in the ‘ndrangheta, some of the most historical and relevant – criminally speaking – dynasties have also been active cross-border, often duplicating their activities with different ‘branches’ of the same family ‘business’ and exploiting the close-knit nature that is associated to their mafia mobility and migration (Sergi 2022).

One of the countries where intercontinental ‘ndrangheta families/dynasties are most visible is Australia. Studies have looked at the different roles organised crime groups have in Australia and the ‘ndrangheta is part of a what appears a very competitive underworld (Masters 2018). Some Italian mafia-type groups and especially ‘ndrangheta clans have been operational for almost a century in Australia, never fully severing the bonds with the motherland, but also developing a fully Australian ‘portfolio’ (Sergi 2019a, 2022). This is why ‘ndrangheta families/dynasties in Australia – a prime example of mafia mobility – are the perfect case study to understand how intergenerational changes affect the inner workings of organised crime families. Finally, ‘ndrangheta dynasties in Australia are also migrant families, meaning that these groups are also affected by relationships and intergenerational changes within their own migrant communities and cultures in addition to the host culture.

Theoretical framework: familiness diversification, recognition, and reputation

In addition to considering studies on intergenerational crime families and studies on mafia mobility with a specific focus on the ‘ndrangheta in Australia, we need to reflect also on studies on recognition and reputation with reference to how they affect the diversification of familiness in ‘ndrangheta dynasties/families. Sergi (2021a: 1527) details how familiness in the ‘ndrangheta can be understood by assessing the following, in relation to the family business: activities and business forms; modes of control; strategy; enterprise culture; governance structure. Under “*enterprise culture*” we find “*social prestige; reputation; family identity across generations; historical legacy*”. This is where we place changes affecting the families from a perspective of identity and reputation across generations. Recognition is considered a stepping-stone of reputation-building, achieved throughout a variety of means (Pizzorno 2007). Understanding what resources make up recognition and consequently reputation for ‘ndrangheta dynasties is paramount to understand the impact that familiness diversification has had on the various groups.

First, we consider what constitutes *diversification in familiness*. As familiness refers to the involvement of the family and its personal affairs in a business, we can identify both what diversifies families, and then what diversifies businesses, in this case underpinned by illicit activities. Familiness diversification includes changes occurring at family level that have an impact on how that family pursues business or vice-versa, the changes occurring in business that might have an impact of family relationships. As we are talking about ‘ndrangheta families in Australia, we are also talking about Calabrian *migrant* mafia families, their *transcultural* changes through

different generations and the evolution of their enterprising capabilities, including structural and contextual ones.

Research on Calabrian-Italian migrant families in Australia (Marino 2020) has found that feelings of “double absence” or “spaesamento” are common in first-generation, where individuals feel disconnected both to their homeland and to the new home. Marino (2020) also found how ethnic identity in second-generation Calabrians implies a sense of in-between-ness, often leading to rejecting the culture of origin. Being a minority within a cultural hegemony implies in fact different forms of adaptation. Conversely, in third-generation, re-embracing Italianness and Calabrianness is not a stigmatising choice any longer and it becomes “cool” again (Marino 2020). This complements what Ricatti (2018) discusses in terms of *transculturation*, as a critical lens to identify those voices outside of the mainstream migration discourse in Italian migration in Australia. Through a transcultural lens (Ortiz 2004) – that looks at how stratification of cultures changes migrant practices, predominantly in contexts of cultural hegemony and colonialism – we could interrogate whether ‘ndrangheta families have evolved in line or in deviance from common Calabrian migration experiences. Although this is not the main aim of this paper, having in mind transcultural practices and trends in Calabrian migrants today in Australia helps us frame migrant mafia families’ diversification, and ‘ndrangheta families among them and not as a separate phenomenon.

The familiness diversification of these dynasties needs to also be considered in terms of the functional diversification of their mafia-type business. The concept of functional diversification in mafia mobility, developed by Campana (2011; 2013) and built upon by Varese (2020), considers how mafia-type groups diversify their activities across territories through investments in the legal and/or illegal economy. If we pair this to the view that mafia groups move through conditioned opportunism (Sergi and Rizzuti 2023; Rizzuti and Sergi 2021) we can identify how socio-economic context variables might play a role in diversification and how with higher diversification we can expect higher (criminal) success of the family.

Second, considering the diversification of entrepreneurial capabilities in these families leads us to explore how external recognition and reputation affect ‘ndrangheta dynasties’ enterprise culture. The dialectic between recognition and reputation is a key characteristic of mafias and complex organisations in general. Reputation and recognition are keys both for economic activities and for protection services, as well as for the identity of the organisation (Gambetta 1993). In line with Pizzorno (2007), we can understand how and why recognition is formed and maintained especially when mafias, as semi-secret, clandestine, organisations, seek to develop and maintain their reputation. According to Pizzorno (2007) every social agent belongs to plural circles of recognition where individuals share judgements and values on what needs to be considered worth of value and where judgements are reinforced through reiterated patterns of interaction. Within circles of recognition reputation is formed either because of one’s credibility, or because of one’s excellence, or because of one’s behaviours within the community and in accordance with community’s values (Pizzorno 2007). Mafia groups gain external recognition also when capable to provide extra-legal governance as well as engaging in various illegal activities (Smith and Varese 2001; Sciarrone 2006). Reputation is also linked to visibility (Pizzorno 2007),

as a specific strategy of social actors to augment their recognition by exposure. There exists also ‘reputation by invisibility’ (), affirmed and strengthened by a regular circulation of coherent information – a *narrative* – on a specific skill or of the reach of a network, i.e., their capability to effectively *conceal* their profitable connections, deals, and illegal activities within hidden arenas (Sergi and Vannucci 2023).

