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"For justice, we must go to Don Corleone" The Mafia boss and his quest for a just society

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ABSTRACT

Not every victim of injustice, real or perceived, became a deviant. Nor did every deviant become a mobster. Interestingly still, nor did every mobster become a Don. It took a lot to emerge as a Mafia Don, the formal and acknowledged head of an organized crime syndicate in America. The Don was perpetually under threat to his own life, but secured the lives of his numerous clients and protected them from the injustice perpetuated by a society ruled by people of power, wealth, and influence. Even though he was perceived by mainstream society and the state as a deviant of the highest order who had resorted to illegitimate means to acquire success in life, those under his benevolence, protection, and debt held him in the highest esteem. To his clients, the Don was a symbol of fairness and any association with him only improved their social prestige because of the fear he evoked in the hearts of the unjust. He was the ultimate refuge of the wronged and the deprived of society. In a society inherently unjust, the Don established justice through means completely unacceptable to it. In the eyes of the state, the Don had no authority to administer justice in the first place. In the eyes of the Don's clients, the murder and mayhem that he indulged in were simply meant to secure for them the justice that mainstream society and the state always deprived them of: prompt, decisive, and appropriate.

Key Words : Justice, Mafia boss, Society, Victim

INTRODUCTION

Amerigo Bonasera, a law-abiding American citizen and undertaker by profession, goes through hell as his daughter is brutalized by her boyfriend and his friend for refusing to have sex with them. Bonasera lodges a police complaint and the two boys, belonging to wealthy and politically influential families, are let off by the local court on flimsy grounds. His faith in the American judicial system thoroughly shaken, Bonasera approaches Don Vito Corleone, head of a powerful New York mafia family, for justice for his daughter on the day of the Don's own daughter's wedding. Don Corleone admonishes Bonasera for not approaching him first and instead going to the Police, but agrees to help the much-harassed undertaker in return for his hand of friendship. Bonasera formally seeks the Don's friendship, calls him "Godfather", and gets "justice" for his daughter.[1]

In this episode, penned by Mario Puzo in his bestselling novel *The Godfather* and immortalized in the opening scene of the Oscar-winning film of the same name made by Francis Ford Coppola in 1972, Don Corleone (played by Marlon Brando in his most memorable role ever) raises important issues about American society. He understands that law-abiding citizens like Amerigo Bonasera approached the Police when they were in trouble, unaware of the bitter experience awaiting them in the hands of both the Police and the judiciary, both of which were sold to political power, influence, and wealth. The Don reminds his client that if people in the neighborhood and beyond knew that he were friends with the Corleone family, then they would have feared him; consequently, Bonasera would not have had to face the ignominy that he did: neither the culprits

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nor the Police nor the judges would ever have dared to harass either him or his daughter. Then again, the Don lays down his own code of justice: he refuses to punish the boys with death. Reason: Bonasera's daughter was still alive. In other words, punishment must be proportionate with the crime.

Amerigo Bonasera knew that Don Corleone administered an alternate system of justice, instant and appropriate. The Don accepted himself in that role, suggesting his scant regard for both the Police and the judiciary (later in the novel, and in the movie, it is revealed that there were many judges in his payrolls as well, as were politicians, journalists, and government officials). Don Vito Corleone knew that he was living in an unjust and unfair society where the rich, the powerful, and the influential have made a mockery not only of the judicial system but also of the idea of justice itself. He was now a man of great wealth and political influence but sympathized with those who had neither. He felt it was his duty to help such helpless people if they sought his help, and along with his help sought his friendship as well.

The "friendship" was important, for that would enable the Don to increase his influence in society. Those he was friends with would seldom, nay never, go to the Police against him, nor testify against him in the courts. On the other hand, the Don's friends, men of little wealth, power, and influence, would also benefit from the friendship they had with the Don: they would escape harassment in the hands of that unjust and unfair society because society and its leaders feared the Don. Vito Corleone, who had no qualms about using violence to establish his own brand of justice, was the protector of all those who sought his friendship and through it his protection. He was their Godfather.

Land of opportunity, not "equal" opportunity:

The American Dream was not only a pursuit of happiness, but a pursuit of excellence. It had inspired countless immigrants who landed on American shores and made full use of the opportunity that America provided and their native lands withheld for a variety of reasons. For such people, America was a country like no other, and that was the reason they migrated; they were not always fleeing persecution or poverty, but were attracted by the opportunity that not only America provided but represented as well.[2] Once in America, they imbibed American values, and depending on their capabilities and their willingness to use those varied capabilities, tasted success in various degrees.

