

# **Criminal Networks: The Forgotten Actors of International Politics**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The main purpose of this course is to examine whether an increasingly wealthy and powerful crime aristocracy, the Mafias, has developed a thorough strategy and acquired necessary capacities to conquer power worldwide. This course will first attempt to critically assess the lines commonly drawn between politics, conflict, and crime. The study of the Mafias' nature reveals this geopolitical actor is structurally opposite and in competition with Nation-States.

Evaluating the Mafias' flexible political strategies and their efficiency shows that these actors are not a "State within a State" anymore but can be considered as challenging Nation-States' power in the international arena on an equal footing. The course finally touches upon the roots of Mafias' thriving economic and financial power, their main comparative advantages as geopolitical actors in the international scene and how it sustains their thorough quest for power.

*Keywords:* crime, Mafia, economy, power

# **Redes criminales: los actores olvidados de la política internacional**

## **RESUMEN**

El objetivo principal de este curso es examinar si una aristocracia criminal cada vez más rica y poderosa, las Mafias, ha desarrollado una estrategia exhaustiva y ha adquirido las capacidades necesarias para conquistar el poder en todo el mundo. Este curso primero intentará evaluar críticamente las líneas comúnmente trazadas entre política, conflicto y crimen. El estudio de la naturaleza de las ma-

fias revela que este actor geopolítico es estructuralmente opuesto y compete con los Estados-nación.

Evaluar las estrategias políticas flexibles de las Mafias y su eficiencia muestra que estos actores ya no son un “Estado dentro de un Estado”, sino que pueden considerarse como un desafío al poder de los Estados-Nación en el ámbito internacional en igualdad de condiciones. El curso finalmente toca las raíces del próspero poder económico y financiero de las mafias, sus principales ventajas comparativas como actores geopolíticos en la escena internacional y cómo mantiene su búsqueda exhaustiva de poder.

**Palabras clave:** crimen, mafia, economía, poder

## 犯罪网络：国际政治中被遗忘的行动者

### 摘要

这门课程的主要目的是检验黑手党这一日渐富裕和强大的犯罪精英集团是否已发展出一个全面的策略，并获得必要的力量来战胜全球势力。这门课程首先将试图从批判的角度评估政治、冲突、犯罪三者之间经常划分的界限。对黑手党本质的研究显示，这个地缘政治行动者在结构上与单一民族国家相反，且与之相竞争。

对黑手党灵活的政治策略和效率的评估显示，黑手党不再是“一个国家中的一部分”，而是可被视为在国际舞台上以相同身份挑战单一民族国家的力量。课程最后提及黑手党茁壮成长的经济和财政实力的根源，黑手党作为地缘政治行动者在国际舞台中的主要比较优势，以及黑手党如何维持其对权力的彻底追求。

关键词：犯罪，黑手党，经济，权力

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## **I. Introduction**

**I**n competition with Nation-States for governmental power, are Mafias key international players to take into consideration in the present and coming years? How, and to which extent, do Mafias flexible political strategies and thriving economic power impact domestic and international politics?

### **1.1. DEFINITIONS**

Many international institutions mandated to combat crime have attempted to draw a universally accepted definition of its most dangerous form: organized crime. Interpol avoided the pitfall by stating that “the definition of organised crime greatly varies from one country to another. Organised criminal networks are usually involved in criminal activities in several countries” (Interpol 2017; UNODC Palermo Convention 2004, Article 2, 1).

Yet, this dissertation draws a clear distinction between gangs, transnational organized crime, and Mafias, the underworld aristocracy. As Wilfried Pareto would say, there are a self-conscious *criminal elite* and a *criminal mass*. All Mafias share three common broad characteristics. First, they all own major shares in the world largest illicit revenue sources such as, on a transnational level, drug, human or weapons trafficking, and, on a domestic level, systematic racketeering of major economic activities. This poly-criminality is a major strength of Mafias as these actors never depend solely on one source of revenue which considerably increase their longevity. Second, at the head of the criminal pyramid, Mafias dominate inferior types of criminalities such as street gangs. Finally, Mafias have impermeably survived all forms of repression, none have been eradicated yet despite being active for over a century. This dissertation’s references to Mafias will be done according to the following definition: “Mafias are secret and fraternal societies, permanent and hierarchical, founded on a principle of obedience, practicing ethnical recruitment, having a territorial basis, while dominating other forms of criminality and appropriately using mythological origins” (Gayraud 2011, 269).

### **1.2. BACKGROUND**

In the contemporary world, they are only a few criminal organizations that meet the necessary criteria to earn the Mafia label. Crime aristocracy is composed of the Sicilian Cosa Nostra, the Calabrese Ndrangheta, the Pugliese Sacra Corona Unita, the Neapolitan Camorra, the Turkish Maffya, the Albanese-speaking Mafia, the Japanese Yakuza, the Chinese Triads, and the American Cosa Nostra (Gayraud 2014). These Mafias have new competitors as dangerous and as powerful as they are, yet not integrally part of the criminal aristocracy (FBI 2017). For example, outlaw motorcycle gangs are dominated by U.S. Cosa Nostra and Brazilian gangs by Mexican cartels, which are the only genuine contenders of Mafias’ power along-

side the Russian Bratva. Currently, it is arguable that the most powerful criminal organizations are the Ndrangheta, Mexican cartels, and the Triad *Sun Yee On*, which alone has over 50,000 members.

New comers in the criminal upper-world such as Mexican cartels and Nigerian Crime Syndicates (NCS) share many characteristics with traditional Mafias. They run large and highly profitable illicit and licit economic activities and thrive within varied legal and regulatory environments (Williams 2014). Yet, their short existence and structural instability, their excessive use of violence and, for some, their interest in short-term profits rather than long-term power differentiates them from Mafias (Criminal Intelligence Agency 2000).

### 1.3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Mafias are by essence a sensitive issue, difficult to treat or controversial to write about. Mafias have suffered a historic academic oblivion in most fields of research, from Anthropology to History and from Economics to Sociology. Yet, Mafias are ancient actors, present in the political and geopolitical landscapes over past centuries, and mentioned in official documents since the eighteenth century for Triads or nineteenth century for Cosa Nostra (Grennan and Britz 2006). Mafias have often played an unknown, yet crucial, role in pivotal historical moments such as the Second World War, the Cuban Missile Crisis or the birth of the so-called *Françafrique* system at the end of the decolonization process in the former A.O.F. and A.E.F.<sup>1</sup> Example: Asserting their nationalistic heritage and the defense of the Samurai Bushido (code of honours), Yakuza notably proved their know-how during colonial adventures by providing intelligence, conducting terrorist actions in enemy territories, and funding the war effort by developing all sorts of licit and illicit trafficking, enriching themselves considerably in the process (Chomsky 2011). Nonetheless, Mafias are barely mentioned in any mainstream historical, political science, or economic analysis.

Moreover, Mafias are rarely defined separately from organized crime and even less as a Weberian type of actor with a strategic aim to obtain power (Den Boer 1999). Mafias are not considered potential competitors to Nation-States. Finally, Hagedorn's work highlights the blatant shortfall in criminologists' sociological approach of crime. In fact, academic obsession with structural inequalities in global markets pushing marginalized communities into illicit activities has incited liberal scholars like Kelly or Cockayne to focus on organized crime's influence in under-developed territories, voluntarily turning a blind eye on the fact that Mafias are thriving in every part of the world thanks to liberal market flaws and evolution, notably in the finance world. Thus, even when Mafias are considered as distinctive and powerful entities, their economic, territorial, coercive, and social influences are partially or separately considered (Pearce and Woodiwiss 1993).

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<sup>1</sup> Afrique Occidentale Française and Afrique Equatoriale Française.

## II. Mafias: The Quest for Power

The study of Mafias' structural characteristics shows that they are by essence in competition with Nation-States. Breaking down Gayraud's definition, and describing first their internal functioning, I will argue that Mafias are rational actors with a thorough consideration for governmental power challenging Nation-States' sovereignty as defined in political theories of Statehood.

### 2.1. PORTRAIT OF A MAFIA

Strictly speaking, no unique, dominant Mafia organizational structure with universal applicability exists, as their functioning differs according to the social and historical realities of the regions they are born in (Gayraud 2011). Nevertheless, based on repentant' testimonies and fieldwork, various experts have been able to draw an archetypal Mafia model which originates in the Sicilian Cosa Nostra (United State Justice Department 1967). The following section discusses the keys to Mafias' success: their effective command and control structures, their cohesiveness and flexibility, and absolute faith in their leadership and codes.

