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SOLUTION POSSIBILITIES IN CRIME PREVENTION STRATEGY: A PHD SUB-PROJECT ON EDUCATION INTO SOCIO-CULTURAL IMPACTS OF THE SICILIAN ORGANIZED CRIME

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This paper stands as a call for the emerging researchers of the Alpine-Adriatic region, as well as a manifestation of a sub-project within the framework of a PhD thesis, since the idea emerged from the combination of empirical observations as a lecturer and the theoretical research as a PhD candidate. The part, which is connected to the aforementioned thesis reveals that how a sort of "criminal toolkit" and myth-making rhetorics arm mafia(s), and mafia-type organizations, up to be able to gain legitimacy and justification from the society, through the imitation of certain customary behavioral patterns or the transplantion of parodistic religious processes. Disguising their presence in the illegal market and the camouflage of moral purity relativize and normalize criminal activities by giving them a certain patina. The part, which is connected to empirical observations theorize how the conceptual boundary in the civic-criminal axis is blurring as slowly diverts general attention from serious crimes and, beyond intimidation, provokes law-abiding citizens to refuses cooperation with the authorities. Thus, solution possibilities in crime prevention strategy are the fact-finding education and the creation of strong counter-narratives to mafia-rhetorics.

1. Introduction

1.1 General view

Regarding former research into the complexities of organized crime, there is an interdisciplinary agreement concerning the fact that all criminal organizations - regardless of their internal, structural or socio-cultural differences - are sharing adaptive nature, easily reorganizable internal structures, consequently they can recapitalize new, illegal profit activities. (Varese, 2013) Furthermore, they do it in a quick manner according to changing global circumstances. Paradoxically, their unscrupulous characteristic feature arms them up with the ability to blend in the society which they intend to exploit. But, due to this same attribute, their survival is extremely dependent on the extent of their legitimized existence by the infected community, in which they operate: this is a feature, which is comparable to parasitic lifestyle, dependent on the tolerance of the host organism. The primary aim of criminal organizations (i. e. non-state agents) is to influence local or global markets by influencing politics to gain extra-profits. However, they emerge in diverse forms in order to adjust to state-specific shortcomings in local justice systems, economic endowments, socio-political and cultural atmospheres to jeopardize the vertical coverage of state authorities.

The previously detailed features are also emphasized by the UNODC website (UNODC, 2026): "...organized crime, in general, is a broad concept from large poly-crime-orientated networks to small family businesses dedicated to one or a few specific offences." Thus, progressive and interdisciplinary field of criminology seeks to focus on both the horizontal and vertical extent of illegal social networks, analysed within the scientific scope of social embeddedness of organized crime. Contemporarily, investigative bodies and authorities of law (i.e. state-actors) enforcement are able to monitor new emerging collaborations or rivalries between the non-state actors from the same levels of the supply chain. Although, they can map the expansion routes of raw materials from their place of place of origin to their final distribution hubs. Although, research institutes specialized in related investigations, are currently able to puzzle out the dynamics of internal relations in informal trading networks. But the illegal market is an unpredictable and unregulated environment with "special" extra-legal bonds which function as warrantees between the actors. In this circular system, general key drivers of legal market activities (like the capital, collaterals and clauses) are replaced with normative forms of interactions (like the status quo, the given words and violence) (Gambetta, 1996).

The most widespread contemporary scientific approach, advocating utilitarianism, is associated with the name of John Stuart Mill. His theory assumed that all the people's actions can be explained by their pleasure principle. It stands that during transactions, actors involved are able to rationally weigh the necessity between subjectivity or effectiveness in their acts. This concept was complemented by Ildikó Ritter's social project, which put this concept into the atmosphere of illegal drug market and replacing it with the relational line of distributors and consumers (i. e. sellers and buyers). Since the place of transaction was a place without any internal or external coercive circumstance, regarding the golden rule of the "need and demand", both parties generated benefits for themselves, at least it seemed like this from the point of view of the consume (Ritter, 2014).
The unrecognizable exploitation of the consumer by the distributor is parallel with strategic exploitation of society by criminal organizations. According to the criminal-psychologists, this phenomenon is called the intra-cultural appropriation theory, through which within the vicious circle of civic-criminal compliance, non-state actors ensure their "dominant" positions with culturally appropriating themselves to commonly cherished norms and values within their given society. As a result, they infiltrate and poison every sector of the legitimate way of life. (Travaglino and Abrams, 2019) Since, they have to rely heavily on multiplicative interconnections with the social, economic and political environments, consequently they do not operate in the social vacuum but within social networks of trust (Van de Bunt et al., 2013).