Robert K. Merton, in a path-breaking 1938 article, pointed out that even though there may be shared values in every society, the same opportunity to realize those values may not be available to all individuals because of the difference in their class positions. In other words, despite the fact that institutionalized means for the attainment of shared cultural goals may exist, as a result of a difference in class position determined mostly by economic status, all individuals may not have the same access to the means required to reach those goals.[3] That made America a land of opportunity, but not of equal opportunity.

Worse, Merton says that American culture attached great importance to success, but not equal importance to the use of accepted and institutionalized ways of achieving success, like academic qualifications, merit, honest hard work, initiative, and ambition. American society thus was doubly guilty: neither did it provide everyone equal access to the same opportunities for achieving material success, nor did it attach any importance to the use of institutionalized means for that purpose. This leaves enough room for Americans to resort to illegal and generally unaccepted means—like crime—to achieve material success for themselves.

Each American pursued and acquired his share of the American Dream by any means available to him, even if those means were not legal in the eyes of society and the state. This is what Merton called a situation of "anomie", where generally accepted "rules of the game" ceased to operate; each individual was free to choose his own means—even deviant means—to achieve success. It is as if Merton was finding fault with the American Dream itself for failing to emphasize on the need to use legal and institutionalized ways *only* to achieve professional and material success and for harping *solely* on the need to succeed in life.

That American society provided equal opportunity to all Americans to be their best selves thus emerges as a myth. All Americans were united on the need to succeed, but legitimate means for success were not open to all of them. If an American used deviant means to achieve material success in life, he might succeed in his goal of becoming wealthy, but what he became in life was far from conventional society's idea of success. In fact, the pressure to deviate from legitimate means to achieve success was greater on the American lower classes simply because they had little or no opportunity

to access those means.[4] Despite the fact that American society never taught individuals the need to achieve success through the use of conventional means *only*, once a deviant became "successful" using unacceptable means, society rejected not only the means he used but also the "success" he achieved. The "success" of the deviant had only one thing common with "success" in conventional society: the fact of becoming wealthy. This was the great and tragic irony of American society, whether in Chicago, New York, or Boston.

But then, American society failed to display adequate courage when it rejected the deviant's methods and results: since "deviant means" involved the use of violence, "law-abiding" Americans like Bonasera were afraid of such deviants and tried to keep clear of them. "Good" and "decent" men kept gangsters at arm's length, not only because they did not approve of the latter's use of violence, but because they were afraid of gangsters for the same reason. Violence did evoke fear in the heart of the good man, even if he tried to hide it behind the garb of disapproval. Interestingly, the Don was aware of how society looked at him: he knew that society repudiated his methods and his profession but at the same time society and its leaders were afraid of him too.

Deprivation in an unjust society:

Scholars, especially those belonging to the Left, agree unanimously that injustice, derivation, and inequality remained endemic in American society. In fact, many of them still loathe the liberal welfare state's slow pace in bringing change.[5] There is no doubt that American society is perceived by many as unfair and unjust, a far cry from John Rawls' idea of justice as fairness, existing in a society built through a consensus of rational and equal individuals.[6] But at a personal level, injustice was the feeling of being deprived—by society, other individuals, or the state—of something that one perceived he deserved. Being deprived of the legitimate and accepted means of success did not mean that an individual would abandon his success goals. No American would want success to elude him. Not only did he value success and regard it as something he deserved, he actually deserved the legitimate means of achieving success as well, something that he was deprived of. That developed in him an acute sense of injustice.

A deprived American thus resolved to achieve success by whatever means were available to him. Since society had deprived him of legitimate means of achieving success, he now rejected both those means and the society that laid them down. To him, society was absolutely unjust and accordingly, it deserved to be repudiated and along with it the written codes (laws) it had framed and the institutions it had devised for its orderly functioning (government).

If he was an outcast in the eyes of society, society to him was an association of unjust individuals led by men of wealth, influence, and power who deprived those at the bottom of the rung of conventional means of becoming successful. Accordingly, the Don gave no credit to society for his success; he was a self-made man who, despite initial poverty and deprivation, had done well in life (even though he was under the perpetual threat of getting killed). Ironically, like those who rejected him and his methods, he had wealth, power, and influence.

To the Don, society was unequal and unjust. He rejected society and its norms, but craved to be recognized by society. At the same time, he knew that society, whether out of fear or out of its tendency to respect power, influence, and wealth, would recognize him. The Don held no official position in conventional society, but wielded influence over those who did. He used both the threat of violence and actual violence to achieve his ends, and very successfully managed to elude being brought to "justice" that society administered.