#### 2.1.1. Mafias' Formal Structure

A Mafia is designed rationally with an integrated position intending to optimize profit. It functions regardless of personnel change: no individual—not even the leader—is indispensable. This hierarchical form is still current but unequally applies to all types of Mafias. As an example, the Camorra or Ndrangheta have more horizontal forms of the criminal network with certain autonomy of decision and execution (Reski 2013). Yet, most Mafias have a top-down hierarchy in terms of decision making.

Cosa Nostra's central unit is the "Family," also called *cosca* (artichoke heart). It is called differently in other Mafias but functions similarly. Each *cosca* has its own *men of honor* or initiated members. A Mafia unit comprises as many as 700 to as few as 20 initiated members. Each Family is headed by one man, the "boss," whose primary functions are to maintain order and to maximize profit. Subject only to the possibility of being overruled by the Commission, the boss' authority in all matters relating to his family is absolute. Beneath each boss is an "underboss," the vice president of the family, who collects information for the boss, relays messages to him and passes his instructions down to underlings. On the same level as the underboss, but operating in a staff capacity, is the *consigliere*, an adviser and manager. Hierarchically inferior are the *caporegime* (lieutenants), some of whom serve as buffers between the top members of the family and the lower-echelon personnel. To maintain their insulation from the police, leaders of the hierarchy, and particularly *Bosses*, avoid direct communication with the workers; therefore, all commands, information, grievances, and all money flows back and

forth through these trusted go-betweens. Lieutenants, however, are not involved in strategic decision making. Other *caporegimes* serve as chiefs of operating units. The lowest level “members” of a family is the *soldati*, the soldiers or “button” men, who report to the *caporegime*.

The right to constitute a family abroad is called *decina* (a tens), as it is said that 10 *men of honor* are necessary to build a family (Reski 2013). On average, families have between 25 and 30 *men of honor*. It is crucial to note that all subsidiary families created abroad remain faithful and hierarchically submitted to the Sicilian *cosca* of its founding members. This rule is *de facto* maintaining coherence in the implementation of the global strategy decided by the *Coupola*. The *Coupola* or *Commission* is Cosa Nostra’s overarching body where all rules and major decisions are made, usually by consensus. It gathers *capomendati* (mandated Mafiosi representing three or four families) from all Sicily and is headed by the most powerful of their own, *Capo di tutti capi* (“boss of all bosses”) such as Bernardo Provenzano and Toto Riina.

In the 1960s, membership was, ethnically speaking, exclusively Italian–American—Cosa Nostra families only started to include Neapolitans and Calabrese associates in their ranks in the 1930s and more noticeably in the 1960s. Interestingly, many Jewish gangsters have played a significant role in the development of Cosa Nostra in the United States and some of them were given high positions of commands. Among many others, we can cite Arnold Rothstein who mentored Charles “Lucky” Luciano, the founder of the modern Mafia, Benjamin “Bugsy” Siegel, the head of *Murder Incorporated*,<sup>2</sup> and founder of the modern Las Vegas, and finally Meyer Lansky, *consigliere* of several families’ bosses and who managed their investments in the construction, tourism, and gambling industries in Florida and the Bahamas (Cockayne 2016).

### *2.1.2. Mafias’ Normative Order*

In the following section, we present Mafias’ as a counter-government operating with its own laws, judicial system, and codes. This obviously constitutes a direct challenge to Nation-States as they are founded on their normative production and legitimacy. What are the components of Mafias’ normative order?

Mafiosi are soldiers primarily fighting for the interests of their Mafia. Through its enforcement power and in exchange for an absolute obedience to the hierarchy and normative order, Mafias provide security and protection to its initiates (Grennan and Britz 2006). In fact, coercion, defined as “the use of overt threat and actual force to influence another decision,” is central to Mafias’ functioning.<sup>3</sup>

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2 Murder Incorporated was a team of assassins formed by Jewish gangsters to support Luciano in his successful putsch against old Mafia leaders such as Masseria.

3 Mafias have “enforcers” in their ranks, who maintain organizational integrity by arranging for the maiming or killing of recalcitrant members.

The harming capabilities or perceived threat associated, internally and externally, with the Mafia forces (human capital and technology at its disposal) is an essential means to enforce deals, to ensure the continuity of their legal order in the territories they control and capture targeted resources (predation and robbery).

Interestingly, Mafias' normative backbone is close and comparable to feudal societies. In these holist systems, the individual disappears behind the collective. Mafias' codes give its leaders authoritarian power over everyone in the organization, and establish absolute loyalty, honor, and respect as its three core values. *Men of honor* are bound for life by an allegiance to their hierarchical superior as well as their interests.<sup>4</sup> In return, bosses are deeply attached to the defense of the group and its homeland.

It is also fundamentally important to note that Mafias' codes encourage members to consider Nation-States, all public institutions as its enemies, its normative order and set of values as being flawed. As Gayraud points out, Mafias have developed within traditional societies, such as the ones surrounding the Mediterranean basin, attaching central importance to biological family and extended family or clan bonds (Kelly 1999). Hence, Mafias built their own normative codes in opposition to the holistic values behind Democracies' social contracts. Solidarity among its ranks is praised in contradiction to contemporary liberal individualism. Mafias' leaderships determine meaning, motives, and causes.

In addition, fighting a long-term war against some powerful opponents, Mafias cherish invisibility and discretion as central norms to preserve its continuity. Mafias' obsession is to dissimulate its activities, its members, ambitions, rituals, and laws, sometimes even its own existence (Gayraud 2014). During initiation rituals, Mafias teach new *men of honor* secret means of recognition and distinctive communication. First through their own language using slang, old dialect, and own coded salutations. Mafia movie *Donnie Brasco* (1997) depicts the meaning of the salutations "one of *my* friends" and "one of *our* friends" which, respectively, differentiate introduction of a business partner and an initiate within a Cosa Nostra conversation. Moreover, initiates are instructed to become men of few words. Like in ancient societies, the virtues of silence are brought forward, once again a deliberate differentiation with modern liberal Nation-States. Language is perceived as a potential danger and oral treason from their own ranks (repentant) is punished by death.

### **2.1.3. *The Resonance of Initiation***

Initiations are symbolistic rituals materializing the separation between Mafias and Nation-States as two opposite normative entities and legitimate coercive authorities. This process, comparable to Mafia's human resources' work, is therefore cru-

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4 Most Mafias are misogynistic' actors to the notable exception of the Camorra.

cial, not only for internal cohesiveness but also for its preservation. In fact, only repentant can challenge Mafia's secrecy, discrete functioning, and activities. Following damaging testimonies by a repentant, Mafias regularly freeze all initiations, such as the five New York Families in the 1960s and 1970s (Gayraud 2011).

Mafias first attempt to create a distinguished social community by applying geographic—ethnic criteria of recruitment, such as the obligation of being Sicilian Catholic to become a Cosa Nostra' men of honor (Kelly 1999). Second, priority is given among Mafias to *biological vitality*, i.e. a highly selective and meticulous leadership renewal. Mafias are careful not to integrate too many members of the same family in their ranks; bonds created by initiation are always superior to blood ties. Furthermore, within Mafias, power never transmits via a hereditary system (Potter and Lyman 2007). Members of the criminal elite are always recruited as per a very strict process following the criminal meritocratic rules, new initiates are chosen, and they never apply. Selection criteria include cruelty, ruse, the rejection of moralistic considerations, and the capacity for violent domination.

In New York, a guarantor presents the candidature in front of the five families which decide, by consensus, to "open the book": the start of the initiation (Gayraud 2011). Strongly influenced by religious and ancient sect practices, Mafias initiation rituals are secrecy and solidarity oath. Most of the Mafias' initiation ceremonies entail three phases: a separation from the ancient world, a transition, and then incorporation, erasing all past allegiances. Ndrangheta initiation ceremony or rite of passage is interestingly called "baptism" as the initiate simulates its death and then resurrects within its new family (Cockayne 2016, 93). This ritual ceremony also has a strong socio-psychologic effect as it inculcates trust among members, internal cohesiveness, a sense of in-group and out-group identity, and life-long loyalty to a code shared by a select few. In fact, an initiation is also the formal empowerment to the secret. Once initiated, a Mafiosi is part of a brotherhood, any offense against him is an attack against the group. Hence, initiation creates a strong social identity for newcomers which gain a new identity, a future, and appurtenance to a superior social group. This social status' change means that even the lowest-ranked initiates will be superior to any gang chief (Reski 2013).

Finally, sacred family ties created by initiations are highlighted in Ndrangheta' religious references in its own hierarchy. In fact, the most important chiefs of Ndrangheta, 155 families or *locali* (places) and their multiple branches or *Ndrine*, are called *mamma santissima* or sacred mother (Reski 2013). Inspired by Cosa Nostra, a *camera di controle* (chamber of control) gathers the highest ranked *santa* (saints or initiated), called *associazione* and *vangelista* (bishop). Similarly, it is striking to see that within Yakuza's basic criminal cells or *Ikka* (Family), the chief is called *Obayun* (master or father), his lieutenants *Wakagashira* (elder sons), his under-lieutenants *Wakashu* (sons), and the soldiers' ranks can be translated as elder brother, brother, and younger brother (Pons 1992). Often overlooked this social and normative cohesiveness has played a great part in Mafias' expansions.