1.2 Annotation to the New Conceptual Approach

Concerning the mafia(s) and even the mafia-type organizations, this theory indicates to a new conceptual turning point which analyzes if the former nomination of the "traditional" (in many older works 'archaic', e. g. Norman, 1966) mafia was defined by a superficial conceptual framework or not. This latter one would assume that there should be a fully independent and modern version of it, meanwhile contemporary findings in research have already proved, that only their focus, strategies and main profile have been changing. Regarding criminal morphology, the members' behaviour and its fake internal "culture", they have always systematically built on same structures.

The structural adaptability of the mafia(s) can be examined through a comparative longitudinal research analysis to understand how illegal focus activity took diverse shape with time. In the middle of the 19th century, the era of the emerging European nation-states, the new Italian state had shortcomings in its effective vertical coverage in its rural areas (characterized by latifundia), the Sicilian mafia focused its illegal activity on racketeering. (Fava, 1984) After, the World War I, the main criminal activity slowly focused on the transatlantic alcohol smuggling (there were no sophisticated technological tools or elaborated international cooperation) due to the Prohibition and the massive migration of Sicilian criminals to the US during the Italian fascist regime. After the World War II, during the 6-months of AMGOT (allied military governance) in Sicily, they became mediators in the transportation of military aid packages, like grain supplies. In the 50's, when new factories and large companies were built in the central cities of the island, thanks to the Marshall aid the rural population moved to the capital city, so the mafia took advantage of the "construction boom" by real estate speculations: they colluded altogether with representatives of the Christian Democratic Party (Lupo, 1999). As the deepening process of European Economic Community provided free movement of goods, people, services and capital with by the Roman Treaty, signed in 1957, facilitated the intra-European trade the organization was occupied with internal distribution of drug shipments imported from across the borders. However, this remained its main profile until the 70's, in the mid 80's, the immeasurable brutality of the Second Mafia War led to the Maxi Trial. It triggered stricter international regulations and for the 90's practical ranges of criminal movements have been narrowed (rigorous and precise legal restrictions or more effective investigation system), but their negative influence on the social culture still remains a threat.

Consequently, the importance of economic historical perspectives, in correlation with culturally more embedded criminal organizations (not every form of them) are crucial. Since, despite the fact, that the Sicilian mafia has post-feudal origin (nearly 250 y), it's mystery-making rhetorics and a sort of a "criminal toolkit" falsifies and exaggerates historical-cultural elements, which were either predated the actual emergence of the organization or scientifically are still unproven theories. According to the research theory of the PhD thesis, from which this sub-project has been emerging, these are definitely the key socio-cultural factors in the legitimization (first step) and justification (second step) of the aforementioned criminal organization, and of similar ones, from the part of the infected community. These processes typify, relativize and normalize criminality until it gains a certain patina which catalyze the continuity of the informal control of criminals (third step) by:

- Applying mystery-making rhetorics
- Catalyzing and self-appropriating (to) "cultural norms"
- Falsifying history by creating fake etiological myths
- Transplanting parodistic religious processes (appearance of moral purity)
- Implementing parodistic "codes of honour"
- Demolishing local folklore with chants about crime culture
- Imitating parodistic customary behaviour patterns (fake bourgeois entanglement)
- Hiding behind the most popular political ideology of the period

Since, the primary target of these deceptions is the society, even media organs, printed press and social media can transmit mythicized descriptions of criminal organizations with the information derived from interviews, pleas in trials or media appearances. As the conceptual boundary in the civic-criminal axis is blurring, it slowly diverts attention from serious crimes and, beyond intimidation, it provokes law-abiding citizens to refuses cooperation with the authorities.

2. Sustainability for Social Development and Awareness

2.1 Strategic Importance and Practical Background

Increased presence of counter-pressure (law enforcement, secret agencies, etc.), stricter legislation, all-encompassing technical coverage and more effective criminal policy cannot be a mere abstract set of rules, but must reflect and address real social relations, human needs, problems and values. However, this assumes that general legislative processes (both national and international) in most cases appear as a kind of response, since they must adapt to changing realities. Therefore, it often begins to develop when a given social problem reaches a level that can no longer be addressed using purely non-legal means or when changes in social norms or value systems do not create new expectation. However, two well-known police practices are to counter the theory of responsivity which are the covert investigation (infiltrate into criminal organizations for months or years), and the technological (aerial and satellite) or internet / telecommunication surveillance (searching laboratories, farms and colonies) in areas that are difficult to access (even online), criminal organizations are evolving in parallel with them and find alternatives. Thus, with time, they become reactive responses as well.