Achieving recognition through these kinds of reputation-building mechanisms, especially the last one, is ultimately also linked to the ability to maintain ambiguity within and across these families. It has been argued in organisational studies (Cappellaro et al. 2021) that strategic ambiguity in clandestine organisations, including mafia-type groups, is maintained by overcoming a series of struggles of external and internal actors. Ambiguity forces externals to constantly reinterpret the activities of the group (Cappellaro et al. 2021) and express values over people who are ambivalent in their relation within or around the mafia group. Crucially, ambiguity and secrecy (as opposed to visibility) can be mutually reinforcing: the more secretive the mafia group tries to be, the more ambiguous it appears but the balance between visibility and invisibility (thus secrecy) is always changing (Sergi, 2023). In mafia-type groups, contrary to what happens in legitimate contexts, ambiguity does not lead to a loss of reputation (Fombrun and Rindova 2000) nor to a loss of legitimacy (Zuckerman 1999).

Table 1 considers the interplay between familiness diversification and evolving recognition of ‘ndrangheta dynasties in Australia. As said, familiness diversification can be assessed by looking at both the intergenerational evolution of the family business and the evolution of the family unit. Conversely, recognition is made of the various forms of reputation the families have maintained or gained or lost by externals, including law enforcement agencies, but also other criminal groups. This is why it is better to use recognition and not reputation in this framework: recognition is wider as a concept and includes discovery from outsiders due to the various forms of reputation but also identity-building from within various circles before any reputation. Recognition, in our typology, will necessarily overlap partially with reputation, as the latter often is indicative of the former. The typology sketches four ideal-types of dynasties: gatekeepers; holdovers; newcomers; vanishers.

Table 1 The interplay between familiness diversification and recognition in migrant ‘ndrangheta dynasties: a typology

		‘Familiness’ Diversification	
		High	Low
Recognition	High	<p>The Gatekeepers. We expect these to be longstanding families whose recognition is solid and managed to diversify their familiness across generations, thus remaining successful.</p>	<p>The Holdovers. We expect these to be longstanding families whose recognition resists but whose familiness diversification has been ineffective, thus being somewhat unsuccessful.</p>
	Low	<p>The Newcomers. We expect these to be new(ish) families whose recognition is still building, and whose familiness diversification has made them successful.</p>	<p>The Vanishers. We expect these to be new or old families whose recognition is today missing as they failed at diversifying their familiness across generations.</p>

Methods

This article seeks to fill a gap in research by looking at how ‘ndrangheta families-dynasties have evolved in Australia, from a perspective that considers both their recognition and the diversification of their familiness.

This paper is part of a wider project on transnational cross-border mafia-type families for which the Australian ‘ndrangheta family clans are the case study and the context of reference. The project was funded by XXX and received ethical approval by XXXX in October 2023.

Data for this paper was collected and analysed in a three-step process: first, knowledge was gathered by a variety of sources (media sources; archives; police reports and investigations; case law) and organised around family trees; second, interviews with law enforcement consolidated this knowledge and problematised it around specific themes (involvement in criminality; marital choices; role of women; reaction to culture and norms etc.); third, updated family trees were analysed in light of the theoretical framework with specific reference to indicators of recognition, reputation, and familiness diversification. A total of 38 families were considered; these are not all the possible families, but just those for which at least some data on different generations could be retrieved. The amount of data about each family group varies making comparison at times quite difficult (hence the interviews). Among these families are families whose “mafia status” has been ascertained both in Italy and in Australia, but often, in Australia, this is not of public dominion nor ascertained by a court of law. The author would be facing potential defamation lawsuits if they shared surnames that could qualify specific people with the mafia label, as it has happened to journalists in the past. A decision has been made to only nominate those very few families whose “mafia status” has been ascertained or circulated in some way via Australian authorities publicly. This means that the mafia status was ascertained either through Italian judicial documents, or through closed investigative data in Australia, acquired through “protected” fieldwork.

Also, the author is particularly weary that there exist in analysis and research on mafias a potential for a surname bias, that is an assumption of mafia belonging made on individuals due to their surname and their family ties with alleged or confirmed mafia members. The author does not wish to fuel such a bias any further.

Fourteen team interviews with law enforcement were conducted and analysed: 9 with Australian Federal Police - AFP (3 in Melbourne, 2 in Sydney, 2 in Canberra, 1 in Perth – including Western Australia Police, 1 in Adelaide), 3 with Victoria Police (2 in Melbourne, 1 in Mildura), 1 with New South Wales Police in Griffith, 1 with South Australia Police in Adelaide. Additionally, 4 interviews with local journalists were analysed. Fieldwork was carried out with a pilot visit in March 2023 and then in January and February 2024. It must be noted that these interviews are extremely hard to get and even if they are not many in number, they are qualitatively among the best kind of access to law enforcement on this subject that can be imagined currently. Interviews lasted an average of 2.5 h and involved a minimum of 3 individuals and a maximum of 20 per meeting. Two deeds of confidentiality were signed with the AFP and NSWPOL in Griffith, that give these institutions oversight of the published

results to make sure that nothing confidential is unintentionally disclosed, including most of the surnames and organisational trees of the families.