## 2.2. NATION-STATES' COMPETITORS

The following section argues that Mafia's structural characteristics are by essence an opposition to the Nation-States absolute sovereignty, even more as sovereignty is an absolute concept. Applying Mafias' constitutive elements to Nation-States' sovereign attributes underline a thorough confrontation between the two actors, as Mafias propose a credible alternative societal offer to Nation-States.

### 2.2.1. *The Incompatibility of Nation-States' Sovereignty and Mafias' Quest for Power*

Sovereignty can never dissolve and be shared among different actors on the same territory without dissolving itself (Pemberton 2009). As Hinsley and Held stress, sovereignty entails that "there is a political authority in community which has undisputed right to determine the framework of rules and regulations in a given territory and to govern accordingly" (Held 2000, 38). Sovereignty is said to be diluting both in domestic and international arenas, yet Nation-States remain the basic unit of international politics. However, while being often encompassed in a wide group of "non-state actors," I consider that Mafias constitute a distinctive challenge to Nation-States' sovereignty.

In fact, Mafias have the unique ability to simultaneously offer a credible alternative form of governmental power while challenging the core elements constituting Nation-States' supreme command over a defined society, as well as its absolute and independent determination of its own fate. In fact, a Nation-State's *de jure* use of power does not mean that it is *de facto* the true political power on a specific territory. An entitled sovereign competence is fundamentally different from the "supreme ability to induce people to take a desired course of action, by bringing some sort of pressure to bear upon them, a *de facto* use of power" (Peters and Benn 1959, 257). Having a Nation-State presence on a piece of territory does not mean that is the effective ruler or authority on it.

The notion of Nation-States' authority is related to the question of power's origins, its human philosophical endeavors, and tenants. This question has been heavily debated for centuries, according to Raymond Aron, power designates the potential of actions owned by a certain group of people, its capacity to dictate and implement military, economic, or moral choices (Aron 1966). In fact, Aron explains that throughout the ages, power is constituted by the same elements: *milieu* (territory), *resources* (number of men and resources), and the *capacity for collective action* (organization, command structure, discipline, and solidarity). These criteria apply perfectly and equally to Nation-States and Mafias which are entrenched in territorial realities, wealth driven by true collective objectives. However, Mafias' quest for power is inherently different from Nation-States. In fact, Mafias' vision of governmental power is absolutist but do not include any consideration for Rous-

seau's notion of representation, as notably emphasized in his essay *Considerations on the Government of Poland* (Held 2000). In fact, Mafias are self-centered actors whose lure for power is inherently a selfish quest erasing every possible obstacle, contrary even to the notion of social contracts and democratic principles. Its vitality and legitimization come from its own ranks, none of its objectives or means of actions are dictated from outside its structure (Gayraud 2011).

### **2.2.2. Nation-States' and Mafias Conflicting Core Attributes**

International Law requirements of statehood are set out in Article 1 of the 1933 Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States. Required criteria include a permanent population; a defined territory; a government and the ability to enter into relations with other Nation-States. Each of these Nation-States constitutive elements is interestingly contested by Mafias.

Mafias' most visible challenge to Nation-States' governmental power lies in its constant capacity to neutralize States' responses and attempts to dismantle it or to diminish durably its power and resources. In fact, Mafias infiltration of public structures, especially judicial systems and law enforcement, is the key as it directly implies that they cannot be durably repressed without affecting local, regional, or national elites (Cockayne 2016). Many Nation-States first fail to subject Mafias to their own rules. For instance, while being on all European polices most-wanted criminal' lists, Cosa Nostra *capo de capi* Toto Riina and Bernardo Provenzano have succeeded, respectively, for over two and four decades to expand their Mafias' power. However, Mafias do not only neutralize Nation-States' legitimate use of force but they also impose their own coercive governmental authority.

In fact, Mafias run a parallel tax' collection system which according to Weber constitutes one of the most ancient Nation-States' attributes of power (Held 2000). Hence, it is noticeable that racketeering, i.e. protection against a real or imaginary security threat, is a basic source of all Mafia's wealth. Cosa Nostra repentant' Antonio Calderone describes the racketeering system run by *pizzo*, Cosa Nostra tax collector, as being the most visible sign of a territory being under Mafias' rule and of citizens' subordination to its authority (Ziniti 2017). In fact, every legal (commerce, construction, etc.) and illegal (gambling, thefts) economic activity will be taxed and transformed into sources of revenues. A recent study of the Italian small business confederation (*Confesercenti*) highlighted that 80% of shops in Sicilia and 50% in Napoli are paying their taxes to Mafias which earn over \$60 billion euros annually from this activity alone (Gayraud 2011). In Japan, *sokaiya*, i.e. Yakuza facilitators, are allegedly racketeering companies such as Toyota, Japan Airlines, or Takashimaya for annual profits estimated at several billion dollars (Grennan and Britz 2006).

Finally, like Nation-States, Mafias are profoundly anchored in the social and historical realities of the territory they originate from. It is arguable that the territory is a part of a Mafia's biotope (Reski 2013). The Mafia territory is first its historic

cradle and its strength is highly dependent on this vital space. However, Mafias have a permanent objective to extend their territorial control and contest traditional understanding of territories as they govern and operate in their own maps and flexible boundaries. Having strongholds do not limit Mafia's constant attempt for territorial expansion. In these new maps designed by Mafias, economic flows, urban designs, environment protection, and moral norms are all strongly impacted (Cockayne 2016). Sometimes, Mafias have the ability to create a *Potemkine village*, giving an illusion of control to Nation-States over their own territory. As a matter of fact, in many Chinatowns around the world a "ghost mayor" rules. For several decades, the well-known and highly respected "nocturnal mayor" of Manhattan's Chinatown was Benny Ong, the local chief of all Triads (McFadden 1994).

### **2.2.3. Mafias' Smart Power**

Mafias perfectly fit in Joseph Nye's smart power analysis as they successfully combine the hard power of coercion and payment with the soft power of persuasion and attraction (Nye 2011). In fact, the acquiescence of social legitimacy is indispensable for Mafias, not only to ensure stability for business but also to gain political power in their competition with Nation-States. Hence, in areas where Mafias govern people often willingly choose to cooperate with them. In South Italy, for example, Mafias' only presence at a café with a candidate to local or national elections is a sufficient signal to indicate to local populations who to vote for (Gayraud 2011). How do Mafias build this smart power? According to Cockayne's analysis, Mafias use "strategic communications" tools designed to shape "the normative order through efforts designed to legitimise and normalise criminal conduct and criminal influence" (Cockayne 2016, 38).

Tocqueville and Benedict Anderson insisted that Nation-States sovereignty needs to be imagined and continuously reinvented to be accepted by a human community if it is to become real and endure (Gayraud 2014). Thus, as each Nation-State has a national story, every Mafia needs a founding myth. A street gang has a reputation, while a Mafia has a legend. Glorious origins are essential to reinforce Mafia's internal cohesiveness and to justify its purpose, they are therefore extensively taught during initiation. Using elements of regional history, Mafias create patriotic myths, usually insisting on its resistance against oppressive military or political forces. For example, Cosa Nostra would have been founded during Sicilian Vespers (1282), Palermo's famous resistance against French military invasion, and its acronym would find its origins in the screams of a Sicilian mother seeing her daughter, a Fia, being raped by a French soldier. A second version says it was inspired by a Palermo resistance slogan *Morte Alla Francia! Italia Anela* (M.A.F.I.A.).

As both Foucault and Lukes underline, the successful exercise of power implies to win "the heart and mind," to produce or impose attachment' feelings to the Nation-State through norms and discourses, the same applies to Mafias (Fels,

Kremer, and Kronenberg 2012). Indeed, diffusion of founding mythology among local population enhances Mafias' strength. For example, U.S. Cosa Nostra' Families were allegedly formed to defend Italian immigrants against White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) establishment, showing their attachment to values of honor, courage, and virility. The use of the social bandit mythology (Robin Hood) and social charity to win the heart of the poor working class could not correspond to anyone better than to Pablo Escobar, the head of the Medellin Cartel, which in the early 1980s won \$500,000 a day. Despised for the extremely violent war he conducted against the Colombian State, Pablo Escobar was venerated like a Saint in Medellin's poor neighborhoods. During his reign, Escobar spent a significant amount of money in charitable public works, built schools, sports fields, and housing developments. He gifted affordable houses to thousands of families living in slums, interestingly giving his own name to the newly built neighborhood, *Barrio Pablo Escobar*.

