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On the Limits of a Disengaged Agent

Understanding Social Norm Change in Mafia's Territories

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Chapter 1

Introduction

To what extent can the notion of a “disengaged agent” enlarge our understanding of social norms? In this thesis I will deal with this question. My aim is firstly to show how our understanding of social norms depends on the way in which we conceptualize a person and secondly to argue that Charles Taylor’s concept of a person as a strong evaluator is a better conceptual basis to understand a process of social norm change than the notion of a disengaged agent. To do so, I will deal with the payment of extortion rackets to the Sicilian Mafia (a practice which in Italy is called “pizzo”) as an example of social norm. Also, I will deal with a process of social norm change from “pay the pizzo and do not denounce”, to “do not pay and denounce extortionist requests” which the anti-Mafia movement *Addiopizzo* managed to induce mostly in Palermo.

In Chapter 2, I will deal with the ontology of social norms. I will argue that the essential property of a social norm is the fact that norm compliance has a shared significance which is collectively understood as being obligatory. In Chapter 3, I will explain why in some Mafia’s territories the payment of extortion rackets can be considered a social norm and not merely a behaviour which individuals share. Again, it is important to note that more than dealing with the phenomenon of pizzo per se, in this thesis I look at how economic theory would answer the question why entrepreneurs living in Palermo at the beginning of the 2000s complied with the social norm for pizzo.

In general, economists tend to conceive social norms as behavioural regularities which emerge and which are followed because they fulfil a specific function. A first type of functionalist approach circumvents the question about why people comply with social rules and lets structural constraints carry the explanatory burden. For example, by conceiving the Mafia (and its rules) as a side-product of structural problems, e.g., a State which is incapable of setting authoritative rules or a backward economy.

I will argue that the fundamental argument against such approaches is a methodological one: Although the emergence of a social norm might depend on structural constraints, this is not sufficient to explain why it exists.

A second type of approach relies on the idea that norm compliance serves self-interest. Concretely, entrepreneurs pay the pizzo because engaging in collusive activities with the Mafia is advantageous to them. Following this line of reasoning, the State tried to use top-down legal intervention to alter the incentives behind the supply and demand side of the practice. But neither deterrence actions towards criminals, nor the introduction of penal sanctions against extorted people (who did not denounce) were successful in disrupting the practice. In Palermo there was a shared understanding that “one ought to pay the pizzo”. In other words, the payment of pizzo used to be a stable social norm.

In Chapter 4, I will deal with three individualistic approaches to social norms which depict social norms as bundles of individual preferences and beliefs. I will apply each of the approaches to my case study. In David Lewis’s world an agent pays the pizzo, because when others pay, this is also the best thing for him to do. Robert Sugden’s agent pays it because she experienced that it is in her interest to do so and because she fears the resentment of others if she does not. Bicchieri’s agent pays because given her beliefs about what others do and about what she believes that they expect her (expect that she ought) to do, she prefers to act in the way which is socially appropriate. All the approaches reduce the social nature of social norms to the interdependency of actions for a certain outcome (the normativity of a social norm is reduced to instrumentality). They do not account for a shared meaning attributed to norm compliance.

In Chapter 5, I will present Taylor’s concept of man as a strong evaluator and contrapose it to the notion of a disengaged agent. I will explain how all approaches presented in Chapter 4 are built on a procedural (“disengaged”¹) notion of reason which presupposes the meaning of actions. Concretely, an agent either steers his actions in the light of an outcome or acts in a way which is consistent with her beliefs about what others do or believe. According to Taylor instead, what makes of a living being a person is the faculty for making qualitative distinctions about herself and about her environment through a framework of evaluation (a framework of “goods”) which she shares with others.

¹ Taylor, *Reason*, p. 10.

If we apply Taylor's anthropology to our question about why people comply with social norms, we can say that norm compliant action has a shared meaning which is constitutive for individuals' identity.

In Chapter 6, I will deal with a process of social norm change which the grassroots movement *Addiopizzo* managed to induce in Sicily. More precisely, I will analyse how the social norm for pizzo progressively disappeared in Palermo and how, instead, a "social norm for legality" (a social norm for not paying the pizzo and for denouncing extortionist requests) emerged. Thereby, by building on Taylor's anthropology, I will argue that *Addiopizzo* managed to perturb the institutional inertia which is typical of Mafia's territories by attributing to individuals' action a new shared significance: its contribution to the common good of a Mafia-free society. In a first phase, it let legality become a good which was constitutive for individuals' identities. In a second phase, it coordinated the actions of individuals whose identities had changed and let the social norm for legality progressively become a social property.

As stated above, the overall goal of this thesis is to show how the concept of a person as a strong evaluator can help us understand social norm change better than the concept of a person as a disengaged agent. This is mainly for the following two reasons. Firstly, because it makes us look for the sources of normativity of a social norm. "Understanding" social action (norm compliance) means interpreting it as an expression of a shared "good" (e.g., legality) which constitutes both individuals' identities and social reality. (Essentially, this background of goods gives a ground to the otherwise groundless feelings and beliefs of disengaged agents.) Secondly, Taylor's notion of a strong evaluator, inseparably ties action to *identity*. While acting and interacting, an agent reinforces or weakens the shared significance attributed to a behaviour. Concretely, what characterised the process of social norm change induced by *Addiopizzo* was the fact that non-compliance with Mafia's rules started being considered the "higher" action and that accordingly an increasing number of people started changing their behaviour. Without doubt, the process of social norm change depended on individuals' anti-Mafia behaviour. However, as we will see, it was more than that.

Chapter 2

What Are Social Norms?

2.1 Introduction

Social norms accompany us in our daily lives. When we return favours done to us by others, speak quietly in public places, or pay protection rackets while living in Mafia's territories, we comply with social norms. While being present in our lives, social norms also characterise the societies we live in. Typically, the presence of a social norm such as “pay the protection racket and don't report to the police”² will be associated with a particular economic and social structure, e.g., with a comparatively low GDP or with the presence of a “culture of lawlessness”³. External parties will refer to the territory as being “backward” or to the society as being “uncivilised”. We could conceive the social norm for racket-payment as one of the forces which brings about a certain outcome. Or we could consider the norm itself a side-product of a structural problem (such as the presence of a “soft State”⁴) whose roots lie deep in history. By referring to what social norms bring about, or to why they emerged, social scientists often point to them. But in the first instance, what are social norms? What is their essential property that is, *that* which makes them social norms and not something else?⁵

In this chapter, I will deal with the ontology of social norms. In section 2.2, I will give a definition of social norms as *social rules* of behaviour and argue that their essential property is their normativity. In section 2.3, I will explain how in being institutional rules, social norms structure human interaction.

² Lipari and Andrighetto, *The change in social norms*, p. 234.

³ Williams, *Illicit markets*, p. 328.

⁴ In *Mafia, legalità debole e sviluppo del Mezzogiorno* La Spina defines the notion of a “soft State” (through which the existence of the Mafia as a criminal organization is often explained) as “a public governance characterised by a systematic inability to set and enforce authoritative rules” (p. 158).

⁵ Hodgson in *On defining institutions* (pp. 499) refers to Aristotle and emphasizes the importance of determining “essential features” to give a definition of something.

2.2 Social Norms as Rules of Behaviour

Building on Jon Elster's and Elizabeth Anderson's accounts of social norms, I define social norms as "rules of behaviour"⁶ which are "understood by [the] members⁷ [of a social group] as being obligatory and authoritative"⁸. The simplest social norms are injunctions, such as *Do X (return favours done to you by others or pay the protection racket)*; or *Don't do X (don't speak loudly in public places, such as in trains)*. More complex examples are the following ones: *Do X (get vaccinated), if it would be good that everyone did X*, or *Do X (have children), (only) if you do Y (marry)*.⁹ In being rules of behaviour, social norms generally bring about collective behavioural regularities which are observable. We will observe, for example, how most people return favours done to them by others, or how, if we meet someone who speaks loudly in a German train the person is likely to be a foreigner, that is, not a member of the social group. However, if we are interested in the ontology of social norms, it is not expedient to reduce social norms to the behavioural regularities which they bring about. In the following I will argue that an essential property of social norms is their normativity defined as the shared "understanding of group members that they all ought to comply with the standard of conduct"¹⁰. I will present two arguments for why referring to a behavioural regularity is not sufficient for a definition of social norms.

In the 1960s the anthropologist Colin Turnbull examined the practices of an African ethnic group, the Ik people.¹¹ Thereby, he observed how in a period of famine hunting increasingly became a solitary activity. The members of the tribe went hunting alone and ate what they had hunted far from the villages. Some of them even repaired broken roofs at night to ward off potential offers of neighbours to help. Put shortly, Turnbull observed how the tribe members did not exhibit the typical prosocial behaviour, such as sharing goods with others, or helping each other, as well as, of course, accepting the help of others.

Assume that we defined social norms as mere regularities in behaviour, that is, as a behaviour which different members of a same social group share. In this case, we could deduce from Turnbull's observation that there were no norms for prosocial behaviour. However, as I will argue in the following, such a definition does not help us understand what truly happened.

⁶ Elster, *Social Norms*, p. 99.

⁷ Being a member implies social interaction which implies knowledge of the rule.

⁸ Anderson, *Beyond Homo Economicus*, p. 170.

⁹ Elster, *Social Norms*, p. 99.

¹⁰ Anderson, *Beyond Homo Economicus*, p. 171.

¹¹ Bicchieri uses this example in *The Grammar of Society* (Chapter 1).

Without doubt, the Ik did not comply with norms for prosocial behaviour. They did not share goods with others and did not want to be offered help. However, how do we explain the fact that they repaired broken roofs at night, or that they turned solitary hunting into a “furtive activity”¹²? As Cristina Bicchieri¹³ points out, in a condition of extreme deprivation, hunting became a solitary activity to escape situations in which the prosocial obligation to share a potential bounty with others would have been present. Equally, broken roofs were repaired at night, not to run into future obligations to return favours by accepting the help of others. The tribe members recognized the shared understanding that one “ought to share goods or to return favours”. They recognized the normativity of prosocial norms and avoided situations in which it would have been difficult not to comply with them. Though the tribe members did not comply with prosocial norms, it was the normativity of such norms which motivated their behaviour. Conceiving social norms as mere regularities in behaviour could lead us into thinking that a social norm does not exist if the behaviour which we typically associate with it is not observed. But as the example of the Ik suggests, this does not need to be the case.

Another problem to a purely behavioural definition of social norms is a problem of “empirical demarcation”¹⁴ which is typical when trying to define “things” within the social sciences. What does a collective habit¹⁵, such as the one for having a large breakfast in the morning which is present in some cultures have in common with a supposedly similar thing, such as the norm against speaking loudly in a train in certain countries? What, instead, makes them different objects of study? Both, collective habits as well as social norms can be conceived as dispositions of individuals, as tendencies to behave in a particular way. In both cases, the presence of a tendency for a behaviour goes hand in hand with a pattern of behaviour which we can observe. What, however, makes a habit different from a social norm is the fact that if someone chooses not to follow a social norm, he will encounter the resentment of others. Social norms are at least “partly sustained by [the] approval and disapproval”¹⁶ of others. If I do not return favours done to me by others, I will encounter the resentment of others. This is symptomatic for the fact that social norms are social in what I call a “deep sense”.

¹² Bicchieri, *The Grammar of Society*, p. 9.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Hodgson, *On defining Institutions*, p. 498.

¹⁵ There are different approaches to what a habit is. I refer to Hodgson’s definition in *What are Institutions* (p. 6) according to which a habit is a “disposition to engage in previously adopted behaviours triggered by an appropriate behaviour or thought”. A habit is not any type of repeated behaviour, or uniformity of behaviour which simply is the “result of inherited genes and instincts” (p. 3), as, for example, blinking could be. Habits are acquired in a social context: this is a feature which they share with social norms.

¹⁶ Elster, *Social Norms*, pp. 99.

What makes of a social norm more than just a shared behaviour is the fact that it has a shared significance which is collectively understood as being obligatory. Social norms are (a species of) social *rules* while collective habits are not.¹⁷ In the following, I will spend some words on the concept of a rule by referring to Geoffrey Hodgson's paper *What Are Institutions?*.

According to Hodgson, a rule is any “socially transmitted and customary normative injunction or immanently normative disposition, that in circumstances X do Y”¹⁸. “Socially transmitted” means that rules are not the product of genes or instincts, but that their emergence depends upon the presence of a social structure and some use of language.¹⁹ People come to appreciate and value rules through social interaction. Since rules are often learned implicitly and once, they have been learnt they are followed without much thought, they can be considered forms of tacit knowledge. However, every time that rules are scrutinized, normative issues emerge and are discussed explicitly. Thus, we can conclude that rules are at least “potentially codifiable”²⁰.

To sum up, social norms are manifest in behaviour, but they are not reducible to behaviour. To define them – and therefore, to demarcate them from other social things (e.g., from habits) – it is not sufficient to refer to the behavioural regularities which their existence brings about. What defines social norms and what thus gives them the status of rules, is their normativity.

2.3 Social Norms as Institutional Rules

According to Hodgson, defining what a rule is, is the basis to understand institutions²¹. In fact, he defines institutions as “durable systems of established and embedded social rules that structure social interactions”²². In this section, referring to Hodgson's theory, I will describe how *the normativity of social norms structures human interaction*.

Hodgson refers to what I call “two levels” of embeddedness of rules: Their emergence depends upon a “contingent social structure”²³ and on “some use of language”²⁴.

¹⁷ However, habits can gain a shared ought dimension and thus become social norms.

¹⁸ **Hodgson**, *What Are Institutions*, p. 3.

¹⁹ Social structure includes all sets of “social relations”. **Hodgson** (Ibid.) conceives social structure as a nexus of relationships among group properties (e.g., group differentiation and group size) which vary concomitantly. I use the term as a synonym to measurable/observable (group) properties – everything which can work as a “systematic constraint”.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Within the social sciences, the word “institution” is used to refer to a variety of different things. Some common examples are the following ones: language and the family (often referred to as “fundamental institutions”), companies and other types of organizations (“private institutions”), governments (“public institutions”) and the market as an “economic institution” (**Miller**, *Social Institutions*, The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy).

²² **Hodgson**, *What Are Institutions*, p. 13.

²³ Ibid., p. 3.

²⁴ Ibid.

