

Which community for cooperatives? Peasant mobilizations, the Mafia, and the problem of community participation in Sicilian co-ops

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Abstract: The literature on cooperatives often conceptualizes cooperativism as an organized effort to embrace community participation. Through the analysis of agrarian cooperatives in Sicily that were formally established to counter the Mafia and by ethnographically exploring the notion of community for cooperativism, this article aims to problematize this idea of cooperatives as “community economics”. It proposes an anthropological approach that critically analyzes divisions of labor and the internal factions’ divergent concepts of “community”. In Sicily, workers in “anti-Mafia” co-ops recognize a sense of community and “way of life” in Mafia-influenced mobilizations outside the cooperative environment, contrary to the co-op administrators’ legalistic views of community. The article illuminates how the fact that often co-op members draw on different ideas of community can lead to contradictions and tensions, especially as there are different social realities underlying those ideas.

Keywords: community, cooperatives, divisions of labor, Mafia, anti-Mafia, Sicily

This article discusses the nexus between personal relations and impersonal institutions in agrarian cooperatives, focusing on the case of Sicily. Exposure to the demands of market institutions has been noted as the major factor in the development of hierarchies and unequal divisions of labor within cooperatives. My analysis of the dynamics within Sicilian agrarian cooperatives working against the Mafia, however, avoids assuming that it is simply the influence of access to markets that compromises internal cooperative relations. Rather, I analyze “community participation” and associated discourses of mutuality (Taylor 2010), stressed in the socio-

logical literature on cooperatives (Sapelli 2006), to demonstrate that cooperative participants may well belong to different “communities” and hence appeals to “community mutuality” can very well contradict economic democracy in cooperativism. On the one hand, the local workers of the anti-Mafia cooperatives drawn toward local ideas of community pertaining to alliances with local, stratified struggles often reproduced unequal relations of power that reflect Mafia rhetoric and practice. On the other hand, the co-op administrators’ understanding of community in state-sponsored ways also jeopardized internal democratic work relations.



The article hence proposes to rethink the dichotomy between “community” and “wage employment”, as one informs the other even when they appear contradictory. The aim is to examine cooperatives within the tensions that their (often politicized) principles create as they articulate their participants’ livelihoods. I will begin by situating my ethnographic argument within the relevant anthropological literature on cooperatives. I then present my ethnographic material on peasant mobilizations in Sicily, where co-op members actively participate alongside *mafiosi*, guided by a sense of “community”. Finally, engaging with Stephen Gudeman’s conceptualization of community, I will debate the theoretical implications of my findings regarding the ambiguous role of claims to community in contemporary cooperativism.

Cooperatives and claims to community participation

Anthropologists have been interested in cooperatives since Mauss, who was himself actively involved in cooperativism (Hart 2007: 5; Fournier [1994] 2006: 125). Some of this anthropological attention has been rooted in concepts of embodied knowledge, seeing cooperativist principles as “experienced”, not encompassed by totalizing systems (Whyte 1999). For this reason, some scholars see cooperatives as experimenting with the potential for a plural economy run on collaborative principles (Graeber 2010).

The cooperativist ideal of weaving community mobilization with economic practice to achieve worker control in action seems reinforced when authors discuss how co-ops articulate with the totalizing systems of neoliberal capitalism (Dow 2003). One main line of argument, therefore, considers cooperatives in light of capitalism with a human face, as social enterprises (Ridley-Duff 2009) resilient to crises (CICOPA 2011). In other work, especially from the global South, they are analyzed in light of anticapitalist community economics (COPAC 2012).

A similar notion with enduring currency, also associated with the idea of cooperativism as a source of resilience vis-à-vis capitalist systems, is that cooperatives’ community participation retains the value of labor for labor, guaranteeing industrial democracy within them (V. Smith 2006). Community participation is hence hailed as cooperatives’ democratic essence, enhancing the assumed emancipatory potentials of the social economy in development studies (MacPherson 2008: 640).