Mafias have always tried to balance the use of coercion with social action in order to reinforce their noble image, "a necessary evil," in the eyes of the general public. For instance, Al Capone gave soup to poor workers during the 1929 depression and Yakuza Yamagushi-Gumi organized free food and water deliveries to the population affected by the 1995 earthquake in Kobe. Mafias' smart power is also visible in its attempt to brand itself as the only reliable social mediator and peace enforcer in neighborhoods where traditional public security duty is delegated to them, such as in Taiwan (Triads), Little Italy (Sicilian-American), or Corleone (Cosa Nostra) (Grennan and Britz 2006). On the contrary, the war between Mexican cartels and their structural instability, the public acts of terror, and continuous emergence of new powerful actors have prevented them to become perennial Mafias. The use of torture and murder of civilians have become a trade mark of these ultra-violent criminal organizations: on March 15, 2017, a mass grave of 250 human skulls, all victims of cartels, was discovered in Veracruz (Karimi and Jones 2017).

In fact, since the 1990s, cartels emerged out of paramilitary branches of the most powerful Mexican cartels such as *Los Negros* headed by the Beltran Leyva formerly part of the Sinaloa Cartel and the Zetas, deserters of the elite corps of the Mexican army, who became the private army of the Gulf cartel leader' Osiel Cardenas Guillen (Saviano 2014).<sup>5</sup> Their military ultra-modern equipment (Kevlar, assault rifles, night-glasses, wire-tapping, etc.) and highly professionalized rigid and codified structure, their post-modern criminal flexibility, and lack of territorial roots have allowed them to quickly become major criminal players. In addition, newly formed Familia Michoacan or the Millennium Family has all contributed to transforming Central America into a transnational battleground.<sup>6</sup>

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5 Grupo Areomovil de Fuerza Especiales.

6 Along criminal organizations such as White Templars or kill-Zetas, the Michoacan Familia is of-

To conduct this war, the cartels have recruited the most brutal “killing-machines,” Guatemala’s Kaibiles, highly trained militaries reportedly responsible for many massacres and who massively deserted the army since the end of the war in 1996 (United States Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services 2000).<sup>7</sup> Over the past few years, Mexican cartels have entered a vicious cycle of terror actions which has increasingly diffused a culture of violence through songs, videos, and messages (notably via digital tools). They broadcast mass murders live, bury people alive, use torture tools such as electric saws, light people on fire using oil, or announce their new victims screaming “grilled meat! grilled meat!” in the war zones (Saviano 2014).

Finally, it is interesting to note that Mafias are challenging Nation-States normative discourse by targeting medias and the entertainment industry. Since the late 1960s, U.S. Cosa Nostra’ Families have increased their shares in pornographic and classic entertainment companies. Through Meyer Lanski’s heir Alvin Malnik, the Mafia has, for instance, massively invested in the *Film Enterprises and Distributors* Company, which notably produced Frank Sinatra or the Rat Pack band. Malnik was also notoriously close to Michael Jackson whom he saved from bankruptcy several times. Famous movies favorably presenting Mafias’ values such as the *Godfathers trilogy* or *the Things of Ours* were also notoriously directed by Mafiosi such as Danny Provenzano (Cockayne 2016). Similarly, in Japan, in the 1970s, Yakuza produced over 1,500 apologetic movies through the company Toei.

### **III. Mafias’ Multifaceted Political Power**

**T**hanks to their acquisition of an incredible amount of wealth and resources, Mafias influence Nation-States, control them or shape their destiny in several regions of the world, becoming either indispensable partners, hidden masters, or indestructible opponents.

#### **3.1. MAFIAS’ POLITICAL STRATEGIES ON DOMESTIC SCENES**

The primary source of Mafias governmental power originates in their influence, shaping or dictating of Nation-States’ policymaking and implementation process. Captivatingly, Mafias appear to have built unique flexible political strategies which adjust to the balance of power with their opponents in local contexts, hence becoming a key international actor.

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officially fighting a messianic battle, protecting the poorest and weakest, against other cartels. Their use of rituals and religious terminology to justify their actions did not prevent them to commit horrendous atrocities and to run some of the most profitable criminal activities in the country.

7 Kaibiles training involve terrifying survival and killing tests. In recent years, drug seizures in Guatemala have reportedly dropped five times compared to their level in the 1990s notably because of paramilitaries involvement in drug trafficking, prostitution, and racket activities.

### **3.1.1. The Trade-Off**

The first form of Mafias' political strategy is an alliance at local and national levels with public authorities. Thanks to their territorial control, Mafias force governments to grant them protection or facilitation for their criminal activities in exchange for access to enclave populations, markets, criminal finance, illicit labor, and votes. Politicians acquire present or future political power thanks to Mafias' financial and territorial support during and after electoral campaigns. They notably coerce people on territories they control in order to orientate their votes toward one candidate. Mafias simultaneously provide marginalized groups with access to the goods and services controlled by higher political powers, to protection, and to social mobility. This trade-off usually implies the use of corruption, understood as a transaction which exchanges an illegal or illicit exercise of government discretion for a criminal resource (Cockayne 2016, 35). Strategic corruption at its "highest" level aims to decisively shape the law-making process and its implementation by manipulating key public figures.

Corruption allows Mafias to transform their enemy, the public force, into an ally and accomplice. Contributing voluntarily to Mafias' activities and neglecting its professional duties make the public officer tied to the activity in the long term, the coercive threat being an efficient insurance. Corruption creates a sense of friendly partnership, while the corrupted is entirely submitted to its criminal allegiance, therefore ensuring continuity to the criminal activity. The financial gains permitted thanks to corruption, notably the gaining of public markets, surpass greatly the initial cost consented.

Italy illustrates perfectly the electoral trade-off between a national leading political party and Mafias. In fact, following the Second World War, Cosa Nostra developed close links with the *Christian-Democrats* party. It notably helped the Christian-Democrats leaders to be continuously elected in Sicily, Naples, or Rome for several decades. After the fall of the Christian Democracy in the late 1980s, highlighted by the murder of Christian Democrat strong man in Sicily Salvo Lima, the Mafia turned to a new political force named *Forza Italia*. In 1993, during his trial, Mafiosi repentant Antonio Giuffré affirmed indeed that Silvio Berlusconi, Forza Italia leader and head of Italian multinational Fininvest, was personally in touch with Cosa Nostra' Bosses in the 1970s and 1980s (Dickie 2004). Moreover, according to Giuffré, Senator Marcello Dell'Utri—Berlusconi's right-hand man—traded the ease of judiciary pressure on Cosa Nostra in exchange for electoral support (Dickie 2004). Dell'Utri was convicted of corruption charges in 2004.

### **3.1.2. Political–Criminal Nexus**

The second level of Mafias' political strategy involves the creation of an intimate partnership with Nation-States' institutions. In a complex interplay between the regulated and unregulated world, Mafias and local elites' fate becomes intertwined.

The political—criminal symbiosis has many faces. One side of the coin is the criminalization of high-level public officials, i.e. their direct participation in criminal activity as highlighted in UNODC reports on West and Central African regions (UNODC 2013). In his research, Stephen Ellis also describes Nigerian politicians' participation in large criminal networks notably fee-fraud, human smuggling, and narcotics trafficking (Ellis 2015). On another aspect of this political—criminal symbiosis was emphasized by Jim Woolsey, a former CIA Director, using the example of several former Soviet satellite states, where organized crime groups started to work as complementary to Nation-States' structures, "doing everything that was not acceptable from a government" (Cockayne 2016, 3).

Broadly speaking, Mafias use this political strategy when they do not have structural capabilities (manpower or finances) to control a territory on their own. It is, however, noticeable that Mafias have successfully developed a political—criminal nexus, i.e. the sharing of governmental power with local political forces, in every type of political regime and socio-economic environment. Even repressive societies are not exempted. North Korea's state budget is indeed decisively dependent on the trading of narcotics, notably methamphetamine, to Triads and Yakuzas (Glenny 2009). In fact, Mafias are intrinsically interlinked with several Nation-States' histories, notably Cuba and Turkey, in the following case studies.

A classic historical example is given by the U.S. Cosa Nostra support to Batista's coup in Cuba in 1952 (Cockayne 2016). In return for their support, a governing joint venture was created allowing the Cosa Nostra to run illicit and licit gambling, prostitution, and narco-trafficking in the country. Cuban State' resources were allocated to facilitate these illicit businesses: favorable legislation was passed, banks were created, and security forces provided. Leading politicians such as the Prio Socarras brothers, at the time Prime Minister and Senator amassed fortunes (Cockayne 2016). The joint venture notably established *Aerovias Q*, a commercial airline entitled to use military airports and to avoid customs, which played a central role in shipping cocaine from Colombia to Camaguey (Cuba) where it was refined before being sent to the United States.

