

Editorial: On the Edges of Organised Crime

Editorial

On the Edges of Organised Crime

Vittorio Martone* and Antonio Vesco**

This special issue is the result of a collaboration that began in 2014, stemming from a shared reflection among academics interested in Italian Mafias from different perspectives, including sociology, anthropology and political science. Thanks to a series of official meetings (in Ottawa, Paris and Naples), we progressively defined our theoretical frameworks and developed the research questions through which to look at our subject matter. As an introduction to this special issue of EROC, it may be helpful to recall the main theoretical and methodological issues that emerged during our meetings.

*Vittorio Martone is research fellow in the Department of Social Sciences, University of Naples Federico II, Italy. Among his recent publications, the book *Le mafie di mezzo. Mercati e reti criminali a Roma e nel Lazio* (Donzelli 2017). Contact: vittorio.martone@unina.it

** Antonio Vesco is a postdoctoral researcher in the Department of Cultures, Politics and Society at the University of Turin. He completed his PhD thesis in Anthropology (University of Siena) and Political Sciences (University of Paris 1 Sorbonne). He is a member of the Scientific Committee of LARCO (Laboratorio di Analisi e Ricerca sulla Criminalità Organizzata, University of Turin). Contact: antonio.vesco@unito.it

The European Review of Organised Crime 4(1), 2017, pp. 1-8.

ISSN: 2312-1653

© ECPR Standing Group of Organised Crime.

For permissions please email: european.review.oc@gmail.com

In 2014 we presented a session entitled *Mafias italiennes, capitalisme et mobilité internationale. Retour sur une perspective socio-anthropologique* at the Conference *Mobilité(s)* of the Acsalf

(*Association canadienne des sociologues et anthropologues de langue française*^[i]). On this occasion, we concentrated first and foremost on the implications of the mobility of Italian Mafias, looking at their transformations in the global economy. We analysed various case studies (from Northern Italy, Belgium, Germany, Canada, etc.) to understand the different relationships between Mafias and enterprises. We discussed the construction of “extensive networks” within trade, economic and financial fluxes. We also questioned the changes in the relationships between Mafias and their local contexts, whether original or new territories. Although they operate globally, we refer to mafias as being “locally rooted”, as they do not lose their symbolic value or identity in their territory of origin, but we also look at how they build their own “recognisability” in their new territories and businesses.

In May 2015 we organised a second seminar on *Activités entrepreneuriales, pratiques mafieuses et élites sociales à l’heure du capitalisme mondialisé* at the *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales* (EHESS), coordinated by Jean-Louis Briquet (Université Paris I Sorbonne)^[ii]. During this workshop, we delved further into the issues previously discussed, trying to tackle two main questions: (1) a methodological dilemma, reflecting upon the nature of the contribution to be made by ethnographic research in trying to analyse Mafias, (2) theoretical frameworks, mapping out the paths of social and territorial mobility of “Mafia entrepreneurs”. We therefore presented empirical case studies that reconstructed the biographical and entrepreneurial paths of some *Mafiosi* or crime families in Italy, Belgium and Mexico, looking at the role of violent “mafia practices” as a mechanism for capital accumulation and social mobility.

The increasingly predatory entrepreneurial practices characterized by the use of violence and a wide network of relationships as tools for accumulating wealth in the economic market, were also the subject of our third and last meeting, held in Naples in December 2015. We organised a session on *Entrepreneurial activities, predatory practices and legal/illegal economies. A socio-anthropological perspective* as part of the First General Conference of the ECPR-Standing Group on Organised Crime^[iii]. The research questions that guided the studies presented in Naples focused on the relationship between the role of Mafia entrepreneurs and the proliferation of predatory and mafia-type practices within legal and illegal economies. In particular, we focused on—using a socio-anthropological and ethnographic perspective—the relationship between entrepreneurial careers, economic activities and predatory practices for the accumulation of capital in several sectors of the economic market.

During our debates, we identified a fundamental theoretical and methodological set of issues referred to as the “edges of organised crime”. Observing the Mafia as a phenomenon which is based on markets, but which is always connected to territories and social networks, can help us redraw the boundaries of what Mafias are, considering them through four different dimensions: legal, geographic, socio-cultural and finally methodological.

