

'Ndrangheta In The Greater Toronto Area: Charts And A Classification Of Types Of War - AN UPDATE

By Andrew Machin

"As for my personal safety, following my decision to collaborate [with the government], among the Bonavotas, I fear above all Domenico Bonavota because he's got a criminal mind and when he gets into his head that he has to kill someone, he goes to great lengths to accomplish his intent".

Andrea Mantella, government witness and former boss of the 'Ndrangheta rooted in Vibo Valentia, reported to the prosecutors about Domenico Bonavota (below), boss of the Locale of Sant'Onofrio (village in Province of Vibo Valentia).



A very important update is required regarding the structure of the 'Ndrangheta in Southern Ontario, which is described [in the fourth article of this series](#).

Once again, this important knowledge comes from Italy.

More precisely from the courthouse of Lamezia Terme (Calabria) where the trial resulting from the maxi police operation called Rinascita Scott is taking place. This was an extraordinary police operation for the number of arrest warrants issued (334), hitting very hard the component of the 'Ndrangheta rooted in the Province of Vibo Valentia, on the North West border of the Province of Reggio Calabria.

Moreover, it was particularly celebrated because it led to indictments of not only a large number of men of 'Ndrangheta, but also several entrepreneurs, professionals and politicians. Those external supporters of the organization who, with their complicity, allow it to pursue its multiple illegal interests.

Nonetheless the 'Ndrangheta itself was hit at its highest level.

We refer in particular to Luigi Mancuso (cl. 1954), boss of the very powerful Locale of Limbadi, but also undisputed supreme boss of the entire area of Vibo Valentia, arrested on Dec. 18, 2019, around 7 pm, on board a train while he was returning to Calabria from Milan.

The timing chosen for this arrest and the others tells us a lot about the context within which prosecutors and law enforcement agencies are forced to work in those territories.

Initially, the date chosen for the operation was set for Dec. 20. However, on Dec. 18, it had become increasingly evident that the 'Ndrangheta, due to leaks of news, had found out about the date.

Consequently, many bosses were now ready to flee. Hence, the sudden decision by prosecutors to anticipate to the day before (Dec. 19).

In Luigi Mancuso's specific case, so as to take even fewer risks, his arrest took place a day earlier by the special force of the Carabinieri. For several days, they monitored him who, at that time, was formally free. Indeed, the fear was that, as it had already happened, he would leave at large shortly before the arrest.

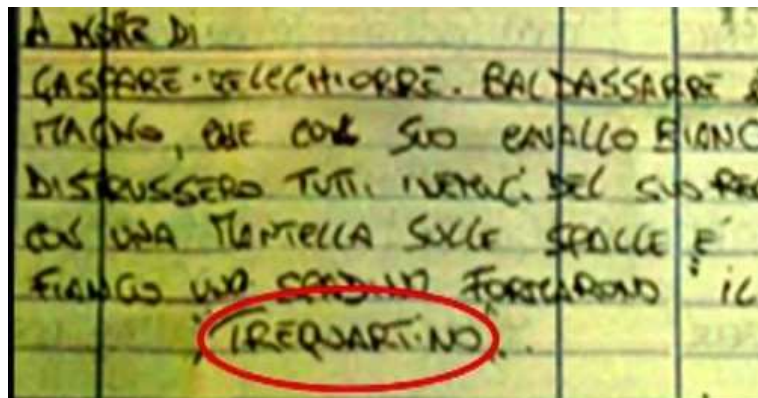
Eventually, one operational unit shadowed Mancuso on board a train where his arrest took place on arrival near the Lamezia Terme railway station (See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1vngC87qyh>. The video is very short and almost completely blurred. However, it is valuable because it captures exactly the moment when specialized agents arrest Mancuso among the other passengers. During the vision, the very high level of tension, considering the great importance of the target, is perhaps perceptible. Probably no other type of police operation produces superior ones).

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Project Rinascita Scott is largely based on the statements of some former 'Ndrangheta full members who became government witnesses.