Underlining how cooperatives’ endorsing of community economics raises defense mechanisms for labor against capitalist dynamics has long been a pursuit for anthropological approaches, too (Holmström 1989). Authors often underline workers’ self-management as a way to create jobs and autonomy (Nash, Dandler and Hopkins 1976; Holmström 1993), or as indigenous responses to neoliberalism, as, for example, in Oaxaca (Stephen 2005). The model of economics from below, which cooperatives appear to embody, situates economic activity within social frameworks that promote economic democracy, subvert neoliberal markets, and contribute to economic “horizontalism” (Sitrin 2012). Cooperatives are moreover seen as promoting new forms of social responsibility, and even new forms of consciousness (Bryer 2011; Kasmir 2012). In this interpretation, cooperatives would salvage labor from the effects of neoliberalism, especially in “transition” periods, by investing in local communities’ coherence (Buechler and Buechler 2002). This approach often distinguishes co-ops from aggressive capitalist limited-liability shareholder corporations (Vargas-Cetina 2011: 133). The community orientation of cooperatives is then related to their accountability to local communities, also reflected in their investment structure, as profits are invested only locally. This suggests an idea of development that, unlike expansive growth, endorses an intensive and productive channeling of capital and labor into local arrangements (Sapelli 2006); hence the appeal of cooperatives for anthropological approaches, seeking to highlight “local context” (Checker and Hogeland 2004).

References to community participation need not always imply enhanced industrial democracy. Bulgarelli and Viviani (2006), for example, discuss how exposure to states and markets translates into hierarchies in cooperatives, which are unlikely to be prevented by the representation and incorporation of local community in the co-ops. This is, however, seen as an inevitable development, and the authors do not see democracy as jeopardized, as they prioritize efficiency.

Likewise, Degl'Innocenti and colleagues (2003) argue that in Italy cooperativist workers' management used to be mostly inspired by solidarity as a principle. Their findings are echoed by others, who also point out that solidarity gave way to "market mutuality" as an organizing discourse as cooperatives sought to open up to global markets, hence causing internal hierarchies (Zamagni and Zamagni 2010). However, the principles of democratic participation and economic development are thus in tension, and exposure to markets, especially on a global scale, often compromises cooperativist principles of solidarity and mutuality (Whyte and Whyte 1991; Kasmir 1996; Sapelli 2006). According to Vargas-Cetina, the fluidity and labor insecurity that neoliberalism introduces to local communities often means that the desired community participation happens in a way that makes reform-oriented grassroots cooperatives ephemeral associations, highly context dependent, and in constant flux (2005: 246–247).

However, while the influence of states and markets is often stressed as the cause of declining democratic participation, economic anthropology could benefit from more critical, grounded conceptualizations of "community". We can learn from inquiring into what exactly is meant by community on the ground—and what happens when groups in co-ops' workforces have different viewpoints on what community is. In fact, claims to community are not only mobilized as a democratic counter to external influences: divergent claims to community are often at the center of already existing conflicts between factions within cooperatives.

Along these lines, and in the context of the corporatist hegemony of references to "community" in regionalist rhetoric in Spain, Susana Narotzky and Gavin Smith propose a critical reading of "community" ideologies (Narotzky 1988, 1997: 120; Narotzky and Smith 2006). Both Narotzky and Smith criticize explicit references to cooperativism as "community economics" for being a (state-produced) ideologically manipulative scheme that reproduces hierarchy (G. Smith 1999; Narotzky 2004).

This article follows this criticism, arguing beyond the paradigm of cooperatives as community economics, but does not see market influence as the only cause of the shortfalls of cooperativist principles. References to community, some of which can be state-sponsored, can also hide existing conflicts among co-op participants, as in the case of the "anti-Mafia" cooperatives in Sicily. My ethnographic data raises the question of "which community" is meant when community participation is understood differently by members of cooperatives, and especially when *different factions* in an already stratified division of labor make claims to different understandings of "community".

My argument hence draws on definitions of what community *is understood to be* within my research participants' paradigms. In the Sicilian case discussed below, one cooperative faction sees the state as representative of community, as against the Mafia. At the same time, another faction holds an understanding of community that is informed precisely by the personalized, unequal relations of patronage associated with the Mafia. How can we locate "community" in such contemporary cooperativist configurations?

The main aim of the analysis that follows is to question the concept of cooperatives as "community economics", in order to suggest an anthropological approach that takes into account the internal factions' differing concepts of community. These factions are understood as groups recognized in divisions of labor in cooperatives, the outcome of processes of internal specialization and even bureaucratization (Rakopoulos 2013, 2014a, 2014b).

Having critically reviewed the ways in which cooperativism is conceptualized as an organized effort to embrace community participation, the main question this article now explores is how claims to community often reinforce inequality and reproduce social phenomena, such as the Mafia, that cooperatives are meant to diminish.