The fascinating political—criminal nexus in modern Turkey illustrates how necessity and leader's greed brought a Nation-State's ruling elite to seek an alliance with a Mafia, which greatly expanded thanks to this growing collusion of means, objectives, and interests. Following WW2, Turkish Mafia bosses or *Baba* (father) considerably increased territorial control, both in cities and in the countryside, thanks to growing revenues from heroin trafficking. Their support became vital to politicians, businessmen, and security forces during periods of serious instability such as in the 1970s and 1980s when the country was close to chaos (Ülkütekin 2014). Facing armed opposition from Kurdish, Marxist, or Armenians' movements, the military and police establishments turned to a young nationalist' movement called *Ulkucu* or *Grey Wolves*, led by Abdallah Catli. Quickly allied with

Mafia leaders, they were extremely useful to Turkish secret services to conduct unlawful assassinations and counter-insurgency operations within and outside Turkish borders (Glenny 2009). In return, Ulkucu and Mafia were given a blank check to conduct drug, weapons, and cigarettes trafficking. Covering their illicit activities under their nationalistic sense of honor and attachment to the Ottoman Empire heritage, pro-governmental Babas were also given access to political and administrative positions (Aslaneli 1999). Hence, in 1996, the Susurluk scandal, notably involving Catli, revealed the inextricable mutual interests between Mafia and Turkish elites in managing highly profitable criminal activities as well as fighting Kurdish separatism (Aslaneli 2001).

### **3.1.3. Mafias' States**

The last and ultimate political strategy of Mafias aim is to take *de facto* full authority over a Nation-State. The criminal-political nexus questions the threshold where a region is still considered to govern public institutions or turn into a Mafia's territory. Douglas Farah defined criminalized states as "states where the senior leadership is aware of and involved—either actively or through passive acquiescence—on behalf of the state, transnational organised crime (TOC), where TOC is used as an instrument of statecraft, and where levers of state power are incorporated into the operational structure of one or more TOC groups" (Farah 2015, 2). According to Moises Naim, in Mafia states, a mix of notorious criminals, Presidents, militaries, spy chiefs, and government officials "enrich themselves, families and friends while exploiting the money, muscle, political influence, and global connections of criminal syndicates to cement and expand their own power" (Naim 2012, 1). Mafias become the sole political force ruling directly or through a puppet-government, capturing every resource, using public power according to their criminal needs and eliminating all reluctant forces. National interests and Mafias' interests amalgamate. From Afghanistan to Venezuela, examples of criminalized Nation-States are allegedly numerous (Naim 2012).

In Western and Eastern Balkans, a criminal patronage system has indeed been established. In July 2001, an Italian prosecutor formally accused the then-Prime Minister of Montenegro Milo Dujkanovic, Minister of Foreign Affairs Branko Petrovic and local police chiefs, to be active associates of Camorra and Sacra Corona Unita bosses in the running of the largest Mediterranean cigarette trafficking network, smuggling over 1,000 tons of cigarettes per month (Traynor 2003). Cigarettes were mainly sold to Tobacco multinational companies based in Switzerland including R.J Reynolds and Philip Morris (Glenny 2009). Experts affirm that during President Dujkanovic' reign half of Montenegro's GDP originated from criminal activities (Gayraud 2014).

In West Africa, Guinea and Guinea-Bissau are two famous Mafia States' examples. In 2007, UNODC's reports highlighted that the two countries had become

a new cocaine trafficking hub from South America to Europe. Guinea-Bissau was further described as “an interesting case in point because indications [were] that this country [was] particularly utilised by traffickers” (UNODC 2007, 10). As one of the poorest in the subregion, “the entire national budget of the government of Guinea-Bissau is just about equal to the wholesale value of 2.5 tons of cocaine in Europe” (UNODC 2007, 12), consisting of many small islands with their own landing strips, and ruled by low-paid and easily corruptible officials, Guinea-Bissau logically became pushers’ paradise (Hanson 2007). The coercive power of Mafias to keep control of their own state was highlighted by South American cartels’ logistical and financial support both to Guinea-Bissau president’ elections and to multiple military coups, notably in April 2012 (United Nations Security Council 2012). Among other notorious drug-lords, Vice-Admiral Bubo Na Tchuto and two of his followers were arrested by the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and later indicted for their involvement in narcotics trafficking (Valdamanis and Andrade 2013).

### **3.2. THE GEOPOLITICAL POWER OF MAFIAS**

In addition to their national political influence, Mafias’ direct participation in international affairs encompasses several dimensions. Yet, the power of Mafias as geopolitical actors is especially visible in war zones around the world.

#### **3.2.1. A Determining Role in Conflicts**

Mafias thrive in conflict, and more broadly in politically or economically instable context. New transnational criminal organizations are sometimes created in the aftermath of a conflict, such as NCS after the Biafra war (1967–1970). Mafias benefit indeed from these troubled periods to recruit cheap labor force, to provide governance in deprived areas, and to extend their illicit trafficking (bootlegging, drug markets, prostitution, etc.). The Vietnam War and its aftermath saw the booming of heroin trafficking and consumption, notably in the United States (Collins 1993). Implemented in the region since the Indochina war, Corsican mobsters (*the French Connection*) allied with U.S. Cosa Nostra’ Families and CIA officials, created the Golden Triangle, the world’s largest heroin production region (Kelly 1999). Similar schemes have allowed heroin trafficking to thrive in Afghanistan (Collins 1993).

Furthermore, in Sahel’s conflict zones, in Afghanistan and Sudan, a progressive delegation of sovereign powers to criminal organizations by local authorities against shares of illicit revenues has considerably reinforced criminals’ wealth and political power (Lacher 2012). Uncontested masters of large territories, criminals are able to blackmail governments through their proximity to terrorist organizations or as the main local economic actor (Sebastian 2015). Consequently, powerful criminals become indispensable partners in peace-making processes, while war’ continuation is often in their best personal interest (Margolis 2008).

Armed groups' evolution toward criminalization, from ideological focus to economic motivations, also gives Mafias a determinant role in conflict resolution. Today, most of the armed groups in Colombia, from paramilitaries like *Los Pepes* to the Fuerzas armadas revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC), are cocaine producers, collaborating closely with Mexican cartels and Italian Mafias, notably the Ndrangheta (Saviano 2014). Hence, without Mafias, their buyers, incentives, and resources might be insufficient for armed groups to continue fighting, forcing them, in turn, to seriously engage in peace processes.

### *3.2.2. Mafias' Weapons Smuggling: A Direct Incidence in Conflicts*

Mafias are indispensable geopolitical actors to take into consideration as one of the primary activities enriching them; arms' trafficking is directly fuelling conflicts globally. The current leader of illicit arms smuggling is Russian organized crime or *Bratva*. As Misha Glenny points out, in 1990s Russia's institutional chaos, thousands of *Vori'* (thieves) networks were ruling the country: "By 1999, they were more than 11,500 registered 'private security firms' employing 800,000 people ( ... ) 200,000 had licenses to carry arms, while Russian Interior Ministry estimated that there were at least half as many against that remained unregistered" (Glenny 2009, 84). Increasingly structured, the *Bratva* extended its activity beyond Russian borders thanks to two sources of wealth: the distribution of heroin coming from central Asia and the immense stocks of abandoned weapons at their disposal (Yakov 1999).

In fact, during the 1990s, smugglers like Viktor Bout and Leonid Minin started to move weapons to armed groups in Sierra Leone, Angola, Columbia, and Afghanistan providing air cargo services to places no one else would go (Glenny 2009). However, the first transnational criminal empire built thanks to weapons smuggling was the network of "Don" Semen Mogilevic, a notorious *Bratva'* boss, and FBI most-wanted man. Involved in prostitution, immigration, and drug business, and reportedly controlling Moscow' Sheremetyevo International Airport, Mogilevic owns galleries, nightclubs, banks, and caterer companies throughout the world (Saviano 2014).

While being only a small player until 1994, Mogilevic acquired that year the three largest Hungarian weapon companies (Army Co-Op, Magnex 2000, and Digepe General Machine) and obtained a permit authorizing him to legally sell and buy weapons (Saviano 2014). *De facto* controlling the entire Hungarian armament sector, Mogilevic sold weapons to various armed groups in Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, and Pakistan, bypassing every UN sanction or international regulation. In a 2008 Wikileaks cable, then U.S. Ambassador in Ukraine William Taylor expressed his fears that gas supplies to Ukraine and the EU were linked to the Russian *Bratva*, and more specifically Mogilevic. In fact, RosUkrEnergo, the largest Ukrainian gas distributor, 50% owner Oligarch Dmitry Firtash, who financed former president Yanukovich' election, admitted in a meeting with Ambassador Taylor that Mogi-

levich was the “real power” behind his own multi-billion gas interests (Harding 2010). Russian authorities arrested Mogilevich in 2008 over tax evasion at a cosmetics chain, but mysteriously released him in 2009 (Wallace and Mesko 2013).