Two of the most important of them are Andrea Mantella (cl. 1971, former boss of Vibo Valentia, having the high rank of "Trequartino", transl. Three-Quarter; below, the secret ritual formula of conferral of this rank written on a piece of paper discovered by the Carabinieri) and Bartolomeo Arena (cl. 1976, from Vibo Valentia and rank of "Trequartino" too). The two subjects who were called to answer about the Locale of Sant'Onofrio (village of about 3,000 people) dominated by the Bonavota blood family, provided crucial information for our field of study:

- the presence of a Locale of 'Ndrangheta in or "in a town near" Toronto, dependent on the mother-Locale of Sant'Onofrio of which, until now, there was no news.



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According to Mantella's testimonies, the Bonavota's group formally became a Locale of 'Ndrangheta in 2012.

However, it was an overpowering force for a few years already. So much to associate itself in a sort of confederation together with other groups and clans of the same area to counter the power of the Mancusos who, directly or indirectly, using satellite clans, have always exerted a heavy influence on the entire Province of Vibo Valentia.

In any case, this situation of more or less open hostility, coinciding with the release from prison, on Jul. 21, 2012, after 19 years of imprisonment, of Luigi Mancuso, gradually subsided in the following years allowing the latter to restore an order centered on his undisputed authority within a recently established Crimine of Vibo Valentia (of which, due to the hostilities towards the Mancusos in the recent past, the Locale of Sant'Onofrio would not be part).

The rise of the Bonavotas had been made possible over time thanks to the combination of two factors:

① A patriarch, Vincenzo Bonavota (below), who died in 1997, extremely respected within the 'Ndrangheta, not only in that of Vibo Valentia, but also and above all in the superordinate one, belonging to the Crimine of Polsi, rooted in the Province of Reggio Calabria, at its highest level.



Andrea Mantella, for example, says that Vincenzo was a “protégé” of Antonio Pelle from San Luca, a mythical figure who is believed to have been for several years the Capo Crimine, the supreme boss of Polsi (in the sixth article of this series, we dealt with the Pelle blood family and in particular with the great August 2009 marriage of the niece of the same Antonio Pelle during which the top bosses of the 'Ndrangheta decided who to confer the position of new Capo Crimine).

But also the other mentioned witness, Bartolomeo Arena, spoke of Vincenzo Bonavota, expressing deep admiration for him: “*Vincenzo Bonavota was respected everywhere, by the Bellocco, the Alvaro, the Piromalli [the main 'Ndrangheta blood families of the Tyrrhenian side; see Figure 1.], everywhere*”. And again: “*The Bonavotas are an old-fashioned family. If they had enemies, they faced them head-on. They never let “lupare bianche” [transl. “white lupara”: the mafia practice of killing a person and making his body disappear], betrayals and tragedies and they were not afraid of anyone*”. “[Vincenzo Bonavota] *faced things head-on*”. “... *There was a big difference between him and the other men in the 'Ndrangheta. I think he was the last real 'Ndrangheta man of the old guard. Once, he told me that he confronted Rosario Petrolo [belonging to a blood family with which the Bonavotas entered into a feud that caused a long trail of murdered deaths] in the street and took his gun. Then, with that gun, he went to Stefanaconi [village near Sant'Onofrio], to Petrolo's men and said: "Do you see it? This is your boss's gun". So he proved not to be afraid of anyone. I respected him and admired him very much*”.

And to make matters worse, curiously, it was even he himself who confirmed his reputation with words as clear as day, during a conversation in prison with his son Pasquale recorded by investigators: “*If a man wants to live as a criminal, as well as you have to be, you have to have the mindset too*”.

② His sons (the actual top of the Locale) who, with great criminal skills, continued the work of their father, demonstrating, in the first place, ability to deploy a considerable military power which is essential to survive in such violent criminal circles.

We refer in particular to Pasquale, cl. 1974, and Domenico, cl. 1979 (below), already sentenced in the first instance to life imprisonment for a murder in the context of a feud within their same Clan.



Prosecutors consider Pasquale, actually still at large, the supreme boss (“*Capo Società*”); Domenico, the head of the armed wing, the “military” boss (he was arrested in the heart of his territory, in the center of the village of Sant’Onofrio, on Aug. 6, 2020). More below the other two brothers Nicola (cl. 1976) and Salvatore (cl. 1988).

