

***The Islamist Mafias: A
new perspective for the
study of the crime terror
nexus***

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Introduction

The crime terror nexus is a concept of research within terrorism studies that explains the relationship between criminal and terrorist organizations or between criminal activities and the terrorist acts. The expression crime terror nexus started to circulate in academia at the beginning of the 2000s with the first theoretical frameworks aimed at analysing these relations, as will be shown in Chapter I. The crime terror nexus can manifest itself in two ways: *directly*, when terrorist groups themselves commit crimes, or *indirectly* when terrorist groups build mutually beneficial relations with non-terrorist criminal organizations.

Across the decades the crime terror nexus has enjoyed fluctuating attention in academic debates. Nevertheless it can be argued that this subfield of research still has a lot to say also for what concerns the wide range of relationships and transformations that terrorist organizations have been able to forge not only with criminal groups but with many different power actors, some of them legal (what I call in throughout this thesis ‘official power actors’). It is in this context that an under-explored aspect of the crime terror nexus can be observed: the one of the so-called ‘convergence processes’, which occurs when terrorist organizations transform into criminal ones and vice versa.¹ This thesis aims to introduce a new interpretation of the convergence processes. More specifically, the debate on these shifts by some organisations from terrorism to crime has brought some further levels of problematization which have been left largely unexplored. The general conception of the crime terror continuum is still characterized in the literature by an extremist approach according to which crime and terrorist activities are mutually exclusive and they cannot coexist. In regards the general field of terrorism studies this approach is evident in the conceptualisation of the terrorist–state relationship. Terrorists and pre-existent political institutions are considered as natural born enemies, but this approach not only shows an inductive attitude, but its results are outdated too. As illustrated by other more recent contributions, not only states but societies and economic markets as well tend to adopt a certain degree of tolerance towards terrorist organisations in certain circumstances.² As will be showed in the rest of this thesis the relationship between terrorism and crime on the one hand and terrorists and political institutions on the other, in some case have taken a double path of coexistence: the same organisation can commit crimes and adopt terrorist tactics or rhetoric and at the same time political institutions can tolerate the existence of organisations which, at least in theory, aim at

¹ T. Makarenko. “*The Crime –Terror Continuum: Tracing the interplay between Transnational Organised Crime and Terrorism*”. *Global Crime*, Vol. 6 No.1, pp. 129-145 (2004)

² See A. Ahmad “*Jihad & Co.*” Oxford University Press (2017)

overthrowing that very same political system or institution. This situation introduces to the debate on the convergence processes (as well as in the crime terror nexus in general) a further element of problematisation: how to make sense not only of an organisation's evolution from terrorism to organized crime but also of the coexistence between terrorist groups and political, economic and power institutions in general? As I will show in Chapter III, a part of the literature has tried to answer this question using the concept/argument of corruption as enabler of the infiltration of terrorist groups within the states' authorities. This kind of answer remains unsatisfactory for at least two reasons: 1) the concept of corruption is indeed very generic; it does not tell very much how about the means and the context in which corruption does or does not take place; 2) the concept of corruption is in some ways biased as it tends to illustrate a reality where only terrorists have an interest in approaching and co-opting states' authority but what about the cases in which political establishments' try to recruit terrorists to achieve their aims? Moreover, the descriptions of the relationships between terrorism and crime or between terrorism and states tend to picture them as occasional or short lived.³ How to describe these relationships when they are more enduring and stable, when they do not last for months or a few years but for decades? Put succinctly, the crime terror continuum, and the debates related to it can go far beyond the mere description of the nature of a criminal organization or of its involvement in crime. As in a Chinese box once a conundrum is solved the solutions open many other sub-problems.

Bearing in mind these levels of problematization, the argument of this thesis is to prove and illustrate how an evolutionary process undertaken by some terrorist groups has transformed them in a new type of criminal organization that I call 'Islamist Mafia'. Just like the traditional Mafias these organisations, as argued by James Cockayne, do not try to achieve the final goal of the instauration of a specific type of government or state form but they aim to rule over their territories and communities while remaining outside the political arena and are consequently unaccountable.⁴ They manage their welfare systems without building a proper state, they implement their laws without creating their tribunals, they perform many of the duties of a proper government without becoming tangible, visible and consequently contestable. What is important to highlight here, from a general perspective, is also how these organisations are characterized by what I call a 'double coexistence path': within the Islamist Mafias criminal activities and profits coexist with terrorist rhetoric and tactics, whilst in turn the Islamist Mafias coexist with the pre-existent economic, political and religious powers. Put succinctly, the organic presence of terrorist activities within these organization

³ P. Wang "Crime-Terror Nexus. Transformation, Alliances and Convergence" Asian Social Science vol. 6 No. 6 pp.11-20 (2012)

⁴ See J. Cockayne, "Hidden Power" Oxford University Press (2016)

does not make them purely criminal groups, while the coexistence with official political institutions does not make them regular terrorist ones. So, what are they? They are Islamist Mafias.

1. The conundrum: research questions and aim of the Islamist Mafias' theory

This thesis aims to answer three research questions: a) is it possible for some terrorist groups to evolve into organized criminal groups? b) If so, how do their main objectives change?; c) In what ways does an Islamist Mafia exist?

As will be showed in the next chapter the topic of the crime terror nexus has created extensive debate within academia, and across the years the analysis of some specific case studies has showed in detail how the cooperation between terrorism and crime can happen in different contexts and take different shapes. Researchers such as Djalill Lounnas⁵ and Ould Mohamedou⁶ have found evidence of the connection between al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and drug trafficking in the Sahel region. In the same vein Freedom C. Onuoha has proved the link between Boko Haram and arms trafficking and human smuggling.⁷ Gretchen Peters⁸ and in more recent times Aisha Ahmad⁹ have offered other empirical proofs and interpretative frameworks of the crime terror nexus in Afghanistan while authors such as Shelley have examined the nexus at a global level.¹⁰ The crime terror nexus has been also the focus of inquiries outside the academic context. For example, journalists such as Serge Daniel have demonstrated the nexus between smuggling and terrorism.¹¹ The same is true for the work of Atmane Tazaghart who pointed out the link between criminal activities and the attacks of the Groupe Islamique Armé (GIA) in France in 1994.¹² In the same vein Mohammed Mokaddem has given further insights about the involvement of AQIM in drug trafficking and smuggling.¹³

Despite the conspicuous number of contributions on the crime terror nexus there are still some important gaps in the current literature: First, part of the literature on the crime terror continuum is still overly influenced by the 'profit vs. ideology' dichotomy – the idea that terrorist groups cannot

⁵ D. Lounnas "Al Qaida au Maghreb Islamique et le trafic de drogue au Sahel". Maghreb-Machrek Vol. 216 No. 2 pp. 111-128 (2013)

⁶ M.-M. O. Mohamedou "The Many faces of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb" Geneva Centre for Security Policy (2011)

⁷ F.C. Onuoha "Boko Haram and the evolving Salafi jihadist threat in Nigeria" in M-A. Pérouse de Montclos "Boko Haram: Islamism, politics and security and the State in Nigeria". African Academic Press (2014)

⁸ See G. Peters "Seeds of Terror" St. Martin's Press (2009)

⁹ See A. Ahmad *Ibidem*

¹⁰ See L. I. Shelley "Dirty Entanglements" Cambridge University Press (2014)

¹¹ See S. Daniel "Les Mafias du Mali" Descartes & Cie (2014)

¹² See A. Tazaghart "AQMI: Enquête sur les héritiers de Ben Laden au Maghreb Islamique", Jean Picollec (2011)

¹³ See M. Mokaddem "Al-Qaïda au Maghreb Islamique : Contrebande au nom de l'Islam" L'Harmattan (2010)

cooperate with criminal ones because their objectives are driven by different and irreconcilable motives -¹⁴ even if other more recent research has demonstrated how this approach is increasingly outdated.¹⁵

Second, the literature on the crime terror nexus has not been completely analysed through one of the most important aspects that characterizes some contemporary terrorist groups: their involvement in politics. The current literature has been mainly focused on the role played by terrorist organizations in the official political arena when these groups are recognized as legitimate political parties by some states, such as in the case of the Hezbollah in Lebanon.¹⁶ Still, in some cases terrorist groups participate to politics even when they do not enjoy any form of official recognition. In fact, behind and through the crime terror nexus, terrorist groups have built solid power relations with the “official” political powers. They have become members of parliament,¹⁷ they have sat in presidential offices and offered their services to the ruling elite of some countries.¹⁸ If the only aim of the criminal activities committed by terrorist groups is to gain the necessary financial earnings to overthrow some pre-existent political institutions, and if crime is subordinated to ideology, then why have they agreed to sit at the same table with their enemies and to participate in the legitimate “political game”? Also, why even after they have achieved this political status and a remarkable economic fortune, have they kept committing those crimes?