Injustice and the use of violence:

One of the reasons the Don found society unjust was that it did not provide the opportunity to become rich equally to everyone. Since America was not a land of equal opportunity, it was not expected to give everyone a chance to become rich. But then, that did not mean that everyone did not have the right to make money. In fact, poorer a person was, more did he want to become wealthy. Just as everyone had aspirations in life, so did the poor and the neglected, the uninfluential and the marginalized.

American society considered becoming rich a worthwhile pursuit, but since it did not provide everyone equally with the legitimate means of doing so, it did not have the right to restrain someone who resorted to "illegitimate means". In the Don's eyes, anything that fed hungry mouths was acceptable—even if society disapproved of it—but the one resorting to illegitimate means should try, as far as practicable, to earn his livelihood without harming anyone else. If "illegitimate means" involved breaking the law, so be it. If it involved

murder, that was to be the last resort. Only those were to be physically eliminated that were real obstacles to the achievement of success by the poor and the neglected: people who had power, influence, and wealth and were guilty of grossly misusing them. Killing them would actually be a service rendered to society, so that such people cannot act as obstacles to the poor man's success anymore.

According to the Don, men of power, influence, and wealth were bent on maintaining themselves in positions of authority so that they could perpetuate their reign of injustice. Not that every rich or powerful man was unjust, but those that were unjust required to die. The poor man took up arms only under duress, only when it became a matter of survival for him. That made the use of violence necessary under certain exceptional circumstances, and legitimate also. Injustice cannot be abolished from society if unjust men were allowed to live and continue with their nefarious activities. In the Don's eyes, such unjust men themselves lacked legitimacy; so it was perfectly legitimate to kill them and put an end to their unjust rule. American society's chronic inability to provide equal opportunity to all its citizens is what spurred alienated individuals to use violence. And only when violence was used against unjust individuals was justice finally established. Accordingly, the Don and his criminal gang were willing to use violence anytime, anywhere not only to intimidate sections of society he perceived as unjust, but to exert influence over them by instilling fear in their hearts.[7]

But then, all poor and socially alienated individuals were not in a position to use violence to bring about visible improvement in their condition. Honestly, most individuals failed to gather the courage necessary to murder other individuals, howsoever cruel their perpetrators might be. This is where the Don stepped in. On behalf of wronged individuals, the Don engaged in physical violence, even committed murder if the need arose. The Don, of course, did not do the dirty work. He had an organization to carry out his writ: an organization he had built up over time. It was this organization, populated by members of the Don's family and absolutely reliable individuals sworn to silence and secrecy that used violence on the Don's orders. The Don's organization not only meted out instant and appropriate justice, but acted as a shield to protect helpless individuals.

Distributive and retributive justice:

As the Don saw it, society was unjust to him and to many like him who were poor in the beginning. It was because of society's injustice that the poor took to crime, much as they would not like to. More importantly, it was because of this injustice that society had done him and to his ilk that society had lost all authority over him. Accordingly, society had forfeited every right (and every authority) to judge him and his use of "unacceptable" means of achieving success. Neither could justice be expected from an association of unjust individuals (that society was), nor could society be allowed to bring him to "justice". The Don repudiated both society's idea of justice and its right (and authority) to judge him by its own standards.

The Don, however, did not stop there. He promulgated and administered his own brand of justice. This justice was both instant and commensurate with the crime it sought to punish. Society was unjust; the Don was not. Ordinary members of society were at the mercy of those with power, influence, and money. That added another significant dimension to society's injustice: it failed to protect its ordinary members from the wrath of the wealthy, the powerful, and the influential. Since society was unjust to the poor and the powerless, the Don saw it his duty to do them justice. The Don's brand of justice was meant for those at the receiving end of conventional society which, in the name of "justice", habitually did injustice to them. It was also meant to bring to justice those who ran the unjust system that went by the name of society and state.

The Don, because of his own humble beginnings, identified with the poor, the powerless, and the deprived. Accordingly, the justice he dispensed on their behalf was both distributive and retributive. It was **distributive**, not only because he wanted to reward people according to their merit, but go about allocating society's scant resources with a sense of fairness through his actions[8], something that society, which was inherently unfair, would not do. It was also **retributive**, because he wanted to punish the unjust, in contrast to society which would not punish them. More importantly, not only would he mete out punishment without any delay, the punishment handed down would certainly be proportionate to the crime committed.[9] The Don ran his alternate system of justice for the benefit of the victims of the rich, the powerful, and the influential. It did not matter to him that society and the state considered both his activities and his alternate system of justice illegal and devoid of legitimacy.