The first *edge* refers to the legal definition of organised crime. A significant part of the academic literature, especially studies on Italian Mafias, deals with this phenomenon as being “external” to

society, a pathogen that has the primary purpose of plundering collective wealth. This is an approach influenced by an exclusive—and often naïve—use of judicial sources. This approach is limited to describing the “crimes” identified by the judiciary, implicitly admitting an ethical-legal prejudice. It is no coincidence that this reading generally accompanies a description of Mafias as structured and hierarchical organizations, closed and hyper-rational bureaucracies, who plan strategies that prey on a “healthy” society and economy. The description offered by the judiciary is effective in fighting crime, but neglects much of the complexity of the phenomenon, which instead relies on social, economic and political conditions in the contexts in which the Mafia acts. Especially when narrowing the scope to analysing Mafia entrepreneurship, the judiciary sources help us consider criminal strategies (violence, intimidation, how some illicit trafficking operates), but underestimate the overall functioning of local economies. However, as will be seen in the essays of this special issue, the success and social mobility of violent entrepreneurs are facilitated by contextual conditions. Violent entrepreneurs are successful where illegality in economic relationships is widespread, as is the diffused violation of legal norms and numerous instances of informal and irregular economies. Corruption in public administration also plays a key role. Faced with these “de-regulated” contexts it is sometimes complicated even to distinguish the perimeter of Mafia organisations, or rather the *boundaries* between what is inside or outside of the modern concept of Mafia.

This grey area is even harder to make sense of when Mafias reinvest illegally accumulated capital into legal markets. In these instances, they often abandon their most explicitly criminal and violent traits, making it even harder to distinguish between Mafia practices, informal economies, and economic crime. It is a camouflage that reaches its highest levels in the financialization processes of the so-called “global Mafia”, where the legal framework deficit is not only related to the norms and limits of investigative and counteractive instruments, but also to a general underestimation of “power crime”, committed by actors such as corporations, financial institutions and other similarly powerful organisations (Ruggiero 2015). This problem is heightened by differences in national laws and the variability of the crime-fighting strategies adopted in different countries, where judicial definitions may also depend on legal cultures and contingent political and cultural factors.

The case of the “new mafia” in Rome analysed in the article by Vittorio Martone, for example, shows how very different judicial interpretations may arise when facing similar mafia phenomena, even within the same national legislation. Instead, Mary Alice Young shows how international narcotics drug repression strategies can influence the definition of wildlife crime, amplifying the scope of this alleged organised crime while at the same time ignoring the complexity of a phenomenon that is not necessarily organised and has very unstable borders.

This aspect leads us to the second of the four *edges* described above, related to the geographical dimension. Academic texts in Italian—which can take credit for having laid the foundations for the analysis of Mafias in the rest of the world^[iv]—have primarily demonstrated the origins and local roots of the Mafias, their organisational and entrepreneurial traits linked to their territory, their political connections and decentralised institutions. More recently, greater attention has been given

to international mafia networks and the territorial expansion of the clans, bringing to light: on the one hand, their capacity to initiate (and at times dominate) international drug networks, smuggling, counterfeit and distribution; and on the other, their attempts to infiltrate and/or take roots in Italian regions or other countries not historically conditioned by the phenomenon. Using this framework, we can consider Mafia organisations both as an international and a local phenomenon: they need social and political legitimisation in a given territory, but running parallel they seek to expand their affairs further. In other words, it emerges that organised crime, armed with pre-consolidated, non-local networks, are able to take advantage of the increased internationalisation and globalisation of trade, reinforcing long-established networks. This territorial mobility raises a number of questions regarding the internal organisation of the Mafia. Entrepreneurial activity is what characterizes the Mafia's mobility and expansion, which is often accompanied by a decrease in the use of violence, creating greater sophistication and flexibility in its organisational forms.

This is why a further key to framing the criminal phenomena investigated in this special issue consists in referring to the market as an area of action for organised crime groups. It is through their inclusion in the “long networks” of the market economy that criminal groups (and in particular Italian Mafia clans) take part in international trade, relocating their economic activities. In addition to constituting an economic resource available to Mafia groups, the new territories of expansion have become new places with territorial roots, or spaces in which groups have experimented with new forms of symbolic membership and identity. Although they are involved in a globalised economic scenario, criminal groups have intertwined relationships with specific business contexts in the different territories in which they operate. The presence of the Mafia contributes to the economic and social regulation of these *new* territories, encouraging the development of new criminal devices for governing the local economy. In this scenario, one of the main strategies adopted by organised crime groups is money laundering from illicit trafficking and reinvesting into legal markets by promoting collusion and complicity with those belonging to the so-called grey area (entrepreneurs, public officials, politicians, professionals) (Sciarrone 2011 and 2014). They constitute real networks of dominant elites—that Santino (2006) defined as “mafia bourgeoisie”—within which criminal powers intertwine internationally with political and economic figures in different territories (see Briquet and Favarel-Garrigues 2008). We thus witness the replication of typical mechanisms of Mafia activity even in geographical areas far removed from those in which the organised crime groups were originally rooted. In many cases, such regulation mechanisms do not provide explicit use of violence or intimidation, but are structured through widespread cooperation between criminal, economic and political actors, where it becomes very difficult to distinguish the boundaries between what is and what is not Mafia.