Mantella highlighted Domenico's particular danger, but also of the whole Clan as evidenced by the fact that, as soon as the news of his collaboration with the prosecutors spread (in 2016), it immediately moved to try to locate and kill him before the police protection system was completely put to point.

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During Rinascita Scott trial, but also in other trials, the two dwelt on the dynamics of 'Ndrangheta within which the Bonavotas were involved. And, speaking of their ramifications outside Calabria, here is how they expressed themselves in front of the court of Lamezia Terme:

“[The Bonavota Clan] starts from Vincenzo Bonavota, protégé of Antonio Pelle, called ‘Gambazza’, who also had other friendships in Locride [area under the Polsi’s authority] and he was loved by all the men of ‘Ndrangheta.

He did a double Locale, one in Sant’Onofrio and one in Toronto, Canada. After his death, the command passed to his sons and the Locale became triple: in addition to Sant’Onofrio and Toronto, a Locale of ‘Ndrangheta was also recognized in Carmagnola [in the Turin area, Italy]. I left them active as Clan, active to 101%”.

(Andrea Mantella, Apr. 2021).

“I know that the Bonavotas have influence in Carmagnola, in the Turin area, where the boss who commands is their uncle Salvatore Arone. I know that the Bonavotas are present in Genoa, Rome and in a town near Toronto, Canada. I learned this in the 2000s from Fortunato Mantino, who told me that there was a Locale of ‘Ndrangheta in Canada, where the Bonavotas had cousins”.

(Bartolomeo Arena, Jul. 2021).

These almost coincident testimonies would configure an articulation composed as follows:

- a mother-Locale in Sant’Onofrio;
- two dependent Locali: one in Carmagnola (in the Turin area) and one in, or near, Toronto.

The Clan could then benefit from structured support in Genoa (where there is a very large commercial port, useful for international cocaine trafficking) and in Rome where Pasquale Bonavota, currently still at

large, seemed to have moved (right from this city, during the Rinascita Scott trial, a registered letter arrived at the Lamezia Terme courthouse appointing his personal trusted lawyer).

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Therefore, this new information requires an update to the previously proposed description of the 'Ndrangheta structure in Calabria and Southern Ontario.

Below, the update of the three Figures.