For the Don, his system of justice was absolutely

legitimate because it brought justice, revenge, and succor to hundreds of victims of social injustice, oppression, and cruelty. What was more, it was deemed legitimate by those who benefited from it. On the contrary, it was conventional society's system of justice that lacked legitimacy because it failed to do justice to the poor, the powerless, and the deprived. Society's justice was fair neither in its approach nor its actions. Worse, it failed to punish the oppressors and the exploiters and accordingly, failed to protect the oppressed and the exploited. The Don's brand and system of justice was a bold attempt to fill this gap. It is pertinent to mention here that the Don operated outside the "system", but he worked for the benefit of others. This was in contrast to the vast army of politicians, bureaucrats, policemen, and rich businessmen who ran society: thoughoperating within the "system", they worked for their own benefit.

Protection and revenge:

The Don did not only establish justice for the benefit of his followers, but also protected his followers from further injustice. This required a lot of work on the part of the Don: intelligence gathering, bribes, threats of violence, and the actual use of violence (even murder). Further injustice could be perpetrated by not only wealthy, influential, and powerful people, but also by the government and other gangsters. The Don had to be perpetually careful and cautious: not only was it important to protect his followers from the scourge of society, he had to protect himself and his family from getting killed as well. There was always a threat to the Don's life: he could be assassinated anytime anywhere. His personal protection was so important that to ensure his own security he was forced to engage in violence on an almost daily basis, identifying threats to his life, and killing people perceived dangerous by his own crime syndicate. In that syndicate, the Don's word was law: no member of the syndicate would dare defy his wishes or his orders. This practice of providing protection to the lives of both the Don (including his family) and his clients is an old one, a tradition that first emerged on the other side of the Atlantic. Providing protection was very much Sicilian.[10]

The Don's syndicate was run by members of his own family and by people who had become close to him over the years, those who were absolutely committed to him and would be willing to give up their lives for him if the need arose. Such people, during their lifetime, were bound by the law of silence (*omerta*) and would never reveal secrets about the Don to the authorities; they would prefer to lay down their lives for the Don than make such confessions to the Police as would endanger the life of the Don himself.[11] Not that all the Don's men had proved absolutely trustworthy: many had cracked under Police torture; others had gone over to other crime syndicates. Arrangements had to be made for such exigencies: anyone guilty of breaking the infallible law of silence had to be taken out immediately.

The Don believed that an individual should be responsible for his own protection. In other words, self-preservation was the responsibility of the individual and the individual alone. Anyone who called the Police or other individuals for his own protection was a coward.[12] Till the time it was possible for the Don to take up arms for his own protection, he did so. But once the Don became the head of an empire—a prominent crime syndicate—it was dangerous for him to venture out in the open. It was not possible for him to look after himself anymore: he now entrusted his security to others who, as part of his syndicate, would protect his life whatever it took to do that.

The Don thus sacrificed a normal life for the sake of others. He could not walk the streets freely, nor visit the movies with his family. Not that he was afraid of anyone, but the threat to his life hung on his head at all times. He had to live for others; many depended on him for their protection and survival. His crime syndicate fed many mouths, educated many kids, married off many daughters. He could not do anything irresponsible that would cost him his life and jeopardize the future of so many families.

Society feared him, and those that associated with him benefited from that fear. Many of his loyalists got killed at various times, and he responded swiftly to those killings. No one could get away with murdering a loyalist of the Don; the Don would avenge it within days (sometimes within hours). Revenge was necessary to send a clear message to society. No one (including the authorities) could take the Don for granted nor could anyone get away threatening him and his adherents. In case an adherent fell victim to the bullets of the Police or other gangsters, the Don would retaliate swiftly and unambiguously. If the Don failed to retaliate, society would not fear him anymore. So he would plan and take revenge on those who had tormented his loyalists. In this, the Don was merciless: he did not hesitate to take out politicians, bureaucrats, policemen, and other gangsters

if they were found guilty of harming his loyalists in any way.

Also, revenge was necessary to preserve the Don's reputation and the fear that he evoked in the hearts of those who were opposed to him and his activities. It was also necessary to sustain the faith that his loyalists had in him: faith that he was their ultimate protector, in contrast to conventional society that was the tormentor. Accordingly, among the Don's loyalists were found men who were well established in conventional society themselves, ranging from policemen and politicians and judges to doctors and businessmen and film artistes.