This is best explained through an example. An imbalance in sex ratio as it is the case in China and other Asian countries because of selective abortion²⁵ limits social potentialities. Concretely, as there are more men than women in the country, some men do not have (not even potentially) a female partner to marry. A change in social norms from “pay a dowry to get your daughter married” to “invest in your son’s education to get him married”²⁶ depends on the presence of an imbalance in sex ratio.

The first level of embeddedness of a rule tells us that a rule does not appear by chance in a specific social environment. The social norm for investing in one’s son *depends* on the presence of an imbalance in sex ratio. However, it is not the imbalance in sex ratio which provides the rule with an authority. The rule has a power because “being married with someone from the opposite sex” has a shared significance, it is collectively valued. Here we are at the second level of embeddedness of rules, namely, their dependence on at least “some use of language”²⁷. We can say that the emergence of rules depends on language because through language people can codify the shared significance of a rule. In the following I will explain how social norms structure social life.

Often economists adopt a functionalist approach to institutional rules: they rely on structural constraints to explain their existence.²⁸ If structure (e.g., gender ratio) changes, the behaviour of individuals changes as well. Ordered (market) behaviour is conceived as the result of resource and institutional constraints and is depicted as being largely independent of the agent.²⁹ For example, going back to the example of the Ik people I referred to in the previous section, we could let the famine do much of the explanatory work (of accounting for the individualistic behaviour of the tribe members) by arguing along the following lines: Given a situation of extreme deprivation, the tribe members let hunting become a solitary activity. However, although the individualistic behaviour of the tribe members depended on the famine, what structured their interaction was not the famine but the normativity of prosocial norms: In being a member of the Ik, I know the social norm for reciprocity. I know that if I need help and if I am offered it, I ought to accept it and be willing to return favours in future. Concretely, I know that if someone who helped me repairing my roof asks me for food, he will rightly expect me to give him some and that he will be resented if I do not. In a context of deprivation, I choose to repair my roof at night so that I do not encounter the obligation to return favours in future.

²⁵ Hesketh et al., *The consequences of son preference*.

²⁶ Budden, “Why millions of Chinese men are staying single”.

²⁷ Hodgson, *What Are Institutions*, p. 3.

²⁸ A prominent example is Gary Becker's Demand and Supply model of marriage.

²⁹ In *What Are Institutions* (p. 16.) Hodgson refers to these types of approaches as being “agent insensitive”.

Put shortly, I choose to elude situations in which I ought to comply with prosocial norms. We can say that my behaviour *depends* on the famine. What structures my interaction with the other tribe-members, however, is the fact that my action has a shared significance.

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I dealt with the ontology of social norms. I defined a social norm as a social rule. What makes of a social norm more than a behaviour which people share is its normativity: The fact that individual norm compliance has a shared significance which is collectively understood as being obligatory. This normativity has the power to motivate the action of individuals and to structure social life. In chapter three, I will focus on the payment of extortion rackets as an example of a social norm.

Chapter 3

The Payment of “Pizzo” – a Social Norm

3.1 Introduction

Extortion rackets are a global phenomenon. However, in some parts of the world these practices are endemic.³⁰ In Italy, the money paid to Mafia organizations in form of rackets is called “pizzo”, presumably from a bird’s beak when drinking water. In the same way as, drinking water comes natural to a bird, in some parts of Italy (typically, in Southern Italy, but increasingly so also in parts of Northern Italy) paying extortion rackets is a “normal and habitual”³¹ activity for an enterprise. I will start this chapter by looking at the costs associated with the practice. I will focus on Sicily since in the last chapter of this thesis I will deal with an anti-racket movement founded in Palermo in 2005. I will then introduce two functionalist answers to the question why people pay extortion rackets and finally explain why the practice is a social norm and not merely a collective habit.

3.2 On the Costs of “Pizzo”

According to estimations, around the year 2000, between eighty and ninety percent (!) of Sicilian businesses paid extortion rackets to Cosa Nostra (the Sicilian Mafia).³² The payment of rackets is for two reasons of vital importance for Cosa Nostra. Firstly, because it brings about profits (around one billion euros for the year 2006).³³ Secondly and more importantly, because it secures a capillary control over the territory, the rule being “let all pay little, but let all pay”³⁴.

³⁰ **Lipari and Andrighetto**, *The change in social norms*, p. 227.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² **Chinnici and Plescia**, *Lo sviluppo d’impresa*, p. 541.

³³ Other sources of revenues are illegal activities, such as drug trafficking. But obviously, mafia organisations also infiltrate in legal markets, such as construction, waste management, agriculture. Sometimes they “control significant portions of these markets” (**La Spina**, *Mafia, legalità debole*, p. 43 and **Vaccaro and Palazzo**, *Values Against Violence*, p. 1075.).

³⁴ According to **La Spina** (*Mafia, legalità debole*, pp. 187-191), the endemic payment of extortion rackets started in the early 1990s after the murder of relevant figures in the fight against the Mafia, such as Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino (two magistrates and leaders in the processes against Cosa Nostra). After these massacres, Cosa

While the Mafia makes more money from its other (legal and illegal) activities, it is the pizzo which “embeds the organization into the day-to-day fabric of Sicilian life”³⁵. Vaccaro and Palazzo³⁶ refer to it as “a key institution of Sicilian society” which has been structuring the economic and social life in some parts of the region for more than 150 years now. The negative outcomes associated with the practice are of different nature. They include economic and political costs arising from societal asymmetries, higher crime rates resulting from the presence of a criminal organization and psychological harm caused by an environment characterised by predatory activities.³⁷ Regarding the economic costs on a firm level, we can say that meeting extortion demands adds to the direct costs of running a business.³⁸ On top of these direct costs, there are also costs of missed opportunity. Firms are forced to make decisions which are not efficient, for example, because they are not free to choose their suppliers. At the same time, entrepreneurs who pay the pizzo and who are accustomed to taking advantage of entry barriers have less incentives to be innovative and are therefore less likely to withstand global competition.³⁹ These are only some of the factors which make it no surprise that, as stated in the introduction to Chapter 2, Mafia territories tend to have a comparatively low GDP.⁴⁰ But why do Sicilian entrepreneurs pay extortion rackets? Or, more precisely, why did entrepreneurs in Palermo at the beginning of the 2000s pay pizzo?

The rest of this thesis revolves around this question. In this chapter and in the next one, I will look at how economic approaches (would) tackle this question. I will start by formulating two functionalist hypotheses⁴¹ analogous to the ones economists tend to formulate when dealing with institutional rules. I will consider a first type of approach according to which social norms emerge to “serve” a collective interest. Strictly speaking, such approaches circumvent the question “why people comply with rules” and let structural constraints carry the explanatory burden as explained in section 2.3. They are, however, prevalent in the scientific and public

Nostra had to face a general feeling of outrage by the civil society. As a consequence, it focused on a widespread payment of pizzo, as well as on an infiltration into the public procurement sector.

³⁵ Vaccaro and Palazzo, *Values Against Violence*, p. 1079.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 1075.

³⁷ Lipari and Andrighetto, *The change in social norms*, p. 227.

³⁸ According to Lisciandra (*Camorra ed Estorsioni*, p. 169) the average pizzo-month-rate paid by firms in Sicily was 504€. According to Vaccaro and Ribera (*Addiopizzo*) monthly payments vary from €60 for a stall in a market up to €10000 for a construction firm. (For comparison: the median value in Campania was 283€). It is important to note that pizzo rates are never “unbearable”. In an interview with Addiopizzo (June 2023) the organisation explained, for example, how during the Covid-19 lockdowns the rates were lowered.

³⁹ La Spina, *Mafia, legalità debole*, pp. 178-180.

⁴⁰ Pinotti, *The economic costs of organised crime*, p. 205.

⁴¹ Functionalist approaches conceive social norms as behavioural regularities which emerge and are followed because they fulfil a specific function – as Elster puts it in *Social Norms*: they either “arise from” or “serve” rationality.

discourse around the endemic presence of the Mafia in Southern Italy. The second type of approach relies on the idea that it is “individually rational” to comply with rules.

3.3 Collective Rationality: Institutional Rules as “Solutions”

Scholars, as well as the public discourse, often conceive the Mafia as a side-product of structural problems. Examples of such structural problems are a state which is incapable of “set[ting] and enforc[ing] authoritative rules”⁴² or a backward economy. In general, the idea that institutions emerge as solutions to a problem, that they persist because of the functions which they have and that they disappear when they stop serving this function is widespread.⁴³ In such approaches the explanatory burden of the emergence of institutional rules is carried by structural constraints often justified by referring to historical facts and natural conditions.

Paolo Sylos Labini⁴⁴, for example, puts the endemic presence of the Mafia in some parts of Sicily down to the long presence and slow progress of disintegration of a feudal system. While in Eastern Sicily the downfall of feudalism started in the 16th century through the emergence of an agrarian middle class, in the Western part of the region the unfavourable climatic conditions and the arid soils hindered a similar development. This is why the Mafia took its roots especially in the Western part of the region. More precisely, it developed as a “(pathological) form of juridical-administrative organization that tried to surrogate the arrangement [of infrastructure, laws and regulations] that the emerging middle class was advancing elsewhere”⁴⁵. The mafia emerged from feudalism. The emergence of feudalism and its persistence, in turn, are explained by respectively referring to historical events and to climatic conditions. Vaccaro and Palazzo, instead, refer to “a period of political instability during the 19th century”⁴⁶ which let Cosa Nostra emerge as a private system of protection and regulation.

Approaches which try to explain the presence of institutional rules by referring to their function have been rejected on several grounds. For example, by arguing along the following lines: If social norms emerged to serve a purpose, they should cease to exist (or at least progressively disappear) whenever they start creating “huge social costs”⁴⁷. However, the persistence of several harmful social norms (e.g., discriminatory norms against minorities) demonstrates that

⁴² **La Spina**, *Mafia, legalità debole*, p. 158.

⁴³ **Varese**, *Mafias on the move*; **La Spina**, *Mafia, legalità debole*.

⁴⁴ **Labini**, *Le radici della mafia*.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁴⁶ **Vaccaro and Palazzo**, *Values against Violence*, p. 1079.

⁴⁷ **Bicchieri et al.**, *Social Norms*, Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy.

this is not the case.⁴⁸ Being against functionalist explanations because some practices exist though they are “harmful”, relies on the same premise on which functionalist approaches themselves rely, namely, that the existence of institutional rules can be explained merely by referring to functions and outcomes.

I follow Jon Elster⁴⁹ who argues that the fundamental argument against such collectivist, functionalist approaches is a methodological one. Although a social norm might fulfil a certain function at a specific point in history and although its emergence might depend on it, the function which a social norm has, is not sufficient to explain why it exists. As stated in section 2.3 by referring to the example of the Ik, outcomes or structural constraints alone are not sufficient to answer the question why people comply with rules. Even if a social rule does, indeed, make everyone better off, any attempt to answer the question how its good consequences contribute to its maintenance will have to refer to the agent who, whether consciously or unconsciously, is the one who complies with the social norm.

3.4 Individual Rationality: Making Norm Compliance “Rational”

Probably, the most intuitive answer to the question why people in Mafia’s territories pay extortion rackets is that they are forced to do so. For instance, because their life will be at risk if they do not pay. Or, less drastically, because they will face major hurdles in running their businesses.⁵⁰ This can be because of direct retaliatory acts or because enterprises are denied access to services which are indispensable to run a business such as waste disposal. But if this is the case, to what extent are we justified in considering people who pay the *pizzo* as complying with a social norm instead of considering them victims of an illegal authority? In other words, why not conceiving the payment of extortion rackets as a collective habit into which people are forced?⁵¹ In the following, I will deal with this fundamental question.

According to Gaetano Grasso, in its initial phase the Mafia “intercepted a real need for security”⁵² and offered individuals protection from other criminal organizations. Later on, especially, at the beginning of the 2000s, there was no real demand for protection. The supply of protection was only an illusion and the high level of crime rates rather a consequence of the presence of the Mafia: “Everyone knows that [...] it is not true that the extortionist protects,

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Elster, *Social Norms*, p. 108.

⁵⁰ Lipari and Andrighetto, *The change in social norms*, p. 230.

⁵¹ As explained in Chapter 2, a collective habit is a shared behaviour which is acquired in a social-context and repeated over time. We could conceive the endemic payment of *pizzo* as a behaviour which people share for the same reason, for example, because they are all victims of the Mafia or because it is convenient to do so.

⁵² Grasso, *Racket e Antiracket*, p. 322.

nor that there is no alternative to security. It is obvious that the one who shows up in the morning to offer security is the same person who the night before left petrol with a lighter next to it. It is clear to everyone that it is the mafioso who creates a dangerous situation from which he is then supposed to defend you. We face a market for security in which the demand is entirely induced”⁵³.

Essentially, Grasso explains how the “extortionist” assumptions and the notion of protection have been useful to justify a reciprocal, collusive behaviour between Cosa Nostra and entrepreneurs.⁵⁴ His description makes us consider the endemic payment of extortion rackets at the beginning of the 2000s as being the result of cost-benefit analyses pursued by what some economists would call “rational choosers” who choose to do whatever maximises their individual self-interest. While in a first period it was costly in terms of security not to pay and to denounce, at the beginning of the 2000s paying granted some short-run benefits, such as winning a public tender. Therefore, people paid.

To sum up, so far, we contested the hypothesis that the endemic practice of pizzo payment is merely the result of coercion and are considering the possibility that entrepreneurs engaged in collusive activities because doing so is advantageous to them. If this was the case, people would stop paying extortion rackets once it ceases to pay off.

Following this line of reasoning (that the phenomenon essentially is a collective habit), in the past⁵⁵, the State tried to use top-down legal intervention to alter the incentives behind the supply and demand side of the practice. The goal was to make it costly, on the one hand, for the Mafia to ask for the payment of rackets, and, on the other hand, for entrepreneurs to pay and to not denounce. However, neither deterrence actions towards criminals, nor the introduction of penal sanctions against extorted people (who did not denounce) have been successful in letting people change behaviour and consequently in disrupting the practice. Even the offer of protection, relocation and financial compensation for entrepreneurs who chose to not pay and to denounce did not work.⁵⁶ These insights suggest that, at least for the period between the 1990s and the early 2000s, the endemic payment of pizzo was not merely a behaviour which people shared.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 323.

⁵⁴ I continue to use the term “extortionist” although I mostly mean “collusive behaviour”.