Figure 1.: 'Ndrangheta structure

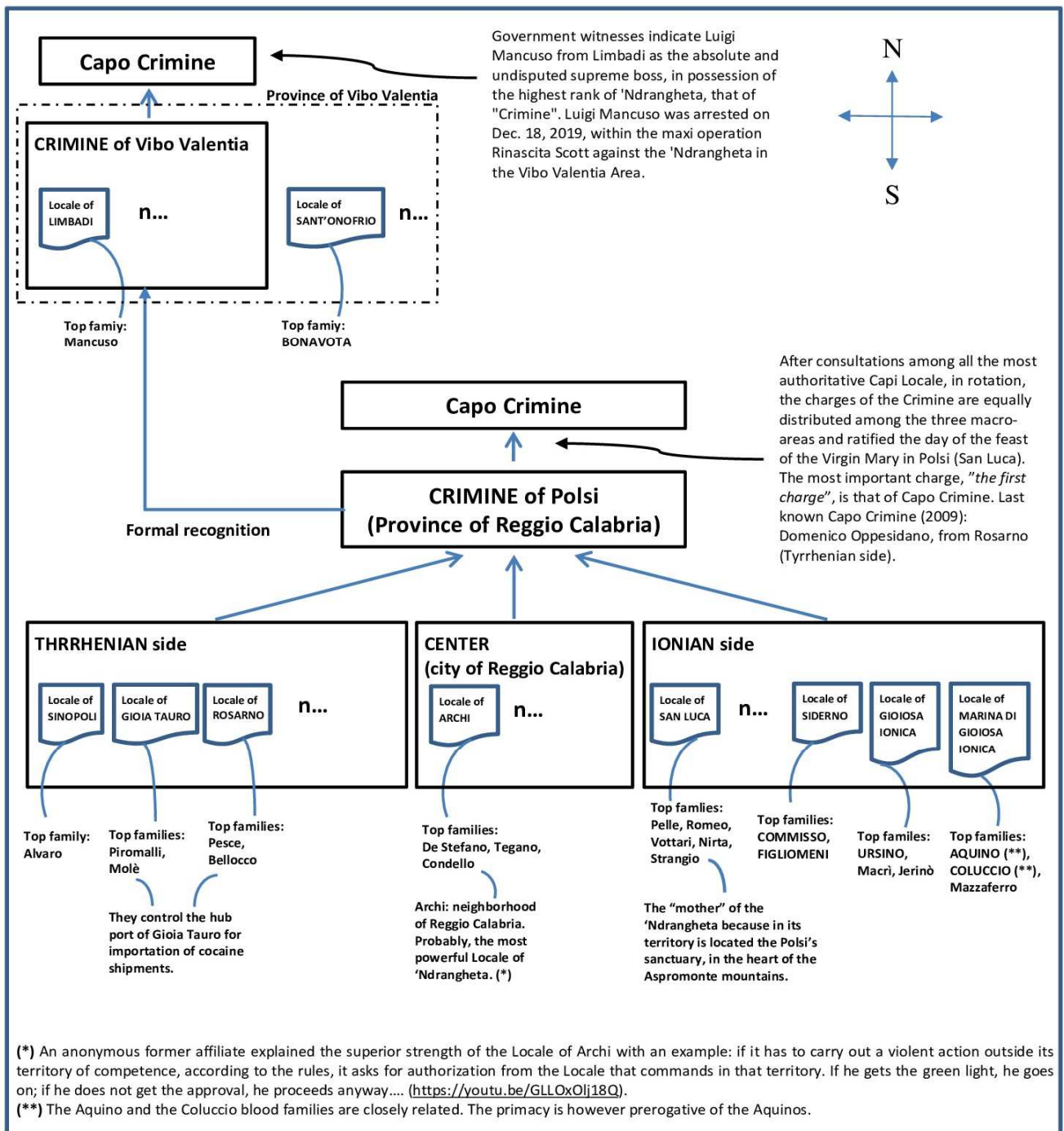


Figure 2.: "Projection" (*) of the 'Ndrangheta in Ontario

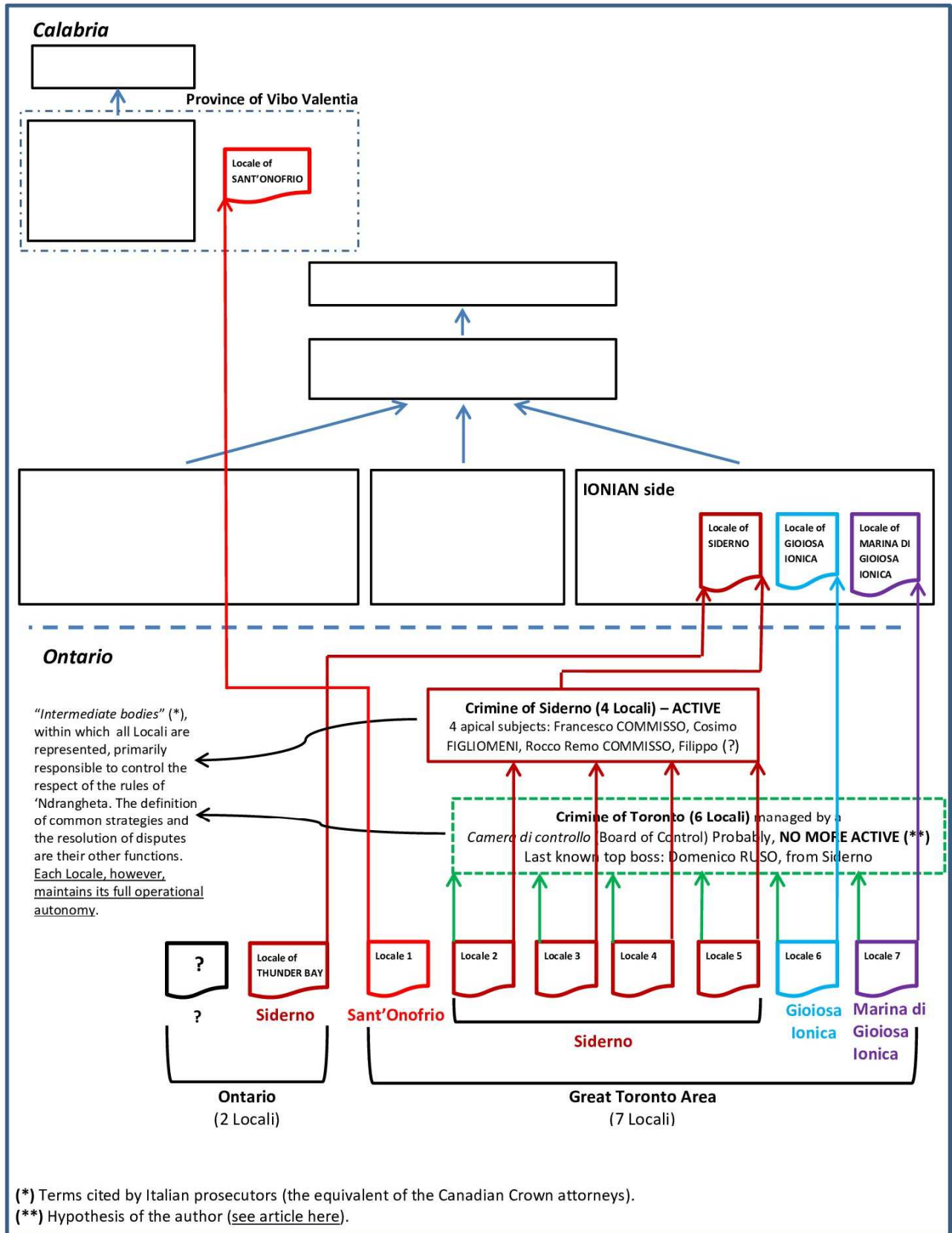
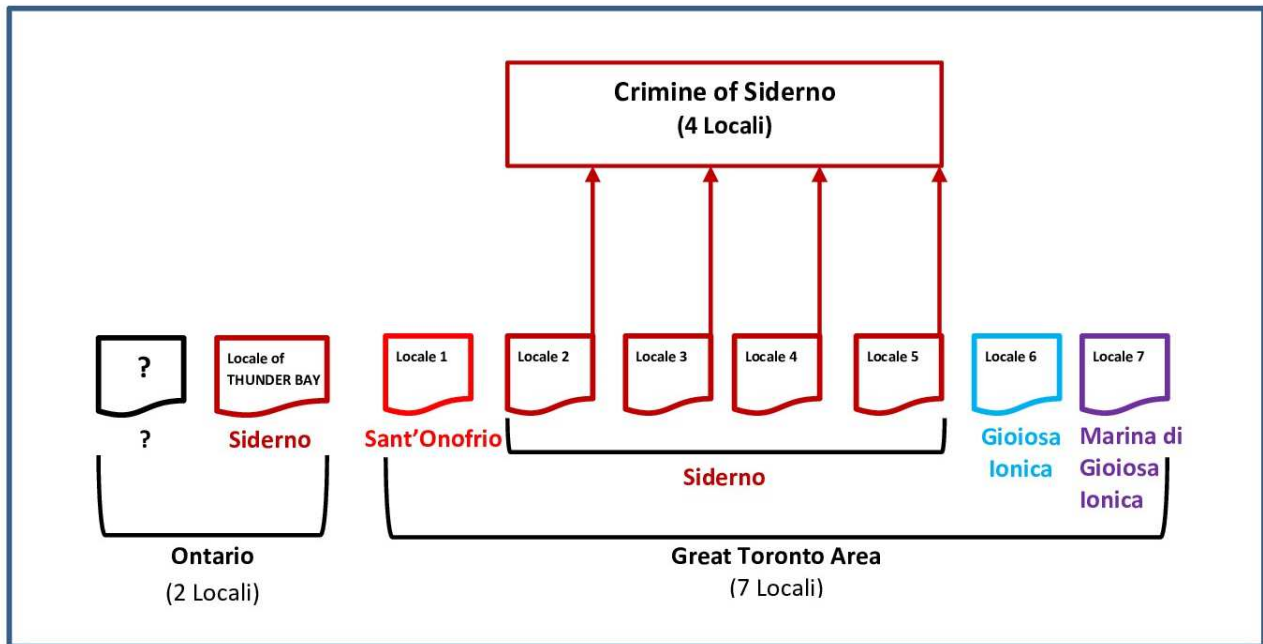


Figure 3.: Locali of 'Ndrangheta in Ontario (mother-Locali and location)



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In particular, we invite you to pay attention to Figure 2. and Figure 3.