While projected into a global-scale economic-criminal imagery, the activities of the groups presented in this Special Issue take place in confined territories, or in particular social contexts strongly influenced by a business ethics and local political cultures. This is clear from the essay by Antonio Vesco and Gianni Belloni, dedicated to the encounter between criminal groups coming from the Campania region and the entrepreneurial fabric of Northeast Italy during the economic crisis. In both similar cases of expanding criminal groups in new territories and with the emergence

of new criminal groups in non-traditional territories, the market is undoubtedly the core crossover between Mafia groups and the business world.

However, the main focus adopted in this Special Issue is to look at the local structure of the market economy, therefore the encounter between organised crime groups and local economics. This encounter is strongly differentiated from one area to another; in describing Mafia practices and the activities of organised crime groups, the discussions presented here describe the practices and dynamics of the local economy and the “real governance” (Olivier de Sardan 2008) of the territories investigated. In this context, mafia-type economic practices are at the heart of the market economy, or within systems that allow effective regulation of the market economy in different territories.

Bearing in mind the backdrop of the international economy, the articles presented here proposes a socio-cultural analysis of criminal dynamics that appear to be strongly localised. The criminal identities of the groups investigated are themselves built locally and through their interaction with the territorial context in which they operate. Taking this into consideration, the structure of the legal horizon that we referred to in the opening of this editorial also plays a significant role. The legal definitions and classifications of these groups—categorized judicially as a “Mafiosi clans” (in Italian cases) or, more generally, as organised crime groups – have a major impact on their public perception in local contexts but also on the personal reputations of those belonging to these groups. Mafias are anchored to circular identities which are constructed in a constant interplay between their perception and public representation on the one hand, and their daily activities on the other (see Lupo 2008). More specifically, the criminal phenomena analysed through these studies are defined at the juncture between their academic interpretation, public representation, and the legal definitions provided by the judiciary on occasion (Mafia, corruption, organized crime, etc.).

The academic approach described thus far naturally has substantial implications on the authors’ methodological choices and all are concerned with the problematic use of the sources at their disposal. As previously mentioned, those who search for secret phenomena such as organised crime, cannot do without judicial sources and documents produced by law enforcement agencies. These secondary sources are provided with other goals, far removed from those of researchers. Sources on which, as noted, scholars must make “a specific reflection: they are filtered out of the eye and the inquirers’ needs, questions and logics which are different from ours” (Gribaudo 2009, p. 23). The rationale and objectives of judicial analysis are in fact different from those of the social sciences: they essentially investigate two very different truths (Sciarrone 2011, p. XXXIII). The scholars who have critically focused on these aspects have analysed criminal phenomena by avoiding the risk of reflecting on the position and perception of law enforcement agencies, which would bring them “to analyse the official response to crime rather than the crime itself” (Ruggiero 1996, p. 48).

This is a risk from which the work of this EROC Special Issue is not exempt. This is not just a problem relating to the different goals of scholars and judges. The judicial documentation found by

the various authors was produced by subjects who have a precise idea of the criminal reality in their jurisdiction. Of course, we are not talking about the specific knowledge accumulated by investigative apparatus in certain areas, but of the pre-understanding of criminal reality by magistrates and investigators. An example of this can be found in the case of Italy, where the anti-Mafia judiciary plays a very important public role, tending to re-propose, in its analyses, explanations based on a legal-institutional concept of the Mafia, still representing it as a subject able to pursue and maintain an order parallel to that of the State[v].

In addition to questioning the value of judicial documents, a socio-anthropological approach to organised crime allows us to go beyond these sources. The information provided by law enforcement agencies may allow for the investigation of criminal groups, but even with the precautionary measures set out above it would not be sufficient to grasp the economic and political dimension in which these groups operate. Judicial sources have therefore been integrated with interviews with privileged witnesses and in-depth investigations based on direct observation of the contexts analysed. The hybridisation of the sources on which all the articles are based is the result of a careful look at the local dimension and the study of “context factors” (Sciarrone 2011), or rather the specifics of the political, social and economic conditions of the zones where the criminal activity has been studied.