Third, the literature on the crime terror nexus has not yet cleared up the evolution of these organizations in terms of their objectives and/or their behaviour. This can be noted especially for what concerns the phenomena of convergence and transformation along the so-called crime terror continuum.¹⁹ The supporters of the convergence theory have argued that terrorist organizations can evolve potentially into criminal ones, but what determines the specific form will they take at the end of this process? The label “organized crime”, adopted in the bulk of literature on the nexus, is very generic and it leaves open many questions about this phenomenon. If Abu Sayyaf or the PIRA have become criminal organizations which type of organization are they now? A street gang? A drug cartel? A hybrid form of different typologies of organized crime? This conceptual node is one of the most evident weaknesses in the current studies on the crime terror nexus and it has brought about

¹⁴ T. Makarenko “*The Ties that Bind*”: *Uncovering the Relationship Between Organised Crime and Terrorism*” Global Organized Crime in D. Siegel, H. van de Bunt and D. Zaitch “*Global Organized Crime. Studies of Organized Crime vol. 3*”, Springer pp. 159-192 (2003)

¹⁵ See A. Ahmad *Ibidem*

¹⁶ See M. Calulli “*Come uno Stato*”, Vita e Pensiero (2018)

¹⁷ R. Carayol “*Ahmada Ag Bibi*” Jeune Afrique (2013)

¹⁸ M.Y. Welsh “*The ‘Gentle’ Face of Al-Qaeda*”. Al-Jazeera (2012)

¹⁹ T. Makarenko “*The Crime –Terror Continuum...*” *Ibidem*

many new expressions like “AQIM mafia style” which sound impressive but hide an entire field of research which is still almost unexplored in academia.²⁰

In the light of these assumptions the aim of this research is to demonstrate not only how some terrorist groups have undertaken an evolutionary process that has changed them from terrorist organizations into criminal ones – and so demonstrate that convergence processes are real and can happen- but also how nowadays they have become a very specific form of criminal organization: they are Mafias. This will be the central argument of this thesis: the outcome of the convergence process along the crime terror continuum is the creation of a new type of criminal organization called “Islamist Mafias”. The “Islamist Mafia” can be generally defined as a cluster of criminal organizations that instrumentally use a political and religious ideology in order to commit criminal actions that are opposite to the states’ and religious laws. The main aim of these organizations is to ensure the enrichment of their members in economic, political and social terms through the activities of the organization. The members of the Islamist Mafias are not all Muslims, but they are nevertheless united by the common will to increment their power. The Islamist Mafia is a criminal phenomenon characterized by a high level of pervasiveness which enables it to forge power relationships in a way and with subjects that the majority of common terrorist groups are not able to reach usually. Understandably the use of the word/concept of Mafia in the general context of terrorism studies could seem an innuendo. Nevertheless, I believe that this concept is appropriate in the context of this work for many reasons: 1) The idea that the Mafia should be considered as a merely southern Italian phenomenon is biased, factually wrong and increasingly outdated. First of all, a wide range of academic contributions in criminology,²¹ history,²² anthropology²³ and other disciplines have proved how Mafioso phenomena can be found even in different cultural contexts from the ones which are typically considered related to Mafia. In the rest of this work I will not dismiss the importance of the influence exercised by Italian socio-anthropological codes in the birth of Mafias, nevertheless the idea that only Italian culture can bring about the creation of Mafias is illogical given the fact that some of the most evident characteristics of Mafioso societies (such as the exasperate sense of honour, the unregulated use of violence as a means for social progression or the exaltation of toxic masculinity) cannot be considered as a mere Italian phenomenon. Moreover, this quasi-deterministic conception is dismissed by facts. Let us take for instance the spread of Mafias globally not only in Italy but also in countries

²⁰ S.M. Torelli, and A. Varvelli. “*Il nuovo jihadismo in Nord Africa e nel Sahel*” ISPI (2014)

²¹ A. Sergi “A proposito di Mafia Capitale. Spunti per tipizzare il fenomeno mafioso nei sistemi di common law” *Rivista di Studi e Ricerche sulla Criminalità Organizzata* Vol. 2 No.1 96-116 (2016)

²² L. Michelutti “The inter-state criminal life of sand and oil in North India” in B.Harriss-White and L. Michelutti “The wild East” UCL Press (2019) p.168

²³ A. Blok “*Anthropology of Mafia*” *International Encyclopedia of Social and Behavioural Sciences* (ebook)

such as Australia, America, or Germany. If Mafias can develop only in Italy, then how to make sense of their presence in these countries and societies? As I will illustrate in Chapter I the idea of the Mafias' as a purely Italian phenomenon is an intellectual heritage left by the first academic studies on these phenomena which, as will be demonstrated later on this thesis, were influenced by a form of racial determinism and that by consequence are wrong on a factual basis and unscientific from a conceptual perspective.

On a second level, this thesis aims also at introducing the concept of Mafia within the bigger context of terrorism studies and also this theoretical shift can be perceived as problematic. First of all, it is useful to remember how the comparison between terrorism and the Mafias is not new in the literature, but it has always been focused on the analysis of the tactics used by terrorist groups. In her fundamental paper "The crime terror continuum" Tamara Makarenko, arguably the founder of modern studies on the crime terror nexus, explicitly mentions the example of the Sicilian Mafia as a case of a criminal group which adopted terroristic tactics.²⁴ The same has been done by other authors such as Shelley.²⁵ In brief, the Mafias as a concept or an historical example, have been already studied in the context of terrorism studies but this comparison has not been evaluated more in-depth, for instance in researching the relationship between terrorist groups and official power actors or how terrorist groups influence electoral processes without using violence. Arguably, this gap is related to a scarcity of interest by terrorism studies' scholars in the Mafias, the same lack of interest which James Cockayne has noted in relation to political science scholarship and the studies on organised crime.²⁶ Paraphrasing Cockayne's words: terrorism scholars have studied terrorism and not the Mafias in the same way as Mafias scholars have studied the Mafias but not terrorism. Given this analytical absence, this thesis offers a more consistent example of the importance of the analysis of Mafias in the context of terrorism studies. For what concerns more specifically the aim of this thesis instead, it is demonstrated that the use of the Mafias' concept is useful when applied to the convergence processes on the crime terror nexus for different reasons: 1) It highlights the deep relationship between the social context and behavioural codes which influence terrorist groups without considering terrorist groups only as the embodiment of some archaic and outdated religious beliefs. Terrorists and societies are much more linked than we tend to admit, and the concept of Mafias permits us to look at what Bell calls the "Coney Island mirror" but starting from a terrorism and political violence perspective rather than from a purely criminological one.²⁷ 2) As will be

²⁴ T. Makarenko "The Crime- Terror Continuum..." *Ibidem*

²⁵ L.I. Shelley "and John T. Picarelli "Methods not motives: Implications of the Convergence of International Organized Crime and Terrorism" *Police Practice and Research* Vol. 3 No.2 pp. 305-318 (2002)

²⁶ J. Cockayne *Ibidem* p. 5

²⁷ D. Bell "Crime as an American Way of Life" *The Antioch Review* Vol.13 No. 2 pp. 131-154 (1953)

showed, the organisations analysed in this thesis have become partners in power with local institutions, but their alliance has not been short or occasional. On the contrary, they have been stable and constant allies of the local institutions and this stability is proved also by their ability to survive many different historical changes and conflicts. In this sense, the concept of Mafia is particularly effective in proving how these groups have been able, through their strategic use of violence, not only to remaining as an organisation in an often-troubled environment but also in extending their influence. In sum the criminal organisations which will be analysed in this thesis have been able to remain intact and to survive civil wars and regime change but these criminal organisations have remained exactly where they were, just like the Mafias did.

Through the Islamist Mafias' framework, I will propose two main intellectual contributions to the study of the crime terror nexus. First, the Islamist Mafias will add a further level of complexity to the relationships between organised crime and terrorism in order to show how these need to be evaluated more seriously by scholars and practitioners. The study of the crime terror nexus, in fact, should not be understood as a mere way to investigate whether Al-Qaeda sells drugs or not. It should be intended instead as a way to show how criminal organisations and terrorist ones, considered as two different and independent power players, interact with each other, and what kind of effects such interactions can produce on their surrounding environment. Secondly, the theory of the Islamist Mafias will push the reasoning on the crime-terror nexus a little bit further, by showing how the interaction of terrorist groups with criminal organisations is also conjugated with an equal interaction with other legitimate and legal power actors. Put in simple terms, this perspective will show how the interaction between crime and terror could occasionally be the forerunner for the institutionalisation of terrorist groups in a pre-existent network of power relationships.