The interviews were organised to discuss data collected on (alleged and confirmed) ‘ndrangheta families from other sources (archives; police reports and investigations; media sources; case law). For each meeting, I went prepared with a set of questions related to 2–4 ‘dynasties in the location of reference. Questions were about involvement in criminal activities (at different levels of ascertainment) of various family members; their choices of spouses or partners; the role of women; their behaviour towards norms and values of the family’s older members and so on. Due to the nature of the interviews, it will not be possible to quote from them directly. The deeds of confidentiality also limit the amount and types of quotes and details about the families that can be shared in this paper. Accurate notes were taken, and paraphrasing will be used to convey the quotes as needed.

All the data, from the various sources including the interviews, were analysed for content and to find scripts and patterns across generations that could be generalisable across them. Data shared for each category has been triangulated with at least two sources (interviews and other possible source, e.g., case law, media).

The categories identified are ideal-typical and therefore they should not be reified, but simply made concrete with data. Not all families will perfectly the category assigned; some branches of the same families have developed in different ways to the point that the surname can belong to two different categories (e.g., Barbaro clan is both a Gatekeeper and a Holdover, depending on which branch we consider). Some common traits have emerged and will be shared in the findings of what makes a family more aligned with one category and not the other.

It is important to acknowledge that previous research on the ‘ndrangheta in Australia was prodromic for this research to unpack the phenomenon from a critical criminological perspective (Sergi 2015, 2017b, 2019a, b, 2021b, 2022; Bennetts 2016; Ciconte and Macri 2009). In fact, previous research has enabled this project to (a) identify the locations where fieldwork could be conducted; (b) identify historical and in contemporary institutional and public depictions of the phenomenon; (c) identify potential ‘ndrangheta dynasties in each location to study further and collect data on.

The gatekeepers

These families (11) are akin to ‘royal’ dynasties, both in Australia and in Calabria, meaning a group of families more important and influential in the ‘ndrangheta than others, for generations. Families included in this category are the reason why the ‘ndrangheta as an organisation (Sergi 2019a) was firstly established since the 1950s in Australia and later resisted to intergenerational changes; in this category are families who have been around since the establishment of the current ‘ndrangheta organisation in Australia. We find Gatekeepers primarily in Griffith (NSW), in Adelaide, in Sydney, in Melbourne, in Mildura (VIC). There is an overwhelming presence of families from the town of Plati, Natile, Careri, in this category, notoriously historical dynasties of the ‘ndrangheta. A set of surnames that appeared in the public eyes and that would fall into this category are, just as an example, the Sergi-Barbaro in Griffith

(NSW), notoriously mentioned in institutional inquiries about the Honoured Society in Australia, such as the Woodward Royal Commission already in 1979¹. There are however, many Sergi families and many Barbaro families and not all of them fall into this category, even when their members are involved in criminal activities as a clan.

The Gatekeepers' recognition in the 'underworld' is in their surnames - often associated to the 'ndrangheta 'royalty' in Calabria as well - and their marriage choices, immediately recognisable to all, usually within the same village or close-by, often known to the public as well. It was said during an AFP meeting (VIC4):

They still maintain to a degree their traditional codes; they leverage their surname for reputation and for their family's reputation in terms of their prominence in that criminal group. They respond as a family to any issue, they are compact, but criminality is done with other groups.

The main characteristic of these families is *business* diversification, that is the 'official' distance from criminal activities, which makes it extremely difficult for law enforcement to keep investigating them today. Their involvement in criminal activities – drug trafficking, importation, money laundering – is today peripheral and usually only relates to some branches of the family. The Gatekeepers tend to use other (ethnic) groups to carry out any purely criminal activity.

However, they built their reputation on violence and crime. The "echo" of that violence (Sergi 2022) – even when it is from decades ago - lingers on the community and fuels ambiguity, because of impunity and resilience. This does not always fuel 'fear', as these families do give back to the community. This shows their ability, across generations, to adapt to the Australian way-of-life in addition to maintaining their southern Italian roots, as anticipated by intergenerational migration research (Marino 2020).

The businesses they are involved in, their financial investment in the community, sporting teams, sponsorships, donations, lots of stuff...giving back to the community, having legitimate business, being seen around. The things of the past, their alleged involvement into this murder or that murder, no-one talks about, feels like you can avoid thinking about that. This helps their prestige; they are benefitting from the uncertainty about their past. (NSW2)

When it comes to their familiness diversification, there is a difference between the Gatekeepers in internal areas (e.g., Griffith, Mildura) and those in the cities (e.g., Adelaide, Sydney, Melbourne). In the cities, the Gatekeepers' changes are more pronounced: the main aim is the social legitimation of the family – the "*shift from crime to power*" (SA1) but without losing sight of the recognition in the underworld. Gatekeepers in the cities have married outside of Italian circles; the new generations have very different jobs from their parents (mostly university-educated) and the role of women follows common society's evolutionary trends: data point at high family

¹ See <https://www.smh.com.au/national/a-tale-of-two-pasquale-barbaros--both-shot-dead-20161115-gsq0v8.html> and <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-11-01/mafia-don-tony-sergi-dies-in-griffith/9106258>.

diversification too, in terms of education and/or profession. A daughter can not only become a lawyer but also be considered for ‘succession’ to his father. In internal areas, the Gatekeepers appear more conservative and orthodox in some choices – for example in terms of who they marry (within the Calabrian community) - but this does not mean their diversification is less pronounced in terms of business and professions: sons or daughters go to university but then they come “back to town” to invest and innovate family businesses (farms, logistics, firms).