It is true, in fact, that generally it is not possible to directly study the criminal activities carried out by a criminal group, but it is also true that these activities were carried out in directly observable domains and situations. It was thus possible to interview those involved in business activities linked to members of criminal organisations: entrepreneurs, workers, trade unionists, politicians (or, like in Alessandro Mazzola’s work, neo-melodic musicians and producers of the Neapolitan musical scene who met the Camorra clan). However, the authors interviewed several witnesses who, from their privileged observatory, have gained considerable knowledge of criminal activities in their own territory (local journalists, magistrates, members of law enforcement agencies, etc.). Ultimately, it has become a priority to use research and analysis methods focused on concrete cases and on localised surveys.

The first article in this Special issue is by Vittorio Martone, who explores the relationship between Mafia enterprises and social cooperatives in the judiciary inquiry *Mondo di mezzo*, which uncovered a native Mafia organisation in Rome, named *Mafia Capitale*. By illustrating the functionality of the case study, its organisational profiles and its *grey areas*, the article demonstrates the role of Mafia regulation in the management of migrant reception centres.

Antonio Vesco and Gianni Belloni present an analysis of the meeting between some criminal groups from Campania and the entrepreneurial fabric of Northeast Italy in a historical phase characterised by a long economic crisis that has encouraged and increased the spread of illegal practices in this territory. These groups offered lending and illegal services to hundreds of companies located in different areas of the region, with the active collaboration of local entrepreneurs, professionals and business consultants.

Mary Alice Young's essay is the only one where no criminal group of Italian origins appear, but in this case the author focuses on questions related to the definition and recognition of the criminal phenomena at hand. Dedicated to rhinoceros horn traffic in Vietnam, this contribution also places particular emphasis on the local level of criminal practices and the socio-economic context in which they take shape. The purpose of the author is to examine whether the illegal wildlife trade, and specifically the rhino horn trade in Vietnam, meet the criteria of the definition of organised crime as set out in existing international and domestic legal frameworks.

With Alessandro Mazzola's article, we return to Italy with the only case in this Special Issue dedicated to the behaviour of criminal groups in a territory with a deep-rooted Mafia history. The author analyses the phenomenon of *neomelodica* music in Naples as a product of popular culture taking shape through highly structured—although barely visible—networks of production and distribution made of professional authors, composers and performers, but also venues, managers, agents and brokers, who dominate the *neomelodica* field by employing a series of informal and illicit strategies.

References

Briquet JL and Favarel-Garrigues G (eds) (2008) *Milieux criminels et pouvoirs politiques. Les ressorts illicites de l'Etat*, Paris: Karthala.

de Sardan O (2008) *The Eights Modes of Local Governance in West Africa*, Africa Power & Politics, Working paper, n. 4.

Gribaudo G (ed) (2009) *Traffici criminali. Camorra, Mafie e Reti Internazionali dell'Illegalità*, Turin: Bollati Boringhieri.

Lupo, S (1993), *Storia della mafia*, Rome: Donzelli.

Lupo S (2008) *Quando la mafia trovò l'America. Storia di un intreccio intercontinentale (1888 - 2008)*. Turin: Einaudi.

Ruggiero V (1996) *Economie sporche. L'impresa criminale in Europa*, Turin: Bollati Boringhieri.

Ruggiero V (2015) *Power and Crime*, New York: Routledge.

Santino U (2006) *Dalla Mafia alle Mafie. Scienze Sociali e Crimine Organizzato*, Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino.

Sciarrone R (2011) *Alleanze nell'Ombra. Mafie ed Economie Locali in Sicilia e nel Mezzogiorno*, Rome: Donzelli.

Sciarrone R (2014) *Mafie del Nord. Strategie Criminali e Contesti Locali*, Rome: Donzelli.

[i] The conference took place at the University of Ottawa in Canada from 14th-17th October 2014. Aside from Vittorio Martone and Antonio Vesco, there was also Lorenzo Scalchi from the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) of Paris and Marco De Biase from the Université libre de Bruxelles et Université de Liège, who promoted the session. Jean-Louis Briquet from Centre européen de sociologie et de science politique (CESSP), Université Paris 1 - Panthéon Sorbonne was the discussant during the session.

[ii] The seminar took place on 13th and 14th May 2015 in Paris. In addition to the participants cited above, there was Romain Le Cour Grandmaison (Université de Paris-1 - Panthéon Sorbonne).

[iii] The conference took place in Naples on 11th and 12th December at the Department of Political Sciences of the University of Naples Federico II.

[iv] It is enough to consider Pino Arlacchi, Raimondo Catanzaro, Diego Gambetta, Salvatore Lupo, Umberto Santino and Rocco Sciarrone. The concept of Mafia is analytically distinct from that of organised crime. On this point see Martone's article in this Special Issue.