⁵⁵ Anti-Mafia and anti-pizzo laws were enacted since the 1980s (**Lavezzi**, *Organised Crime and the Economy*). After the murder of Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino more laws were enacted; the early 1990s represented a “turning point” in state intervention (**La Spina**, *Mafia, legalità debole*).

⁵⁶ **Lipari and Andrighetto**, *The change in social norms*, p. 228.

3.5 The Payment of Pizzo – a Social Norm

Among the reasons which Lipari and Andrighetto⁵⁷ put forward to explain why in the past top-down legal interventions failed to bring about change, there is the fact that the payment of rackets was often sustained by the approval of others and that this undermined the effectiveness of such interventions. The refusal to conform with the payment of extortion rackets has often been punished by fellow citizens through acts of social ostracism and reprobation.⁵⁸ A famous case in this regard is the one of Libero Grassi, an entrepreneur from Palermo who after having publicly announced on TV his refusal to pay the *pizzo*, encountered a period of social isolation and was finally murdered by Cosa Nostra in 1991. Although Grassi quickly became a national symbol of the fight against the Mafia, he was not supported by his fellow citizens. Rather, he was criticised for his behaviour which was described as inappropriate and as destroying the image of Sicily.⁵⁹

When Grassi publicly condemned the practice of *pizzo*, among the citizens of Palermo there was a shared understanding that one ought to pay the *pizzo*. Many Sicilians considered the practice a “legitimate form of private regulation”⁶⁰. The payment of rackets was an established, stable social norm.⁶¹ Fifteen years after the murder of Grassi, at the beginning of the 2000s, a significant proportion of entrepreneurs in Palermo still considered the payment of *pizzo* as being morally appropriate.⁶² The idea that engaging in criminal or collusive activities is the right thing to do is a typical phenomenon of territories with an endemic presence of criminal organisations. It is referred to by Lipari and Andrighetto as a “culture of lawlessness”⁶³.

The Mafia infiltrates the political system and destroys the level of trust in law from within. A culture of lawlessness means a context in which people do not consider laws as being authoritative, but instead, as being vexatious.⁶⁴ Antonio La Spina talks about the presence of a “morality of illegality”⁶⁵ in some Mafia’s territories, which, reinforced by corrupted public authorities, legitimises collusive behaviour. He describes how the Mafia first produces some

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 230.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.228.

⁵⁹ This is what happened to most other “heroes” who all were murdered after a period of social isolation. Both, top-down approaches from state-side and heroic acts from individuals as described by **Vaccaro and Palazzo** in *Values Against Violence* do not seem to be sufficient to disrupt the practice if it is backed up by a shared understanding that “paying is the right thing to do”.

⁶⁰ **Vaccaro and Palazzo**, *Values against Violence*, p. 1079.

⁶¹ Interview with **Addiopizzo** (June 2023).

⁶² **Vaccaro and Palazzo**, *Values against Violence*, p. 1079.

⁶³ **Lipari and Andrighetto**, *The change in social norms*, p. 228.

⁶⁴ **Williams**, *Illicit markets*, p. 328.

⁶⁵ **La Spina**, *Mafia, legalità debole*, p.189.

wealth to legitimise its power among people and then produces “subjectivity”⁶⁶ as a basis for a culture of lawlessness. “Subjectivity” means that the behaviour of individuals is motivated by personal feelings and considerations. Legal behaviour is not valued, and citizens experience a general lack of trust and legitimacy in formal institutions. The rules which one ought to follow are not the ones imposed by the State, but those of the “mafia guy who makes sure that [my] things get done”⁶⁷.

3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I argued that in some Mafia’s territories the endemic payment of extortion rackets is a social norm. After having depicted some of the economic and social costs of pizzo, I introduced two types of explanations for why entrepreneurs pay the pizzo. Following the first one, institutional rules arise out of a collective interest or rather, out of a structural need. Concretely, the Mafia emerged as a “system of private protection and regulation” in an environment of political instability. By referring to section 2.3, I explained how, although the emergence of a rule *depends* on the presence of specific structural constraints, structures or outcomes are not sufficient to answer the question why people comply with rules. Following a second type of functionalist approach to social norms, norm compliance serves the individual interest of individuals. In other words, the endemic practice for pizzo is depicted as a behaviour which people share because it is advantageous to engage in collusive activities. However, top-down legal interventions which aimed at altering the incentive structure behind the practice did not work. By referring to the tragic case of Libero Grassi, I argued that in Palermo in the period between the 1990s and early 2000s paying the pizzo was motivated by the idea that following the rules of the Mafia was the right thing to do.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Vaccaro and Palazzo, *Values Against Violence*, p. 1091 referring to documents of **Addiopizzo**.

Chapter 4

Individualistic Approaches to Social Norms

4.1 Introduction

In section 3.4, I scrutinised the hypothesis that people comply with the payment of extortion rackets in Mafia's territories because it is "rational" to do so. Concretely, I presented the "self-interest hypothesis" according to which the payment of pizzo in Mafia's territories is a mere pattern of behaviour resulting from a cost-benefit analysis which every entrepreneur pursues on his own. I explained how offering financial incentives to people who stopped paying the pizzo and who denounced their extortionist requests has not been successful in disrupting the practice. In section 3.5, I concluded that at the beginning of the 1990s the payment of pizzo was an established social norm in Palermo.

In this chapter, I will present three individualistic approaches to social norms, respectively put forward by David Lewis, Robert Sugden, and Cristina Bicchieri. The first one is a rational choice approach, the second one is an evolutionary approach and the last one a constructivist approach. What all approaches have in common is that they are individualistic. This means that social norms are depicted as bundles of individual preferences and beliefs. In section 4.2, 4.3. and 4.4, I will respectively present and apply the approaches to my case study. In section 4.5, I will draw the following two conclusions: Firstly, in all three approaches the normativity of a social norm is reduced to instrumentality. Norm compliance does not have a meaning per se. Secondly, the "social nature" of social norms is depicted merely as the interdependency of actions for outcomes. This leads to explanatory paradoxes.

4.2 David Lewis's Theory of *Convention*

In his *Convention* David Lewis uses the tool of game theory to model interactive decision-making. This means that while doing his cost-benefit analysis, a rational chooser considers what he expects the other agents to do. More precisely, the *rationality assumption* (which is among the standard assumptions of classical game theory and rational choice theory) tells us that a rational agent will use all known facts in choosing what to do and that he will be out to do as well as possible according to his preference ranking. Also, there is the assumption of common knowledge of rationality.⁶⁸ A rational chooser will pay the pizzo if depending on what he expects the other rational agents to do, he concludes that by paying it he will do the best.

Lewis explains the existence of conventions (conceived as species of social norms) in coordination games, that is, in situations where there is no dominant conflict of interest. A prototypical example of a convention (which solves a *pure* problem of coordination) is the fact that depending on the country people either drive on the right or on the left.⁶⁹ Since no one wants to crash into someone else's car, a convention emerged for driving all on the same side.

Lewis aims at showing how social institutions (conventions, social norms and even language) can emerge from the self-interested actions of individuals and how they can cohere without the glue of agreement⁷⁰ or without any need of sanctions.⁷¹ Formally, coordination problems are defined as "situations of interdependent decisions by two or more agents in which coincidence of interest predominates and in which there are two or more proper coordination equilibria"⁷². Thereby, a coordination equilibrium is a situation in which no one would have been better off had any one agent alone acted otherwise. (For example, no one would be better off if only a minority of drivers in Vienna started driving on the left.) Once a convention is established, e.g., the one for driving on the right, we will have a "metastable self-perpetuating system of preferences, expectations and actions, capable of persisting indefinitely"⁷³. Agents are likely to reach one of the possible equilibria through a system of mutual expectations in which each agent does his part because he expects others to do theirs. The premise of an agent's reasoning

⁶⁸ Gilbert, *Rationality, Coordination*, pp. 1.

⁶⁹ Two other prominent examples which Lewis (*Convention*, p. 5) uses are the following ones: rowing a boat where both rowers need to row in rhythm to let the boat go forward or coordinating on who calls back after a phone call was interrupted to restart the call.

⁷⁰ Please note that agreement (which implies communication) is not needed but can be a source of coordination. Every situation in which the agents become "justified in forming mutual expectations" are circumstances which help solving a coordination problem. Agreement is an "especially effective" means of producing expectations (Ibid., pp. 33-35).

⁷¹ Amadae, *Normativity and Instrumentalism*.

⁷² Lewis, *Convention*, p. 24.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 42.

is his expectation about what others *will* do. This expectation, in turn, is obtained by replicating someone else's reasoning.

In chapter two and chapter three, I explained how social norms imply expectations about how others *ought* to act. I described how in some Mafia's territories, there is not only the expectation that others *will* pay the pizzo but rather a shared understanding that this is what they *ought* to do. We call this type of ought-expectations normative expectations. Lewis considers conventions a species of social norms and defines social norms as "regularities to which we believe one ought to conform"⁷⁴. The agent has reason to believe that conforming answers to his own preferences, as well as that conforming answers to the preferences of most other members involved in the coordination problem. The other members, in turn, expect him to conform as well. To sum up, the normative power of conventions relies on the "ought" of instrumental rationality, on so called prudential reasons⁷⁵ which people share.⁷⁶

One particular example which Lewis makes of a coordination problem is the stag hunt game from Rousseau's *Discours sur l'inégalité* which I will describe in the following. A group of hunters can choose whether to hunt separately and catch rabbits, or whether to hunt together, catch stags and consequently eat better. However, even if only one of the hunters deserts the stag hunt to catch a rabbit, the stag will run away and only the deserter will eat. Therefore, every hunter must choose whether to stay with the stag hunt or whether to desert. He will choose according to his expectations about what others will do. Concretely, if he expects the others to stay, he will stay with the stag hunt. But if he expects even only one of the fellow hunters to desert, he will desert as well.⁷⁷ We can apply this problem to our case study (Figure 1).

Player 1/ Player 2	Not Pay (Stag)	Pay (Rabbit)
Not Pay (Stag)	1, 1	-2, 0
Pay (Rabbit)	0, -2	0, 0

Figure 1. Stag-Hunt Game for two Players

As in the long run the endemic payment of rackets undermines the potential growth of the Sicilian economy, it would be in the interest of all entrepreneurs if no one paid. However, no one will have an unconditional interest in not paying as his individual action will not overturn an established practice which offers some short run benefits to all who comply.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 97.

⁷⁵ Thereby, "prudence" also includes the fear of encountering the resentment of others in case one chooses to not comply. In exceptional cases, compliance can be the product of other-regarding external principles, e.g., norms of cooperation which *constrain* self-interested behaviour (Ibid., pp. 97-99).

⁷⁶ **Anderson**, *Beyond Homo Economicus*, pp.176-177.

⁷⁷ **Lewis**, *Convention*, p. 7.

We have two coordination equilibria in the game. A better one in which no one (or almost no one) pays and a worse one in which all entrepreneurs (or almost all) pay. An agent pays the pizzo because he does not have an interest in not doing so. More precisely, when others comply with paying extortion rackets, it is best for him to comply as well. An agent's reasoning can be described in the following way: I prefer to pay *on condition* that (most) others pay. I expect that the others will pay. As I am a rational chooser, I will pay.

After having described and applied Lewis's theory of conventions, I will now look at how his approach accounts for the normativity of conventions. Normally, when explaining the emergence of rules, scholars follow one of the following two paths: A rule is either depicted as the product of an explicit agreement among individuals which results in an obligation to follow it or as the unintended consequence of the intended (where intended means self-interested) action of individuals. Lewis follows the second path. The actions of different individuals converge on the establishment of a rule as this rule "reflects a general alignment of interest".⁷⁸ Once a rule is established, everyone will prefer to act in a way to keep the rule stable without the need of any agreement or sanctions. What brings about the convention and what makes it stable is self-interest.

We can draw the following conclusion: Lewis's notion of normativity is implicit in his definition of conventions as solutions to problems of coordination. The normativity of a rule is reduced to the self-interest of different individuals whose interests are aligned. Secondly, and implicitly in the first point, the agent will never prefer to act in a way regardless of what the others do. In the following I will comment on Lewis's approach.

Rational choice theory and classical game theory have been depicted by different scholars, such as Margaret Gilbert⁷⁹ and Robert Sugden⁸⁰ as a "blind alley"⁸¹ towards the understanding of social rules. Gilbert considers the reason-replication of a rational⁸² agent "an indefinite and useless process"⁸³ as the explanation of rules in terms of Nash equilibria is consistent with rationality but not prescribed by it. In fact, any strategies that are part of a Nash equilibrium and as such are mutual best responses, are rationalizable. Given that others do their part, we can say that it is rational for an agent to do his part as well. Rationality, however, does not prescribe

⁷⁸ **Amadae**, *Normativity and Instrumentalism*, p. 331.

⁷⁹ In this paragraph I will refer to the so called "infinite regress problem" which rational choice theory encounters as explained in *Rationality, Coordination* (**Gilbert**) and in *Rationality in Action* (**Hollis and Sugden**).

⁸⁰ **Sugden**, *Spontaneous Order*.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁸² As explained at the beginning of this section, rationality implies having knowledge of one's own and everyone's else's rationality, of the possible actions and of their respective ranking.

⁸³ **Gilbert**, *Rationality, Coordination*, p. 4.

one specific action rather than another. Concretely, the rational entrepreneur living in a Mafia's territory does not have a conclusive reason for paying, rather than not paying, because which action maximises his self-interest will always depend on what the others do. The fact that player one is rational (as defined at the beginning of this section) only implies that he will not pay if he knows that player two will not pay. However, while knowing that player two is rational, player one does not know that player two knows that he will not pay. In other words, being rational and knowing to be surrounded by rational people just leads all agents to the following premise: I ought to do my part *if* the others do theirs.⁸⁴

To sum up, following Lewis, we would answer the question why an entrepreneur pays the pizzo in the following way. He pays, because when other entrepreneurs pay, this is also the best thing for him to do. This, however, leads to the infinite regress problem depicted above and respectively to the following paradox: How can a rational agent be justified in expecting the others to pay – without this “justified belief” his action would not be “rational” – but have no reason for paying which is independent of what the others do?

4.3 Robert Sugden's Notion of Normative Expectations

Robert Sugden's approach to social norms builds on Lewis's notion of conventions as systems of mutual self-reinforcing expectations. However, unlike Lewis, Sugden considers conventions “products of evolutionary processes”⁸⁵. Individuals learn through their actions, through processes of trial and error, which behaviour will be the most successful one. The behaviour which, if generally followed, implies that any small number of people acting upon another rule (“potential invaders”⁸⁶) perform less well, is evolutionary stable.