Both in the cities and in internal areas, the distance from criminal activities also means that their function has become a different one in the ‘ndrangheta organisation. The function they play is often conflict management and service providing; they are indeed the gatekeepers, those who are the hub, which keeps the organisation’s recognisability alive throughout generations.

The ones who are really in power don’t show it; that’s the big problem. The ones who are legitimised, who are not doing anything illegal, are probably those who are calling the shots. The status and position of a person in one of those families is usually understood by the visits they receive from older guys, from out of town, but visiting families and friends is not unusual either. What is unusual is that at some point the person of reference changes abruptly and so do the visits. (NSW2)

According to the available data and the analysis of these families these are the traits that may warrant a family a Gatekeeper status: involvement in the ‘ndrangheta in Australia (in addition to having a ‘ndrangheta status in Italy) since the first-generation arrivals; intergenerational involvement in criminal activities with high diversification in business to the point of apparently abandoning criminal activities; high diversification in education and professional choices, which facilitate integration into society; constant and stable recognition in the underworld as apical ‘ndrangheta families thus ability to provide services and protection to the organisation. An important contributing element for the qualification of the gatekeepers is the ambiguity of their criminal status: the action of law enforcement has not diminished their reputation and the uncertainty of law enforcement activities in the past has contributed to their recognition.

The holdovers

These families (7) have been around in public narratives and institutional investigations since the 1950s, like the Gatekeepers. An example of this category would be the Perre family in South Australia, even though their mafia status, clearer for Italian standards, has not been ascertained in Australia and should not be assumed². Often, they come from the same villages in Calabria than the Gatekeepers, such as Plati, and they share family ties across various locations in Australia. The Holdovers, therefore,

² See <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-07-01/domenic-perre-national-crime-authority-bombing/101014264>.

are older families and, in many cases, they have surnames and family ties that would grant them recognition among their peers. They were active for a few decades, and they have been subject to investigations, arrests, and involvement in organised crime activities, such as drug production or trafficking, or even extortion.

Their recognition, therefore, is linked to association with the Gatekeepers or sharing with them the place of origin in Calabria, but also to the reputation of their own activities in the past. Some of the Holdovers have been involved in key moments of the evolution of the Australian 'ndrangheta, including violent outbursts (e.g., murder) and drug trade.

Data on the Holdovers show that these families have had issues with diversification of their familiness either because their business strategy has not changed across generations or because they ran into hiccups at family level. For example, Holdovers are families where, we find father and son both involved in drug trade together with other family members, at a time (in the Nineties) when in the Gatekeepers legitimation and intergenerational evolution had already started occurring.

Holdovers are families where succession has been made complicated by the inclination of sons and daughters. Whereas in the Gatekeepers, inclination of children and then young adults is key but also regimented into family's expectations, in the Holdovers children and then young adults appear less inclined to diversify the family business successfully or to contribute to the family 'meaningfully' by taking over responsibility roles. For example, in one of the Holdovers in Adelaide, even though the son is university-educated, his involvement in the drug trade together with his father and his inability to maintain his "clean" reputation in his chosen profession, determines a sharp (criminal) decline of the family once the father dies.

Holdovers are families whose involvement into organised criminal activities is quite low. Differently from the Gatekeepers, they are not believed, nor they show, to have wealth beyond their means; actually, they are observed: "*scrambling around for extra cash; that family looks like they ask for a recognition they don't deserve anymore*" (SA2).

The issue with low familiness diversification and high(er) recognition than most other families in the underworld, also leads to looking at the values that the Holdovers hold as prominent. While the Gatekeepers make a visible effort to be involved and 'giving back', thus becoming integral part of their communities, the Holdovers live on the fringes of it, at times openly displaying contempt towards institutions, disdain, and disrespect for non-family members, honest people, and law enforcement. Their idea of 'honour' – central to the 'ndrangheta's underpinning 'ideology' (Ciconte, 2011) – can appear akin to a misguided sense of entitlement and arrogance, or plainly manipulated. In this sense, they don't often follow the mainstream Calabrian experience in Australia. However, new generations are indeed reclaiming their Calabrian-ness more, as it is common with third generation migrant communities. daughter of a Holdover family, with a very well-known surname, notwithstanding her exotic and foreign first name and a declared incapability to speak any Italian, often cites her "Calabrianness" has a source of pride and reason for respecting and 'honouring' her.

