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Organised Behaviour and Organised Identity

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There is growing body of literature which offers reviews of the concepts of organised crime and political violence, while documenting the official efforts to address such concepts jointly and treat them as a single issue. It would be intriguing to investigate how members of organised criminal groups and violent political groups respectively react to such official efforts. In my own memory, when the 'mafiosi' happened to share a prison institution with members of the Red Brigades, they would steer away from those idealist Communists who got nothing out of killing. The former, when overcoming the disgust they felt in the presence of those who in their eyes adopted an incomprehensible political stance, and perhaps even a despicable sexual lifestyle, would simply suggest: "don't make revolution, make money, you cretin!". The latter, in their turn, would deal with the former as one deals with yet a different version of the economic and political power against which they fought. Echoes of this are found in an example coming from Greece itself, where the Courts have attempted to term 'common' rather than 'political' the offences attributed to the Revolutionary Organisation November 17.

The fact that organised crime is guided by material motivations and terrorism by political ones may be seen as irrelevant by official agencies pursuing the objective of degrading the 'enemy' whoever that might be. Therefore, the ceremonies of degradation, including the choice of an ad hoc vocabulary, may well serve the task, as the mad, the drug user and the terrorist constitute an undistinguishable mob in the face of which quibbling differences may just obstruct the criminal justice process.

The purpose of this paper is to try and clarify a number of issues that we encounter when dealing with organised crime and political violence respectively.

Professional crime and political violence

Let us start with the hypothesis that organised political groups, in order to finance their activity, are often forced to resort to forms of serious

criminality. While such criminality may at times include drug trafficking, it is likely to be a general rule that political groups purporting to represent disadvantaged communities would avoid involvement in activities that might damage those very communities. Moralistic and Robin Hoodesque in their own self-perception, ideally, political groups will opt for 'robbing the robbers', namely the wealthy who are favoured by the exploitative system against which political action is addressed. Lucrative hold ups, for example, or kidnappings of tycoons, according to this logic, would be the preferred sources of financing for violent political organisations. But even when carrying out such financially rewarding exploits, are we sure that political organisations mimic their criminal organised counterparts? In order to answer this question it is necessary to identify some peculiarities of organised crime and political violence respectively.

Conspiracies and enterprises

There is confusion and eclecticism as to what exactly constitutes organised crime. There is also a tendency to avoid the problem of its definition, as if the obvious need not be defined. In a statement issued by the US President's Commission on Organized Crime, it is stressed that, while there is acceptance and recognition of certain acts as criminal, there is no standard awareness as to when a criminal group is to be regarded as organized. 'The fact that organized criminal activity is not necessarily organized crime complicates that definition process'. Descriptions range from 'two or more persons conspiring together to commit crimes for profit on a continuing basis' to more detailed accounts of what these crimes are. Organised crime can be simply equated with serious offending, although serious crime may be extremely disorganised. On the other hand, o.c. can be identified as one single, self-perpetuating, criminal conspiracy (US agencies in the 1960s). Organised crime is also seen as being constituted by 'crime families' and the notion of bureaucracy has been applied to such families, suggesting hierarchically structured groups, characterized by formal rules and consisting of individuals with specialized and segmented functions within the hierarchy. A few individuals and families, in the past, were therefore deemed to centralize and coordinate all organized criminal activities.

Critics suggest that a credulous sociology was led to believe in the big conspiracy: The Organization. This sociology, 'innocent of such notions as informal organizations and patron-client networks, fixed the sociological frame of organized crime around conspiracy' (Block, 1991: 10).

While bearing these controversies in mind, I suggest that the best-known definitions of organized crime can be classified very roughly as follows. Some hinge on strictly quantitative aspects: the number of individuals involved in a criminal group is said to determine the organizational degree of that group (Johnson, 1962; Ferracuti, 1988). Organized crime is said to differ from conventional crime for the larger scale of its illegal activity (Moore, 1987). Some others focus mainly on a temporal variable, that is on the time-span during which illegal activities are conducted. The death or incarceration of a member of organized crime, for example, do not stop the activities in which they are involved.