Finally, a detailed field-investigation conducted by the C4ADS foundation, and published in September 2013, highlighted the role of the *Odessa Network*, a criminal joint venture gathering high-level politicians and militaries close to Russian President Vladimir Putin (notably one of his personal advisors), oligarchs as well as the Russian Bratva, in fuelling the conflicts in Syria, Somalia, Sudan, or République Démocratique du Congo (RDC) by selling weapons to local armed groups on behalf of the Russian and Ukrainian governments.

### **3.2.3. *Mafias' Wars***

Not only thanks to its economic and logistical participation but also through its ability to control local actors, I would argue that Mafias have built the capacity to manipulate and start conflicts according to their own interests. During conflicts, Mafias can serve insurgent groups through intelligence support, territorial control, assassinations, and, especially, the establishment of efficient production and distribution of goods and services. In fact, Mafias are often necessary and preferred commercial partners to warlords (UNSC 2015). The example of Cote d'Ivoire underlines that revenues of gold, diamonds, manganese, cotton, timber, or cocoa trafficking allowed local warlords to sustain their rebellion but also to considerably enrich and later gain access to high-level administrative or military positions (UNSC 2007). Hence, Mafias strategically choose to support rebellions and to manipulate conflicts to acquire present and future economic and political gains.

Moreover, Mafias have attained the geopolitical capacity to project force, its coercive power, beyond its traditional zones of influences to its best interests. In fact, the Peruvian “Shining path” rebellion has allegedly been rebooted by Mexican cartels and became a puppet cocaine-smuggling armed group (Rodolfo 1999). The Sinaloa, Beltran Leyva, and Gulf cartels have succeeded in transforming the Valley of the Apurimac and Ene Rivers (VRAE), a lawless outpost in eastern Andes that now grows more coca plants than anywhere else on Earth and from where they supply the Brazilian market, the second in the world after the United States (Tegel 2014).

Mafias' ability to launch or develop a conflict depending on their local interests was also perceptible during the recent Balkan wars where criminal groups thrived by selling drugs, weapons, oil, clothes, food, migrants, and information, sometimes also participating directly in combats, notably during the siege of Sarajevo (Gayraud 2011). Indispensable post-conflict partners, Albanian clans acquired unparalleled political and mediatic power in the post-communism institutional void (Glenny 2009). It is, therefore, no surprise that the Albanese Mafia developed a new stronghold in Kosovo following the footsteps of NATO. The

Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) was notoriously financed through various trafficking controlled by Albanese clans, notably organs smuggling through the *Yellow Houses* network (Scheper-Hughes 2011). At the end of the war, former Kosovar paramilitaries engaged full-time in the transit of cigarettes, heroin, migrants, and women to western Europe, developing a new platform for the Albanian Mafia between Turkey and Italy (Glenny 2009).

## **IV. Mafias: The Next Leading Actors in the International Scene?**

**A**cknowledging that Mafias play a significant role in international politics, this section details the core elements illustrating and explaining their thriving power quests and why Mafias are allegedly becoming major geopolitical actors. In fact, Mafias' political strategies, this flexible "tool box," are nourished and sustained all over the world by its incredible wealth and ever-increasing sources of revenues. The first section indeed analyzes Mafias' economic and financial successes as the most tangible proofs of its expanding power both in the least and most developed regions of the world. Secondly, this section discusses which elements in the economic system are conducive to the rise of Mafias in the international arena.

### **4.1. MAFIAS' RISING ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL POWERS**

The economic power of the Mafias is a major threat to Nation-States, as their annual profits are equivalent to the world's richest countries. Hence, Mafias have built phenomenal empires in the legal economy and are among the wealthiest actors in the international scene thanks to the benefits they accrue from highly profitable illicit activities. Their growing influence in the financial sector reveals that Mafias have developed a new deadly influencing tool targeting the least and most developed countries.

#### ***4.1.1. Mafias' Strategic Investments: An Increasing Presence in Legal Economy***

Multiple elements illustrate Mafias' growing links with legal economic channels. In December 2000, 13 U.S. federal administrations redacted an *International Crime Threat Assessment* warning the U.S. government that reduction in economic and political barriers, notably in Customs Unions, had allowed the least scrupulous capitalistic actors, Mafias, to launder massive revenues in the legal economy (CIA 2000). In fact, in recent decades, Mafias have successfully increased and diversified their presence in the legal economy, creating their own businesses or taking over already existing companies (De Grauwe and Costa Storti 2012). While hardly quantifiable, increasing dependency on Mafias' money following successive economic shocks in Russia, Japan, the United States, and Europe may have further opened companies to Mafias' liquidities and expanded Mafias pernicious influence in our economies (Potter and Lyman 2007).

The fact that all Mafias privilege investments in critical sectors of our consumerist and urban societies such as construction, waste management, entertainment, and sports industries or funeral services, is no coincidence. Mafias' are perennial institutions which look for the most profitable licit and illicit long-term investments, based on their understanding of the core forces driving our societies, including taboos. This, for instance, is the case with Triads' involvement in wildlife trafficking in Asia, South America, and Africa, which fuels Chinese traditional medicine (UNODC 2010). Hence, Mafias investments are strategically decided following the four criteria (Gayraud 2014). First their profitability, second their intensity in human capital (allowing Mafia to offer jobs and remunerations to their constituents), the quality of the fiscal and social coverage provided and its criticality in terms of political leverage. Here are three examples of Mafias' strategic investments and economic power:

- In the 1980s, and probably to date, Cosa Nostra Families were levying a 2% tax on every construction project in New York (Kelly 1999). The five families willingly chose to invest in this highly profitable sector, as through the control of the teamsters' and mason' unions, they could provide jobs to 100,000 workers and dispose of an effective political weapon.
- Renowned expert Alain Rodier estimated in a 2013 study that Triads \$200 billion annual profits, 40% of the Chinese GDP, were massively reinvested in the Chinese legal economy. *Sun Yee On* and the Triad *14K* have allegedly been among the largest investors in Shenzhen "special economic zone" as well as in construction sites of the 2010 Shanghai universal exhibition (Pons 1992). Interestingly, Rodier notes that the Chinese governments favorably consider every "energy contributing to the economic uprising of the country" (Pons 1992, 2).
- In 2004, the Italian national anti-mafia prosecutor Lucio Di Pietro revealed during a press conference that the two Agrofood multinationals Parmalat and Cirio had made an agreement with the Camorra. Against remuneration, the Neapolitan Mafia was imposing these two companies' products in all Southern Italian regions, especially around Naples (Gayraud 2011).

#### **4.1.2. White Gold**

In their competition for power with Nation-States, Mafias hold a significant trump in their sleeves. In the international economy, Mafias benefit from an incredible asset: illicit activities currently generate more revenues than any legal business in the world providing Mafias with incomparable capital reserves. Hence, cocaine or "white gold" is currently the most profitable trade on earth before oil or minerals.

Cocaine is a refuge investment, an anti-cyclical value which allows primitive accumulation of capital. It cannot be affected by resource depletion nor by a

diminishing demand, addiction is rapidly built and our consumerist society has trivialized its consumption.<sup>8</sup> Production and transport costs are minimal, margins are huge. A kilo of cocaine is sold \$1,600 in Colombia, \$30,000 in Senegal, and \$77,000 in the UK (UNODC 2016). A gram of cocaine is sold \$61 in Lisbon and \$166 in Luxembourg. UNODC and Mafia experts also agree that cocaine is increasingly cut in the main distribution markets, meaning that profits are multiplied (UNODC 2016). Roberto Saviano points out that in 2012, a person investing US\$1,000 in Apple stocks, the best performance of financial markets that year, obtained \$1,670 at the end of the year, while a criminal investing US\$1,000 in cocaine possibly acquired \$182,000, a hundred times more (Saviano 2014).