In proposing this framework, I did not take into particular account the necessity of configuring this work according to the canons of a specific school of thought in terrorism studies and for this reason, the Islamist Mafias theory should be positioned in the broader debate of security studies and political violence rather than in the academic debate on terrorist organisations. In fact, in the rest of this work, it will become clearer how this thesis goes beyond the analysis of the crime terror nexus according to the 'orthodox' studies on terrorism. The Islamist Mafias are of course interested in crime also for financial reasons but the evolution of their involvement in such criminal acts produces a more in-depth change in their strategies and long-term goals as well. However, it is true that this work will consider some elements characterising the 'critical' studies on terrorism, such as the role of ideological constructs and symbolism in terrorist groups. But still the observation of the evolutionary process undertaken by these terrorist groups will be considered by looking at practical evidence such

as quantitative evaluations of criminal activities such as kidnapping, and above all qualitative empirical evidence rather than interpretations. The Islamist Mafias will be considered in this work as a multidimensional security threat characterised by violence, involvement in illegal markets and empowered by corruption and unwise political choices, rather than the outcome of the adherence by some terrorist groups to a Salafi-like ideology or of their remarkable financial availability. The Islamist Mafias remain a subject in the field of political violence but rather than using the violence to change their surrounding power environment they use it to maintain proficient relationships within it. More specifically, I will consider how these organisations are sellers of a specific good (violence) in the market for governance and as entrepreneurs in this arena they try to position themselves in the most proficient location to increase their power and influence, vis-à-vis other entrepreneurs present in the same market. In simple terms, the violence of the Islamist Mafias remains political but the aims of their violence change.

In this context it is necessary to restrict and define in which sense the word Mafia will be used in this thesis. First, I will not talk metaphorically of Mafia or Mafias. This means that this word will not be used to generically describe a corruption culture within some societies or some economic or social groups which are hermetically closed and elitist. In this work the term will refer to outright criminal organizations, more precisely the Italian Mafias and the Islamist Mafias, which denote the characteristics of the definitional model that I will introduce in chapter II (which are social legitimacy, relationships with legitimate power actors, economic ambivalence, criminal ideology and governmentality). Secondly, I will use the word Mafia to indicate not only the Sicilian criminal organization, but all the criminal organizations borne in south Italy, including the Camorra and the 'Ndrangheta. The choice of this use of the word is not casual. As Isaia Sales stated, to understand what Mafias are scholars have to proceed to a unified study of these three organizations: “The impression we have about Mafias is that it is more interesting to analyse their common winning model, which in fact we call the mafioso method, than the specific differences between each organization.”²⁸

1.2 The Case Studies

The case studies that will be examined in this thesis, that are examples of “Islamist Mafias”, will be: 1) The Haqqani Network (also addressed as the Haqqanis or the HN) in Afghanistan; 2) the ensemble of jihadist groups currently active in the Sahel region composed of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb

²⁸ I. Sales “*La Mafia come metodo e modello*”, Limes, rivista italiana di geopolitica (2014)

(AQIM), the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), *Ansar Al Din* (AAD), the Macina Liberation Front (MLF), and the new group *Jamaa't Nusrat Wal Islam Wal Muslimin* (JNIM). All these groups will be defined collectively as the Sahelian Jihadi Groups (SJG).

In this context, some clarifications are necessary due to the nature and the choice of the case studies. Firstly, concerning the case of the Sahelian Jihadi Groups it is evident how this is composed by different terrorist organisations which will be considered as Islamist Mafias in comparison to the Haqqani Network's analysis which is instead focused on a single organisation. The reason behind this choice of regrouping the terrorist groups in the Sahel into one case study is due to the same practical reasons that other authors have faced while studying these organisations: a) Their development, from an historical perspective, is intertwined and it is impossible to separate neatly one group from the other. As I will show in chapter IV each group has cooperated with another in the exploitation of kidnapping and drug trafficking and they have offered reciprocal assistance on different occasions; b) The history of the jihadi groups in the Sahel is to some extent personalistic, as it revolves around the same key figures or "strong men" such as Mokhtar Belmokhtar, Iyad Ag Ghaly or Abdelmalek Droukdel.²⁹ As this thesis will show these are also the key figures involved in the evolution of the Islamist Mafias and consequently they represent different faces for the same common tendency. The separation in the different groups, just as the adoption of different names, is more related to opportunism rather than evident differences among different groups; c) The Sahelian Jihadi Groups have occupied for almost three decades the same region and they were and are involved in the same kind of illicit activities. Just like the lines between crime and terrorism in the Sahel are blurred, the same it is true for the ones between different armed groups. The overlapping of one group's activities with another would make any analysis of a singular group imprecise and be unable to capture the general tendency behind the birth of the Islamist Mafia; d) As a further demonstration of the high level of interconnectivity among these groups, in March 2017 they merged to create the new coalition called *Jamaa't Nusrat Wal Islam Wal Muslimin* (JNIM). This event reinforces the assumption that these groups cannot be analysed separately. Finally, it is not the first time that the jihadist groups in the Sahel are studied conjunctly and this thesis could be considered as another example of this conjunct analysis in the literature.³⁰ Secondly, from a general observation these terror groups denote many similarities with the Mafias from a hierarchical perspective (for example, the value of bloodlines in their configuration or the strategic use of weddings as a tool to forge alliances or the social legitimation that both these groups have been able to capitalize). As we will see in the

²⁹ A. Thurston "Jihadists of North Africa and the Sahel" Cambridge University Press pp. 97-99 (2020)

³⁰ For one of the most recent examples in this sense see A. Thurston *Ibidem*

proceeding chapters the SJGs and the Haqqanis have been compared to the Mafias by some authors. This thesis acts as a verification mechanism for this comparison. A third reason for the choice of the Haqqani Network and Sahelian Jihadi Groups as examples of Islamist Mafias is mainly technical and is related to the presence of a satisfactory amount of literature concerning the study on these organizations in the context of the crime terror nexus. Finally, and most importantly, despite the evident geographic and historical differences between these two groups the comparison between them can reveal some important findings for the study of the nexus and for the demonstration of the validity of this thesis. Fourthly, for their behaviour in strategic terms these groups are in my view the most similar ones to the Mafias especially for what concerns their ability in the pursuit of their ultimate goal of accruing what Cockayne calls ‘hidden power’. If we compare the SJGs or the Haqqanis with other groups often analysed in the context of the crime terror nexus studies this similarity is evident. Let’s take for instance the case of the Hezbollah.³¹ It is true that this Lebanese terrorist group is involved in many different illicit activities such as drug trafficking and that it enjoys a remarkable level of social legitimacy, but on the other hand it has created its own political party and consequently it pursues its political objectives through participation in national elections. As a power player in Lebanese politics Hezbollah is very far from being hidden. Another organisation extensively studied in the crime terror nexus is the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) which has extensively resorted to a wide range of criminal activities to finance its armed struggle. It is involved in sophisticated money laundering schemes and across the decades it has occasionally enjoyed a strong level of social and political legitimacy.³² Despite these similarities with the Mafias, even in this case the objectives of the PIRA cannot be summarised with the will to achieve a form of political recognition or of cooperation with the local authorities. On the contrary, this Irish nationalist group has been more often focused on an uncompromised fight against the British government through a binary confrontation which is political (with the participation of the Sinn Fein party to elections in Ireland and Northern Ireland) and paramilitary (through the commissioning of terrorist attacks against the UK). For these reasons the main objective of the PIRA cannot be considered hidden nor its relationship with the local power players be considered cooperative. Finally, if we consider the case of the Abu Sayyaf Group in the Philippines³³ (another often mentioned example of crime terror nexus) its strategy is very different to the one implemented by the Islamist Mafias. Its relationships with authorities are discontinuous and more based on the corruption of low ranking officials, and also its

³¹ C.B. Realuyo “*The Terror-Crime Nexus: Hezbollah’s Global Facilitators*” PRISM: a Journal of the Center for Complex Operations” Vol.5 No.1 pp.116-131 (2014)

³² C. P. Clarke “*Drugs & Thugs: Funding Terrorism through Narcotics Trafficking*” Journal of Strategic Security Vol. 9 No.3 pp. 1-15 (2016)

³³ McKenzie O’Brien “*Fluctuations Between Crime and Terror: the case of Abu Sayyaf’s Kidnapping Activities*” Terrorism and Political Violence Vol.24 No.2 pp.320-336 (2012)

involvement in crime is fluctuating and the group does not enjoy a strong form of social legitimacy within the local population.³⁴ The Islamist Mafias, to be such, must be terrorist groups involved in criminal activities of course but they also need to denote certain characteristics that we will see in Chapters II and III. Moreover, the Islamist Mafias must have a power objective which is of course political in part but that it must be hidden. They influence the political agenda, but they do not have any will to become tangible and/or perceivable. As we will see in the proceeding chapters the difference between being and not being a tangible power player is not mere intellectual speculation, but it is the very heart of the Mafias (and of Islamist Mafias) as a criminal phenomenon. Being visible and hidden at the same time is a key characteristic of these organisations, they are the hidden part of a power system not a visible part of a political one. In this context, it is important to highlight how during this thesis I will talk about power-oriented objectives rather than criminal or economic ones because it is my conviction that the ideology vs. crime dichotomy is nowadays quite reductive in order to describe the dynamics within the crime terror nexus. As I will show with this research, the Islamist Mafias', and consequently the Islamist Mafioso, aim at increasing their power and not merely their bank accounts.