The anti-Mafia cooperatives and their members' "communities"

My case study concerns a particular configuration of politicized cooperativism that aimed to curb the Mafia's influence in western Sicily. After the mid-1990s the relationship between the state and Cosa Nostra shifted from connivance to conflict, triggered by an escalation of Mafia violence (Chiesa 2007). In Spicco Vallata, in Palermo's rural hinterland, most local *mafiosi* were arrested, convicted, and jailed for life. Between 1996 and 2009 the state confiscated land from the Spicco Vallata mafia and from 2000 onward started bestowing it on "anti-Mafia" cooperatives via a state apparatus, the Progress and Law Consortium. The consortium was delegated to distribute all confiscated land within the eight municipalities of Spicco Vallata and oversee its use. My fieldwork was based in San Giovanni, a Spicco Vallata village.¹

The rhetoric used by the consortium in this redistribution of assets presents a just state actively intervening to restore to an (idealized) community what has been "stolen" from it. State documents explaining the rationale behind the confiscations (Consortio Sviluppo e Legalità 2001: 1) present *mafiosi* as having "usurped" the agricultural land from what was allegedly "in the common domain," available to "the community" (ibid.: 4). Land was allocated to the cooperatives, "as they represented the community" (Libera 2009: 2) and were founded to promote "an economy of legality and solidarity" (Libera 2010: 2).

The municipalities retain legal ownership of the confiscated assets, and the cooperatives hold the usufruct. The consortium claimed that

all the land restituted to the community since 2000 went to cooperatives. The public competitions for a position in the cooperatives resulted in the establishment of the co-ops Falcone (in 2001) and Borsellino (in 2006) and the hiring of their core workforces. The selection process involved detailed scrutiny of the applicants' abilities and "anti-Mafia commitment", which included proven lack of kinship connections and other social contact with *mafiosi*. Land was also allocated to the existing Lavoroealtro cooperative, which had been established in 1998. The first land plot to be restituted through allocation to a social cooperative was a vineyard in the village of Curiune that had belonged to the *mafioso* Totò "The Beast" Riina, confiscated in 1999 and bestowed to the Lavoroealtro cooperative. The members of the co-ops Falcone, Borsellino, and Lavoroealtro, overall about forty-five people, are the focus of the narrative below.

There are two types of members of the co-ops: administrators and manual workers. In addition, there are contractual, seasonal workers. The difference between members and other—temporary—workers was that members had permanent contracts and moreover had a vote in the annual Members' Assembly. Crucial differences *among members* were that while administrator members enjoyed professional terms of continuous work, the permanent contracts of most worker members provided actual work and pay *only* for the agricultural season. In that respect, diverging from a marked tendency in the anthropology of work to distinguish between workers in stable employment and contractual workers (e.g., Parry 2013: 350 on "embourgeoisified" workers), I focus on stratifications *within* those in stable employment—administrators and worker members—not least because the latter, more often than not, were allied with temporary workers. The term "workers", in this article, indicates both temporary workers and worker members.

The two-tiered organization of Spicco Vallata cooperatives is partly rooted in the co-ops' embeddedness in local social arrangements (Rakopoulos 2014a); it established a pattern followed

by anti-Mafia cooperatives elsewhere. In the following, I demonstrate the repercussions this has on the overall meaning of community participation in anti-Mafia cooperativism.

Community for cooperative administrators

The co-op administrators were middle-class graduates from Palermo who did not own agricultural land. They were more inclined than workers to align with the Progress and Law Consortium's idea of "community" as a way to guarantee the "community's participation in the social use of the confiscated assets" (Frigerio and Pati 2007: 67; Libera 2008). Administrators subscribed to the consortium's claims to community, despite the fact that these claims are largely imaginary. There was only one, short-lived, historical case of collectively owned land in Spicco Vallata, during the 1946 peasant land occupations (Santino 2009), but rhetorically the confiscations all draw on this postwar revolutionary interlude in the late 1940s (Rakopoulos 2014a). Accepting the consortium's state-produced rhetoric that the confiscated land symbolizes "a resource for the area, an opportunity for development and civil growth" (Frigerio and Pati 2007: 5), the cooperatives' administrators perceive that the newly created cooperatives can "democratically accommodate the land returned to the community" (*ibid.*: 37). The consortium's promotion of state intervention in Spicco Vallata aims at the restitution of assets to "the community" (*ibid.*) in the sense of "reconstituting unlawfully usurped land back to the collectivity" (Consorzio Sviluppo e Legalità 2001). According to the administrators, then, the cooperatives represent the "collective".