Lastly, Holdovers do not show significant differences between the cities and the internal areas: some of them are even spread out across several locations, which adds to the problems of continuity of their familiness and their 'brand'. One specific fam-

ily, once active between South Australia and Victoria – internal areas – have maintained their recognition through marriage with other active and known families across the nation; some low-level criminal involvement in many cases do not “refresh” their recognition and do not show willingness to significantly diversify: *“Even if they have been around for quite sometime, the newer generations are all marrying into various other families, so they basically don’t exist anymore on their own, they go with what their acquired families do, or don’t do” (SA1)*. This indicates how the next potential step for holdovers could be to transit into the category of the vanishers.

According to the available data and the analysis of these families these are the traits that may warrant a family a Holdover status: involvement in the ‘ndrangheta in Australia (in addition to having a ‘ndrangheta status in Calabria) since the first-generation arrivals; intergenerational involvement in criminal activities but with low diversification; low diversification in education and professions is not a consistent trait, but the lack of integration into communities is; risk of disappearance (eventually falling into the Vanishers category) is quite high due to uncoordinated intergenerational changes, notwithstanding somewhat constant high recognition.

The newcomers

The Newcomers are families (13) that have affirmed their reputation recently compared to the Gatekeepers and the Holdovers, thus have “appeared” in the underworld roughly in the past 15–20 years or less. The Newcomers are involved in organised crime activities (e.g., drug trade) and relatively visible in the underworld. They cannot be mentioned by surname due to confidentiality of the data and their current suspected involvement in serious organised crime. Mostly, they are linked to Melbourne’s underworld and in some cases, they are linked to migrant families from the area of Oppido Mamertina or Sinopoli in Calabria. We find them also in Perth, with links to family members from Nardodipace (Vibo Valentia province) or the Siderno area, as well as in Adelaide and Canberra as well still linked to the Aspromonte villages. Crucially, most of these families are connected to Calabria primarily for family reasons, and not criminal reasons, like the Gatekeepers, with of course, a few exceptions. The most common way to gain reputational capital in these families, especially when they are of Calabrian descent, is to marry with a Gatekeeper family and become the branch of that family that engages directly in illicit activities and more obviously illicit wealth. The recognition of the Newcomers is *derivative*; they often acquire more relevance because of their connection and involvement with a more established clan, for both structures and activities. For example, we read in case law: *“the drugs trafficked by FM were alleged to have been imported by Pasquale Barbaro, as head of a drug syndicate, and others. It was not alleged that FM was involved in the importation of the drugs”*³.

Recently, they can derive power also from a family abroad – which denotes the ubiquity of the ‘ndrangheta globally. As noticed:

³ M [name redacted] v The Queen [2021] VSCA 1 (15 January 2021).

Some of the recent families are from the same area in Calabria [of Gatekeepers]; whether that is what ties them together is not always clear. They are both new and old migrants; when they are coming from Calabria, they usually get introduced to some of the families here by other families there. It's always families introducing families and vouching for them, both new and old migrants. (VIC4)

One of the things that characterises the Newcomers is that they are found almost exclusively in urban settings, which does not surprise considering that cities have normally a more vibrant 'underworld'. The urban nature of Newcomers also suggests another characteristic of these families: they innovate their *familiness*, often moving from one illegal or legal market to another, with different members of the family engaging in different activities at the same time. The Newcomers often accentuate the separation between the licit and the illicit in the family branches. For example, in one of the Newcomers in Melbourne we find two cousins: one who is a well-known entrepreneur and investor, and another who was convicted for drug trade and not even in an apical position. Newcomers establish themselves thanks to their familiness diversification capabilities. Their links with the Gatekeepers, they often offer options for diversification:

We have seen virtually all males with that surname (Gatekeeper family) marry outside of Calabrian families, but almost all females marrying very traditionally, either with Calabrian families or with other Italian families who we then start see involved more in organised crime (ACT6).

The Newcomers also offer possibilities for succession, especially when in Gatekeepers there's a problem with identifying an 'heir' who can retain the prestige and recognition, as well as offering the needed familiness diversification. A 30-year-old son of a Newcomer family in Melbourne - whose father is suspected to be involved in money laundering through seemingly legitimate businesses - is in business with a member of the younger generation of the gatekeeper family they are linked to. He has been indicated as a possible successor to the Gatekeeper family due to the difficulty in trusting the ability of the natural successor to fulfil the role successfully.

As said, Newcomers do not have a 'ndrangheta 'pedigree' from Calabria, they are not well-known 'ndrangheta families in the places where they originally come from. They only belong to the 'ndrangheta network (or organisation, if one can prove that in Australia) in Australia; their Calabrian heritage is secondary to their criminal capability since, in the family choices, they often follow the more typical migrant experience. However, their diversification is not hindered by the lack of 'pedigree': they are often more involved with global illicit markets (drug trade primarily) than the Gatekeepers or the Holdovers and they are also often more involved with other criminal groups in their local areas.

It is at times difficult to draw clear (analytical) lines between some Gatekeeper and some Newcomers, primarily because in some cases Gatekeepers also established their reputation directly in Australia and not in Calabria, thus they could be considered to some extent also Newcomers to the 'ndrangheta. However, what differentiates the

two is recognition: when a Newcomer family emerges through marriage links with another family, the latter is likely to have reached the status of Gatekeeper locally.