Criminologists who focus attention on its structural characteristics observe that organized crime operates by means of flexible and diversified groups. Such a structure is faced with peculiar necessities due to its condition of illegality. Firstly, the necessity, while remaining a 'secret' organization, to exert publicly its coercive and dissuasive strength. An equilibrium is therefore required between publicity and secrecy that only a complex structure is able to acquire. Secondly, the necessity to neutralize law enforcement through *omertà* (conspiracy of silence), corruption and retaliation. Finally, the need to reconcile its internal order, through specific forms of conflict control, with its external legitimacy, through the provision of occupational and social opportunities (Cohen, 1977).

Frequently, definitions of organized crime revolve around the concept of 'professionalism': its members, it is suggested, acquire skills and career advancement by virtue of their full-time involvement in illegality. Mannheim (1975) only devotes a dozen pages of his voluminous treatise to organized crime. The reason for this may perhaps be found in his preliminary general statement, where it is assumed that all economically oriented offences require a degree of organization, or at least necessitate forms of association among persons. In this light, the term 'organized crime' should be applied to the majority of illegal activities.

Other authors prefer to concentrate on the collective clientele of organized crime. This is therefore identified with a structure involved in the public provision of goods and services which are officially defined illegal. Organized criminal groups, in other words, simply fill the inadequacy of institutional agencies, which are unable to provide those goods and services, or perhaps officially deny that demand exists for them. The contribution of McIntosh (1975) is to be located in this perspective. She notes that organized crime is informed by a particular relationship between offenders and victims. For example, even the victims of extortion rackets often fail to report the offenders, less because

they are terrified than 'because they see the extortionist as having more power in their parish than the agents of the state' (ibid.: 50). It may be added that the victims may also recognize their 'protector' as an authority which is more able than its official counterpart to distribute resources and opportunities.

The descriptions and definitions mentioned so far share a central element: they are, to varying degrees, related to the notion of 'professionalism'. This seems to allow for an original approach to the subject-matter, because such a notion alludes to a plausible parallel to be drawn between organized crime and the organization of any other industrial activity. However, one crucial aspect which characterizes the crime industry is neglected. This is that the crime industry itself cannot limit its recruitment to the individuals who constitute its tertiary sector or middle management. In order for the parallel with the licit industry to be validated, it has to be stressed that organized crime also needs a large number of unskilled criminal employees. Professionalism and unskilled labour seem to cohabit in organized criminal groups, and their simultaneous presence should be regarded as a significant hallmark of organized crime.

In my opinion, therefore, what connotes large criminal organisations is their internal division of labour, which transcends the technical skills of their members, displaying a *social* differentiation between those enjoying decision-making power and those devoid of it.

Let me now give a provisional answer to the question posed above: even when carrying out financially rewarding exploits, are we sure that political organisations mimic their criminal organised counterparts? I would suggest that, even when committing serious crimes, political organisations cannot be assimilated to organised crime, but rather to varieties of professional criminality. In this type of criminality the distribution of roles, typically, is based on specific individual skills, while a relative collegiality presides over decision-making, so that the planning and execution of operations are enacted by individuals close or known to one another. On the contrary, contract killers or drug couriers working for large criminal organisations, for example, hardly know the identity of the final beneficiary of their acts. They may engage in a long-term career while ignoring the strategy, motivations, let alone the face, of their employers.

Considering that some organised criminal groups do not limit their activities to conventional offending, some supplementary observations

are needed. Successful organised crime manages to establish partnerships with the official world, particularly with business people and political representatives. When unable to do so, it remains a form of pariah organised crime, operating in the underworld, and destined to exhaust its resources and energies within the restricted realm of illicit markets. Organisations leaping onto the overworld, by contrast, are required to adopt a business style, a conduct, a strategy and a 'vocabulary of meaning' helping them to blend in the environment receiving them. In an environment saturated with corruption, within the political as well as the economic sphere, organised criminals will learn the techniques and the justifications of white collar criminals, now their partners. They may still 'commute' between licit and illicit markets, but their new status will force them to identify allies, sponsors, mentors and protectors. In brief, they will be required to develop the negotiation skills characterising an economic consortium or a political party. Even when groups, while operating in the official economy, find it opportune from time to time to use violence, this violence will still be inscribed in the 'vocabulary of meaning' belonging to political parties and competing economic actors. Killing, therefore, may become in this case part and parcel of the negotiation process.