But what if once a rule (an equilibrium) had been established in a population/society, an occasional shock on preferences, induced an interest in deviating? This precisely is the situation upon which Sugden builds his notion of normative expectations and to which I will refer in the following. To do so, I will start from the optimal equilibrium in the stag hunt game depicted in Figure 1 and describe a prisoner's dilemma scenario (Figure 2).

⁸⁴ Both, **Gilbert** (*Rationality, Coordination*) and **Sugden** (*Spontaneous Order*) essentially argue that rationality cannot be the only source of successful coordination.

⁸⁵ **Sugden**, *Spontaneous Order*, p. 91.

⁸⁶ **Axelrod**, *Cooperation among Egoists*, p. 314.

Player 1/ Player 2	Refuse (Cooperate)	Accept (Defect)
Refuse (Cooperate)	1, 1	0, 2
Accept (Defect)	2, 0	0.5, 0.5

Figure 2. Prisoner's Dilemma

In a Sicilian village the optimal equilibrium in which no one (or almost no one) engages in collusive activities and therefore, all “cooperate” against the Mafia, is established (payoff of 1 for both players). At a certain point an entrepreneur is made the following offer: She can win a public tender (payoff of 2) if she gives a lump-sum to the Mafia. Following the idea of a self-interested agent, the entrepreneur will prefer to break the rule if the expected benefit from doing so is high enough. In giving the lump-sum to the Mafia she will break the chain of self-reinforcing expectations and make the rule against collusive behaviour progressively unstable. Essentially, in Lewis's framework a convention is stable because everyone's compliance maximises everyone's interest and this fact is common knowledge. (No one is interested in crashing into someone else's car and thus everyone reasonably expects everyone else to stick to the rule for driving all on the same side.) However, in the situation depicted in Figure 2, we would expect a self-interested agent to give money to the Mafia exactly because she knows that the others do not expect her to do so. Clearly, in this situation the stability of the rule against engaging in collusive activities cannot be explained by referring to “narrow”⁸⁷ self-interest only.

Another example of a situation in which (narrow) self-interest is not sufficient to explain the stability of a social norm is the opposite situation. As described in Chapter 3, offering a financial compensation to entrepreneurs who choose to stop paying the *pizzo* and to denounce extortionist requests has not been a successful measure in disrupting the practice.⁸⁸ Again, if self-interest was the only factor determining the stability of *pizzo* such a public intervention should have been successful in making the rule progressively unstable. It is exactly to account for situations in which rules are stable even though, occasionally, it may not be in people's narrow self-interest to follow them, that Sugden introduces the notion of normative expectations.⁸⁹ Normative expectations are a subclass of moral sentiments: “sentiments of approval and disapproval associated with general classes of action”⁹⁰.

⁸⁷ The self-interested advantage can be defined in terms of a material/monetary outcome (what I refer to as a *narrow* understanding of self-interest) or in terms of an immaterial outcome, such as the social ostracism which Libero Grassi encountered.

⁸⁸ Lipari and Andrighetto, *The change in social norms*, p. 228.

⁸⁹ Sugden, *Normative Expectations*, p. 74.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 84.

Normative expectations exist when people are resented if someone does not follow a rule. Conventions and social norms – the latter defined as regularities of behaviour whose conformity elicits approval – emerge together because the system of mutual expectations generates normative expectations. In other words, in Sugden's world social norms are equilibria brought about by evolutionary forces and possibly maintained by normative expectations. Thereby, it is important to note that the normative expectations are modelled as being endogenous: they are not produced by an exogenous preference for a certain value. In other words, the fellow citizens of the potential deserter in the Sicilian village would not be resented by her action of endorsing corruption because doing so is deemed to be wrong or bad but because her action did not meet their expectations.

To explain the normative force of rules Sugden refers to Hume according to whom a behavioural regularity gains its normative character – that is, it elicits approval from others when followed and disapproval when not followed – through the psychology of sympathy.⁹¹ It is part of human psychology to feel resentment against individuals whose acts are contrary to our expectations and to our interest. It is also part of human nature to feel at unease at being the focus of another's person's resentment. Agents in Sugden's world are progressively motivated to comply with rules also by the desire to avoid this kind of resentment.⁹² Following Sugden, the desire to avoid resentment can explain why an entrepreneur living in the Mafia-free village will not pay the lump-sum although doing so would be profitable.

Going back to the initial question about why people in Mafia's territories comply with the social norm for the payment of pizzo, Sugden would answer in the following way: An entrepreneur who works in a Mafia's territory complies with paying because, in most cases, it is in her interest to do so and because she has normative expectations for doing so. She fears the ill-will of others if she does not comply. In the following I will comment on Sugden's approach.

While Lewis's approach lets us conceive the social norm for pizzo payment as an equilibrium grounded in self-interest, Sugden, formally (!) does not reduce the reason for compliance to self-interest. What contributes to the stability and existence of a social norm is an agent's concern for whether the others believe that she will conform (normative expectations). This belief cannot be incorporated in an agent's payoff. Therefore, conceptually, we cannot say that Sugden's agent follows a social norm because she wants to maximise her self-interest. Nonetheless, practically speaking, the agent sticks to a rule either because of the prospect of a

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.78.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 85.

future reward and/or because she fears a negative outcome (an emotional cost). Thus, we can conclude that also Sugden explains norm-compliance by referring to (self-interested) outcomes.

At the end of last section, while commenting on Lewis's approach, I described how we encounter the following paradox. Every rational agent needs to expect the others to comply with a social norm to have a reason to comply. Everyone has a conditional reason and consequently, no one a conclusive reason for complying. Sugden's approach encounters an analogous paradox, though on an emotional level. An agent chooses to stick to a social norm against engaging in collusive activities because she fears the resentment of others. Everyone needs someone else's resentment to have a reason to comply, no one can be motivated by her own feelings of resentment towards herself. However, as Elizabeth Anderson⁹³ points out, especially under the Humeian assumption that everyone shares the same moral sentiments, it is difficult to accept that all agents rely on the resentment of others to be motivated to comply with a social norm.

4.4 Cristina Bicchieri's "Empty Ought"

In this section, I will present Cristina Bicchieri's constructivist approach to social norms. It depicts social norms as collective rules of behaviour built on individual beliefs about collective expectations. As Lewis and Sugden do, Bicchieri conceives a social norm as the unplanned result of the interaction of individuals and as a "cluster of self-fulfilling expectations".⁹⁴ Social norms originate in small groups where ongoing interactions are the rule. In those groups individuals learn to behave in a way consistent with the interest of the group.⁹⁵ Social norms emerge as solutions to problems which are inherent to certain social interaction situations, such as a conflict of interest which can be resolved by the emergence of a prosocial norm for cooperation.⁹⁶ What makes Bicchieri's approach different from the other two approaches which I presented so far is the fact that the agent has a preference for norm compliance.⁹⁷

⁹³ Anderson, *Beyond Homo Economicus*, p. 184.

⁹⁴ Bicchieri, *The Grammar of Society*, p. ix.

⁹⁵ Bicchieri et al., *Social Norms*, Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy.

⁹⁶ Bicchieri, *Norms of Cooperation*, p. 840.

⁹⁷ Gächter et al. (*The importance of peers*, p. 85) describe, for example, how in a sequential dictator game, generous peers do not breed more generosity although their actions do have a strong impact on which behaviour is considered as being socially acceptable. In other words, the focus on normative consensus ("the most frequent notion of what is appropriate") seems to be not sufficient to explain norm compliance.

We can say that Bicchieri combines an explanation of norm compliance in terms of norms with one in terms of preferences and expectations.⁹⁸ More precisely, she gives the following definition of what a social norm is:

A behavioural rule R is a social norm iff each member i of a sufficiently large subset of a population P:

(1) *Contingency condition*: knows that R exists and applies R to situations of type S,

(2) *Conditional preference*: prefers to conform to R in S on condition that:

(a) *Empirical expectations*: i believes that a sufficiently large subset of P conforms to R in S

and either

(b) *Normative expectations*: i believes that a sufficiently large subset of P expects i to conform to R in S

or

(b') *Normative expectations with sanctions*: i believes that a sufficiently large subset of P expects i to conform to R in S, prefers i to conform, and may sanction behaviour.

In other words, a member of a community will comply with a social norm if she is aware of the existence of the rule (Condition 1) and if she prefers to conform to it under the condition that she has empirical and normative expectations for doing so (Condition 2). In the following I will focus on these two notions of expectations.⁹⁹

The condition for empirical expectations tells us that expectations of conformity matter for compliance. A social norm needs to be practiced (or at least believed to be practiced as it was the case in the example of the Ik people in Chapter 2) to exist.¹⁰⁰ The normative expectations condition, instead, points at the reciprocity of expectations. Not only do I need to expect that others conform to a norm to prefer to follow it, but I need to believe that the others expect me to comply with it. This second type of expectations can be a mere empirical belief of the form “I reasonably expect others to expect me to follow a norm because I followed it until now”. Or it can be a normative belief of the form “I believe that others think that I have an obligation to

⁹⁸ She seems to resolve what **Jon Elster** (*Social Norms*, p. 99) refers to as “one of the most persistent cleavages in the social sciences”, namely, the opposition between the so-called homo economicus who is pulled into his action (norm compliance) by the prospect of future rewards and the homo sociologicus who is a “plaything” of social norms.

⁹⁹ Please note that according to **Bicchieri** (*The Grammar of Society*, Chapter 1), rules which are followed independently from what others do (such as the moral norm against murdering) are not social norms. In game theoretical terms this means that compliance with a social norm cannot be a dominant strategy. Both, moral norms and personal norms can be reasons for certain actions which are independent of what the others do.

¹⁰⁰ Thereby, also empirical expectations *can* have an ought-dimension: The agent might think that everyone ought to conform to R in S for prudential reasons or because complying is the right thing to do (**Bicchieri**, *The Grammar of Society*, pp. 13-14.)

conform to R because this is the right thing to do”.¹⁰¹ While for some people, empirical and normative expectations are sufficient to induce conformity, others need the possibility of being sanctioned to induce a preference for compliance. Thereby, the sanctions Bicchieri refers to are informal sanctions, such as gossip, open censure, ostracism, or dishonour as well as feelings of remorse which might accompany the transgression.¹⁰² At this point it is important to note that the agent has a *conditional* preference for compliance, that is, a preference which *depends* on the presence of empirical and normative expectations. Essentially, while Sugden refers to the fear of resentment to explain the stability of social norms, Bicchieri refers to a preference for doing what is socially appropriate.

Going back to last section’s example, the entrepreneur from the Sicilian Mafia-free village (Figure 2 and Figure 3) will prefer to stick to the social norm against engaging in collusive activities and therefore to not give the lump-sum to the Mafia if she expects the others to do so (empirical expectations) and if she believes the others to expect her to do so as well (normative expectations). Whenever faced with a defection, she will reassess her expectations and possibly prefer to defect.¹⁰³ Essentially, the presence of a social norm against engaging in collusive activities transforms a situation which can be modelled as a prisoner’s dilemma into a coordination game in which the strategy “refuse (the offer of the Mafia)” is the best outcome (Figure 4). In other words, the social norm is an equilibrium of the game it creates.

Player 1/ Player 2	Refuse (Cooperate)	Accept (Defect)
Refuse (Cooperate)	1, 1	0, 2
Accept (Defect)	2, 0	0.5, 0.5

Figure 3. Prisoner’s Dilemma



Player 1/ Player 2	Refuse (Cooperate)	Accept (Defect)
Refuse (Cooperate)	1, 1	-2, 0
Accept (Defect)	0, -2	0.5, 0.5

Figure 4. Coordination Game

Player 1/ Player 2	Refuse (Cooperate)	Accept (Defect)
Refuse (Cooperate)	S, S	W, B
Accept (Defect)	B, W	T, T

Figure 3’. Prisoner’s Dilemma from the perspective of a (materially) self-interested self (Best, Second, Third and Worst Outcome)

Player 1/ Player 2	Refuse (Cooperate)	Accept (Defect)
Refuse (Cooperate)	B, B	W, T
Accept (Defect)	T, W	S, S

Figure 4’. Coordination Game from the perspective of Bicchieri’s norm follower

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 15.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁰³ A social norm is “a function which maps one’s expectations into what one ought to do” (Ibid., p. 219).

In the following I will deal with the conditions under which a conditional preference for norm compliance transforms the prisoner's dilemma into a coordination game. To do so, I shall first describe what a norm-based utility function is.

In Bicchieri's model an agent's utility level depends on two factors: the payoff which she gets for a specific strategy profile, for example, one in which she defects, and the other player cooperates (strategy profile Accept (D), Refuse (C) in Figure 3), and the payoff deduction resulting from her defection multiplied by the parameter k which measures her sensitivity¹⁰⁴ to the norm. The utility level of player 1 if she deviates from the norm is the payoff of 2 minus the loss of player two because of player one's deviation (net loss of 1) weighted with the level of sensitivity of the transgressor, k_1 .

$$U_1(D, C) = \Pi_1(D, C) - k_1(\Pi_2(C, C) - \Pi_2(D, C))$$

The Prisoner's Dilemma (Figure 3) is transformed into a Coordination Game (Figure 4) by the presence of a social norm if both players do not have an incentive for breaking the social norm. More precisely, for the social norm to be stable the sensitivity of the potential deviator (in our example player 1) needs to be bigger, the smaller the loss player 2 encounters because of player's 1 deviation and the bigger the net gain player 1 draws from deviating. In the following I will comment on Bicchieri's approach.

Following Bicchieri, we can conceptualize the social norm against engaging in collusive activities in the Mafia free village as a collective rule of behaviour dependent on individual beliefs about what others do and what others expect that they (ought to) do. What leads the entrepreneur living in the Mafia-free village to stick to the social norm for cooperation and therefore, to not pay the lump-sum to Cosa Nostra, is the material payoff and her *conditional* preference for norm compliance, that is, her preference for doing what is socially appropriate.

What follows from this is that compliance necessarily depends on others' expectations. Concretely, an entrepreneur who values cooperation or legality will have no reason to comply with the social norm for doing so if the others' expectations do not "allow" her to do so. While in Sugden's world, the agent needs someone else's feelings of resentment to comply with a social norm, in Bicchieri's world, she needs someone else's expectations which activate her *preference for not being the transgressor*, not for complying with the social norm per se.