On a final note, a further explanation on the use of case studies is needed. This thesis will not analyse a negative or contradictory case study in the development of the Islamist Mafias because this would add unnecessary complexity to the normative contribution of this work. There is scope for further research to be conducted on similar phenomena and/or other scholars will improve or challenge this framework. In the rest of this work (especially in chapter III) the case of Islamic State and other terrorist organisations will be discussed in comparison with the Islamist Mafias in order to show why they do not fit in this framework. Nevertheless, the adoption of a negative case study would have led me to open another relevant field of problematization (if not a parallel thesis) on the issue of why some terrorist organisations undertook a similar evolutionary path but reached different outcomes. In the future, I will hopefully have the opportunity to analyse this divergence from the framework of the Islamist Mafias but for the moment the normative aspect of this thesis has to be supported only by affirmative case studies.

2. Methodology

³⁴ McKenzie O'Brien "*Fluctuations Between....*" *Ibidem*

The normative nature of the theory of the Islamist Mafias pushed me into adopting a qualitative methodological approach. Quantitative contributions in the study of the crime terror nexus³⁵ and on the studies on mafias³⁶ have provided some interesting insights on these topics but this methodology is to some extent weak when adapted to a normative perspective. Put in simple terms: it is almost impossible to find an objective method to “count” a mafia. In summarising the methodology behind this work, it can be assessed how it is composed of two parts: on the one hand, this thesis can be considered as the adaptation of a definitional model (the five elements model by Isaia Sales) to two different case studies, on the other this research is another example of “mere description” as proposed by John Gerring.³⁷ The methodology of this work can be consequently synthesised as follows: 1) in reviewing the previous contributions on the study of the crime terror nexus and on the studies on Mafia I will problematise and highlight the gaps in the current literature; 2) I will adopt and explain a normative model to overcome these conundrums; 3) I will describe the case studies and I will compare them with the definitional model adopting an historical approach. It is important to stress how the analysis of the case studies will not solely focus on the convergences between the SJGs, the Haqqanis, and the definitional model proposed by Sales but also how, for the sake of precision and intellectual honesty, I will highlight the divergences between the Islamist Mafias and the Mafias as defined by the five elements model, as well. As a final remark, some clarifications are needed concerning the historical periods that will be analysed in the rest of this thesis. In the case of the Sahelian Jihadi Groups I will analyse the development of their activities starting from 2003 to 2020, in the case of the Haqqani Network instead, the history of the group will be analysed starting from its involvement in the proxy war against the USSR in the 1980s until 2020. Concerning the first, it is true that the historical origin of the SJGs, including also some of their leading figures, can be traced back to the Algerian civil war or even before to the experience of the Algerian mujahidin in Afghanistan as done by some authors.³⁸ Still the choice of this timeline is due to two main necessities: 1) from a practical perspective an analysis starting from the 1990s will be too long and it could be to some extent misleading from an analytical perspective. 2) The aim of this thesis is not to provide an in-depth historical account of these terrorist groups. Its aim is instead to highlight an evolutionary process on the crime terror nexus concerning these groups. From a chronological perspective these two events (the birth of these jihadi groups and their becoming an Islamist Mafia) are not coincidental with the start of the evolutionary process and consequently they do not need to be considered as

³⁵ J.A. Piazza & S. Piazza “*Crime Pays: Terrorist Group Engagement in Crime and Survival*” *Terrorism and Political Violence* pp. 1556-1836 (2017)

³⁶ G. De Feo and G.D. De Luca, “*Mafia in the Ballot Box*”, *American Economic Journal* Vol.9 No.3 pp. 134-167 (2017)

³⁷ J. Gerring “*Mere Description*” *British Journal of Political Science* vol. 42 pp. 721-746 (2012)

³⁸ See G. Kepel “*Jihad*” and A. Thurston “*Jihadists of North Africa and the Sahel*”

simultaneous events. As will be showed in chapter IV the kidnapping business and its consequences, such as the merging between AQIM and the local traffickers' milieu, is the moment when the evolutionary process towards becoming an Islamist Mafia begins and consequently this will be also the starting point of my analysis. In the same vein, the Haqqani Network started its evolutionary process while emerging as one of the key assets of the US and other power actors in the proxy war against Moscow. Put succinctly, it is after the Afghan war that the Haqqanis became the kingmakers of the country and consequently began their evolutionary process. The main theory behind this work is based on a careful and extensive literature review of some of the most significant works on the nexus and in Mafias studies. Nevertheless, the innovative and unique nature of this thesis - and the wide range of the literature used for its development - requires some clarification on aspects of the qualitative approach adopted for the development of the Islamist Mafias' theory and for the analysis of the case studies:

Firstly, a word on multidisciplinary. As will be shown in the rest of this thesis, the definition of mafia from a logical and methodological perspective cannot be solved with a one-size-fits-all approach. More specifically the use of one single discipline or science is not sufficient to define and explain what Mafias are and by consequence what Islamist Mafias are. Just like political violence, Mafias are one of the most complex phenomena present in social sciences and because of their simultaneous manifestation in different fields (social, political, economic) a coherent and updated definition of Mafias cannot avoid reliance on a multidisciplinary framework and/or analysis. In fact, as will be shown in Chapter I, all the monodisciplinary approaches applied to the studies on Mafias have produced restrictive or even misleading and deterministic research outcomes. The definition and the analysis of the Islamist Mafias is bound to this same necessity and for this reason, in the rest of this work a wide range of theories and empirical findings will be taken from a great number of different social sciences (e.g., economy, criminology, political theory and terrorism studies).

After having assessed the reasons why multidisciplinary is an important choice for this thesis it is important to clearly state where the Islamist Mafias' should be located from a disciplinary perspective. The criminological research field is indeed very narrow for the theory of the Islamist Mafias because of the extensive analysis of the politics-crime relationships that will be presented in the following pages. To understand the field of application of the Islamist Mafias it is better to consider this work as related to the bigger field of political violence. In this thesis in fact, I will give proof of the new strategic objectives adopted by these terrorist groups, of their social recognition and of their functionality for the local economies and power systems. Yet all these evolutions and the

success obtained by the Haqqanis and the Sahelian Jihadi groups – be it the ability to sell their services to the official power actors or to effectively control some territories and communities - are effectively based on a proficient use of violence. In this sense, the Islamist Mafias are a precise representation of a peculiar use of political violence: the use of violence by a subject brings about the increase of his power. In this sense, as will be explained in Chapter II, the Islamist Mafias, like the Italian ones, are a good example of Bertrand Russell's assumptions on power: the root of all its different forms is the use of violence.³⁹

Another important methodological issue to explore is the use of journalistic sources, the demonstration of the existence of the crime terror nexus must be demonstrated factually. More specifically there needs to be some empirical evidence of terrorist involvement in criminal activities. The Islamist Mafias, of course, do not escape this logic. This necessity, nevertheless, poses many problems on how to achieve such empirical demonstrations and to collect the necessary data. To mention a few of these: 1) Terrorists tends to deny their involvement in criminal activities which might be perceived as ideologically contradictory or could reflect badly on terrorist groups from a political legitimacy perspective; 2) On the other hand, criminals tend to dismiss their cooperation with terrorists since it can attract the obviously undesired attention of the law enforcement authorities. To these generic problems, related of the general study of secret illegal organizations and the crime terror nexus, two further problems need to be added in relation to the aims of this thesis: 1) Terrorist organizations would, arguably, never admit to have cooperated or have struck a deal with the official governments and vice versa; 2) because of the evident ideological contradiction between being a Mafioso and being a terrorist group it is hard to consider that some terrorists will ever admit to be an Islamist Mafioso. For these reasons, the opportunity to find reliable empirical findings, useful for the development of this thesis, are indeed very narrow. Research has been conducted in Afghanistan and the Sahel among the local populations in relation to anthropology⁴⁰ or sociology⁴¹ but very few of those related to the crime terror nexus have found empirical data useful for the purposes of this thesis. The necessity to find empirical data to support the normative approach of this thesis linked to the impossibility of conducting fieldwork because of the civil wars which are afflicting Afghanistan and Mali has obliged me to rely occasionally, on journalistic sources to give shape in a deductive way to the main arguments of this thesis. For this reason, in the rest of this thesis I will rely also on journalistic sources to demonstrate the evolution in the case studies of terrorist groups into Islamist

³⁹ See B. Russell, "Power" Routledge (2004)

⁴⁰ S. Rasmussen "Disputed Boundaries: Tuareg Discourse on Class and Ethnicity" *Ethnology* Volume 31, No. 4 pp. 351-365 (1992)

⁴¹ C. Lindholm "The Structure of Violence among the Swat Pukhtun" *Ethnology* Vol.20, No. 2 pp. 147-156 (1981)

Mafias and to support my interpretative framework. The issue of the adoption of journalistic sources in academic writing is an old one. The difficulties linked to the study of terrorist groups and secret societies in general have pushed scholars to rely on such kinds of documents and this thesis represents another example of this merging. In this context, it is needless to say, the journalistic sources used in this work have been carefully examined and taken only from journals which enjoy a high reputation at a regional or global level. Of course, this critical analysis of the sources will not automatically exclude the risks related to the use of such sources but given the impossibility of conducting fieldwork for this research it was an obliged choice which I have approached carefully. More specifically, the journalistic sources adopted in the rest of this research were chosen according to three different parameters: a) reputation of the authors, for instance journalists like Rukhmini Callimachi or Steven Coll are widely considered experts in terrorism respectively in Mali and Afghanistan. According to the same parameter other sources like the interview to Mokhtar Belmokhtar published by Points Chauds or the column by Sirajuddin Haqqani published by the New York Times can be considered reliable too since they involve members of the Islamist Mafias; b) the use of journalistic sources quoted in existing peer-reviewed research. Some of the journal articles quoted in this research were mentioned also in other scientific research which in their turn were subjected to double blind peer-review, consequently they can be considered reliable because of the scrutiny provided by the editors and the reviewers of the journals; c) use of journalistic sources confirmed by other sources via 'triangulation'. In simple terms, when the information provided by a journalistic source are confirmed also by the academic literature and other journalistic sources these can be considered reliable. Of course, these parameters do not offer a perfect solution to the eventual inaccuracies or simplifications that are characteristic of journalistic reporting, but still this type of evaluation represents the best way for levelling them to the standards of academic research.