But one thing was for sure: whosoever was an adherent of the Don had been at the receiving end of society's injustice at some point of time or the other. They were part of the Don's extended empire and helped the Don in myriad ways from time to time. But the Don was responsible for their protection and their wellbeing at all times and could not afford to let them down in any manner. In other words, the Don would do nothing that would shake the faith of his loyalists in him and his capability to protect them and allow them to operate without fear or hindrance in conventional society. If anything came between them and their success, then the Don would make it disappear. The Don was infallible: in the eyes of his loyalists, the Don could do no wrong, nor could he make any mistake.

The Don and mainstream society:

In the Don's eyes, mainstream society was beyond redemption. It was ruled by individuals who had always preserved themselves in power through corrupt means and by depriving the poor of the opportunities of success. The only language that such a society understood was the language of fear and the Don would give them just that. Society was also dishonest and honesty was never recognized by anyone; in fact, honest hard work was seldom rewarded and honest individuals always tended to suffer at the hands of the corrupt. Accordingly, the Don had devised two ways of dealing with such corrupt individuals, deemed most appropriate by him and his loyalists: either killing them or neutralizing them by making them join his payrolls.

The Don knew that his activities were illegal, howsoever legitimate they might be in the eyes of his loyalists, and that he could continue with his activities solely by making the authorities look the other way. If someone among the powerful and the influential had become too intrusive or obstructive, there was no other way but to physically eliminate him. But then, the Don had to be doubly cautious if he had to take out a powerful or influential person: society (including the authorities) should know that it was the Don who was behind the murder of that person but should have no solid evidence to prove it in any court of law. The Don would ensure that he could never be convicted by any court nor found guilty of any offense or crime by any committee appointed by the federal legislature. Accordingly, the rate of conviction of Mafia bosses was very low.

But the Don also knew that he was leading a dangerous life and would not like all his children to follow him in his profession. In fact, his children lived easy lives, as different from the life of struggle that the Don himself had led when young. This was the primary reason why the Don's children at most times failed to comprehend fully their father's cause. They knew their father was different from the other "normal" fathers in mainstream society and why their father was different. But they themselves had never been at the receiving end of society, leading protected and privileged lives right from birth.

As fate would have it, the Don failed to give his own children a normal childhood out of fear for their lives. As the Don grew in power, the more he and his family became vulnerable to outside threats. Such an environment within the Don's household was thus not conducive for raising normal children. Born and raised in the midst of crime, the Don's kids, more often than not, aspired to be criminals themselves. This led to a conflict of interest between the Don and his kids in spite of the fact that the Don's wisdom could not be challenged either by his adherents or his family members. Worse, it led to undesirable consequences for the Don: his kids either joined the crime world against his wish or abandoned him forever when they grew up and took to mainstream professions, refusing to acknowledge him as father anymore.

But then the Don wanted his children to join mainstream professions and earn the recognition from society that had eluded him. The Don knew that people in society feared him but since his activities were not legitimate, he could not present himself as a role model to that society. Seldom would anyone want his son to be like the Don; the Don himself would not want his sons to follow in his footsteps either. The Don was respected, his activities were not. More importantly, the threat to the life of his children was always there. The only way

to escape a life perpetually shadowed by threats of assassination was to join a respectable legitimate profession. But more often than not, the Don's wish remained a chimera. He had no choice but to brace himself to countenance the violent deaths of some of his children, if not all.

The Don had people from a variety of professions on his payroll: politicians (including lawmakers), policemen, judges, bureaucrats, realtors, journalists, sportsmen, film artistes. These people were expected to stand by the Don when the need arose and bail him out of trouble without any fingers pointed at him. They were also expected to participate in an elaborate exercise of creating a favorable image of the Don in society and thwart any attempt to malign that image. The Don is a do-gooder, but there was need to reinforce that image in the minds of all and sundry, far and near, so that people remembered only the good he did for society and forgot the nefarious activities he and his syndicate were generally involved in. In fact, over a period of time, the Don himself floated a number of legitimate businesses of his own to gain respect in society.