¹⁰⁴ The higher k is, the stronger is an agent's preference for norm compliance. If $k = 0$ the agent is not sensitive at all to rule breaks and his utility level depends only on material self-interest. Being "sensitive" to a norm means that one does not like encountering a norm violation ("being a victim") or, on the other side, being the "transgressor" (Ibid., p. 54).

In other words, Bicchieri depicts an agent who follows what I conceive to be an “empty ought”. It is empty because it has no real normative substance. The expectations are being followed only in virtue of their existence.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented three approaches to social norms and applied them to the problem of the payment of pizzo in Mafia’s territories. In Lewis’s world, agents comply with paying the pizzo because given certain beliefs and constraints, compliance is directly in line with their (narrow) self-interest. Sugden, as well as Bicchieri, recur to feelings which people dislike, such as the resentment of others (a form of emotional sanctioning) to explain why people comply with social norms, especially in cases in which compliance is not in line with their (narrow) self-interest. Bicchieri includes the norm status of a rule into the utility function of an agent, that is, a *conditional* preference for norm compliance. The agent has a preference for doing what is socially appropriate.

We can draw the following two conclusions:

- 1.) In all three approaches, *norm-compliant action* is depicted as a “means to an end”, it *does not have a meaning per se*. The normativity of a social norm is reduced to instrumentality.
- 2.) The agents need not have any reasons for complying with a social norm which are independent from the actions or from the reactions of others. The “*social nature*” of *social norms* is reduced to the *interdependency of actions*.

In Chapter 2, while defining social norms I explained how a social norm is not only a behaviour which different people share but how it is social in a “deep sense”. It provides individuals’ actions with a shared significance. All the approaches which I presented in this chapter do not account for this fact. They neutralize what makes a social norm *social*. This, essentially, is the common ground of the paradoxes which they encounter. As I will explain in the following chapter, all approaches rely on the concept of a person as a disengaged agent.

Chapter 5

Charles Taylor's Anthropology: Strong Evaluators vs. Disengaged Agents

5.1 Introduction

In Chapter 4, I presented three individualistic approaches to social norms. I explained how such approaches depict norm compliance as a “means to an end” and how they reduce the social nature of social norms to the interdependency of actions. In this chapter, I will argue that the approaches presented in Chapter 4 are built on a notion of man as a “disengaged agent”. To do so, I will first present Taylor's concept of a person as a strong evaluator.

5.2 Why Does a Strong Evaluator Comply with a Social Norm?

According to Charles Taylor, the distinctive feature of being human is the faculty for strong evaluation. Persons are concerned with the *qualitative worth* of their desires, of their actions and of their feelings. They regard some desires as desirable, others as undesirable, some actions as right, others as wrong, some feelings as superior, others as lower.¹⁰⁵ In other words, what makes of a living being *a person* is the faculty for making qualitative distinctions about himself and about his environment.¹⁰⁶ This faculty is not only a capacity which defines us as members of the same species but which is *constitutive* for us:

“We are living beings quite independently of our self-understandings, or of the meanings things have for us. But we are only selves insofar as we move in a certain space of questions, as we seek and find an orientation to the good”¹⁰⁷.

¹⁰⁵ Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, p. 16.

¹⁰⁶ Taylor, *Sources*, pp. 19-21.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 34.

A first essential pillar in Taylor's philosophical anthropology is the following one: *Being a self is linked to having a sense of the "good"*¹⁰⁸.¹⁰⁹ In the following I will deal more extensively with the relationship between being a self, having an identity and (having a sense of) the "good". Following Hartmut Rosa¹¹⁰, we can say that Taylor's philosophical anthropology is a theory of identity *and* action because action is tied to identity. Being a self means engaging in strong evaluations. However, to evaluate strongly we need something which stands independent of our own desires, feelings, and actions. We need some *goods* which represent the standard by which we make our qualitative distinctions. We can imagine a self as a person who moves within a space of strong evaluation and whose background (or framework) of evaluation is shared with others. He orients his actions according to this background and tries to align his self-understanding according to it.

Consider the social norm for cooperation which tells the citizens of a Mafia-free village: "You ought not to engage in collusive activities with Cosa Nostra". (The situation I referred to while dealing with Sugden's and Bicchieri's approach). A strong evaluator will comply with the social norm because she evaluates her potential actions – the payment of the lump-sum to Cosa Nostra or the refusal of the offer – in front of a background which she shares with others. Given that "legality" is a good and legal action the standard, her faculty for strong evaluation tells her that refusing the payment of the lump-sum is the superior action. The concept of a person as a strong evaluator grounds the normativity of a social norm (defined as the shared understanding that one ought to comply with it) in the identity of an agent. This does not mean that the agent complies, because in being a member of the group, she is committed to following the social norm itself, but because the norm compliant action has a significance, a meaning which she shares with others and which is constitutive for her identity.

A second fundamental insight in Taylor's anthropology is the following one: *We achieve selfhood among other selves*.¹¹¹ A person is a "*social, embodied being*"¹¹² whose action is bound to a body situated in the world. Her self-understanding is not established in a monologue, it depends on and develops within the historical and cultural community in which she lives and acts.

¹⁰⁸ It is important to note that in Taylor's work strong evaluations "involve *all qualitative discriminations* between motives or ends, *not just those we call moral*". For example: "Some people feel that it is more admirable, to be cool in their style" (Taylor, *Human agency*, p. 24).

¹⁰⁹ Taylor, *Sources*, p. 51.

¹¹⁰ Rosa, *Identität*, pp. 79-88.

¹¹¹ Taylor, *Sources*, pp. 32-40.

¹¹² Taylor, *Reason*, p. 10.

Going back to the entrepreneur living in the Sicilian Mafia-free village, we can say that Sugden would refer to the resentment of others to explain why the entrepreneur prefers to stick to the rule against engaging in collusive activities. Bicchieri would also refer to feelings of guilt and shame on the transgressor's side.

It is, however, worth considering the nature of these feelings. A person can only be resented about the absence of a behaviour which she thinks that she could rightly have expected. Equally, feeling ashamed of something presupposes evaluating this thing in terms of how one knows it would have been right to be. Put shortly, such feelings can only emerge from the fact that a certain "*valued significance*"¹¹³ is collectively attributed to an action (in our case to norm compliance), instead of to another action (non-compliance). The entrepreneur might desire the higher profits which she would make if she engaged in collusive activities and at the same time feel ashamed of having this desire because she considers collusive behaviour a "failure to respond appropriately"¹¹⁴ to what is good (i.e., legal behaviour).

This leads us to the type of reason which lies at the ground of a concept of a person as a strong evaluator, namely a *substantive* conception of reason. A strong evaluator reasons in "transition"¹¹⁵. This means that by using a language which she shares with others¹¹⁶, her reason is concerned with comparing feelings/desires/actions to establish which are the superior ones. By doing so she articulates the framework which lays at the ground of her and others' reactions. In other words, she *makes sense* of her own and others' moral responses by making the framework explicit. It is by making sense of her reactions, for example, of her feeling of guilt, that she comes to a self-understanding. As Taylor puts it: "To know who you are is to be oriented in a moral space, about what is good, what is worth doing, what has meaning".¹¹⁷ Legality as a "good" is constitutive for an agent's identity if it governs her self-evaluation and thus if it determines her self-understanding. In fact, even if she chooses to start engaging in collusive activities, she will know where she stands in relation to the "good". In a nutshell, having an identity is knowing where one stands in relation to a shared framework of goods. Besides being "sources of the self", goods are also constitutive for social reality. A social norm is an (implicit) articulation of a framework. It is a social property of a social group, whose normativity has the power to structure social life.

¹¹³ Rosa, *Identität*, p. 85.

¹¹⁴ Anderson, *Value in Ethics*, p. 3.

¹¹⁵ Taylor, *Explanation and Practical Reason*, p. 225.

¹¹⁶ For example, imagining someone's resentment and my feeling of shame if I do not comply with a social norm is an implicit claim about the framework which we share. Using Anderson's words these reactions are "bearers of meaning" (*Value in Ethics*, p. 3) that legality is a good.

¹¹⁷ Taylor, *Sources*, p. 26.

5.3 Disengaged Agency

After having described Charles Taylor's anthropology and his concept of a person as a strong evaluator in the previous section, in this section, I will go back to the approaches presented in Chapter 4 and argue that they are all built on a concept of a person as a "disengaged agent".

I concluded Chapter 4 by saying that what Lewis's, Sugden's and Bicchieri's approach have in common is the fact that norm-compliant action is depicted as a "means to an end" and that its social nature is reduced to the interdependency of actions. This clearly contrasts with a concept of man whose reason is concerned with comparing the appropriateness of feelings/desires/actions through a language of evaluation which she shares and develops with others. A disengaged agent is defined in absence of any constitutive concerns. Her norm-compliance is the mechanical operation of a disengaged reason. Or rather, it is the product of a *reasoning* which does not "draw any insight from the significances things have for us"¹¹⁸.

In Lewis's world norm compliance is depicted as a behavioural regularity which results from the fact that different individuals consider it "rational" to pay because doing so maximises their self-interest. Thereby, it is important to note that they are not disengaged because what motivates their action is self-interest. In fact, self-interest could be an evaluative standard which gives the action a shared significance.¹¹⁹ The normativity of a social norm is reduced to the prospect of an outcome and an agent's reason to the correct application of a given "rule" of action: to "do whatever maximises self-interest".

Sugden and Bicchieri include a notion of normative expectations into their accounts. Sugden defines normative expectations as "sentiments of approval and disapproval associated with general classes of action"¹²⁰ which arise endogenously. By attributing a normative component to the rule through its emergence (and not prior to it), Sugden *neutralizes* the nature of normative expectations. The disapproval which follows a norm break is almost depicted as an inconvenient gut feeling which arises as an automatic reaction if expectations are not met. However, neutralizing the "feeling of resentment" and explaining it by referring to its evolutionary utility, means missing its distinctive feature, namely the fact that others'

¹¹⁸ Taylor, *Reason*, p. 10.

¹¹⁹ For example, if we consider a problem of pure coordination with its respective solution, e.g., the convention for driving all on the right, we recognise that, indeed, the only reason why someone drives on the right instead of on the left is self-interest. However, the model of a rational chooser does not allow us to look at the *meaning of actions* (in our example the self-interest of different individuals whose interests are aligned) as *reasons for action*. Only doing so can, however, ground the otherwise groundless beliefs that "given that yesterday others drove on the right, today I *ought* to drive on the right as well". A shared good of self-interest which gives to the action a shared meaning can make "precedent" a conclusive reason for action.

¹²⁰ Sugden, *Normative Expectations*, p. 84.

resentment for my action has a sense only insofar as my individual action has a shared significance which is a shared reason for action. Bicchieri depicts social norms as “social constructs” which exist “simply because enough people believe that they exist and act accordingly”¹²¹. An agent complies with a social norm because (for psychological reasons) she has a predisposition to act in a way which is socially appropriate. Essentially, norm compliance is depicted as an action which is consistent with an agent’s individual beliefs.

All three approaches are built on what Taylor would call an “external model”¹²² of practical reasoning. They base action on criteria which are not anchored in the “moral intuitions”¹²³ of agents who are instead presumed to be without a framework. They are built on a procedural notion of reason which *presupposes* the meaning of action (norm compliance): An agent either steers his actions in the light of an outcome or acts in a way which is consistent with her beliefs. In other words, they offer a *criterium* according to which norm compliance is the “correct” action.¹²⁴

But how much do these approaches really enlarge our understanding of social norms and concretely, of the social norm for pizza? In the following chapter I will deal with this question.

5.4 Conclusion

To sum up, in this chapter, I dealt with Charles Taylor’s anthropology and contraposed the notion of a man as a strong evaluator to the concept of a person as a “disengaged agent” on which the individualistic approaches presented in Chapter 4 rely. According to Taylor, what makes of a living being a person is the faculty for making qualitative distinctions about himself and about his environment through a language of evaluation which she shares with others. Applying this to the notion of social norms, we can say that they are *social* because norm compliance is motivated by the shared meaning attributed to norm compliant action. A social norm is an articulation of a good which is constitutive for individuals’ identities and for social reality.

¹²¹ **Bicchieri**, *The Grammar of Society*, p. 10.

¹²² **Taylor**, *Sources*, p. 75.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 75-90.

Chapter 6

Understanding Social Norm Change in Mafia's Territories – The Movement of *Addiopizzo*

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I explained how, following Charles Taylor, we would explain norm compliance as the result of the self-evaluations of persons who are social beings in a real, constitutive sense. I did, however, not deal with the following objection. Do we really evaluate all our actions? Concretely, did an entrepreneur living in Palermo between the 1990s and early 2000s really ponder between alternative actions, or did he just pay the *pizzo* because this is what he, his relatives and his competitors have been doing for decades?¹²⁵

In Chapter 2, I explained how most rules are learned implicitly and how they are often followed without much thought. In other words, compliance with rules often relies on tacit knowledge and is an automatic, unquestioned action. Still, as the social ostracism which Libero Grassi encountered when he refused to pay the *pizzo* shows, in the moment in which a stable social norm is broken or scrutinized, normative issues emerge.¹²⁶ We can say that “acting within a framework means functioning with a *sense* of qualitative discernment”¹²⁷ and not necessarily, explicitly evaluating all actions. Compliance with a social norm might be an automatic, unreflective action. However, when forced to revise one's own or someone else's non-compliance, a person will be able to give a qualitative judgement about it, that is, to tell which action is the “higher” one.

¹²⁵ Please note that Taylor speaks about man as a social, *embodied* being not as an *embedded* one. The faculty for strong evaluation implies that a person is not a “plaything of social forces” (Elster, *Social Norms*, p.99) but that she can take a stance on her behaviour.

¹²⁶ As explained in Chapter 2, this is symptomatic for the fact that social norms are ontologically different from collective habits.

¹²⁷ Taylor, *Sources*, p. 21.

When Grassi, for example, chose to publicly oppose the payment of pizzo, his action was considered by his fellow-citizens as being morally inappropriate. There was a discrepancy between how he judged his action and how most other people judged it.