Political violence and criminology

Looking at the work we have inherited from the founding fathers, it comes as no surprise that political violence was central to the analytical efforts of early criminology. Cesare Beccaria and Jeremy Bentham, for example, dealt with 'sedition' and 'crimes against the state' respectively, and their analyses, which also addressed institutional violence, were triggered by the revolutionary movements of the eighteenth century. The Positive School, in its turn, was engaged in understanding the turmoil of 1848, the violent events occurring during the Commune of Paris, as well as the attacks carried out by anarchists, revolutionary socialists and individual nihilists. Last but not least, Durkheim was compelled to differentiate between socialism as a 'reasonable proposal for change' and communism as an 'abnormal programme of destruction' (Ruggiero, 2006).

Moving to the current times, it seems that only after the events of 9/11 has criminology resumed any specific interest in political violence, at least in its variant commonly termed terrorism. Thus: 'Criminology can play a major role in helping us understand the aetiology of terrorist behaviour. Again, contributions in this area have thus far been limited,

but we are already seeing traditional criminological theories being applied to explain terrorism' (LaFree and Hendrickson, 2007: 782).

There are scholars advocating the application of criminological theories of 'common' violence to the analysis of political violence, who argue that both types of violence are directed to the achievement of goals. For example, both aim at extracting something from someone; moreover, at least by perpetrators, both are presented as the outcome of provocation by the victims. When institutional-anomie theory (value clash) is applied to the study of terrorism, this is described as a clash between supporters of primordial institutions against 'a rootless world order of abstract markets, mass politics, and a debased, sacrilegious tolerance' (ibid: 26).

From a different perspective, the suggestion has been made that the principles of situational crime prevention should also be applied to terrorism. According to this view, after identifying and removing the opportunities that violent groups exploit to mount their attacks, situational measures implemented through partnerships among a wide range of public and private agencies will assist with this task (Clarke and Newman, 2006). In other contributions the point is put forward that conventional crime is characterised by tensions and dynamics that underpins many forms of terrorism. Issues of shame, esteem, loss, and repressed anger, alongside the pursuit of pride and self or collective respect, which provide important tools to criminological analysis, may also help establish a taxonomy of terrorism. That criminological theories can migrate into the area of political violence is empirically probed by authors who apply a rational choice theoretical framework to a specific examples of political violence and terrorism.

This notwithstanding, it is still appropriate to claim that most of the literature on political violence is produced by experts in political sciences, international studies and law. It is worth specifying, in fact, that most criminological studies available do not focus on political violence or terrorism, but rather on the official perceptions, the institutional responses to these phenomena, and the effects that such responses produce in the social and political sphere.

It is not uncommon for criminologists to address the consequences of state intervention against terrorism, particularly in terms of human rights violation, its impact on civil liberties and policing, but also in respect of corporate and state crime. Themed sections of academic journals and professional magazines have also focused on 'trading civil liberties for

greater security', 'anti-terrorism and police powers', 'terrorism and criminal justice values' (Zedner, 2008).

It may be contended that the state of criminology with respect to political violence is similar to the state once observed by Becker (1963: 166) with respect to gangs and juvenile deviance. 'I think it is a truism to say that a theory that is not closely tied to a wealth of facts about the subject it proposes to explain is not likely to be very useful'. In other words, one may look at violent political actors with the same dissatisfaction with which Becker looked at young delinquents, and lament the paucity of information available around what they think about themselves and their activities. Some criminologists, perhaps stimulated by such paucity, have followed an alternative analytical route.