The origins and actors of this success story illustrate Mafias' economic power and comparative advantage in a globalized market economy. In Mexico, during the Vietnam conflict, the U.S. army, in need of more morphine, asked Mexican farmers to grow more opium, a product imported in the region by Chinese workers in the late nineteenth century. Felix Gallardo, aka El Padrino, a former judiciary police officer, quickly became the main actor of heroin trafficking in Mexico and created a highly efficient criminal centralized system, determining uniform negotiations' modalities between drug producers, intermediaries, and dealers. Newly born Mexican cartels quickly attempted to diversify from heroin and marijuana production and distribution, by climbing the cocaine trafficking food chain by becoming indispensable partners to the Colombian cartels. In the late 1980s, the Cartel de Medellin controlled over 80% of the cocaine trafficking on Earth (Saviano 2014). An agreement was soon reached, as Escobar' boats and submarines were increasingly intercepted by the DEA on the Caribbean route to Florida, he needed a new secured route to smuggle cocaine to the United States. Mexican cartels' ascension could start and 25 years later bosses like Joaquin Guzman Lora, aka El Chapo, would become one of Mexico's richest billionaires and U.S. enemy number one (Woody 2016).

Following El Padrino' arrest and the fall of its centralized system, a lack of overarching leadership led to a bloody territorial war between cartels. However, the human and logistical costs of this drug war do not seem to be stopping the progression of Mexican cartels, which have expanded all over the United States, Australia, South America, and Africa, and are at the forefront of new illicit activity such as methamphetamine trafficking (Suo 2016). Mexican cartels' current target seems to be Europe, where 80% of cocaine trafficking is owed by the Ndrangheta, the other major global player in this business (Sergi 2015). The gateway to Europe for Mexican cartels is Spain, Mafias Eldorado since the fall of General Franco's regime (Resa-Nestares 1999). Thanks to their control of the Guinean narco-States and their alliance with Galician Barons, the Mexican cartels started to expand in Spain around 2007 (Nealer 2013). The seizure of 3.4 tons of cocaine in the port of

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8 Cocaine has evocating nicknames: *haven dust*, *blow*, *take-away*, *devil dandruffs*, or *Florida snow*.

Barcelona in 2010 linked to the Sinaloa Cartel or the arrests in Spain of top Mexican operatives, notably El Chapo's cousin, confirmed the worst fears of Italian Mafias regarding the implementation of this ferocious competitor in their markets (Lopez 2013).

#### *4.1.3. The Indelible Footprint of Mafias in the Finance World*

Mafias' perpetual attempt to increase its tremendous wealth by reinvesting illicit revenues in the legal and illegal economic and financial systems, legitimately raise questions over its ability to influence positively or negatively its course. In other words, have Mafias successfully developed a new deadly political weapon, and a tremendous source of revenue, by investing critical parts of its estimated \$500 billion annual revenues in financial markets (UNODC 2011)?

Mafias' increasing interest in the finance sector emerged in the 1970s. Increasingly loose fiscal legislations encompassed one of Mafias' key strategic objectives, i.e. "the creation of venues for the private accumulation of capital, without the loss of any of that capital to public governmental purposes through redistributive taxation, social welfare or the provision of public goods" (Cockayne 2016, 262). Moreover, as Holton highlights, global multiplication of stock markets, complexification of financial operations, and rapidity of information sharing match Mafias' desire to stay invisible while conducting their illegal activities (Holton 2012). Hence, Mafias have considerably extended their activities thanks to the development of wild capitalism, offshore shell companies, tax evasion schemes, and tax havens.

Thriving Mafias' presence in the finance world was brought into the open during successive financial crises. Several studies, notably from Yakuza expert Philippe Pons, indicate indeed that 30–40% of toxic assets during the 1990s Japanese stock exchange crisis belonged to the Yakuza (Pons 1992). These "Mafia assets" were, by definition, unrecoverable loans (McCarthy 1993). Mafias uprising in the financial world, Naim argue has been boosted by the 2008 crisis, as they easily recruited brilliant unemployed bankers, accountants, or computer scientists and became major players of the international finance system (Naim 2012).

In December 2009, Antonio Maria Costa, then UNODC Director, declared that earnings of Mafias made up the sole liquid assets at the disposal of some banks seeking to avoid collapse during the 2008 financial crisis (Gayraud 2014). According to the IMF, between 2007 and 2009, banks in the United States and Europe lost more than \$1 trillion in toxic assets and bad loans, and by the second half of 2008, shortage of liquid assets (cash flow) had become a major problem for the banking system. In many instances, Mafias' enormous assets were the only available liquid investment capital further encouraging banks to open their doors to criminal organizations. This was demonstrated by two Colombian economists, Alejandro Gaviria and Daniel Mejía, as they revealed that 97.4% of South America

drug-trafficking revenue, \$352 billion overall, is laundered annually in American and European banking circuits through various financial operations (Syal 2009). In a Chinese boxes system, the *drug money* is transformed into electronic titles, using several currencies (notably virtual ones such as Bitcoins), passed from one country to another through offshore companies and untraceably reinjected in the financial systems through interbank loans (Gayraud 2014).

Several cases revealed by whistle-blowers reinforced the growing influence of Mafias in the Banking system, notably in the United States and the UK recently described by Saviano as “criminal capitalism capitals” (Saviano 2014). In 2016, HSBC notably agreed to pay \$1.9 billion in fines to the U.S. government for financial irregularities in dealing with money that had come from Mexican cartels (Gayraud 2014). In 2010, the U.S. administration condemned Wachovia Bank to pay a paltry \$160 million fine for failing to properly control the transfer of a staggering \$378.4 billion from Mexican *casas de cambio* (United Kingdom Parliament 2013). Using local bureaux de change the Sinaloa Cartel sent millions of dollars in cash and opened hundreds of bank accounts in the Miami branch of the Wachovia bank (Saviano 2014). As Walter Howie’s *Red Capitalism* highlights the penetration of criminal money and criminal behavior in the Chinese state-owned banking system is as worrying as the situation in the UK or in the United States (Howie 2011). Other tax havens such as the Bahamas or Switzerland have also been largely targeted by Mafias, a 2008 investigation by Italian research institute Eurispes showed that €44 billion of Ndrangheta assets were looted in Zurich banks (Reski 2013). Finally, as already mentioned, Mafias own banks, sometimes entire banking systems in poorer countries, such as Nigeria, Cyprus, or the Bahamas.

Mafias successfully became major actors of the banking and financial system in the least and most developed regions of the world, developing a potentially lethal political weapon as overreliance of modern Nation-States and corporations on this financing source critically exposes them.

#### **4.2. CAUSAL FACTORS OF MAFIAS’ EXPANSION**

To fully apprehend Mafias’ thriving financial and economic, and consequently governmental, power, it is necessary to analyze which factors are conducive to this rapid expansion.

##### **4.2.1. Market Economy: Mafias’ Best Ally ...**

In local and global liberal markets, Mafias benefit from structural advantages as it doesn’t fear competition, it can use coercion to eliminate it, and finally can inflect workforce and clients using corruption violent threats. Unlike other actors, Mafias aren’t limited by any moralistic considerations and they opportunistically take advantage of any enrichment prospect, any favorable evolution that liberal markets offer them. In the 1970s when offshore fiscal paradises became an accepted and

natural financial tool, they were used to optimize Mafias' wealth. Mafias also started to exploit legislative weaknesses to launder criminal assets. Following the assassination of Sicilian politicians and Cosa Nostra opponent Pio La Torre in April 1982, Palermo prefect passed a law authorizing the pre-emptive freezing and confiscation of alleged Mafia's assets (Gayraud 2011). In response, the Italian Mafias operated a massive transfer of their assets toward Germany, a legislative paradise.

In fact, in Germany, unlike in Italy, the burden of proof for mafia-related crimes lies with prosecutors. In other words, whereas in Italy, the suspect has to prove that their income is legal if a mafiosi is caught in Germany, it is up to the prosecution to prove that his income comes from a crime (Knight 2011). According to Petra Reski, the lack of will of the German authorities to adjust this legislative framework can be explained by the fact that they are mainly interested in "getting the mafia to invest its money in Germany, notably in the development of its Eastern part" (Knight 2011). In fact, in November 1989, Giovanni Tagliamento, a wire-tapped Sicilian *man of honor*, gives the following order to one his man based in Germany: "Buy, buy everything that you can, restaurants, firms, grounds, all! All! All!" (Cerf 2013). Today, in Munich, Cologne, or Erfurt, Italian Mafias have made highly profitable real-estate acquisitions, built many restaurants and hotels, and bought shares in large companies (Associated Press 2007).

#### **4.2.2. ... and Source of Inspiration**

Mafias are porous biological creatures living in symbiosis with their environment from which they constantly learn. Interestingly, Mafias have incorporated the four following managerial techniques and core elements of multinationals' economic strategies in their internal and external functioning.