As I explained in Chapter 3, the payment of pizzo proved to be an “extremely change resistant”¹²⁸ institution exactly because it is a social norm which “embeds the [Mafia] into the day-to-day fabric of Sicilian life”¹²⁹. In this last chapter, however, I will show how the institution of pizzo proved to be changeable. In section 6.2, I will deal with norm abandonment and norm emergence. In section 6.3, I will present the Sicilian anti-Mafia movement and organization, *Addiopizzo*, which was founded in Palermo in 2005. *Addiopizzo* managed to induce in Sicily (mostly in Palermo) a process of social norm change from “pay and do not report” to “do not pay and denounce extortionist requests”. As a consequence, an increasing number of people started not paying the pizzo, a result which neither state intervention, nor heroic actions such as the one of Libero Grassi had managed to bring about.¹³⁰ My overall goal is to explain in section 6.4, how the concept of a person as a strong evaluator can help us depict and understand the process of social norm change better than the concept of a person as a disengaged agent.

6.2 What is Social Norm Change?

In Chapter 2, by referring to the example of the Ik people who in a period of severe famine started not behaving in a prosocial way, I explained how a social norm can exist although the behaviour which we typically associate with it is not observed. Concretely, by referring to Cristina Bicchieri¹³¹ I explained how although more and more tribe members did not share goods with others and did not want to be offered help, the typical prosocial norms for cooperation and for reciprocity still existed. Paradoxically, it were these social norms which motivated the peculiar, asocial behaviour of the Ik members and which structured their social life. The tribe members recognized the normativity of prosocial norms and tried to avoid situations in which they would have had to comply with them, e.g., by making of hunting a furtive activity or by repairing their broken rooftops at night.

Following this definition of a social norm as a rule of behaviour whose normativity has the power to motivate action and to structure social life, we can say that whenever a social norm

¹²⁸ Vaccaro and Palazzo, *Values Against Violence*, p. 1077.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 1079.

¹³⁰ Lipari and Andrighetto, *The change in social norms*, p. 232.

¹³¹ Bicchieri, *The Grammar of Society*, p. 9.

exists, a shared significance can be attributed to an individual's norm-compliant action. During a process of norm abandonment, norm compliance progressively ceases to have a shared significance. The social norm is unstable. More and more people stop abiding by it. What, essentially, defines a process of norm abandonment is the fact that the sources of the normativity of a social norm cease to be sources of the selves. What, instead, characterises norm emergence is the fact that through individuals' actions the new sources of the self, become the sources of normativity of a social norm. The social norm is an expression of a good which is constitutive for the identities of the members of a social group. In the following, I will explain the process of norm abandonment and norm emergence in more detail. Thereby, I will refer to the example of the Ik people.

Consider a tribe member who in a period of general famine must repair his broken rooftop. He knows that if he repairs it during the day, others will offer him their help and count on his help in future. He considers their expectations to be right, as, "accepting the help of others and returning favours" is the "higher" action than "accepting the help and not returning the favour" or "not accepting the help from the beginning". He finds himself in the following dilemmatic situation: He knows what he ought to do, but in this new context of famine he fears the possibility that others will use the social norm for reciprocity to ask him in return for food. In other words, he has an individual reason for not complying with prosocial norms which is not in accordance with the shared reason for compliance, namely the shared meaning attributed to helping each other and to reciprocating help. To escape this dilemma, he chooses to avoid social situations in which prosocial norms would be activated. Concretely, he repairs his broken rooftop at night when he is less likely to be seen by others.

By doing so, the tribe member does not embody what is constitutive for him and for social reality, namely the good of reciprocity. He will feel ashamed of doing so. With the time, however, he will deduce that others are behaving in a similar way. (For example, because he observes how they have food although no one saw them hunting.) He will feel less ashamed for his own, individualistic behaviour and expect more and more tribe members to not behave in a prosocial way and to also feel less ashamed of doing so. Following Taylor's notion of a person as a social, embodied being whose actions are inseparably tied to his identity, we can say that the normative power of the social norm gets weaker (which means that the social norm is perceived as being less authoritative) when more and more people stop complying with it.¹³²

¹³² Please note that here I am just applying Taylor's anthropology to the Ik example. However, it would be interesting to check how the perception of the normativity of a rule and people's actual compliance with it, vary with the number of people who abide by it. Following Taylor's concept of man as a social, embodied being who

Eventually, the standard of evaluation which leads individuals' actions, will be another one. We will have a new good which provides individuals' actions with a shared significance. With the time, a new social norm might emerge as an articulation of this good. For example, a social norm which postulates that "everyone ought to provide for himself". Once that this social norm is established, the tribe member will not only not feel ashamed of his individualistic behaviour anymore, but even feel rightly resented if someone happens to ask him for food.¹³³

If we look back at the approaches to social norms depicted in Chapter 4, we can say that Lewis's approach would let us think that when the Ik people started to avoid certain social situations to not comply with prosocial norms, these prosocial norms already did not exist, as the tribe members did not behave accordingly. His explanation of norm change would be as follows: In this new situation of famine, following the social norm led to a negative cost-benefit analysis, therefore, the tribe members stopped behaving in a prosocial way. If we apply this line of reasoning to the case study of the payment of pizzo, we will expect compliance with Mafia rules to disappear when it stops being beneficial to individuals. As we have seen, this, however, did not happen.

Following Sugden and Bicchieri, a social norm exists if the respective (normative) expectations are there. Concretely, Sugden would refer to the tribe member's fear of encountering the resentment of others to explain why the prosocial norm still existed when the tribe members acted in an individualistic way. He would explain a process of norm change by referring to sociobiological reasons. Concretely, in this new situation of scarce resources, individuals who acted in a prosocial way learned quickly that their behaviour was not the most successful one. In fact, people who did not accept the help of others, did not encounter the risk of having to return costly favours and thus "performed better". During this learning process, agents started feeling less resentment towards people who did not act in a prosocial way. To sum up, as in Lewis's approach, social norm abandonment is presumed to come about when entrepreneurs experience that it is advantageous to not follow the rule.

evaluates his actions through a framework shared with others, makes us consider the normativity of a rule as developing simultaneously to others' compliance with it, because individual action (norm compliance/ non-compliance) has a shared meaning, not only because "people tend to do what others do" (an established insight in social psychology). Francesco Guala (*The normativity*, p. 3119) observed in an experimental setting the existence of an "intrinsic normative pressure to conform to an established regularity" in a *history of joint action*. This implies that a group of people who stop doing their part in an established institutional status-quo, endogenously accelerate a process of norm abandonment. This would be in line with Taylor's framework.

¹³³ Please note that although the asocial actions which we observe might be the same, there is a difference between not complying with a prosocial norm because one's behaviour is led by self-interest or complying with a *social norm for self-interested behaviour*.

This process of norm abandonment will be accompanied by a change in feelings which people have, i.e., they will progressively feel less resented if someone does not follow the norm for reciprocity.

Bicchieri, who defines social norms as “social constructs” would refer to the existence of empirical and normative expectations to argue for the existence of a social norm: Agents have a *conditional* preference for social norm compliance. Whenever they start being uncertain about what others do, about what others expect them to do or believe that they ought to do, the system of beliefs which builds up the social norm may collapse.

But how can the conceptualization of a person as a disengaged agent, which essentially neutralizes what Taylor would call the moral intuitions of persons by depicting their normative expectations either as gut feelings which emerge for evolutionary reasons or as system of beliefs, help us understand norm change, that is a process in which people stop complying with a rule and start abiding by a new one?

6.3. The Intervention of Addiopizzo

It is often assumed that the abandonment of a harmful collective behaviour which is an institutional rule requires some form of structural instability. In the case of pizzo, the tension between a Mafia system and a democratic order combined with the social and economic costs created by the endemic presence of the Mafia, could be possible sources of such an instability. However, they have been present for centuries and, unsurprisingly so¹³⁴, have never been sufficient to let the Mafia disappear. In fact, the Mafia has an interest in keeping its power and secures it by fostering a culture of lawlessness. Generally, the abandonment of a harmful social norm in an “unstable environment” is either described as being the result of the heroic actions of individuals who aim at changing their environment, or by referring to existing authorities which impose new institutional rules on agents who are presumed to passively accept them.¹³⁵ As we have seen, both paths to change did not induce a process of norm change in Mafia’s territories. In this section, I will deal with the grassroots movement and anti-Mafia organization *Addiopizzo* which by becoming a “broad societal movement”¹³⁶ has become the “most successful anti-protection racket initiative ever mounted in Sicily”¹³⁷.

¹³⁴ “Unsurprisingly” because different strands of literature describe how people are deeply embedded in institutions and perceive the values, beliefs, practices as being legitimate (Battilana et al., *Agency and institutions*).

¹³⁵ Vaccaro and Palazzo, *Values Against Violence*, p. 1078.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 1080.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

I will depict the steps towards social norm change from “pay and do not report” to “do not pay” in chronological order. I will start by looking more closely at the context in which the social norm “pay and do not report” was in force.

In Chapter 3, I described how the presence of criminal organisations and corrupted public authorities on a territory tend to go hand in hand with a culture of lawlessness and a morality of illegality. I explained how, when Grassi publicly denounced the endemic payment of extortion rackets, the average citizen of Palermo ignored the detrimental effects of the Mafia’s presence on the territory and considered the payment of pizzo a morally appropriate practice. As Vaccaro and Palazzo put it, the Mafia managed to impose its own interpretation of “values” defined as “desirable, trans-situational goals which serve as a compass in people’s lives”¹³⁸. For example, it spread the idea that a person’s *dignity* depends on whether he does his own business and does not look at others’ businesses – in particular, at the Mafia’s business.

Over ten years after the murder of Libero Grassi, when *Addiopizzo* started its first initiatives in 2004, a silent acceptance of Mafia’s activities in Palermo was still collectively valued.¹³⁹ Blind abidance with Mafia-rules, such as the rule for paying the pizzo and for not reporting extortionist requests, was considered an appropriate behaviour which ought not to be questioned. (At best, it was considered a problem to be solved by the State.) The idea that a given institutional setting should be maintained at all costs is a phenomenon which has often been associated with a condition of social stagnation typical of Southern Italy. Mario Rainer Lepsius¹⁴⁰, for example, explains the low rate of success of initiatives which in the 1950s aimed at fostering the economic development and the level of alphabetization of these regions by referring to the fact that any behaviour of individuals which could have contributed to changing an established institutional equilibrium was frowned upon.¹⁴¹ Similar to Vaccaro and Palazzo, he describes how an individual’s dignity was conceived as depending on his contribution to the maintenance of an established institutional setting.¹⁴² We can look at this collective aversion towards change (including progress) as being itself a social norm which stabilised the social norm for pizzo.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 1076.

¹³⁹ In this context it is also worth pointing at the notion of a “made man” (in Italian “man of *honour*”) which is not only reserved to people who officially are members of Cosa Nostra, but to everyone who engages in collusive activities and who submits himself to the Mafia and its rules.

¹⁴⁰ Lepsius, *Immobilismus*.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 332.

¹⁴² A concrete example is the following one. The provision of fields with watering systems was welcomed by farmers: “Development aid organisations encountered mostly communicative, open-minded individuals who were willing to cooperate” (Ibid., p. 318). However, after the watering systems had been established, they were not used. Whoever used them, encountered the reprobation of others.

Lepsius, as well as Lipari and Andrighetto also refer to the Sicilian society as being marked by “a lack of cooperative tradition”¹⁴³.¹⁴⁴ Different scholars have referred to this phenomenon as “amoral familism” or an “individualistic ethos” meaning a societal context in which the close family and forms of patronage, e.g., mafia patronage, are the only social relationships in which the value of solidarity and norms of reciprocity are in force. Following Lepsius’s description, the rule which drove social behaviour, especially in the Western part of Sicily in the 1950 and 1960s, was the following one: Do whatever maximises the material, short-term advantage of your close family, assume that everyone else does the same and thus, that any behaviour which is presented as serving the common good is a form of deception.¹⁴⁵ While it is difficult to determine to what extent this lack of “horizontal solidarity structures”¹⁴⁶ was a product, or rather, one of the driving forces of the Mafia’s presence in Sicily, it can be considered a structural constraint on which the persistence of the Mafia depended. However, as explained in section 2.3 and in section 3.3, outcomes or structures are not sufficient to explain why people comply with rules. As I will show in the following, to understand the intervention of *Addiopizzo*, it is helpful to articulate the sources of the normativity of the social rule for pizzo.

As explained in Chapter 3, the individualistic ethos typical of some parts of Southern Italy served as a basis for a culture of lawlessness. People did not consider the legal code as being authoritative, but instead as being vexatious.¹⁴⁷ Following Mafia rules was considered the right thing to do. Any doubt that following the laws of the State could have made (at least in principle) everyone better-off was eliminated from the beginning by a social norm against change. In a nutshell, we can say that *Addiopizzo* managed to perturb this “institutional inertia”¹⁴⁸ by attributing to individuals’ actions a new shared significance, concretely, its contribution to the common good of a Mafia-free society through legal behaviour. As I will show in the following, we can divide the intervention of *Addiopizzo* in two phases: A first one in which people were induced to pay attention to the problems created by the Mafia. They started questioning the rightfulness of their tacit acceptance of the Mafia and let legality progressively become a good which was constitutive for their identities. (In this phase we can observe what Taylor calls the “reasoning in transition”¹⁴⁹ of a person). In a second phase, the social norm for not paying the pizzo and for denouncing extortionist requests (the “social norm for legality”) became a *social*

¹⁴³ Lipari and Andrighetto, *The change in social norms*, p. 230.

¹⁴⁴ A Sicilian proverb says: “To make a society you need an odd number, but one is too few and three is too many” (Lepsius, *Immobilismus*, p. 304).

¹⁴⁵ Lepsius, *Immobilismus*, p. 323.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 322.

¹⁴⁷ Williams, *Illicit markets*, p. 328.

¹⁴⁸ Lipari and Andrighetto, *The change in social norms*, p. 232.

¹⁴⁹ Taylor, *Explanation and Practical Reason*, p. 225.

property. In the following I will deal with these two phases by referring to some of the most significant actions of *Addiopizzo* in its early stages.