Elements of criminological theories are used by Hamm (2007), who refers to Sutherland's notion that criminal behaviour is learned through interaction and interpersonal communication. While Sutherland argued that the learning process involves specific techniques to commit crime as well as rationalisations for the crimes committed, Hamm supplements these with 'a third element in a person who is willing to use it as a tactic: fanatical dedication to a cause' (Hamm, 2007: 115).

Rationalisations are intended by Hamm as ideology, therefore 'the confluence of skill, ideology, and fanatical dedication has been the engine driving most terrorist groups throughout history'. Drawing on classical sociological thought, the author also introduces the variable charisma, that he applies to specific characters in the contemporary history of terrorism such as Carlos the Jackal and Osama bin Laden. Charisma, or the power of the gifted, is regarded as the fourth dimension of terrorism, a quality that elicits loyalty and unquestioned action. For charisma to express its strength, however, a crisis has to erupt in specific spheres of collective life. Charismatic leaders, therefore, are capable of responding to crises through their unique gifts, which may fall in the spiritual domain, in the economic arena or in the political sphere. 'If the crisis involves political conflict, the gifts will be in the realm of oratory. And if that conflict leads to violence, the leader is likely to be gifted in military tactics' (Hamm, 2007: 115). The author, however, mainly looks at 'terrorism as crime' from a particular angle, as he is less interested in political violence per se than in the crimes committed for the provision of logistical support to that violence. His analysis, therefore, focuses on crimes aimed at providing terrorists with money, training, communication systems, safe havens, and travel opportunities. These crimes are seen as the 'lifeblood of terrorist groups', and include counterfeiting, bank

robbery, theft, fraud, kidnapping, espionage, drug smuggling, gun running, tax evasion, money laundering, cell phone and credit card theft, immigration violations, passport forgery, extortion, and prostitution. Hamm's goal, therefore, 'is to examine terrorists' involvement in these crimes and describe law enforcement's opportunities to detect and prevent them' (Hamm, 2007: 3). In this way, one may opine, criminological theories are mainly applied to the analysis of 'auxiliary' common offences rather than precise political ones.

Arena and Arrigo (2006: 3) claim that the extant literature 'examines the causes of terrorism from within a psychological framework'. There is, in effect, an abundance of studies addressing violent political conduct as a function of the individual's psyche, or even attempting to identify specific personality traits 'that would compel a person to act violently'. This search for the terrorist personality, in reality, is a long-standing effort and echoes the analysis of Lombroso and Laschi (1890), according to whom individualistic political offenders (as opposed to revolutionaries) are characterised by 'congenital criminality and impulsive instincts, which converge in a form of epilepsy associated with vanity, religiosity, megalomania and intermittent geniality' (Ruggiero, 2006: 43). Arena and Arrigo suggest that the identity construct is too often deemed a contributing factor in the emergence and maintenance of extremist militant conduct, and while noting that knowledge around identity and terrorism is limited, they propose an alternative social psychological framework grounded in symbolic interactionism. The concepts utilised include symbols, definition of the situation, roles, socialisation and role-taking.

Fuzzy actors

As I said earlier, organised crime may use violence as a supplementary tool of negotiating their presence on markets, or with the system. Violent political groups, on the contrary, use violence as a signal of their unwillingness to negotiate with a system they would rather demolish. Their action transcends the immediate result they achieve, and prefigures, realistically or not, a different set of achievements which will be valued in a future, rather than in the current society. Of course, some political groups may use violence as a supplementary form of pressure to accelerate a specific negotiation and pursue a concrete, material objective. But in this case, the word 'terrorism' becomes inappropriate, and such groups might be described as engaging in 'armed trade unionism'. Are official governments prepared to do so? The ad hoc vocabulary of degradation, alluded to above, would prohibit it.