As administrators commuted every day from Palermo to work in the cooperatives' offices in Spicco Vallata and were not living there permanently, their understanding of community with regard to the co-ops' activity was divorced from local experience and more aligned to the urban civil society in which their lives were embedded

(see the analysis of the 1990s anti-Mafia movement in Schneider and Schneider 2002, 2006). The administrators promoted the idea that anti-Mafia cooperativism consists of the application of a legally bound regulation of labor, which they called "standardization." Work in the cooperatives was presented as legal, remunerative, safe, and nonhierarchical.

The core idea driving administrators was that anti-Mafia cooperativism was providing employment. But the actual livelihoods of co-op worker members were more complex. As remuneration from the cooperative was not sufficient to make a living, the local co-op workers continued to seek other means of livelihood. Workers, unlike administrators, engaged in informal activities outside the cooperative framework to complement their family income.

Agrarian wage labor in Spicco Vallata has historically been unregulated and highly exploitative, part of local networks in the informal economy, mostly controlled by the Mafia (Lupo 2011; for the urban context of Palermo, see Falcone 1993; Cole 2007). In this setting, the anti-Mafia cooperatives promoted regulated work, resulting in anti-Mafia cooperativism being vested in formal employment—a regularized, contractual relation, binding members both together and to "anti-Mafia" obligations. However, such formal employment proved unable to contain local workers' practices that derived from other, more immediate definitions of community, including ongoing relations with *mafiosi* (as shown in the following section).

Giampiero, the president of the Borsellino cooperative, spoke to me at length about the changes that wage employment in the cooperatives had brought about locally. He suggested that Borsellino's administrators "convince the *braccianti* using only the wallet: we ask them how much the *mafioso* pays them, they tell us, '30 euros a day.' ... OK, we respond, the daily contract for agriculture is 51.62 euros.... So, come to us; and they do!"

Cooperative administrators emphasized the need to "standardize work relations," that is, introduce legal regulations to labor relations in

Spicco Vallata. Alongside pay, this standardization of labor into employment involved national insurance contributions and taxes accumulated toward pensions. “The wallet” thus meant not only solid remuneration but also legally guaranteed protection. Administrators presented the cooperatives as establishing this standardization—a protective legal regime never before deployed in Spicco Vallata. They were convinced that the process of formally valuing agricultural wage work and promoting labor rights would be accompanied by ideological change. Luca, Falcone’s president, told me that “once a labor regime is standardized, it will drag peasants away from Mafia sympathies in their community. . . . Their ideas will follow their conditions of living.”

This discourse resembles modernization rhetoric, as explored in relation to moral economies (e.g., Taussig [1980] 2010). However, the administrators of the Borsellino cooperative admitted that “the wallet” was not always enough to “shift ideas.” As Loredana, the co-op’s 35-year-old agronomist, bluntly put it: “Our worker members are not anti-Mafia.” Workers earned wages from the cooperatives by laboring on the confiscated land plots and also worked on their own land tracts (*pezzi di terra*), mostly vineyards; therefore, a part of their income came from selling their own grapes to the local wineries. Most, when I asked, acknowledged that the pay from the cooperatives was “not enough.” They called themselves *contadini* (peasants), a term that encompassed all landowners, regardless of the scale of their production; their mean landholding was a modest 3.5 hectares.

The link between wage labor and land cultivation meant that informants were both workers and independent peasant producers. In Italy, such livelihoods have been described as mixed (e.g., Pratt 1994) and were sometimes incorporated within development plans (see, e.g., Mingione 1994). In Sicily, this “mixed” mode has remained in place as a way of sustaining local livelihoods but has generally been associated with Mafia influence and the region’s related uneven development (Centorrino, Limosani,

and Ofria 2003). Thus, while the “standardized” employment of the workers linked them with the co-ops’ anti-Mafia concept of community, their work as peasants implied other influences, drawn from other ideas of “community”.