According to the available data and the analysis of these families these are the traits that may warrant a family a Newcomer status: recent appearance in the recognised underworld; general lack of direct (family-based) mafia connection from Italy; derivative power from Gatekeepers (or Holdovers); currently (only) at second generation; higher diversification both in business but lower in education and professional choices in the family.

The vanishers

The Vanishers are families (7) that used to appear in historical documents as being active in criminality with other families in the 'ndrangheta in Australia, but do not appear active nor relevant anymore. In this category fall surnames like Marafiotte and Pollifrone in South Australia, Italiano in Melbourne. These are families whose recognition has evaporated after the first generation, and whose familiness diversification can be considered low. These families are difficult to analyse as we cannot be sure that the absence of evidence is also evidence of absence. However, the absence of surnames that used to be recognised in both the public and the police discourses, can indicate indeed the low recognition and their vanishing.

It is necessary to identify in what way the familiness diversification can be considered low. Arguably, a family that used to be active in criminality and has vanished in the accessible discourse, might also have exhibited high familiness diversification, in what are the intersection between family changes and business changes. However, here the business we are interested in is mostly of criminal nature or adjacent to criminality (mafia-type); the scant data we have about some of the families that would fall in this category show that the changes that might have occurred did not involve any type of successful attempt to diversify the mafia-type business of the family.

The Vanishers are families that were at least mentioned in the archival data in the decades immediately after the mass migration to Australia (1950–1970 s) when 'ndrangheta's activities were linked mostly to first generation migrants. Often, these are families that gave way to at-the-time newcomers who have since become gatekeepers due to their intergenerational familiness diversification and the growth of their recognition. Among the Vanishers we find men whose charisma was at a given time particularly relevant and recognised. The reputation and the charisma of the boss is at times the one thing that sets apart this family from others. This is often paired with a commonality in the place of origin between apical members of various families, including the now Vanishers and some Gatekeepers and Holdovers.

One of the families that is in this group is a very well-known clan, until recent days, in Calabria. In Australia, a member of this family was an apical member of the Honoured Society in Melbourne where he was involved in the notorious Queen Victoria Market Murders, a period when murders of members of the honoured society were linked to the control of the extortion rackets and the cartels of the fruit and vegetable market (Sergi 2022). After the death of this man, there was a struggle for power which resulted in other murders and eventually a new course of action with another

family on top – a family that today would in fact feature among the Gatekeepers. The head of the emerging family was, at the time, a young associate and mentee of the previous boss of the Vanisher family. Indeed, Vanishers include families who have “moved on”, either because they lost in a conflict with others where they were defeated, or they suffered because of the actions of law enforcement agencies, or - as the data point mostly to in Australia - because heirs, new generations, were either not interested in following the ‘mafia heritage’ or there was no suitable heir. In this sense they also align to a transculturation lens that looks at how deviance from mainstream migrant experience leads to completely new identities.

From a police perspective it is almost impossible to trace the end of the Vanishers, because they fall out of police radar’s due to the lack of engagement in criminality for decades: “*we know from old documents about this family and we do have one or two people with the same surnames living here, but they fall out of our purview*” (WA2). Even when an individual once involved is still alive, his contribution and the one of his family might be fitting the Vanishers: “*With him, U.P., we knew he was mastro di giornata [apical position in a ‘ndrangheta local structure] and we don’t know when this stopped: he is old now and his relatives are all out of this*” (SA1). Indeed, in this specific family, one of the daughters of U.P. had married into a Holdover family, which, arguably, also contributed to the vanishing of U.P.’s family from ‘ndrangheta circles.

According to the available data and the analysis of these families these are the traits that may warrant a family a Vanisher status: involvement in the ‘ndrangheta in Australia (in addition to having a ‘ndrangheta status in Calabria) at the first-generation; marriage with other families and consequent loss of identifying surname; low business diversification; lack of data on their current involvement in any activity related to the ‘ndrangheta.

Discussion: intergenerational evolution in the Australian ‘ndrangheta dynasties

Analysing the intergenerational evolution of ‘ndrangheta families/dynasties in Australia has revealed interesting findings. While not all families are dynasties (some are quite “young”), their familiness diversification and recognition help us understand their success or lack thereof.

First, Gatekeepers are families that more than others we can call dynasties, as their intergenerational changes are tangible, and their ‘brand’ association with the ‘ndrangheta, their recognition, and their contribution to the organisation, remain strong notwithstanding the diversification or probably because of the diversification.

Second, Holdovers are families that could have continued to be successful dynasties, but effectively they are not, as their intergenerational evolution is somewhat faulty or had some hiccups in terms of succession or ‘brand’ survival. Their contribution to the wider organisation is uncertain due to their lack of innovation in crime and notwithstanding their enduring recognition.

Third, Newcomers are families that appear fundamental for the survival of the organisation today but also important in the narrative-building of the ‘ndrangheta in

Australia. In fact, although their connection with the Gatekeepers and with the first families among them is not always clear, it is because of them that attention to the ‘ndrangheta persists also for law enforcement. They are the quintessential manifestations of ethnic organised crime, which poses problems in terms of understanding how ‘Calabrian’ or ‘Italian’ they are.

Fourth, Vanishers are families that on the one hand, support the historical narrative of the ‘ndrangheta and, on the other hand, show that there’s no deterministic equation in the evolution of this mafia-type organisation. The fact that there are Vanishers in the first place supports the idea that, in migrant settings, intergenerational evolution can result in the exit from, and disappearance of, mafia groups.