As can be seen, the alleged Locale dependent on the mother-Locale of Sant’Onofrio is placed in the GTA (“one in Toronto”; “in a town near Toronto”; hence it would be one of the seven Locali rooted in this Area), but outside the Crimine of Toronto.

Indeed, although it had been promoted directly by Vincenzo Bonavota (therefore certainly before his death in 1997), the Locale in Toronto could not have been recognized at least until 2012, given that only in that year his mother-Locale would have obtained formal recognition in Calabria.

However, even later, the dependent Locale in Toronto could hardly have been admitted as its mother-Locale of Sant’Onofrio is located outside the territory of competence of the Crimine of Polsi within which instead the neighboring mother-Locali of Siderno, Gioiosa Ionica and Marina di Gioiosa Ionica are, as part of the Ionian Side (see Figure 1.).

Furthermore, the historical period itself may have played its part.

Indeed, following the Verduci’s murder (Apr. 24, 2014), we think that a split has arisen within the Crimine of Toronto. It would then be followed by the creation of a Crimine of Siderno (the existence of which, thanks to some interceptions by Italian police forces, is certain), reserved only and exclusively, as its very name suggests, for the Locali dependent on the mother-Locale of this town excluding all the others (see the second article of this series).

In any case, the links between Locali are the most varied, often and willingly outside the superordinate bodies, and obviously motivated generally by business reasons.

For example, in Calabria, one of them linked the mother-Locale of Sant’Onofrio and that of Gioiosa Ionica, both of which have, as we now know, a dependent Locale in the GTA.

Indeed, according to Bartolomeo Arena, by answering questions from defense lawyers during the Rinascita Scott trial in Oct. 2021, Pasquale Bonavota was dedicated to the business of video poker machines to be distributed in bars and cafés together with the Ursini blood family from Gioiosa Ionica (this surname, Ursini or Ursino, reminds us of the Canadian Project Ophenix which led to the convicted sentence for drug trafficking charges of Giuseppe Ursino, resident in Canada but belonging to the same blood family from Gioiosa Ionica; the revelation itself then confirms, in general, the primary interest of the 'Ndrangheta in the business of gaming machines in Calabria as in Canada and wherever may be rooted).

We suppose that the Canadian police forces have already spotted the cousins of the Bonavotas who moved to Southern Ontario.

Also because, in addition, another important clue was always revealed by Andrea Mantella, in Apr. 2021, this time in a courtroom of Turin during the trial against the Bonavotas' cell settled in that area:

- wherever the members of this crime family settle, they do not fail to organize a Calabrian religious festivity during the Easter period.

But let's leave the word to Mantella himself:

"[In the Municipality of Carmagnola, in the Turin Area] the Arone blood family and the Bonavota Clan are the same thing: the same faction, the same strength. And, coincidentally, in this village there are Calabrian traditions. Including the "affrontata" [not translatable], that is a typical Calabrian religious festivity. The Bonavotas are in Carmagnola and this religious festivity takes place there; the Bonavotas are in Toronto and it takes place there. Coincidentally".

We remember that religious events, outside own land of origin, have the purpose of preserving cultural identity and maintaining relative group cohesion; a very small part of which, strengthened by this cohesion and a code of conduct deriving from that culture, in communities of Calabrian origin, will engage in organized criminal activities.

Furthermore, for these criminal articulations religious festivities take on an additional value: that of making explicit their dominant strength to the whole of the respective communities, which come together on such occasions, as per tradition. For example, Bartolomeo Arena, always during Rinascita Scott trial in regards to the Bonavotas said: *"The Bonavotas were also interested in bringing the statues of the saints during religious events because for criminals carrying a statue meant manifesting power over the territory in the eyes of the other villagers"*.

All this active religious devotion then helps explain why it is generally not impossible for an indicted Calabrian mobster to find a Catholic Roman priest ready to attest, in front of any Canadian court, the high moral qualities of the accused and the great commitment he gives in favor of his community.