“Mutual aid”: Informal work exchange among cooperative workers and other peasants

In late October 2009, just after the harvest, peasants had taken to the streets. Among them were most of the co-op’s worker members. They thought that the prices offered by local wineries for the grapes their vineyards produced were exploitative, averaging twenty euro cents per kilogram, and therefore demanded compensation for their losses through European Union (EU) subsidies administered by the Sicilian Autonomous Region. In a “spontaneous protest”, unrelated to the local agrarian unions, thousands gathered outside the Parliamentary Assembly of Sicily. A coffin engraved with the words “Spicco Vallata” was on public display, symbolizing the death of the area. One man from San Giovanni was quick to explain that “there has never been so much law enforcement and regulation of our activity . . . and so we have to be more vocal.” Some demonstrators held a banner that read: “Stop penalizing us, stop the fines.” By “penalization,” they meant the enforcement of the law against *lavoro nero*, or unregistered work. After the success of the anti-Mafia cooperatives and the administrators’ talk of “standardizing” labor relations, state agents had taken the issue of registered work more seriously. The police often raided the fields to check on laborers’ documentation proving their legitimate, contractual work. The employers were penalized with heavy fines for unreported work.

In discussions I joined in at the demonstration, people kept repeating the phrase, “Ci rubiamo tra di noi,” which literally translates as, “We are stealing from each other” (the contextual translation of the phrase would be, “It’s mutual stealing”). In the heated atmosphere of the

demonstration, the expression was a response to accusations and criminal charges that they as “employers” were robbing their “employees” of social security contributions. As a co-op worker clarified to me, “If this is stealing, it is mutual, as between us it is turn and turn about: today’s employer is tomorrow’s employee; so we are ‘stealing’ from each other.”² Demonstrators referred to this reciprocal exchange of labor as “mutual aid,” alluding to it as a “community practice”; payment for work exchanged hands under the table. A day’s work was normally paid a mutually agreed average of thirty euros. People from the cooperatives shared the viewpoint that it was unfair for the state to penalize peasants for their informal mutual aid networks.

However, deployed in a discourse of friendship and conviviality in the village, the claim of mutuality did not recognize the unequal relations of power in this agrarian labor market—and the way Mafia patrons benefited from the system. In fact, the practice of “mutual aid” was informed, and encouraged, by local *mafiosi* landowners, who aimed to further radicalize the demonstrations. Sharing with dissenting peasants the term “mutual aid,” they identified in this system a “Sicilian way of life” that they wanted to defend, drawing on discourses of “community,” understood as shared by all peasants. The rhetoric on the maintenance of “community mutual aid” obscured the class differences involved. The implied integration through community mutual aid was equally premised on friendship relations among peasants *and* the Mafia’s overarching patronage. As elsewhere in the Mediterranean region, people’s “rural pluriactivity” went with a partial integration into wage dependencies arranged around claims to continuing the “cultural tradition of a place” (Narotzky and Smith 2006: 27 and 31).

In Principe, a Spicco Vallata village, in November 2009, seven hundred peasants gathered and burned their citizen ID cards in a public ritual disowning their Italian citizenship to express how they felt “abandoned and penalized by the state.” The anti-Mafia cooperative administrators condemned the event as excessive and

dangerous. The role of *mafiosi* and politicians close to them was fundamental in encouraging *sicilianismo*³ in the event, as *mafiosi* influencing the demonstration hailed “the unity of the peasantry” and the “common interests of all Sicilians.” *Mafiosi* who had prompted the Principe event called for similar activism across all Spicco Vallata villages, publicly encouraging Sicilians to “follow the French farmers’ example” (a reference to demonstrations earlier that year) in rejecting the state and its symbols. The carabinieri police marshal thought that such massive “resistance” could hardly be prosecuted, so the police were deployed in an observer role only.

The activity of the *mafioso* Baffi is characteristic. Recently out of prison, he was a widely popular figure, regarded as an incumbent Mafia “boss” of the area. The day after the Principe event, hundreds of peasants, among them co-op workers, gathered in the municipal hall of San Giovanni to discuss the ways forward for their demonstrations. At one point, Baffi grabbed the microphone and addressed the public, smiling confidently as he started speaking. His speech animated the crowd. “His charisma speaks for all of us,” said an old man sitting beside me. Baffi attacked the police prosecution and insisted that the “mutual aid” system was “established as a tradition in the area” and was something that “Sicilians just do and should be proud of doing.” He repeated this tactic at the next gathering, a few days later. On that occasion, he appealed to “Sicilian unity” and expressed “disregard for the miserly state of Rome,” which “wants to suck taxes out of Sicily” and “penalize local peasants.” Baffi told me later that “the law enforcement uses anti-Mafia talk to put fines on us, as if everyone here is a *mafioso*.”