Table 2 compares the four categories across their main traits that qualify the inclusion of a family within a category or the other.

There are analytical issues from the analysis of these four ideal-typical groups of families that emerge from the social context in which these families exist and have developed. The main issue is the one of interconnectivity with the ‘ndrangheta organisation cross-border, in Calabria. A second issue is linked to the conceptualisation of the link between ethnicity and organised crime activities. A third issue is the changing of roles within Australian families of the ‘ndrangheta. A final issue is about comparison with trends within the wider Calabrian/Italian community.

The interconnectivity with the ‘ndrangheta is not always easy to assess. While most of the Gatekeepers families and some of the Holdovers have contacts with their families in Calabria, this is often not immediately connected to criminal activities, but at most to enabling ones (e.g., travels). It appears that interconnectivity is more a result of the “double village” (Teti 2015) lifestyle that most first- and second-generation migrants still experience: the privileged pathway of contacts that unites communities from the same village in different parts of the world at the point of creating shared spaces of village relationships. From a ‘ndrangheta perspective, data show that we are closer to a profile of separation between criminal organisations (Varese 2020), one in Calabria and one in Australia. This does not mean that contacts cannot enable instrumental encounters or criminal activities, but it means that strategy is not imposed from Calabria onto Australian families nor that there is a relationship of submission of the latter to the former, but at most collaboration cross-border.

Table 2 Main traits of family categories

	Gatekeepers	Holdovers	Newcomers	Vanishers
Historical ‘ndrangheta ties in Calabria/Italy	X	X		X
Hybridisation with other criminal groups		X	X	
Ambiguity over their criminal status	X			X
‘ndrangheta association developed in Australia			X	
Current ‘ndrangheta ties in Calabria/Italy aiding business in Australia	X		X	
Evolution is mostly aligned with migrant experience	X		X	X
Involvement in serious crime (excluding protection services)		X	X	

There are, however, contacts for criminal purposes and cross-border activities with some, not all, Newcomers, especially when they admit – as some do – affiliates recently migrated from Italy/Calabria. The existence of the Newcomers continues to pose problems of understanding and boxing of the phenomenon as “ethnic” organised crime or as ‘ndrangheta even. Although most of these families have a tenuous connection to Calabria or other Italian areas, their *raison-d’être* is not *ethnic*: their involvement in criminality is not dependent on ethnic bonds, nor on ethnic networks, but rather on the rewards of whiteness and mainstream access to organised crime (Cooley 2016). Newcomers are also difficult to ‘box’ within the ‘ndrangheta as affiliations and careers often do not appear to respect the organisation’s known rituals nor rankings. Newcomers, however, are important testimonies to the fact that “ethnic” criminal succession (Ianni 1973) remains key to the functioning of the ‘ndrangheta, whereby there appears to be a mostly peaceful transition between Gatekeepers and Newcomers (and some Holdovers) through marriages and alliances that are meant to ‘transfer’ recognition and criminal capacity.

To different extents - and notwithstanding possible choices underpinning criminal strategies - roles in the families (both ‘ndrangheta and ‘normal’ migrant families) are changing. This is particularly visible with the role of women and the investments on children.

Familiness diversification in the clans appears to be higher the more the family follows the “common” migrant experience: this means that the space for the cultural determinism that is often associated to the ‘ndrangheta is narrower generation after generation, leaving room for increased individual agency. This means, in practice, that familiness diversification might increase the space for individual agency and this, in turn, can lead alternatively to more or less involvement in mafia-type activities. Indeed, the more “Australian” the new generations identify, the more their involvement in crime, if maintained, will look Australian (and less “Calabrian”). For example, women, especially in Newcomers but also in Gatekeepers, have married more outside of Calabrian and Italian circles; they have studied more and have taken up professions; they have chosen not to have children nor get married. This, in turn can change, the way in which the family “business” diversifies. Conversely, the link between familiness diversification and “common” migrant experiences also means that younger generations might seek to establish their identity as as ‘Calabrians’ or ‘Italians’ differently from previous generations (Marino 2020). On the one hand, in some cases new generations show an abstract attachment to Calabria (where they have never been) and to Italian values, in line with expectations from migration research (Marino 2020). On the other side, in some other cases, new generations do not appear bound to, pre-established notions of honour, respect, decency, and modesty in behaviour: it is not uncommon that senior people in the families intervene to fix problems caused by younger ones (e.g., arrests for vandalism or drunkenness, or fines for speeding). In the Gatekeepers it might also be more common for penalties to be issued by seniors to youngsters when there’s a risk of jeopardising the family’s reputation.

Interestingly, the possibility to break the chain from mafia-type activities – going against beliefs that mafia memberships last forever and are passed on generation after generation – has manifested in the very existence of Vanishers. There’s a problem

with succession that not every family can handle ‘well’: the logic of innovation goes against unconditional rules of succession to preserve familiness (Habbershon et al. 2003). On the one hand: *“the investment on younger generations in most ‘ndrangheta families appears more successful the more it respects the inclination of sons and daughters”* (VIC4). On the other hand, innovation in how the family conducts business (like in the Gatekeepers) or innovation in the way the family opens up to the externals (like in some of the Newcomers’ experiences) might bring uncontrollable change in an organisation that has been mostly conservative and is constituted by long-lasting dogmatic and prescriptive expectations (Catino 2019).