Conducting criminal risk mapping to forecast possible happenings and to improve policy practice with theoretical bases are all part of the intellectual cooperation against organized criminal activity. The preventive education is currently ongoing through interdisciplinarity, so it can facilitate the combat against diversified manifestations of organized crime. At the same time, strong counter-narratives as opposed to mafia rhetorics are still developing. Therefore, supporters of preventive education about organized crime emphasize its potential in long-term and its benefits by fostering critical-thinking among people and giving them the ability to recognize how criminal organizations can infiltrate into the local economies, corrupt politicians and corrode the democratic institutions. Organized criminal activities are characterized by an operational diversity, which provokes scientific analyses to interconnect various academic areas and approaches. However, preventive education is relatively new, so in many countries, it only appears on micro-sectoral levels and it is still in consideration to be introduced as a full trans-disciplinary university program on its own.

2.2 Fact-finding Education: Long-term Crime Prevention

These circumstances provided a solid ground to the spread of a mythicized "criminal culture" due to its attractive nature among marginalized groups, youngsters, etc. Researchers and academics, in any related fields, have to debunk conspiracies and myths of criminal organizations by preventing the dissemination of misconceptions. In order to directly eliminating the toolkit of "dangerous mafia rhetorics", fact-finding education shell transmit clear messages to the public and positively shape moral perspectives by:

- Deconstructing the criminal trajectory or career
- Fostering critical thinking about financial awareness
- Forming solid cultural indentity in moral questions
- Demolishing the stigma of contextualized crime

With the explanation of how the criminal world harness together efforts of its effective actors towards a seemingly "common purpose", replacing institutional authorities will slowly create the social demand for an independent academic discipline on the Organized Crime.

3. Methodology

However, this sub-project relies on primary sources found during personal doctoral research, it does not examine them from the same perspective, moreover it also complements them with empirical observations arose during a personal teaching experience.

Since, the PhD research works with qualitative sources it is crucial to clarify special characteristics of organized crime and make differences between criminal organizations, then to specify scientific background of the Sicilian mafia as well. This analysis is backed by a strong secondary source "bundle", which also displays the renewable nature and adaptive physiognomy of the Sicilian mafia from its first emergence to its major turning points during its 250 years of history. While, primary data, such as two medieval "normative corpora", written manifestations from the 12th century by anonymous chronicles (on a medieval capuchin sect), diaries of aristocrats, works of ethnographers and historians and intellectuals, are aimed at identifying the historical analogues, reconstructing economic historical catalysts and analysing social relation dynamics, customary norms and cultural processes (from the Middle Ages to the Modernity). These factors are compared to their falsified and mythicized "modern" pairs derived from references of mafia-members. These data rely on primary and secondary sources regarding disclosed police evidence, investigative documents, interrogation papers, trial records, media interviews, articles in printed press, recorded confessions and novels from archives and online storages as well.

Precisely, collaborative aspects of this sub-project are connected to a personal-innovative teaching experience as a visiting PhD scholar at one of the EUGLOH-universities (University of Szeged), which was the academic institution during personal BA and MA studies.

4. Conclusions

This issue has a special relevance in those countries where organized crime is not considered as part of the academic repertoire, since the adaptive and reorganizable characteristic features of criminal organizations make them quick and efficient in infiltrating every sector of the legitimate way of life. Regardless of multiple research on criminal infiltration into economic and legal sectors, influence on politics and its social embeddedness the organizations gain their legitimacy from the society in which they operate.

Therefore, the presentation, of which this article is about was aimed to prove, that mapping precisely the socio-cultural impacts of organized crime – in the case of criminal organizations with deep cultural embeddedness – is an urgent task, which cannot be solved only through repressive and reactive state responses to recognize, map, understand combat and, finally, prevent it. Outcomes stand as a lesson, since "organized crime" as a scientific approach and interdisciplinary concept is now mature enough to be an independent university program even at those academic institutions which are in countries with [still] lack of socio-historical precedents, thus any need of counter-narratives. So, this sub-project is aimed at being part of a long-term research in which it can also give answers to the following, or any possible future, questions:

- How the issue loses its theoretic complexity being separated only into micro-sectoral courses?
- How could a trans-disciplinary university program offer effective alternatives in the field?
- Finally, what is the theoretical concept of "'culturally-shaped' higher education about organized crime" and what are the know-hows to hinder the polarization of scientific approaches?

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