The *mafioso*’s appeal to this assumed sense of community among the peasants allows for comparisons between the two realms in which cooperative workers were involved: what they recognized as community (the “mutual aid” informal work exchange) and what their administrator colleagues saw as community (the standardized employment in the cooperatives). Both

made ideological claims to be among equals, when in fact they were segregated across class differences.

“Community economics” in the context of cooperatives

The discourse of a “community-based” way of life involving a “mutual aid” system is a logical attempt to safeguard enclaves of commodified informal economy practices considered illicit by the state, in a context where the rising tide of anti-Mafia activity in the area has reinforced the state’s regulatory mechanisms. Community rhetoric hence forms an integral part of the reproduction of the Mafia’s power to exercise labor patronage and instigate a cross-class sense of belonging in a peasantry that is in fact stratified.

The interclass appeal of *mafiosi* to community through “mutuality” reproduced this class stratification. By obscuring internal stratification, the Mafia’s influence on peasant mobilization intensified many people’s beliefs that “only unity can save the peasantry.” In the same way, peasant struggles aimed to incorporate this informal status *within* what were becoming increasingly more complex livelihoods involving ever more regulated wage employment frameworks.

It was popular with the administrators in Palermo to think that the formal would subsume the informal. The rhetoric of anti-Mafia cooperativism was based on ideas about community promoted by state agents (the consortium). The cooperatives, however, did not succeed in fully encompassing locals in a realm of stable employment, as they, unlike the administrators, continued their practices of seeking income outside the regulated cooperative framework. The administrators’ ideal of cooperativism as regularized work in a state-protected community was implied in the politicized project of curbing the Mafia. Looking at labor more broadly—beyond formal waged work—it is, however, clear that informal activities are a crucial facet of social reproduction, as important as “employment” (Narotzky 1997: 36–37). The integration of

peasant workers of Spicco Vallata into a regime of regulated work in the cooperatives, then, conflicted with their established ideas of community associated with informal work.

An influential theorization of “community” in the context of cooperatives is Stephen Gudeman’s argument on the tension between market and community in modern economy (2008). For Gudeman, economies vary depending on the degree to which people produce for the self or group (community) or for others (market) (2001), a main local model being “the house,” counterpoised to and set outside market exchange, and aiming to “maintain” subsistence economy relations (Gudeman and Rivera 1990). In this model of community economy, the “base,” the making and sharing of a commons, consolidates the community (Gudeman 2001: 27–30). Caring for the base “is a central concern in community, for the base makes a community as it is made” (ibid.: 36).

Relating this framework to the dynamics in Spicco Vallata, however, suggests certain deviations, as the hidden exchange of money for labor is glossed as “community economy”. Invoking this local “way of life” draws on ideas of mutuality and, alongside those, claims to income. Maintaining the “mutual aid” scheme was a crucial financial matter. But the local “traditions” it refers to should be questioned, for the “mutual aid” scheme of work cannot be classified as exchange *as* mutuality (Gudeman 2008: 27). In Spicco Vallata, exchange of money implied commodification of labor. In comparison, the notion and use of “community” by the consortium and among administrators denotes a sense of decommodification of land—setting it outside the market. Meanwhile, among peasants, (ideas of) commons are constituted as political claims; but there is hardly a sharing of commons in an internally variegated and compartmentalized peasantry, where the Mafia obfuscates difference.

Moreover, for cooperative workers, it is the cooperatives’ employment that forms “the base” of their livelihood, not work on their own plot or the system of mutual exchange that is a sup-

plementary exchange of work for extra cash. In fact, although the remuneration of the manual workforce from the cooperatives was nowhere as good as the administrators', wages from the cooperatives were the main source of income for their households.

The workers' idea of a moral economy, as often happens in agrarian movements (Edelman 2005), centered on belonging to the immediate community and pursuing their livelihoods outside and parallel to the "standardized" formal economy of cooperatives' employment. It is important to note that neither Polanyi, associated with the moral economy concept (1957), nor E.P. Thompson (1971, 1991), considered to have fathered the notion, account for the fact that the normative nature of a moral economy appears to include activities that are of ambiguous moral content, for the sake of bettering people's livelihoods. Hann's critique of the moral economy concept is hence relevant to think with, when approaching the Mafia's endorsement of the "mutual aid" practice (2010: 196). Indeed, peasant "community" struggles often develop in ways not beneficial to the majority of the (compartmentalized) peasantry they presumably represent (McMichael 2008).