Concerning the Sales' model, further clarifications about the limits of this framework are needed too. This theory was conceived to study the Mafias in Italy and the author has not taken into account the possibility of adapting his framework to terrorist groups. Moreover, the Sales' model is inherently ambitious since it aims at giving a full multidimensional explanation of the functioning of Mafias and, by consequence, its results are not in-depth in some parts such as the one on governmentality. Still, as I will show in detail in chapter II this model is also the best choice for the development of my normative framework, and it will allow me to overcome some of the weaknesses present in the literature on the Mafias. In this context it should be noted how the adoption of a model focused on the Italian mafias could be perceived as inductive. Still, it is important to clarify considering how the analysis of the social and anthropological factors in the Tuareg and the Pashtun communities will not

be adopted in such a way. What is important to assess is how through this analysis I want to show how both these societies (the mafioso and the Islamist Mafioso ones) have reached the same paradox (the ability to transmit customary behavioural codes from generation to generation but without being able to transform them in a proper rule of law) and faced the same Hobbesian dilemma which cannot be solved without the intervention of an external patron.

Finally, despite the debate on the use of history in international relations and security from a pedagogic and theoretical perspective,⁴² the historical approach remains arguably one of the best tools in the toolbox of every social scientist.⁴³ In this context it is important to provide clarifications on how I am going to use it. The historical approach in this thesis could be defined more as an “historical reasoning” than proper historiographical research. The latter in fact, would necessarily require accessing sources like classified intelligence reports or to conduct field research which was not possible for this thesis for the reasons mentioned above. The historical reasoning as I intend it here can be considered as an implementation of the method proposed by Lawson to solve the conundrum between history and social sciences.⁴⁴ From a theoretical perspective, I will not use history as an inductive tool to support the framework of the Islamist Mafias, nor do I want to propose a history of powers as many post-structuralist scholars do.⁴⁵ Following the approach proposed by Lawson, in the rest of this research I will use history to highlight the context and the dynamics in which the evolutionary process of the observed organisations has taken place. Within this historical contextual observation, I will introduce a theory (the one by Sales) and an ideal-typification theorised by myself (the one of the Islamist Mafia). The choice of this specific historical approach is justified by the nature of the subject of this thesis. In fact, it is important to remember how Mafias and Islamist Mafias are the outcomes of complex evolutionary processes (political, economic or social) which affect the societies in which they are borne.⁴⁶ By excluding the observation of such processes it becomes much easier to fall into the trap of inductive reasoning or in a very generic overview of the phenomenon of convergence processes on the crime terror nexus at best. By virtue of this consideration, the importance of the adoption of an historical perspective is reinforced because only through this approach can I explain coherently the different stages of the evolutionary process of the Islamist Mafias, together with the dynamics which have to some extent facilitated the birth of these organisations.

⁴² J.L. Gaddis “*History, Theory and Common Ground*” International Security Vol. 22 Iss. 1 pp. 75-85 (1997)

⁴³ A.L. George, “*Knowledge for Statecraft: The Challenge for Political Science and History.*” International Security 22(1): 44-52 (1997)

⁴⁴ G. Lawson “*The Eternal Divide? History and International Relations.*” European Journal of International Relations 18(2): 203-26.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*

⁴⁶ D. Bell *Ibidem*

As a final remark it must be mentioned how all the translations from French and Italian into English used in this thesis have been made by myself. The process of translation has followed a literal approach in order to maintain intact the authors' original thoughts and arguments. When quotes were too long or too complex to be translated in English literally, I have quoted short expressions or sentences which can be verified within the text and which are functional to summarize the authors' thoughts without distorting them.

3. Thesis structure

This thesis will be divided into three parts: The first part (chapters I and II) will define what a Mafia is, through a comprehensive literature review. To do so I will challenge some of the misconceptions that are affecting both the academic and the general perception of Mafias. The second part (chapter III) will be dedicated to the formulation of the theory of the Islamist Mafia. Here I will use the previous definition of Mafia as a starting point for defining what the Islamist Mafia is and what its main characteristics are. In this chapter I will also critically analyse the theory of the Islamist Mafias in comparison to other theories on the crime terror nexus in order to highlight the contribution that this thesis makes within the debate. The third part (chapters IV and V) will be focused on the analysis of the two case studies mentioned above. In both of these chapters I will analyse the evolutionary process undertaken by the Sahelian Jihadi Groups and the Haqqani Network comparing it with the adopted definition of Mafia and Islamist Mafia to give a practical demonstration of what an Islamist Mafia is and how it works. In the conclusion, I will offer a comparison between the theory of the Islamist Mafias' and the Sales' model on the one hand and between the two case studies and the definition of Mafias on the other. In this conclusive part I will give also some potential hints on the potential future fields of research that the formulation of this new theory will open within the studies on political violence.

CHAPTER I

A literature review on the studies on the crime terror nexus and the Mafia

1. Theories and frameworks for the study of the crime terror nexus

From a conceptual perspective it is not easy to assess when and how academia decided to analyse crime and terrorism as two separate phenomena. As recalled by James Windle and others: “Terrorism and organized crime have existed in some form and to some degree as long as organised society”,¹ consequently we cannot establish clearly when terrorism has been pulled out from the general subject of criminology in order to be studied separately. Put succinctly, the crime terror nexus does not have an official date of birth.

The concept of the crime terror nexus is the outcome of a debate started with the introduction of the expression *narcoterrorism* in 1983. In that year, the then president of Peru, Belaunde Terry, used this word to designate the terrorist-like attacks carried by the local drug cartels against the law enforcement authorities.² The concept of *narcoterrorism* at the end of the 1980s was so widely used that some authors have started to question its validity especially since it appeared to be politically biased.³ As pointed out by Bruce Hoffman, the narcoterrorism paradigm was the outcome of American strategic thought in the Cold War era, characterized by the merging of the two most feared criminal and political phenomena in the US at that time: Communism and Latin American drug cartels.⁴ Consequently, one of the implicit weaknesses of the narcoterrorism approach was that it was applied almost exclusively to Marxist guerrilla groups in Latin America.⁵ Nevertheless, the idea of *narcoterrorism* paved the way for the evolution of the studies on the relations between terrorism and organized crime and consequently for the formulation of the crime terror nexus as we know it today. The increased cooperation between these criminal organizations led to a crucial node of the crime

¹ J. Windle, J. F. Morrison, A. Winter and A. Silke. “Introduction: Hawking the Historical Method in Organized Crime and Terrorism Studies” in J. Windle, J. F. Morrison, A. Winter and A. Silke: “Historical Perspectives on Organized Crime and Terrorism” Routledge (2018) ebook

² J. Hartelius, “Narcoterrorism” East/West Institute and the Swedish Carnegie Institute, (2008)

³ G. Wardlaw “Linkages between the Illegal Drugs Traffic and Terrorism,” Journal of Conflict Studies(1987)

⁴ B. Hoffman “Inside Terrorism” Columbia University Press (2006) p.17

⁵ B. Hoffman “Inside Terrorism” *Ibidem* p.17

terror nexus debate: is it possible for terrorist and criminal organizations to converge? Or, more specifically, is it possible for criminal organizations to become terrorist and vice versa?