The changing roles in gender and younger generations reflect a more general trend in the migrant community and are a prime example of transculturation also in ‘ndrangheta families. Most of these changes are in line with what the Italian/Calabrian community is experiencing, using a transcultural lens (Ricatti 2018; Marino 2020): indeed, transculturation implies increasing ‘deviance’ from the mainstream culture in newer generations and innovation of cultures.

In response to transculturation, and for the ‘ndrangheta organisation to survive in Australia, Gatekeepers and Newcomers – who are arguably those who contribute to it more – have developed different strategies. Crucially, Gatekeepers also survive thanks to ambiguity. Ambiguity in how the general population, law enforcement, and the underworld perceive them, and on how to interpret their activities, choices, and structures, balances out the possible disruption brought by necessary and unavoidable innovation and intergenerational evolution. In other words, the necessary trade-off between admitting change and preserving rules and expectation to save familiness, is balanced out by ambiguity, mostly through opacity (Cappellaro et al. 2021). Ambiguity is here confirmed as integral part of these families’ recognition, thus not all families are able to use it as a strategy.

Additionally, Newcomers’ reliance on ambiguity is also relevant, even though their activities are more obviously on the criminal end and more clearly attributed to family’s associates and members. Newcomers use the consolidated ethnicisation of the ‘ndrangheta narratives (Sergi 2019b) to their advantage. In fact, on the one hand they can benefit from being considered (by law enforcement, by media, by other groups) part of the ‘ndrangheta, even when they are factually not; on the other hand, the ambiguity about their actual belonging to the ‘ndrangheta can facilitate trust and cooperation with other groups, by accelerating recognition and increasing reputation. As noticed already (Sergi 2023:20) *“narratives help constitute the ‘ndrangheta as secretive because of their incongruent nature, and not in spite of their incongruent nature”*. Narratives about a secretive organisation also fuel ambiguity and eventually boost reputation.

Overall, using an intergenerational lens to appreciate the evolution of ‘ndrangheta families/dynasties in Australia has made it possible to assess the reach, the success, and the meaning of that success critically. Familiness diversification and recognition are in fact also influenced by occasional and structural choices, generational changing roles, narratives, and eventually also perceptions about a phenomenon that remains largely secretive.

Conclusion

This paper has explored how familiness diversification and recognition help us understand the intergenerational evolution of families belonging to the 'ndrangheta, or allegedly belonging to the 'ndrangheta, in Australia. This paper has described four ideal-typical families/dynasties, to showcase, and give some order to, the variation found in the data. Eventually, the main findings lead us to conclude that, in the 'ndrangheta realm in Australia, a higher recognition in the underworld is mostly linked to reputational capital 'of the past'; especially when it can be 'transferred' to Newcomers, it is more reliable/durable than the one linked to illicit activities only. The 'transfer', as seen, derives from consolidation of surnames and alliances via marriage; the reputational capital 'of the past' is linked to consolidated practices, advanced diversification in family business and focuses and, in some cases, from the echo of violence (Sergi 2022), the reputation that a family has accrued from having been involved in violent acts.

Conversely, familiness diversification has showed how migration trends and narratives do play a role also in Australian 'ndrangheta families. For example, narratives of resistance and hard work – crucial for both Calabrians and Calabrian migrants (Teti 2015) can be instrumentally used by 'ndrangheta family members to justify their entitlement to (criminal) gains, but also serve to bridge the experience of the Calabrian diaspora to the one of Calabrian criminal diasporas. Eventually, as more "deviance" from the migration mainstream experience is visible with new generations of Calabrian-descent individuals (Marino 2020; Ricatti 2018), we do see the same trend for 'ndrangheta families.

This has two main consequences, both against mainstream understandings: first, migration can break the determinism of the 'ndrangheta 'for life', which is often assumed like in Calabria also elsewhere with little empirical evidence. Second, some 'ndrangheta families might stop appearing as involved in 'direct' criminal activities for a long time, to the point of disappearing from investigations and mapping of the organisation. On the one hand this could be part of what was called the "'ndrangheta social club" (Sergi 2022) – the appearance of former 'ndrangheta clearly well-versed on mafia-type business and structures but otherwise inactive from an organised crime perspective. Effectively, the bosses of the 'ndrangheta social clubs still provide 'protection' services but only in informal and lawful relations within the social circles that recognises their authority. They are similar to 'patrons' in patronage relations, without illegal projections. On the other hand, the ambiguity that the 'ndrangheta families exercise and benefit from - as part of a clandestine, partially visible, and yet secretive organisation - will affect memberships, narratives, expectations, and perceptions. Future research needs to specifically explore how such ambiguity relates to both recognition and reputation as well as chances for familiness diversification.

In this paper, surely the four ideal-typical 'ndrangheta families/dynasties in Australia help us appreciate the complexity and the sophistication of the Australian honoured society in its intergenerational evolution. However, the variation across the families makes us also aware that success in mafia-type families abroad is subjected to trends and changes in the migrant and diaspora community; this makes mafias

less dogmatic and deterministic, more human, and therefore less glamorous and vulnerable.

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