Gudeman points to the dialectic between the different realms of "mutuality" and "market" (2008: 24), drawing on the presumed solidarity of community relations that rest on self-help and subsistence agriculture (Gudeman 1978, 1986; Gudeman and Rivera 1990). Nugent (1981) points out that "the ghost of subsistence" overshadows the introduction of wage labor into what Gudeman (1978) calls the "community" sphere. Thus, Gudeman's earlier work downplayed the issue of commodified work, while in recent books his scheme looks more open to cross-influence. Specifically, aspects of mutuality in the market are acknowledged (2009: 26), while he sees cooperatives as mutuality enclaves, used by a community in relation to a market in ways often detrimental to other participants in that same market (Gudeman 2008: 103).

This is where it is important to note that cooperatives are configured into "factions", formed

by task-specific tiers whose members come from different places and social classes, when assessing what "community" means for co-ops. Members of different factions conceptualize it differently, generating differing relationships to the co-operatives' core value of curbing the Mafia.

Kearney's notion of (post)peasant "hybridity" (1996: 68) might not be fully applicable to the plural attempts of co-op worker members, like other Spicco Vallata locals, to defend their livelihoods. "Hybridity" suggests mingling. But although people build on entirely diversified and even contradictory income categories, here the two realms of formal and informal labor correspond to two juxtaposed ideas of community. The first is the Progress and Law Consortium's: community is achieved through state intervention; the second implicitly pitches community *against* state regulation. These ideas interpenetrate and cross-fertilize each other in the experience of the peasants involved in anti-Mafia cooperatives. But they cannot be "hybridized", because informal labor and standardized employment cannot be brought into the same space (the cooperatives) without friction.

Toward a conclusion: Tensions in co-ops

In Sicily, the state's intervention entailed the promotion of values such as "legality" and relationships antithetical to kinship obligations and local reciprocities, as the local workers' moral practices and relations with local *mafiosi* were seen as contradictions to the state ideology of radical anti-Mafia change. Ironically, though, this comes at the cost of democracy within the "anti-Mafia" cooperatives. To brand co-ops as community participation initiatives can often lead to the reproduction of structures reproducing inequalities out there "in the community". Unquestioned claims to "community" might unwittingly render co-ops amenable to contradictions: in this case, the Mafia's influence and legalistic state discourses compete.

The community participation for which co-ops strive contains interacting realms of labor

markets, protected by the state, and a set of labor relations rooted in mutuality with the workers' peasant neighbors. The latter are exposed to manipulation by the classed interests of the Mafia's agrarian labor patrons. The co-ops, then, contain both "realms", in Gudeman's sense (market and community); their community participation practices are rooted in different ideas of community, which inform diverse ideas of labor. Thus, co-ops are more complex and contradictory than often realized in the literature. The reason is not *only*, as is often argued, their exposure to impersonal institutions such as states (Narotzky 1997) and markets (Kasmir 1996) or, indeed, neoliberalism (Vargas-Cetina 2005; Stephen 2005), but *also* their members' everyday embeddedness in sets of personalized relations of a stratified and classed character, glossed as mutuality.

The realm of personalized community is both commodified and unequal; the realm of abstract markets is accessed by institutions such as cooperatives that are typified as impersonal but are actually peopled. Cooperatives are driven by ideas of equality among participating members, but are in fact stratified; in the case of Sicily, in two-tiered divisions of labor as administrators and workers. Different conceptualizations of "community" among co-op members' groups reinforce and reproduce this stratification.

Such conceptualizations, although enriching the co-ops' social fabric, also undermine their "anti-Mafia" consistency and ideological coherence. Sharryn Kasmir's work is relevant here. Cooperatives produced a different cleavage than, for instance, that across nationalistic or gender lines in the Basque country, where there is a schism between those expected to share a common interest with management and those who are not (Kasmir 1996: 198). As Kasmir's monograph concludes, "[nonunionized] [c]ooperatives ... can divide working classes" (ibid.). Disparity between Mondragón, the focus of that book, as a "model community" and the workers' experiences are revealed through contextualizing work for the Mondragón co-op system (1999).