The critics of the convergence theories have built their arguments on the so-called “profit vs. ideology dichotomy” according to which terrorists fight to create a new political order according to their ideological beliefs while criminal organizations are only interested in criminal economic revenues. Phil Williams, for example, in his paper “The changed landscape” argued that terrorists commit criminal acts only for financial reasons and that despite the involvement of terrorist organizations in criminal activities their aims remain completely different.⁶ Consequently, the alliances between organized crime and terrorism remain occasional and from a general perspective it can be argued that: “there is no nexus”.⁷ Alex Schmid echoed Williams, assessing how, despite some common characteristics, the two phenomena are and remain divided⁸. In the same vein and in more recent times, Peng Wang highlighted how the cooperation between terrorists and criminals is not only occasional but also circumscribed and short living.⁹ In most recent times, authors like Moghadam have reiterated this distinction between terrorism and organised crime in other fields of research within terrorism studies.¹⁰

The rapid changing of the international landscape at the end of the Cold War offered the supporters of the convergence theories new proof to advance their arguments. In 1999, Walter Laqueur dedicated a chapter of his book *The New Terrorism* to the crime terror nexus assessing how the separation line between crime and terrorism was increasingly blurred.¹¹ What is important to know about Laqueur’s work is how the author started to give some important inputs to reconsider the “profit vs. ideology” dichotomy: “It is also true that early ideologists of terrorism such as Bakunin, the Narodnaya Volya, and some of the militant anarchists thought that criminals were the only revolutionary element in society and as such should be enlisted in the struggle against the existing order.”¹² In sum, for revolutionary ideologists, criminals enjoy some form of political legitimacy and consequently the separation of ideology and profit should be considered as less rigid than what the critics of the

⁶ P. Williams “*The changed landscape: from slime molds to terrorism*”. Kent Center (2002)

⁷ P. Williams *Ibidem*

⁸ A. Schmid “*The Links between Transnational Organized Crime and Terrorist Crimes,*” Transnational Organized Crime Vol. 2 No. 4 pp. 1-14 (1996)

⁹ P. Wang “*Crime-Terror Nexus. Transformation, Alliances and Convergence*” Asian Social Science vol. 6 No. 6 pp.11-20 (2012)

¹⁰ A. Moghadam “*Understanding cooperation among terrorist actors*” p. 9 Columbia University Press (2017)

¹¹ W. Laqueur “*The New Terrorism: Fanaticism and Weapons of Mass Destruction*” Oxford University Press (1999) pp. 338-339

¹² W. Laqueur *Ibidem* p. 339

convergence have argued. The influence of Laqueur's work is perceivable in the studies by Chris Dishman who assessed how terrorism can evolve into organized crime despite some ideological and practical difficulties.¹³ The works by Shelley and Picarelli represent another crucial evolution within the academic debate on the nexus. In their 2002 paper "Methods not Motives" the authors were keen to recognize how in some specific cases the crime terror nexus can manifest itself through a form of mutual learning between criminal and terrorist organizations.¹⁴ Despite this, Shelley and Picarelli were not keen to abandon completely the profit vs. ideology framework. For these authors terrorism and crime have different aims even if: "(there) is the need for scholarly research on this relationship".¹⁵

It is in this context that in 2004, Tamara Makarenko published her ground-breaking paper "The Crime-Terror Continuum".¹⁶ In this work the author systematised the most important concepts which have emerged in the debate on the nexus up until then. In referring to the previous assumptions made by Laquer, Makarenko assesses how the end of the Cold War, and the globalization process, have changed the environment in which terrorists groups and criminal organizations operate: "Two traditionally separate phenomena have begun to reveal many operational and organizational similarities."¹⁷ Tamara Makarenko theorised the development of the crime terror nexus as a continuum across which the relations between criminal organizations can evolve during time. At the beginning of this nexus there is the alliances point, where terrorist and criminals cooperate for different reasons. The second point of the nexus is the one of the "operational motivations" where we can find: "criminal groups using terrorism as an operational tool and terrorist groups taking part in criminal activities as an operational tool".¹⁸ The third point is the one of convergence which: "refers explicitly to the idea that criminal and terrorist organization converge into a single entity that initially displays characteristics of both groups simultaneously but has the potential to transform itself into an entity situated at the opposite end of the continuum from which it began"¹⁹. In Makarenko's model the segment of convergence is also characterized by another important element, the "black hole thesis":

¹³ C. Dishman "Terrorism, Crime and Transformation" Studies in Conflicts and Terrorism Vo. 24 No.1 pp. 43-58 (2001)

¹⁴ L.I. Shelley and J.Picarelli: "Methods not motives: exploring the links between transnational organised crime and international terrorism". Police Practice and Research Vol. 9 No. 2, pp. 52-67 (2002)

¹⁵ L.I. Shelley and J. Picarelli "Methods not motives...." *Ibidem*

¹⁶ T. Makarenko. "The Crime –Terror Continuum: Tracing the interplay between Transnational Organised Crime and Terrorism". Global Crime Vol.6 No.1 pp. 129-145 (2004)

¹⁷ T. Makarenko "The Crime –Terror Continuum: Tracing...." *Ibidem*

¹⁸ T. Makarenko "The Crime –Terror Continuum: Tracing...." *Ibidem*

¹⁹ T. Makarenko "The Crime –Terror Continuum: Tracing...." *Ibidem*

“This section of the crime terror continuum refers to the situations in which weak or failed states foster the convergence between transnational organised crime and ultimately create a safe haven for the continued operations of convergent groups. The ‘black hole’ syndrome encompasses two situations: first, where the primary motivations of groups engaged in a civil war evolves from a focus on political aims to a focus on criminal aims; second, it refers to the emergence of a ‘black hole’ state - a state successfully taken over by a hybrid group”²⁰

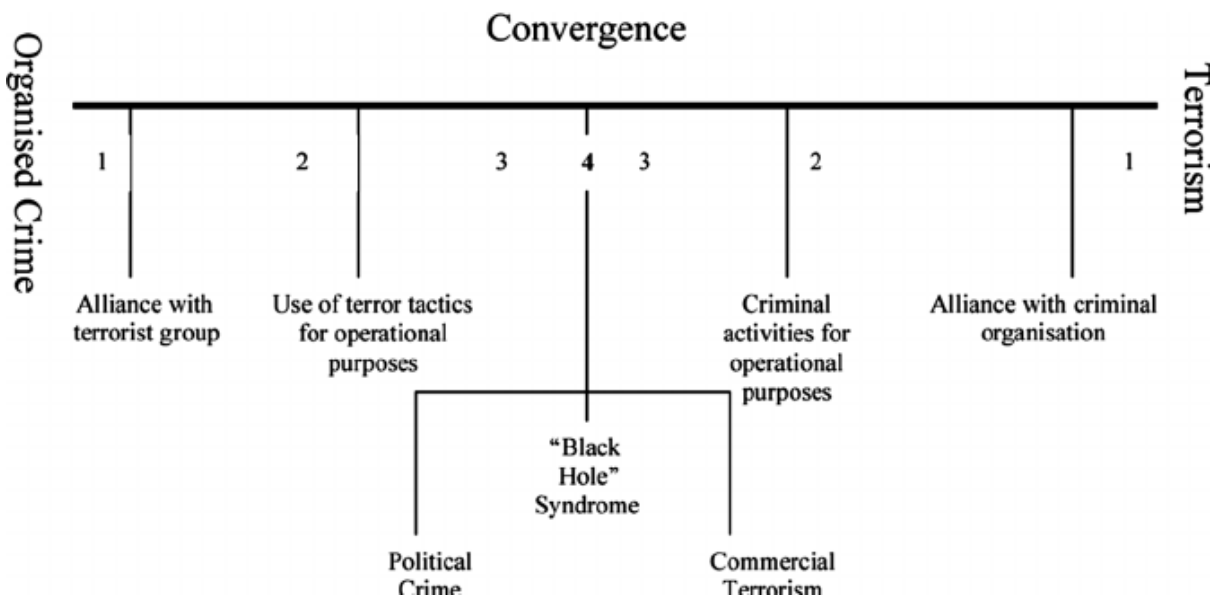


Figure 1 The Crime Terror Continuum theorised by Tamara Makarenko in 2004

Authors such as Sanderson have welcomed the new findings by Makarenko but were cautious for what concerns the phenomenon of convergence, arguing that some points of divergence were still present.²¹ In 2005 Picarelli and Shelley reviewed their previous conclusions in a new paper called “Methods and motives”²² admitting the possibility of convergence: “The process of convergence continues until the two groups become one, which we refer to as a hybrid group”.²³ Moreover the convergence can even lead to a transformation process along the crime terror continuum: “one group can focus on one activity and drop the other one”²⁴. Other authors such as Loretta Napoleoni in her

²⁰ T. Makarenko *The Crime –Terror Continuum: Tracing....*” *Ibidem*

²¹ T.M. Sanderson “*Transnational Terrorism and Organised Crime: blurring the lines*” SAIS Review Vol. 24 No.1 pp. 49-61, (2004)

²² L.I. Shelley and J. Picarelli “*Methods and Motives: exploring links between transnational Organised Crime and International Terrorism*”, Trends in Organized Crime Vol.9 No. 2, pp. 52-67 (2005)

²³ L.I. Shelley and J. Picarelli “*Methods and Motives....*” *Ibidem*

²⁴ L.I. Shelley and J. Picarelli “*Methods and Motives....*” *Ibidem*

book *Terror Incorporated*²⁵ introduced the concept of the “privatisation of terrorism” according to which the terrorist organizations are increasingly involved in criminal activities and so they can potentially evolve into criminal organizations. At the end of first decade of the 2000s some authors went even further highlighting how only “artificial boundaries separate the studies on crime and terrorism”.²⁶ These boundaries have been more and more eroded during the years by other studies in the fields of social psychology²⁷ and political theory.²⁸ It is important to stress here how at this stage the debate on the phenomena of convergence within the crime terror nexus was mainly ontological. The main issue was to assess if the transformation of terrorist groups into organised criminal ones was possible, but little or no attention was focused on how the nature of “converged” organisations can change in practice. Put in simple terms, scholars involved in the analysis of convergence processes have never specified what kind of criminal organisation terrorist groups might become at the end of this process. Organised crime was maintained as a vague label in the bigger picture of the crime terror nexus processes and in this sense the framework of the Islamist Mafias, by proposing an evolution of terrorist groups into a specific typology of organised crime, aims to fill this gap.