Finally, the evolution of organised crime into structures commonly described as networks may make comparisons between the two forms of violence increasingly far-fetched. Networks imply the alliance between highly heterogeneous groups and individuals, each with a distinctive cultural and ethnic background, who may establish common goals on an occasional or long-term basis. Actors operating in networks are socially 'fuzzy', in the sense that their exploits and careers overlap with those of others who are apparently radically different from them. Networks are a reflection of grey areas hosting diverse cultures, identities, values and motivations, areas in which the diversity of activities results from the development of points of contact, common interests and strategies between licit, semi-licit and overtly illicit economies. I am thinking of 'dirty economies' consisting in encounters which add to the respective cultural, social and symbolic capital possessed by criminals, politicians and entrepreneurs, who interlock their practices. Networks, mobility and fluidity are metaphors that aptly describe the flows of people and groups engaged in some of the most successful forms of organised crime.

Such forms of organised crime, in sum, see the participation of diverse collective or individual entities each pursuing their own goals in a style and against a set of values that are consistent with their own specific cultural, ethnic and professional background. As collective actors, participants display a form of *organised behaviour* without showing signs of an *organised identity*. Let us now shift to a set of considerations pertaining to political violence.

Violent political groups do not pursue material gain, and when they do, this is related to the acquisition of symbolic status, namely a capacity to step up their propaganda and hence their visibility. Although criminology does provide analytical tools to deal with symbolic or expressive violence, there are other characteristics in political violence which make this specific conduct hard to locate within a criminological framework. A short overview of theories will help clarify this point.

Anomie theorists may interpret the behaviour of armed groups as the effect of a lack of social integration and regulation, namely of cohesion, collective beliefs and mutually-binding constraints allowing smooth interactions. However, violent political groups claim to represent highly integrated and regulated groups, such as classes, political formations or religious communities. In other words, their lack of solidarity with the dominant social groups is counter-balanced by a high degree of solidarity proffered to what are deemed dominated groups, thus describing a

situation of anomie with respect to the former and one of strong normativeness with respect to the latter. In their case, therefore, it is not anomie, but its opposite, namely solidarity and integration that provide crucial preconditions for action.

Adopting the concept of social disorganisation, it might be suggested that political violence is a possible solution to the dilemmas of exclusion and impotence. However, it should be noted that similar solution is embedded in a process of empowerment in which 'boundary creation' is paramount. All social relations occur within boundaries between those involved, and while at the individual level, these boundaries fall somewhere between *you and me*, at the collective level they fall between *us and them*. Boundary creation between *us and them* is crucial for the formation of identities, and in the case of social movements and groups it also involves the recognition of existing inequalities as unjust. The concept of disorganisation may explain 'oppositional behaviour', not 'oppositional identity'. The latter involves identifying with an unjustly subordinated group, recognising the injustice suffered by that group, opposing it, and forging a collective identity of interest in ending that injustice. This implies a high degree of organisation and purposefulness, rather than aimless social disorganisation. While it is useful to explain dysfunctional processes and behaviours, it is also important to describe how some processes are functional to the promotion of shared consciousness, to the identification of collective interests and the building of organisational capacity to act on those interests. Political violence is one of the outcomes of such functional processes.

In the perspective of learning theories, violent behaviour is transmitted in enclaves of peers and through mimetic processes triggered by role models. Learning opportunities, however, are accompanied by 'claim making' about social justice and the perception of viable ways of pursuing it. Such claims become political when groups and organisations holding means of coercion are addressed. On the other hand, strain theorists would posit that political violence is one of the possible deviant adaptations to an unsatisfactory situation. The impossibility of achieving goals through legitimate means, in this type of adaptation termed 'rebellion', is turned into the imagining of alternative goals and the promotion of alternative, including violent, means to achieve them. Rebellion, however, which implies a 'genuine transvaluation', namely a full denunciation of officially prized values, also includes a sense of frustration, a degree of resentment, and ultimately the perception of one's impotence due to lack of resources. Although questioning the official monopoly of imagination, rebellion as described in strain theory remains anchored to a deprived social condition hampering the constitution of

alternative reservoirs of imagination. Such a reservoir, on the contrary, can be regarded as an important resource without which movements as well as violent political groups could not produce action. Resource mobilisation theorists, for example, suggest that availability of resources, rather than absence of them, makes groups capable of undertaking concrete action. Resources include material and non-material items, such as finances, infrastructures, authority, moral commitment, political memory, organisations, networks, trust, skills, and so on. In brief, while strain theorists tend to see social action as the result of a deficit, organised social action, whether violent or not, can also be interpreted as the outcome of a surplus.