First, Mafias developed strong *Research and Development* departments. Mafias innovation capacity is key to their survival and expansion. It constantly developed new sources of illicit revenues thanks to its global connection and deep understanding of our consumerist societies. The first obvious example is Mafias' involvement in the counterfeiting industry, the third most profitable illicit activity on earth (UNODC 2010). The second example is the criminal innovative use of digital tools not only to better secure their communication and operations but also as a new source of revenue. In fact, Russian, Chinese, Japanese, and famously, Nigerian criminals started cyber-crime, but also large-scale online welfare, insurance, or student loans frauds already in the 1980s (UNODC 2013). Nowadays, Nigerian experts estimate that Nigerian cyber-crime, notably the "419 scam" generated \$9.3 billion of revenue annually across the globe (Adeniyi 2015).

Second, inspired by multinational companies' cartels, Mafias have developed oligopolistic strategies. Mafias are indeed economically rational actors. They prefer creating a criminal oligopoly rather than losing unnecessary resources in intra-Mafia wars. It is thanks to alliances with Albanian clans that the Ndrangheta

holds the port of Rotterdam, where 36 tons or 30% of all the cocaine from Colombia arrives in Europe (Reski 2013). Moreover, in his last investigation, Roberto Saviano reports an incredible criminal lesson where the old European crime aristocracy transmitting its key rules of the Mafia codes to a new crime bourgeoisie. In fact, extracts from an interview conducted by Roberto Saviano with an NYPD police detective which obtained phone tapings of a Ndrine' santa addressing a lesson during an assembly in New York of high-level members of Mexican cartels, Italians, American-Italians, Albanese Mafias, and former Kaibiles soldiers.

who rules just does it and that's all ... you don't have the luxury to believe in a happy, fair and moralistic world ... earn respect and be the one commanding, as no one can mess with us .... Men of Honour don't follow rules, they follow a code of honour. This code doesn't tell you to be just or good but how to govern. Respect the ones useful to you, do not trust family's outsiders, kill only if necessary. Lives pass, men have vices and don't change, rules stay, that's why the code is everything. (Saviano 2014)

Furthermore, since the 1970s, notorious Mafias have adopted managerial behaviors and rules in their functioning. They structured their organization as a multinational with a political, security, financial, judiciary, and illicit trafficking departments (Grennan and Britz 2006). Similarly, traditional Mafias' Board of Directors, *Coupola* and *Commission*, now coordinate investments worldwide. During an interview, repentant Luigi Bonaventura explained that the Ndrangheta functions like a rational multinational: "They have set up dozens of locali in Germany. They have money in Switzerland, in the Netherlands and Belgium, they control the ports. On the Côte d'Azur, they have villas; they are investing in the tourism sector in Bulgaria; in the Balkans, they control the drug routes" (Tizian and Tonnaci 2012).

Finally, in parallel to the development of consulting firms in the legal economy since the 1970s, Mafias have adapted to the multiplication of trade routes, technological innovations, norms, and criminal challengers, by incorporating a new position in their structure: *Brokers*. These occult stage directors connect the dots, they orchestrate immense and various illicit trafficking, they estimate the costs and choose the routes, decide the modes of transports, and hire the necessary and reliable workforce (Saviano 2014). A pioneering broker is Roberto "Bébé" Pannunzi. Never affiliated to one Mafia, nor initiated, he was on excellent terms with Ndrangheta and Cosa Nostra but also Colombian cartels (Bargent 2013). Able to provide Mafias with Boeings and submarines, vetting every step of the trafficking (shipping, landing, stocking, etc.), using elaborated codes and a worldwide network of corrupted agents (among whom Brindisi's deputy attorney), his name alone was a byword for any shipment of high-quality cocaine to arrive at the

destination. At the time of his arrest, which led to the seizure of nine tons of cocaine and the dismantling of a worldwide maritime empire, Nicola Gratteri, Italy's top anti-Mafia prosecutor, commented: "He is the biggest cocaine importer in the world, he organises purchases of 300,000 kg at a time" (Popham 2013). Pannunzi's major innovation was the creation of Mafias' joint ventures gathering *cosca* and *locali* behind his name, which allowed us to considerably lower the cocaine prices and to increase the volume shipped. Nowadays, brokers are increasingly hired and operating online through the unregulated *darkweb* (Glenny 2009).

#### ***4.2.3. Mafias' Exploitation of Globalization***

Firstly, Mafias have considerably benefited from globalization thanks to the development of new trade and transport connections. In fact, thanks to their strategic geographic location and their control of key trade hubs, such as Hong Kong or New York, Mafias have considerably expanded ancient and new illicit trafficking networks. Albanese Mafias have thrived thanks to its positioning between Turkey and Europe. In association with Turkish and Italian Mafias, the 15 largest Albanese criminal clans have taken control over much of the heroin and human trafficking arriving from South East Asia and Northern Africa to Europe (Glenny 2009). In a 2001 investigation, the Economist affirmed that 80% of London's sex industry was controlled by the Albanian Mafia (Associated Press 2001). Another example is the extension of Camorra's waste management activity, transporting and dumping toxic waste, in Romania (Tarihi 2012). Finally, Nigerian syndicates have notoriously developed human trafficking networks, notably prostitution, from West Africa to Europe and the Middle East thanks to the fact that their sexual slaves were cheaper than the Eastern Europe "workforce," thus replacing them on the market, a purely capitalistic market principle (UNODC 2010).

The exploitation of internal and international migration flows has been historically associated with Mafias' developments since the emergence of industrialized and globalized societies in the late nineteenth century. Mafias indeed provide jobs, security, a sense of communitarian solidarity, and proximity to uprooted populations. Chinese workers' immigration has, for example, played a significant role in Triads' expansion. They could indeed trade and store illicit goods as well as create new markets thanks to their presence in Chinatowns all around the world (CIA 2000). In recent decades, new means of transportation and communication, new trade, and human routes, as well as a growing number of internal conflicts, have fostered new immigration waves and innovative interested appropriation of these flows by new contenders in the criminal upper-world. The structural flexibility and adaptation capacity of Nigerian Criminal Syndicates (NCS) have indeed fostered their reliance on Nigerian Diaspora to expand worldwide (CIA 2000). It is even probable that NCS dictated the geographical implementation of extremely poor and uneducated migrants according to their criminal needs. In fact, in recent years, Nigerian communities have surprisingly been established in Japan, Paki-

stan, Bolivia, or Venezuela, similar countries where NCS have, respectively, taken control over large parts of the methamphetamine distribution, heroin transit, and cocaine trafficking (UNODC 2013, 2016).

NCS have finally combined exploitation of new trade connections with a strong innovation by developing a decisive comparative advantage in the criminal world: the use of human couriers to smuggle drugs worldwide. Luring impoverished people with rapid and significant monetary opportunities, training mules in specialized “schools,” hiring logistical experts to use flight connections to its best, and relying on its diaspora NCS considerably perfected and used these smuggling techniques in recent years (NDLEA 2011). They notably invented the so-called *shotgun* method sending several mules in the same plane, while one of them is denounced by a passenger under NCS’ orders, allowing the others to pass the security unchecked.<sup>9</sup> Thanks to their brilliant exploitation of globalization, NCS have progressively climbed the criminal food chain and become major actors of the criminal world.

## V. General Conclusion

**T**he study of Mafias’ structural characteristics leaves no doubt on their nature and quest. In fact, contrary to other criminal entities, Mafias are highly structured actors luring for governmental power. Moreover, it can be observed that the core elements at the foundation of their alternative societal offer, from their normative set to territorial control or their taxation system, defy and diminish by essence Nation-States’ sovereignty as defined in political science theories.

Since its birth, Mafias have successfully managed to adapt to the evolving edges of our societies to exploit their weaknesses to their advantage. In their quest for power, I demonstrated that Mafias have developed a unique set of political tools, rational, and well-thought strategies enabling them to expand in every context and regions of the world. In fact, thanks to the use of their coercive and corruptive weapons, through trade-off, the creation of a criminal–political joint venture or their full control of a Nation-State’s territory, Mafias influence, share or directly dictate governmental power on domestic political stages to their best interests. Furthermore, through its participation in the war economy, fuelling of weapons or manipulating armed groups, Mafias are key international players to take into consideration.

In the last section, I further argued that Mafias have turned into increasingly powerful and sprawling transnational illicit enterprises thanks to their economic and financial powers. I demonstrated this statement through the analy-

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<sup>9</sup> The *shotgun* method is the term given to the use of placing several drug-carrying couriers on a single flight. Generally, the couriers do not know each other.

sis of Mafias' strategic investments, their appropriation of new transport routes, high-frequency finance and new technologies of communication, and, above all, their tremendous wealth. Furthermore, challenging official boundaries and cleverly exploiting to its full extent the strengths and weaknesses of our globalized market economies and consumerist societies, Mafias have found the best vector to their ever-growing power quest.

Therefore, it is not an overstatement to affirm that Mafias are therefore at least participating in the decomposition of the world order as we currently know it and even perhaps to the edification of a criminal age.

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