The original model of the crime terror continuum has been reformulated across the years. The first revision was done by Makarenko herself, who recognised that: “The nexus, however, remains a relatively ill-understood and ill-defined phenomenon that is approached from very specific perspectives instead of from the required holistic viewpoint”.²⁹ The new formulation of the crime terror continuum was based on the same evolutionary principle but the analysis of the stages of the process were and structured according to the different needs (tactics, skills or tools) of a criminal organization.

²⁵ See L. Napoleoni, “*Terror incorporated: tracing the dollars behind the Terror Networks*”. Seven Stories Press U.S. (2005)

²⁶ S. Mullins “*Parallels Between Crime and Terrorism*” Studies in Conflict and Terrorism Vol.32 No. 9, pp. 811-830 (2009)

²⁷ S. Mullins *Ibidem*

²⁸ N. Rossi “*Breaking the nexus: conceptualising “illicit sovereigns”*”. Global Crime Vol.15 No. 4, pp. 299-319 (2014)

²⁹ T. Makarenko. “*Europe’s Crime Terror Nexus: links between terrorism and Organised Crime in EU*” European Parliament (2012).

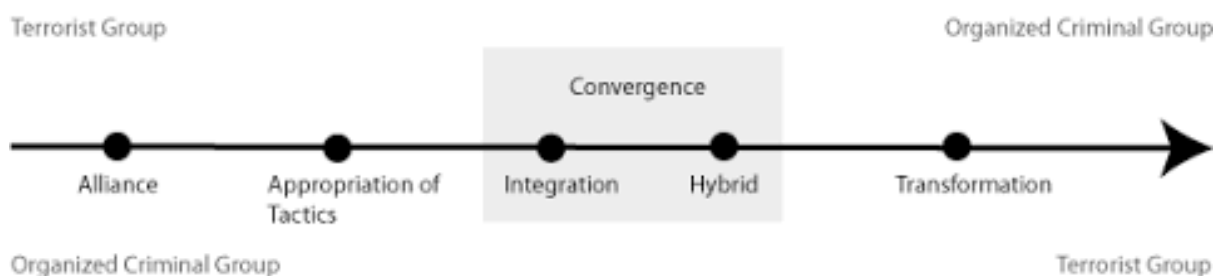


Figure 2 The revised version of the crime terror continuum by Makarenko (2012)

Makarenko and Mesquita proposed another formulation of the crime terror nexus in 2014 while studying the relations between terrorism and organised crime in the EU.³⁰ The authors have formulated a new model based on three plains (operational, organizational and evolutionary) above which the continuum can evolve creating potential “nodes” between terrorism and organised crime. For what concerns the convergence process, Mesquita and Makarenko, assess how in a stable socio-political environment the cases of transformation from terrorism to crime are really rare.³¹ These new formulations of the crime terror continuum have added a further level of complexity to the debate on the topic but other kinds of problematisation remained overlooked in the literature. From a general perspective, the evolutionary processes along the nexus (be them organisational or operational) remained analysed in a generic way. In this sense, the updated formulations of the continuum by Makarenko and Mesquita were still influenced by the ontological nature of the debate: their main aim was to prove the existence of the nexus rather than discuss its consistency. In fact, in the above-mentioned works the authors were able to propose many historical examples of the interaction between organised crime and terrorism within the general models for the analysis of the nexus, but they never proposed in-depth analysis about how the different case studies have evolved, and how their evolution along the convergence processes took place. The Islamist Mafias model, thanks to the analysis of the historical evolution of the Haqqani Network and the SJGs, moves beyond the mere mention of some convergence cases in the bigger context of the crime terror nexus. This thesis will aim to overcome this generic perspective on this subject by achieving two research goals: explain what kind of criminal organisations these terrorist groups have become, and how this convergence process happened.

³⁰ T. Makarenko and M. Mesquita. “*Categorising the crime-terror nexus in the European Union*”. *Global Crime* Vol.15 No.4 pp. 259-274 (2014)

³¹ T. Makarenko and M. Mesquita. *Ibidem*

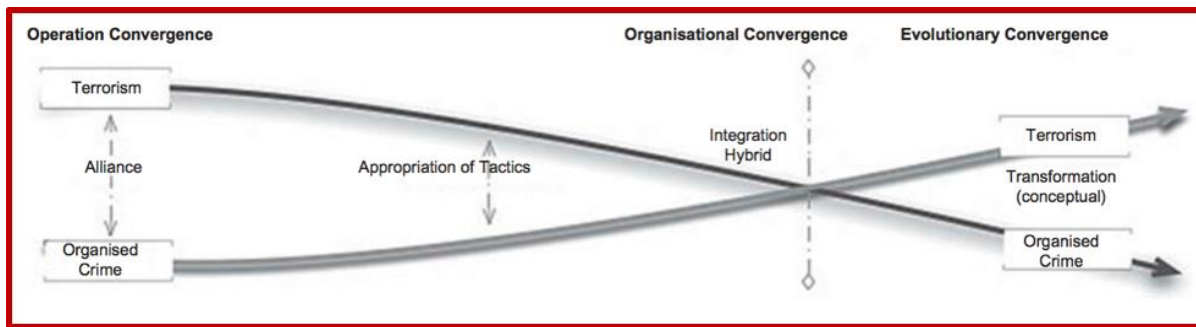


Figure 3 The model elaborated by Makarenko and Mesquita on the crime terror continuum in Europe (2014)

Another important model for the study of the crime terror nexus is the one by Santiago Ballina. In his paper “*The crime terror continuum revisited*”³² the author shows the limits of Makarenko’s model which are: 1) the reliance on the profit vs. ideology dichotomy; 2) the previous models of crime terror continuum do not consider the fact that a criminal organization can evolve from terror to crime and vice versa without the involvement of exogenous factors during this process; 3) the crime terror continuum is unidirectional: “when it discards the possibility that ideology can be adopted by a criminal organization without becoming a facade to conceal greed (...)”.³³ To resolve these problems Ballina proposes a new type of model for the study of the nexus based on three different levels. The first one is the sociocultural background of the observed criminal organizations, which is the main element that enhances the cohesion among the members of such groups. The second level is the one of ideology, and the third level is the one of profits. The latter elements are considered here as separate elements just like in Makarenko’s model but: “unlike the crime terror continuum, it does not assume that they are mutually exclusive, but rather overlapping. It would normally be expected that a group with a strong for-profit trait would have a weak ideological basis (and vice versa), but this is by no means an unbreakable rule.”³⁴

³² S. Ballina “*The Crime-Terror continuum revisited: A model for the study of hybrid criminal organization*” Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism Vol.6 No.2, pp. 121-136 (2011)

³³ S. Ballina *Ibidem*.