6.3.1 Reasoning in Transition

In 2004 a group of seven friends who had just graduated from university started a provocative campaign. They chose to anonymously paste the walls of Palermo over night with posters saying: “A society that pays the pizzo is a society without dignity”¹⁵⁰. In fact, they were convinced that as long as the civil society (entrepreneurs but also customers) stayed in a condition of “moral disengagement”¹⁵¹ towards the payment of pizzo no attempt to eliminate the practice would have been effective. All in all, the first months of activities were marked by an anonymous “guerilla communication” of stickers and banners on the streets of Palermo which induced a public discussion on the tacit acceptance of the Mafia and which led to the foundation of *Addiopizzo*.¹⁵²

The first campaign with the title “*Contro il pizzo! Cambia i consumi*”¹⁵³ (“Against the bribe! Change your consumption”) started a few months later. It aimed at drawing consumers’ attention to the fact that while buying products in shops which pay the pizzo, they finance a criminal organization and to raise their awareness for the harm created by the Mafia’s presence on the territory. Also, it aimed at redirecting their consumption towards shops which were pizzo-free. Concretely, the activists (whose number grew from seven to forty within a few months) sought a dialogue with consumers to convince them to sign a manifest and thus to commit to “direct their consumption towards those shopkeepers who said “no” to extortion-rackets”. Over 3000 declarations of support were collected among consumers. In May 2005, the list of signatories was presented to the press and made public. As Pico Di Trapani¹⁵⁴ (one of the founders of the movement) explains, the success of *Addiopizzo* relied from the beginning

¹⁵⁰ **Addiopizzo**, “La nostra storia”.

¹⁵¹ With the expression “moral disengagement” Vaccaro and Palazzo refer to Albert Bandura’s work *Selective Moral Disengagement*. In his social cognitive theory of the “moral self” Bandura aims at linking moral reasoning to moral action. Morality is rooted in a “self-reactive selfhood” which is not merely an intrapsychic matter. In the development of a moral self, persons adopt standard of right and wrong which are not autonomous. Moral disengagement can happen through different mechanisms, e.g., by portraying a reprehensible conduct as serving a social purpose or by obscuring “the agentive role” in the harm which one causes. We find both mechanisms, especially the displacement/diffusion of responsibility in the narrative around pizzo. However, as Taylor’s concept of a man as a strong evaluator “involves *all qualitative discriminations* between motives or ends, *not just those we call moral*” and most importantly, I use the term “disengagement” in another context, I prefer not to use Vaccaro and Palazzo’s term of “moral disengagement”. The approaches presented in Chapter 4 rely on a concept of man as a disengaged agent. As we have seen, entrepreneurs who paid the pizzo in Palermo when Grassi was murdered were not “disengaged”.

¹⁵² **Risi**, *Io faccio così*.

¹⁵³ **Addiopizzo**, “Contro il pizzo, cambia i consumi”. See Appendix A for the text of this first manifest with which *Addiopizzo* addressed consumers.

¹⁵⁴ **Risi**, *Io faccio così*.

on making individuals aware of their contribution to the suboptimal social condition resulting from pizzo and to awake a sense of individual responsibility for the common good. This, in turn, also meant not associating the anti-Mafia initiative to one specific, heroic person (as it had been the case with figures such as Libero Grassi) but letting it appear from the beginning as a broad societal movement in which everyone's action was asked.¹⁵⁵

After the list of consumers had been published, *Addiopizzo* worked to find entrepreneurs willing to be part of a list of certified¹⁵⁶ pizzo-free shops. Thereby, the enterprises which in the subsequent months joined the “solidarity cooperative”¹⁵⁷ accepted a whole “legality package”¹⁵⁸. Concretely, they committed to not engage in collusive activities, to respect labour regulations and to pay taxes.¹⁵⁹ Again, as soon as 100 entrepreneurs were found, the movement disclosed the names to the public and created an official anti-pizzo certificate and a banner to be posted on shop fronts. The list of entrepreneurs was presented to the public and diffused in the Italian national media.

What mostly characterised these first two campaigns is that they induced a process of “reasoning in transition” which let a growing part of society stop considering a tacit acceptance of Mafia's activities and rules as being right. While collecting signatures, the activists engaged in conversations with the consumers and entrepreneurs. Firstly, they draw their attention to the problems created by the Mafia. An entrepreneur, for example, explained how “[...] after various meetings, [he] realised that [he] had to think more seriously about security and the role of the Mafia in this issue. [...] Those very long discussions were useful because they forced [him] to understand that [he] should be more careful and think more about how the Mafia affects [his] life.”¹⁶⁰ Secondly, the activists asked their interlocutors to compare different understandings of values. For example, they asked them to compare how the value of legality or security is understood in Northern European countries or in an imaginary ideal world and how, instead, it is understood in Palermo.

¹⁵⁵ An extensive literature documented how heroic anti-Mafia action does not work. “The Mafia first isolates and then kills” (**Vaccaro and Palazzo**, *Values against Violence*, p. 1094).

¹⁵⁶ *Addiopizzo* created a commission that interviewed entrepreneurs who requested a “pizzo-free” certification. When making decisions on new members they used documents from the Chamber of Commerce an asked for information at the Direzione Investigativa Anti-Mafia, the government's anti-Mafia directorate (**Vaccaro and Palazzo**, *Values against Violence*, p. 1080).

¹⁵⁷ **Addiopizzo**, “Contro il pizzo, cambia i consumi”. See Appendix for the text of the first campaign.

¹⁵⁸ **Risi**, *Io faccio così*.

¹⁵⁹ In return, they could increasingly count on consumers who preferred their shops to others. In the period which followed November 2007 through the establishment of the initiative *Libero Futuro*, shopkeepers could also count on a network of entrepreneurs, lawyers, and anti-Mafia police which would have supported them in case of retaliatory acts.

¹⁶⁰ **Vaccaro and Palazzo**, *Values against Violence*, p. 1089.

An entrepreneur explained how while security had always meant for him “paying pizzo and closing our eyes when we saw something we were not supposed to see”¹⁶¹ after the conversations with the activist he had a “new sense of security as [...] being with the government, collaborating with the police”¹⁶².

Following Taylor’s notion of man as a strong evaluator who is concerned with comparing feelings/desires/actions to establish which are the superior ones, we can say that after having drawn people’s attention to the consequences of the Mafia’s presence in Palermo and to the role which their individual actions played in sustaining this suboptimal state, *Addiopizzo* let them articulate the framework which laid at the ground of their actions. In other words, it let people “make sense” of their actions and others’ actions before asking them to commit to a socially responsible behaviour judged to be the better one.

In other words, *Addiopizzo* managed to change the self-understanding of individuals. Through the conversations, moving from an action which aimed at one’s own short-run interest and at the maintenance of an institutional status-quo, to a socially responsible action which aimed at contributing to the common good, appeared as a “gain”. Non-compliance with the Mafia-rules was considered the superior action. The new meaning attributed to an individual’s refusal of the payment of pizzo, to responsible consumption and more in general, to any behaviour which was in line with the laws of the State, was its contribution to the ideal of a Mafia-free society.

6.3.2 “Uniting” Citizens

In Chapter 2, I defined social norms as rules of behaviour which tend to bring about behavioural regularities. I argued that the essential property of social norms is their normativity defined as the understanding of group members that they ought to comply with a standard of conduct. During the conversations between *Addiopizzo* activists and citizens, a process of social norm change started: A small group of Palermitan entrepreneurs started developing a shared understanding that they ought not to pay the pizzo and that they ought to denounce extortionist requests. Accordingly, they expected *Addiopizzo* activists and an increasing number of signatories to approve their non-compliance with Mafia rules. But is a growing number of people who consider non-compliance with Mafia rules as being the “superior” action, sufficient to induce a change in behaviour?

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 1091.

¹⁶² Ibid.

Following Vaccaro and Palazzo, a change in the self-understanding of individuals, as the one described in the previous section, is a precondition, but is not sufficient to let a harmful, collective behaviour which results from the presence of an institutional rule disappear.¹⁶³ Agents whose self-understanding has changed need spaces where they “can enact alternative values, beliefs, and practices and [thus] mutually reinforce those enactments”¹⁶⁴. In other words, as also other forms of bottom-up interventions against the Mafia, such as educational campaigns, *Addiopizzo* faced “the daunting task”¹⁶⁵ of coordinating the actual behaviour of people.

This happened in what I refer to as “phase 2”. The activists united people whose self-understanding had changed and who had the same anti-Mafia mindset into networks. They created safe spaces and organised meetings in which citizens could propose and launch new actions. The goal was both, to reinforce the new meaning attributed to legal behaviour among the civil society and to create ties among categories of citizens, for example, among entrepreneurs, but also between the police and entrepreneurs.¹⁶⁶

We can say that both, the direct contact between entrepreneurs and citizens in this second “uniting” phase, as well as the public revelation of the names of adherents in the media in phase 1, were meant to eliminate the stag-hunt conditions which made of the payment of pizzo a coordination problem as described in section 4.2. Concretely, they reduced entrepreneurs’ fear of being the only one to act and thus the fear of encountering detrimental retaliatory acts. As Lipari and Andrighetto¹⁶⁷ put it, we can say that even if (in a hypothetical scenario) all the citizens had had a new anti-Mafia mindset no one would have acted alone. The creation of an anti-Mafia network in which entrepreneurs were in direct contact with each other reduced both the perceived and the real risk for retaliatory acts.

To sum up, the strategy of “uniting” people was crucial to induce a change in behaviour among agents whose identities had changed and to guarantee the survival of the entire movement. Also, “uniting” change-agents and letting them plan and initiate anti-Mafia actions, reinforced the new “ought”.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 1096.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Lipari and Andrighetto, *The change in social norms*, p. 231.

¹⁶⁶ Please note that the participation of the police in the meetings was important as the perception of the presence of a “soft State” was one of the pillars of a culture of lawlessness.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Vaccaro and Palazzo, *Values against Violence*, p. 1091.

This is first of all, because a citizens' understanding that one ought *not* to pay the pizzo passed from being an ought shared with *Addiopizzo* activists to being a social ought. Secondly, because as explained in section 6.2 the “embodiment” of a practice reinforces its shared significance and thus its normative power.

From 2005 to 2019, an increasing number of Sicilian entrepreneurs joined *Addiopizzo*. In 2021 the movement registered a membership of 1214 entrepreneurs and 13376 consumers, mostly from the province of Palermo.¹⁶⁹ By June 2012 *Addiopizzo* could count on the support of 56 activists, 10143 consumers, and over ten percent of entrepreneurs from the Province of Palermo.¹⁷⁰ According to Lipari and Andrighetto, the increasing number of members is an expression of the rate of adoption of the new practice for *not* paying the pizzo. This means that the change in social norms which *Addiopizzo* brought about a change in behaviour.

In an interview from last June 2023, *Addiopizzo* specified how nowadays “those who pay the pizzo and who do not denounce extortionist requests *represent a disvalue* in a large part of the social fabric of Palermo”. It is important to note that, conversely, to the example of the 1k people in which a social norm existed although the behaviour associated with it was not observable, compliance with Mafia-rules and collusive behaviour still is a problem in Palermo. However, especially in the city centre it is not the product of a social norm for abidance with Mafia-rules. In other words, paying the pizzo is not an action which is collectively valued. An entrepreneur who works in Palermo can refuse to pay extortion rackets and denounce extortionist requests without being afraid of encountering social ostracism and consequently, without having to face retaliatory acts.

6.4 On the Limits of a Disengaged Agent: Understanding Social Norm Change

The case study of *Addiopizzo* confirms what I explained in Chapter 2, namely that not every behaviour which people share (even if they share it for the same reason¹⁷¹) is a social norm. While in the 1990s and early 2000s the endemic payment of extortion rackets in Palermo was sustained by the presence of a social norm for compliance with Mafia-rules, nowadays, this is not the case. When *Addiopizzo* was founded, individuals' compliance with Mafia-rules had a shared significance, namely, its contribution to the maintenance of an institutional status-quo which served individuals' short-run interest. *Addiopizzo* managed to let legality become a good which oriented people's action. Essentially, the new social meaning attributed to legal

¹⁶⁹ Lipari and Andrighetto, *The change in social norms*, p. 232.

¹⁷⁰ Vaccaro and Palazzo, *Values against Violence*, p. 1080.

¹⁷¹ The same reason for norm-compliant action is the shared significance/meaning attributed to norm compliance.

behaviour (to not paying the pizzo and to denouncing extortionist requests) was its contribution to the common good of a Mafia-free society. However, to complete the process of social norm change, the coordination of individuals' actual refusal to abide by Mafia rules and their denunciation of extortionist requests was needed.

We can thus conclude that the process of social norm change was more than the sum of anti-Mafia behaviour of different individuals and still relied on it.¹⁷² It was “more” because the first step towards norm change was not merely a change in individuals' beliefs about what others do, but a change in the goods which are constitutive for individuals' identities and social reality. Still, it relied on the sum of anti-Mafia behaviour, because if the new normative horizon had not been put into practice through the simultaneous action of several citizen, the new rule would have been unstable and would have disappeared. (Had a “hero” acted alone, he would have encountered detrimental retaliatory acts which would have reinforced the old rule for compliance with Mafia-rules and thus endangered the emerging potential for institutional change.¹⁷³)

This leads us to the main conclusion of this thesis, namely that the concept of a person as a strong evaluator can help us depict and understand the process of social norm change better than the concept of a person as a disengaged agent. This is for two reasons, which I will present in the following.

By relying on the notion of a disengaged agent, all the individualistic approaches which I presented in Chapter 4, neutralize what makes a social norm *social*. They reduce the “social nature” of social norms to the *interdependency* of actions for a certain outcome and do not account for a shared meaning which in the case of norm compliance is the (shared) reason for action. The concrete explanations of norm compliance I dealt with in Chapter 4 go as follows: Lewis's agent pays the pizzo, because when others pay, this is also the best thing for him to do. Sugden's agent pays it, because she experienced that it is in her interest to do so and because she fears the resentment of others if she does not. Bicchieri's agent pays because given her beliefs about what others do and about what she believes that they expect her (expect that she ought) to do, she prefers to act in the way which is socially appropriate. As explained in Chapter 5, all three approaches are built on a procedural notion of reason which does not aim at “making sense” of actions.

¹⁷² Vaccaro and Palazzo, *Values against Violence*, p. 1098.

¹⁷³ Ibid., p. 1094.

All in all, we can say that depicting social norms as equilibria captures one important aspect of what happened in Palermo, namely the fact that once established, collective rules tend to be stable. For example, Bicchieri's idea that if each person acts as others expect her to act, concretely, if each entrepreneur refuses to pay the *pizzo* and others expect her to do so, the collective expectation will be self-fulfilling and the rule for legal behaviour will be self-reinforcing, can explain why the new meaning attributed to legal behaviour managed to become a social norm. However, we clearly face explanatory limits when trying to deal with the dynamic nature of social rules, e.g., when trying to explain why people preferred to stop paying the *pizzo* and started denouncing extortionist requests.