Political violence may be prevalent in contexts where control efforts eschew negotiation or accommodation, and are themselves characterised by violence. In this sense, the activity of some violent political groups could be understood as violence against the establishment, on the one hand, and as one of the effects of violence perpetrated by the establishment, on the other. If this relational dynamic seems to be successful in explaining political violence, conflict theory, which also contains relational elements, proves too general for the task. It is true that institutions do not represent the values and interests of society at large, and that norms of conduct may only reflect the norms of the dominant culture. But to state that political violence is a manifestation of two sets of norms violently clashing does not account for the fact that in most contexts, where also the norms of conduct only reflect the norms of the dominant culture, there is a negligible degree of contentious politics and political violence. The analysis of the specific context in which political violence occurs is crucial if the generalisations of conflict theory are to be avoided. The existence of repertoires of action, accumulated through long periods of conflict, is in this respect paramount. Repertoires consist of a legacy, made of cultural and political resources, available to political groups. They contain sets of action and identity deriving from shared understandings and meanings, they are cultural creations that take shape in social and political conflict.

Some of the techniques of neutralisation identified in criminology may well describe the ideological process whereby violent political groups come to terms with the effects of their acts. The denial of the victim is operated through the perception of the victim as wrongdoer, the condemnation of the condemners through their association with immorality, and finally the appeal to higher loyalties through the appropriation of the ideals and practices of one's political or religious creed. Techniques of neutralisation, however, seem to belong to an ex-

post repertoire of motivations mobilised by offenders in order to fill the moral void they presumably experience. They are, in sum, a defensive device which may temper moral disorientation. Political violence, instead, combines defensive and offensive strategies, a combination without which action could hardly be triggered. Such strategies may include ways of overcoming a presumed moral disorientation, but must provide, at the same time, strong, unequivocal orientation for individuals and groups to act. This combination of strategies coalesce in the form of collective identity, which transcends pure role or group identity, in that it refers to shared self-definitions and common efforts towards the production of social change. Collective identity offers orientation in a moral space and gives rise to a sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy; it also prompts what is worth doing and what is not in *organisational terms*, leading individuals to appreciate their capacity to change the surrounding environment.

Conclusion

Political violence, therefore, is one of the outcomes of *organised identity* and entails high degrees of subjectivity, so that some features of social life are no longer seen as part of misfortune, but of injustice. Along with techniques of neutralisation, political violence needs to elaborate an interpretive 'frame alignment' with the activists it intends to mobilise.

Against the backdrop of control theories, political violence could be examined as the result of a lack of attachment, commitment, involvement and belief. On the contrary, most armed organisations possess all of these in exceeding measure. In turn, adopting 'propensity event theory' may prove problematic, as the violence of the organisation does not reveal a deficit in self-control and an inclination to impulsivity, but an extremely developed ability to postpone gratification (the perfect social system to come) and an equally patient capacity to plan actions.

In brief, in political violence what is 'organised' is not crime or behaviour, but identity. And yet one may opine that organised crime and political violence could still be analysed jointly, because both require scientific investigations and interpretations of their structure, their internal make up, their external interactions, their targets and their changing physiognomy. The sociology of organisations, in this respect, could well be mobilised for such a joint examination. But this specific branch of sociology is certainly useful for the analysis of other organisations, for example, universities, companies, bureaucracies, and so on. Why then limit our joint analysis to organised crime and terrorism?

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One could propose that, say, the next edition of the Oxford Handbook of Criminology contains a chapter on 'Organised Crime and Universities', or 'Fundamentalist Violence and the Post Service'.

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