My reading of Gudeman's scheme on tensions between community and market calls for such contextualized nuances, acknowledging the penetrative power of local actors (in this case, *mafiosi*) influential in the reproduction of "mutual aid" informal economy schemes. In Spicco Vallata, cooperatives' work is conceptualized in different ways by different members. By and large, administrators subscribe to juridical categories of regulation (employment), and workers to nonregulated practices of mutuality. Both these state-sponsored and Mafia-related categories in turn build strongly pronounced community idioms. Their "mixed" livelihoods and pluriactivity show that these realms are interpenetrating. Gudeman's model, which recognizes wage labor as part of livelihoods (1986: 37–43), could be enriched by taking into account how informal economic practices are stratified by unequal relations of power. Cooperative workers' ideas of community were mediated by commodified relationships, as "mutual aid" entailed the exchange of money for unregistered work.

If we see neoliberalism as historically specific cultural transformations in an "actually existing" set of social practices (Wacquant 2012), it also becomes useful to acknowledge that all neoliberalisms are "mixed systems", which could accommodate different subsystems, undermining them in a potentially globalized total system (Hann and Hart 2011: 162). These can include politicized pockets of protected wage labor and diversified community claims. Viewing economies as holistic systems where market and mutuality principles interact, in a Maussian sense, transcends dichotomies inspired by bourgeois separations between mutuality and market, the gift and commodities (Sigaud 2002; Hart 2007). Embracing only one aspect of this dialectic pitches "market" against "mutuality" - thus often associating cooperatives only with the realm of the latter and not the former.

"Neoliberal" markets can be read as a vision that makes an economy historically distinctive, but "remain merely references to just part of what goes on in an economy" (Hart, Laville, and Cattani 2010: 5). Similarly, Graeber notes that

the market is a model created by isolating certain principles within a complex system (in this case by fixing on a certain form of immediate, balanced, impersonal, self-interested transactions—what we call “commercial exchange”, which is almost never found in isolation but always surrounded by and drawing on other logics—hierarchical, communistic ...). (2009: 131–132)

Mutuality and market relations are thus interchangeable. In the case of anti-Mafia cooperatives, this is particularly salient, as such relations draw on different ideas of community. Both labor as mutuality and labor as (employment) market are glossed with the same term (“community”), in each case acquiring different, even contradictory, meanings. Interestingly, even the (administrators’) references to the state are rooted in a community discourse that seems to legitimize the confiscation and distribution of land, while actually establishing a protected, regularized market for labor with the cooperatives.

Such protection offered to labor by the “neoliberal” Italian state, via the Progress and Law Consortium, is an enclave within a map of personalized hierarchies—informed by the Mafia. The fact that the main bulk of the cooperatives’ workforce move in both the impersonal market of regularized, “fair” work relations *within* the co-ops and the personalized mutuality among peasants (and *mafiosi*) *outside* them suggests that the realms of market and mutuality are not mutually exclusive but continuously exercise interchangeable influences on each other. This can even take place within work institutions set on an agenda defending one such realm and condemning, if not struggling against, the influence of the other, such as the “anti-Mafia” cooperatives. This finding does not promote ideas of agrarian labor institutions as harmonious hybrids; rather, it means that cooperatives operate within and among tensions, because they are *at once* personal and impersonal institutions, incorporating claims to market and mutuality, economy and community. Members’ claims to

“community participation” do not always ease such tensions, as is often assumed, and can instead exacerbate them.

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Notes

1. All names of places and people have been changed to protect anonymity. The only excep-

tion concerns arrested *mafiosi* who are easily identifiable (especially in Italy), as they retain public figure status.

2. “Stealing from each other” suggests informal work does not draw on pooling from familial labor or relationships *within* extended families, as covered by relevant research in Italy on *lavoro nero* (Goddard 1996; Buffa 2008).
3. The historian Salvatore Lupo suggests that the interwar historical alliances of “the agrarian bloc” promoted interclass ideologies, pacifying social tensions, often guided by intellectuals waving the banner of *sicilianismo* (1981: 143–157), as part of a Gramscian discourse on hegemony (1981: 13). The Mafia refers to “Sicilianist demagoguery” as a consensual alternative to coercive strategies and backlash to anti-Mafia claims (Schneider and Schneider 2006: 76).

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