The first reason why the notion of a strong evaluator is a better conceptual basis to deal with social rules is that it makes us look for the sources of normativity of a social norm. Concretely, an entrepreneur complies with the (new) social norm for legality because she evaluates her potential actions (the payment of *pizzo* or the refusal to pay it) in front of a background which she shares with others. Given that legality is a "good", she considers the latter action as being the "better" one. Thereby, "understanding" social action means interpreting action as an expression of a shared "good". It means "articulating" actions and thus looking for the sources of the normativity of a social norm and of a self who is a social being in a constitutive sense.

The second reason is that Taylor's notion of a strong evaluator as a "social, embodied being"¹⁷⁴ inseparably ties action to identity. The self-understanding of a person depends on and develops within the historical and cultural community in which he lives, in which, however, he is not embedded. While acting and interacting with others, an agent co-establishes, reinforces, or weakens the shared significance attributed to a "good", e.g., to legality. As we have seen, the emergence or disappearance of social norms in Palermo depended on individuals' actions, feelings, and expectations. However, it was not reducible to the sum of anti-Mafia actions, to a set of disengaged gut feelings or to a construct of beliefs.

¹⁷⁴ Taylor, *Reason*, p. 10.

6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I dealt with a process of social norm change from “pay the pizzo and do not denounce” to “do not pay and denounce extortionist requests” which the grassroots movement *Addiopizzo* managed to induce in Palermo. Building on Chapter 2, I argued that whenever a social norm exists, a shared significance can be attributed to the norm compliance of group members. During a process of norm abandonment, norm compliance progressively ceases to have a shared significance. The sources of normativity of a social norm cease to be sources of the selves. What, instead, characterises a process of norm emergence is the fact that through individuals’ actions the new sources of the self, become the sources of normativity of a social norm which develops into a social property. I concluded that Taylor’s concept of a person as a strong evaluator is a better conceptual basis to deal with social norm change for two reasons. Firstly, because it makes us look for the sources of normativity of a social norm, in our case, for the “good” of legality which started orienting individuals’ actions. (In other words, it gives a ground to the groundless feelings and beliefs of disengaged agents.) Secondly, because it intrinsically ties action to identity. While acting and interacting with others, an agent co-establishes, reinforces, or weakens the shared significance attributed to a “good”, e.g., to legality. The presence of a social norm depends on individuals’ actions, feelings and beliefs; however, it is not reducible to it.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

In this thesis I aimed at showing how our understanding of social norms depends on the way in which we conceptualise a person and how Charles Taylor's concept of a person as a strong evaluator can enlarge our understanding of social norms, in particular of social norm change. To conclude, I will summarize the five chapters of this thesis.

After having argued in Chapter 2 that the distinctive feature of a social norm is its normativity, in Chapter 3, I introduced the payment of extortion rackets to the Mafia (in Italy called "pizzo") as an example of social norm. Also, I dealt with the costs which this harmful practice produces in some territories, e.g., in Sicily. It is important to note that more than dealing with the social norm for pizzo per se, this thesis revolves around the following question: How do economists account for the normativity of a social norm? Concretely, how would they answer the question why entrepreneurs living in Palermo at the beginning of the 2000s complied with a rule for giving money to the Mafia?

In general, economists tend to adopt a functionalist approach to social norms. They conceive social norms as behavioural regularities which emerge and persist because they fulfil a specific function. A first type of such an approach is prevalent in the scientific and in the public discourse around the endemic presence of the Mafia in Southern Italy. It lets structural constraints carry the explanatory burden, for instance by conceiving the Mafia (and its rules) as a private form of regulation, as a side-product of a "soft State"¹⁷⁵. A second type of functionalist approach relies on the idea that entrepreneurs pay the pizzo because engaging in collusive activities is advantageous to them. The endemic practice of pizzo is depicted as the result of a cost-benefit analysis which every individual pursues on his own.

¹⁷⁵ La Spina, *Mafia, legalità debole*, p. 158.

I explained how, in the past, by following this line of reasoning, concretely, by making it costly to not denounce extortionist requests, the State was not successful in disrupting the practice. This is because giving money to the Mafia was considered morally appropriate. The practice of *pizzo* was a change resistant institution which destroyed the level of trust in the State from within.

In Chapter 4, I answered the question why people complied with the social norm for *pizzo* by respectively applying David Lewis's rational choice approach to conventions, Robert Sugden's evolutionary approach to social norms, as well as Cristina Bicchieri's constructivist approach to social norms to my case study. The rational chooser in Lewis's world pays the *pizzo* if, depending on what he expects the other rational agents to do, he comes to the conclusion that by paying he will do the best. Sugden's agent pays it because she experienced that it is in her interest to do so and because she fears the resentment of others if she does not. Bicchieri's agent pays because given her beliefs about what others do and about what she believes that they expect her (expect that she ought) to do, she prefers to act in the way which is socially appropriate. What all three individualistic approaches have in common is that the normativity of a social norm is reduced to instrumentality and that the "social nature" of social norms is depicted merely as the interdependency of actions for outcomes.

In Chapter 5, I dealt with Charles Taylor's anthropology and argued that the approaches presented in Chapter 4 are built on a concept of a person as a "disengaged agent" which presupposes the meaning of actions. Concretely, an agent either steers his actions in the light of an outcome or acts in a way which is consistent with her beliefs about what others do or believe. According to Taylor instead, what makes of a living being a person is the faculty for making qualitative distinctions about himself and about his environment through a language of evaluation which she shares with others. Applying this insight to the notion of social norms, we can say that a social norm is an articulation of a good which is constitutive for individuals' identities and for social reality. In a nutshell, social norms are *social* because norm compliance has a shared meaning which is a shared reason for action.

In Chapter 6, I dealt with a process of social norm change from "pay the *pizzo* and do not denounce" to "do not pay and denounce extortionist requests" which the grassroots movement *Addiopizzo* managed to induce in Palermo. More precisely, I looked at *Addiopizzo's* intervention through the lens of Taylor's anthropology and divided the process of social norm change which started at the beginning of the 2000s in two phases. In a first phase, *Addiopizzo* let legality become a good which oriented people's action. In other words, it managed to change

individuals' identity through what Taylor would call a process of "reasoning in transition". In a second step, it coordinated the actual anti-Mafia behaviour of people whose identity had changed. The individualistic approaches depicted in Chapter 4 capture one important aspect of what happened in Palermo: the fact that once established, collective rules tend to be stable. However, they clearly face explanatory limits when trying to deal with the dynamic nature of social rules, e.g., when trying to explain why people preferred to stop paying the pizzo and started denouncing extortionist requests.

I concluded Chapter 6 by giving two reasons why Taylor's concept of a person as a strong evaluator is a better conceptual basis to deal with social norm change than the notion of a disengaged agent. Firstly, because it makes us look for the sources of normativity of a social norm; in our case, for the good of legality which started orienting individuals' actions instead of short run interest. Secondly, because it intrinsically ties action to identity. While acting and interacting with others, agents co-establish, reinforce, or weaken the shared significance attributed to a "good". While enacting their identity, they shape social reality.

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Appendix A

Contro il pizzo! Cambia i consumi¹⁷⁶ (18/05/2005)

Il Comitato Addiopizzo presenta ufficialmente la campagna “*Contro il pizzo! Cambia i consumi*” e si rivolge a tutti i cittadini/consumatori affinché aderiscano a questa iniziativa di consumo critico anti-pizzo. Quando si effettua anche il più semplice degli acquisti indirettamente si paga il pizzo, perché una parte dei soldi spesi finisce inevitabilmente nelle tasche degli estorsori. Per incidere su questa realtà, siamo assolutamente convinti che la creazione di un gruppo di cittadini che orientino i propri consumi verso quei commercianti che hanno detto “no” al ricatto estorsivo, costituisca uno strumento concreto per sostenerli contro le conseguenze economiche, sociali e personali a cui questo ricatto li espone. Una crescente massa di cittadini consapevoli del valore delle proprie scelte di consumo costituisce a nostro parere, un incentivo efficace e ulteriore alla denuncia e all’ associazionismo antiracket. Non servono iniziative eroiche, ma piccoli gesti quotidiani che rendano eroica l’intera comunità. L’anonimato che ha contraddistinto finora il movimento è servito a ottenere delle adesioni pienamente consapevoli, che costituissero un impegno concreto da parte dei sottoscrittori. Ma, una volta raggiunto questo obiettivo, riteniamo conclusa la clandestinità delle nostre azioni. La pubblicazione del manifesto e dei suoi primi 3000 sottoscrittori è tesa ad esplicitare la nostra volontà di aprire l’iniziativa a tutta la città. Tutti i commercianti interessati possono prendere un primo contatto ai numeri di telefono della cooperativa solidaria. Telefono fisso: 091 333467 / Cellulare: 347 5020457

Against the bribe! Change your consumption (18/05/2005)

The Addiopizzo committee officially presents the campaign “*Against the bribe! Change your consumption*” and asks all citizens/consumers to join a conscious anti-racket consumption initiative. When making even the simplest of your purchases you indirectly pay protection money, because some of the money spent ends up in the pockets of extortionists. We are absolutely convinced that to change this reality, the creation of a group of citizens who direct their consumption towards those shopkeepers who said “no” to extortion-rackets is an essential means to protect them from the economic, social and personal consequences to which this action exposes them. An increasingly growing number of citizens who are aware of the value which their own consumption choices constitutes, is, in our opinion, an effective and additional incentive to [let entrepreneurs] denounce extortionist requests, as well as an incentive to join anti-racket associations. We do not need heroic initiatives, but small, daily gestures which make the entire community heroic. The anonymity that has characterised the movement served the purpose of obtaining fully conscious adhesions with a real commitment on the part of the subscribers. But, once this goal has been reached, we consider the underground of our actions to be over. The publication of the manifesto and its first 3000 signatories is intended to make our willingness to open the initiative to the entire city clear. All interested entrepreneurs can make an initial contact at the phone numbers of the solidarity cooperative. Landline phone: 091 333467 /Mobile: 347 5020457

¹⁷⁶ Addiopizzo, “Contro il pizzo, cambia i consumi” [Own translation].

Appendix B

On the Limits of a Disengaged Agent – Understanding Social Norm Change in Mafia's Territories:

How would economists answer the question why entrepreneurs living in Palermo at the beginning of the 2000s complied with the social norm for paying extortion rackets to the Mafia? In this thesis, I deal with this question. My aim is firstly to show how our understanding of social norms depends on the way in which we conceptualize a person and secondly to argue that Charles Taylor's concept of a person as a strong evaluator is a better conceptual basis to understand a process of social norm change than the notion of a disengaged agent. In general, economists tend to conceive social norms as behavioural regularities which exist because they fulfil a function. A first type of functionalist approach circumvents the question why people comply with social rules and lets structural constraints carry the explanatory burden. A second type of functionalist approach relies on the idea that norm compliance serves individual self-interest. I focus on three individualistic approaches to social norms (respectively put forward by David Lewis, Robert Sugden and Cristina Bicchieri) which all depict social norms as bundles of individual preferences and beliefs. I apply them to my case study of the payment of extortion rackets in Mafia's territories and draw the following conclusion: All three approaches reduce the social nature of social norms to the interdependency of actions for an outcome and do not account for a shared meaning attributed to norm compliance. Put shortly, they rely on a concept of a person who has a "disengaged" reason. Consequently, they face explanatory paradoxes while answering the "why-question" and especially encounter explanatory limits when trying to deal with social norm change. I argue that Charles Taylor's concept of a person as a strong evaluator can help us understand why through the intervention of the anti-Mafia movement *Addiopizzo*, people in Palermo started preferring not to pay money to the Mafia and to denounce extortionist request.

Über die Grenzen eines „Desengagierten Agenten“ – Wie „Verstehen“ wir sozialen Normwandel in Mafia Gebieten?

Warum befolgten Unternehmer, die zu Beginn der 2000er Jahre in Palermo lebten, die soziale Norm für das Zahlen von Erpressungsgeldern an die Mafia? In dieser Arbeit untersuche ich, wie Ökonomen diese Frage beantworten würden. Mein Ziel ist es, erstens, zu zeigen, dass unser Verständnis von sozialen Normen davon abhängt, welches Menschenbild unseren Erklärungen zugrunde liegt und zweitens, dafür zu argumentieren, dass Charles Taylors' Idee des Menschen als „starker Bewerter“ eine bessere konzeptionelle Grundlage bietet, um sozialen Normwandel zu verstehen als die eines „desengagierten Agenten“. Ökonomen neigen meistens dazu, soziale Normen als Verhaltensregelmäßigkeiten zu begreifen, die deswegen existieren, weil sie eine gewisse Funktion erfüllen. Eine erste Art von solchen funktionalistischen Ansätzen umgeht im Wesentlichen die Frage, warum Menschen soziale Normen befolgen und überlässt die Antwort strukturellen Gegebenheiten. Eine zweite Art von funktionalistischem Ansatz beruht auf die Vorstellung, dass das Befolgen von Normen dem Eigeninteresse von Menschen dient. Konkret wende ich drei individualistische Ansätze (von David Lewis, Robert Sugden und Cristina Bicchieri), die jeweils soziale Normen als Bündel von individuellen Präferenzen und Erwartungen darstellen, auf meine Fallstudie an und komme zu folgendem Schluss: Alle drei Ansätze reduzieren das „soziale Wesen“ sozialer Normen auf die Interdependenz von Handlungen für ein Ergebnis und berücksichtigen nicht, dass der Einhaltung von Normen eine gemeinsame Bedeutung zugeschrieben wird. Sie stützen sich auf das Konzept einer Person, die eine „desengagierte“ Vernunft hat. Dadurch stoßen sie auf Erklärungsparadoxa und stoßen insbesondere dann an Grenzen, wenn es darum geht, sich mit sozialem Normwandel zu befassen. Ich argumentiere dafür, dass Charles Taylors' Menschenbild des „starken Bewerter“ uns dabei helfen kann, zu verstehen, warum Menschen in Palermo durch die Intervention der Antimafia-Bewegung *Addiopizzo* dazu übergingen, kein Geld an die Mafia zu zahlen und erpresserische Forderungen an die Polizei zu melden.

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