Now that the Don led a sizable empire, both fear and respect were important to him. Fear was the first emotion that he had evoked in the hearts of his tormentors and helped establish himself in society. But a section of society still repudiated him and found his activities repugnant. It was necessary to gain respect in their eyes, not because the Don craved respect but "respectable" businesses would help stall all attempts by recalcitrant authorities to nail him and make the intelligentsia ignore his violent past. Recognition by opinion-makers, in addition to the image-building exercise his paid cohorts engaged in, would go a long way in adding to his already formidable reputation. He had both wealth and power. Some in society commanded respect, others were simply feared. The Don had both: he evoked fear in the hearts of those that tried to achieve success by exploiting and cheating others; he was loved and respected by his admirers many of whom had achieved material success in their lives courtesy the Don. The fact that the Don was now a respectable individual did not mean he had turned a blind eye to all instances of exploitation of the poor and the vulnerable by people of power, wealth, and influence. Far from it. Not only did the Don consider himself a social vigilante, he prided himself as a representative of the social underclass and not of the rich and powerful and influential.

Conclusion:

Economic equality was a natural outcome of a society that guaranteed equal opportunity to its members. But then modern liberal societies, for a variety of reasons, did not offer equal opportunity to everyone. However, everyone was expected to succeed in his or her life by choosing a suitable profession. The fact that society did not guarantee to its members equal opportunity to achieve success put in danger the futures of many. All would like to succeed, but since they did not have equal access to the means to achieve success, there is no doubt that success eluded them. Such a society was then guilty of injustice twice over: not only did it withhold the legitimate means of achieving success from many, it was responsible for pushing them into a life of poverty, misery, and wretchedness.

If injustice was not only a feeling but the fact of being deprived of what one deserved in life—and that included not only success but the legitimate means of achieving it—then society and society alone was guilty of perpetrating that injustice. An unjust society had no right to call certain people "deviants" if they resorted to "illegitimate" means of achieving success. These deviants fully accepted society's success goals. But they differed from mainstream society on two counts: they did not agree with society on the definition of "success"; they used means to achieve success that society did not approve of. Society not only repudiated the means they used to achieve "success", but found the professions they took up—their definition of "success"—absolutely abhorrent and reprehensible. This was another instance of society's injustice: not only had it alienated many individuals by denying them the legitimate means of achieving success, but once they were successful society refused to accept them and own them up. Society's injustice had no end.

The Don was a deviant in conventional terms, but he wanted to rectify society's injustice. He would punish the exploiters, and help the poor and the needy to be self-reliant. He would provide them with the means to achieve success in life, and protect them from being exploited by the rich, the powerful, and the influential. In this effort, the Don did not resort to ideology nor did he depend on collective action. To the Don, poverty and injustice were real. They could be removed through individual action that grew from self-confidence and a desire to succeed. The Don did not believe in ideological affinity— he was not learned enough to know about ideologies, even if he did he couldn't care less—but in

reciprocal help that individuals did to each other. What was important was personal relationships between individuals and not their beliefs and backgrounds. Accordingly, the Don extended his hand of friendship to all but especially to the poor and alienated.

The Don realized, better than anyone else, that every individual did not have the means to protect himself from the exploitation and persecution of other individuals. The Don believed that it was incumbent on him to protect individuals harassed by other individuals, but only when they asked him for such help. And in return for that help, the Don would ask for his friendship and allegiance. Once someone gave his allegiance to the Don, the Don would then be responsible for his future well-being and protection. Since those who sought the Don's help were many, the Don ended up forming an army of loyalists. Not only would they give up their lives for the Don if the need arose, the Don was their ultimate protector and provider.

Accordingly, the Don provided his loyalists with an alternative government, led by one individual and sustained by complete loyalty toward him and complete faith in his capabilities. More importantly, he presided over an alternate system of justice: not only was it fair and punished the unjust, it was appropriate and instant. Every act of cruelty and injustice was avenged. It took into account the fact that revenge and not forgiveness was a basic human tendency. So the Don's brand of justice consisted in taking revenge on the unjust; if an act of injustice went unaddressed and unavenged, it would be injustice in itself. Seen in this light, the Don's justice was humane, even if it involved murder and mayhem. The Don knew society would remain unjust as long as it existed, but it was important to do one's bit by not only putting an end to such injustice but by trying to be fair and just in life. The Don did this through his system of justice, and in his court he was both prosecutor and judge. He was also the executor. As he saw it, he did all this on behalf of a big section of society to which society denied justice by making it the underclass but compounded that injustice by looking the other way when the rich, the powerful, and the influential unleashed their acts of injustice on it. The Don had no choice but to intervene on behalf of the underclass—to which he belonged and with which he continued to identify even after achieving success—because people of that class wanted him to do justice for them and bring the exploiters to justice. The reason he was entrusted with this work by the underclass was simple: they saw him as their Godfather.

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