³⁴ S. Ballina, *Ibidem*

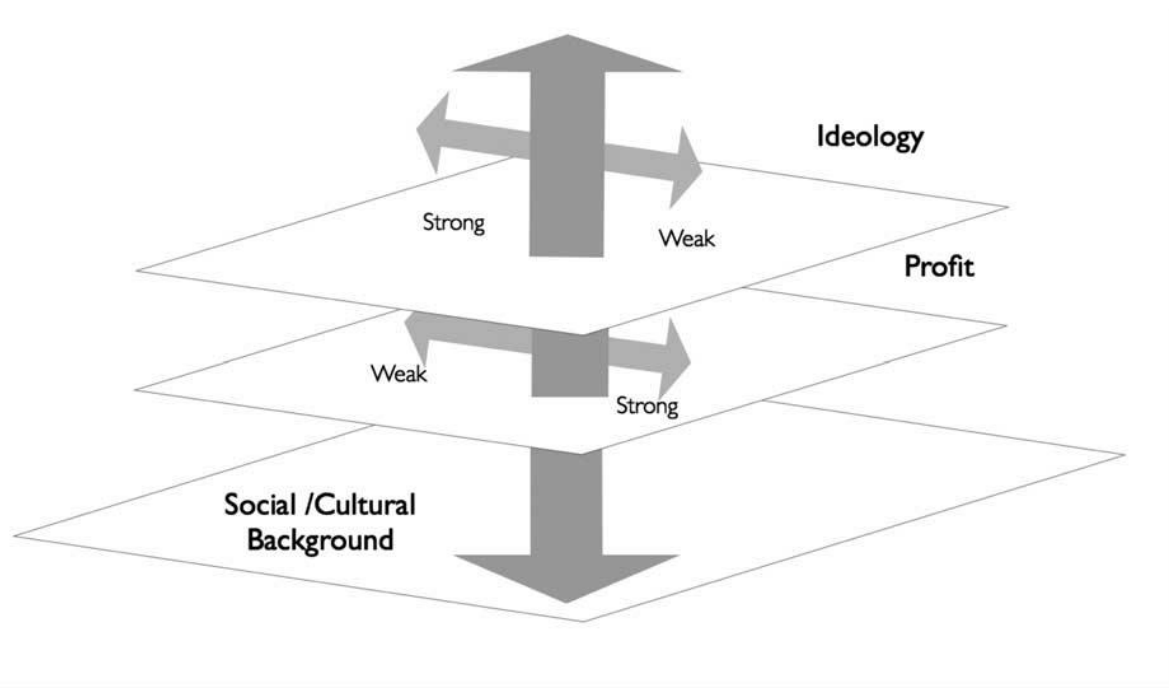


Figure 4 The crime terror continuum revisited by Santiago Ballina (2011)

Ballina’s model represents a remarkable step forward in the study of the crime terror nexus. His revised version of the continuum in fact, proposes an in-depth analysis of the case studies of La Familia Michoacan in Mexico and the Abu Sayyaf group in the Philippines. Moreover, the author adds another level of problematisation within the debate on the nexus by considering the importance of the social and cultural background in the context of the convergence processes on the continuum.³⁵ This element will be adopted also to explain the evolutionary process of the case studies analysed in this thesis, and by consequence the Islamist Mafias framework can be considered as closer to Ballina’s approach rather than the first elaborations of the crime terror continuum. Still, in developing this new approach I want also to fill a theoretical gap present in this model. It seems in fact that the Ballina model can be considered as an unfinished work to some extent, since the author was not able to capture a crucial aspect in the study of the nexus: how the actors surrounding terrorist groups react to their evolution on the continuum. In fact, just like local populations can adapt to the shift from terror to crime, even political, religious and economic establishments can change their attitude toward criminal organisations following their evolution on the continuum and occasionally they can be involved in the convergence processes as well. In recent times the importance of middlemen as facilitators of terrorist alliances has been noted by authors like Bacon, but this kind of analysis has not been developed in the context of the crime terror nexus.³⁶ What I will show in this work is how the reorientation of terrorist groups toward crime changes the attitude of the local power actors as

³⁵ S. Ballina *Ibidem*

³⁶ See T. Bacon “*Why Terrorist Groups form International Alliances*” University of Pennsylvania Press (2018)

well and how in this process middlemen play a not negligible role. In fact, in the analysis of the case studies I will advance Ballina's reasoning further by showing how the socio-cultural background in the context of the crime terror nexus becomes a tool through which terrorist groups can forge new proficient power relationships with legal power actors and it is in this context of realignment that middlemen play an important role.

More recently a new subfield in the study of the crime terror nexus has emerged in relation to "foreign fighters" and the radicalization phenomena. Even if this field of research will not be analysed in this thesis an honest and timely analysis of the debate on the crime terror nexus cannot overlook it. In a 2015 report published by the International Center for the Study of Radicalization (ICSR) the authors Peter Neumann, Rajan Basra and Claudia Brunner wrote about the previous models of the crime terror continuum:

"None of these accounts reflect how terrorist structures, radicalization and recruitment have changed. Jihadist groups such as al-Qaeda and Islamic State operate not wholly as top-down organizations but also in the form of dispersed, autonomous cells who pursue strategies and tactics that are not always – or necessarily – aligned with those of their leadership. The traditional literature has failed to recognize this, and – consequently – tells us little about the merging of criminal and terrorist milieus in places like the suburbs of Paris or Brussels."³⁷

Starting from this paper Neumann and Basra have published other studies in which they have progressively updated the findings of their first report in 2016³⁸ and 2017³⁹. In the same vein the European think tank GLOBSEC has launched a series of reports that analyse the crime terror nexus in the broader context of radicalization and recruitment by terrorist organizations.⁴⁰ Other authors as Gallagher have pushed this reasoning even further describing the main factors which are characterizing the context in which the new crime terror nexus is manifesting⁴¹ and how the foreign

³⁷ P. Neumann, R. Basra and C. Brunner. "*Criminal Pasts, Terrorist Futures: European Jihadists and the New Crime-Terror Nexus*" ICSR (2015)

³⁸ P. Neumann, R. Basra "*Criminal Pasts, Terrorist Futures: European Jihadists and the New Crime-Terror Nexus*". Perspectives on Terrorism Vol. 10 No. 6, pp. 25-40 (2016)

³⁹ P. Neumann and R. Basra, "*Crime as Jihad: Developments in the Crime-Terror Nexus in Europe*" CTC Sentinel Vol.10 No.9, pp. 1-6 (2017)

⁴⁰ GLOBSEC, "*From Criminal to Terrorists and back?*" (2017)

⁴¹ M. Gallagher. "*Exploring the Nuanced Nexus between Terrorism and Organised Crime*" ICCT (2018)

fighters can use the skills learned while fighting with terrorist organizations abroad to put their criminal careers back on track.⁴² This last evolution of the study of the crime terror nexus is still developing and to date the literature on the new crime terror nexus is very fragmented. Specifically, this lack of a common piece of work which can develop the methodological framework upon which this new nexus is based and above all the supporters of the new crime terror nexus need to develop more in-depth their arguments against the old formulations of the nexus, or their position on the debate related to the profit vs. ideology dichotomy. There are other two weaknesses that at the moment are characterizing this new formulation of the nexus and that need to be stressed here: 1) The new crime terror nexus, as theorized by this author, cannot be considered as historically recent. Already in the 1980s and 1990s the phenomenon of the gang members turned into jihadi militants was already known and, in some aspects, explored. This is true for instance for what concerns the case of the so-called *Gang de Roubaix*⁴³ or of important jihadist leaders such as Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi⁴⁴ and Abu Hamza Al-Masri.⁴⁵ In sum, the link between gang militancy and jihadism was not borne with the Islamic State or the ‘fourth terrorist wave’ in general.⁴⁶ 2) The arguments against the previous formulations of the crime terror continuum seem weak too. The crime terror nexus in its early days was aimed at studying the evolution of criminal organizations and not the radicalization of single leaders or individuals. It is not entirely correct to assess that the previous studies on the nexus have failed in understanding the evolution of the radicalization of criminals. It is more appropriate to argue how academia was simply interested in investigating other type of issues related to the nexus.

2. A review of the structural approach on the studies on Mafia

2.1 Mafia. Etymology and uses of the word

The origin of the word “Mafia” is uncertain. Some authors assess how the root of this term lay in different Arab words as *mahyās* (bold man), *maha* (cave), *māhfīl* (meeting place), *mu’āfā* (a form or private protection), *marfūd* (rejected) or *ma’āfir* (name of a family who ruled Palermo during the

⁴²M. Gallagher “*Criminalised Islamic State Veterans – A future major threat in Organised Crime Development?*” Perspectives on Terrorism, Vol. 10 No.5, pp. 51-67 (2016)

⁴³ See A. Tazaghart, “*AQMI: Enquête sur les héritiers de Ben Laden au Maghreb Islamique*”, Jean Picollec (2011)

⁴⁴ See J. Warrick, “*Black Flags: the Rise of ISIS*” First Anchor books (2016)

⁴⁵ See R. Pantucci “*We love Death as you love life. Britain’s suburban Terrorists*” Hurst & Co. (2015)

⁴⁶ D. C. Rapoport “*The Fourth Wave: September 11 in the history of terrorism*” Current History Vol. 100 No. 650, pp. 419-424 (2001)

Arab domination).⁴⁷ According to Santi Correnti the word Mafia derives from the Tuscan dialect.⁴⁸ Other authors such as Giuseppe Pitrè do not clarify the origin of the term but they agree about the fact that the meaning is referred to a form of social recognition, linked to the use of violence.⁴⁹ The first appearance of the term itself is less disputed. According to some recent historical research the word Mafia appeared for the first time in 1863, as the title of a play by Giuseppe Rizzotto and Gaetano Mosca called “*I Mafiusi de la Vicaria*” (The Mafioso of the Vicaria).⁵⁰

The Oxford Dictionary defines Mafia as: “An *organized* international body of criminals, operating originally in Sicily and now especially in Italy and the US and having a complex and ruthless behavioural code.” But also as “Any *organized group of criminals* resembling the Mafia in its way of operating” or “A group regarded as exerting a hidden sinister influence.”⁵¹ It is important here to stress this last meaning, which shows how the use of the term Mafia has become so broad as to indicate every secret, sinister and pervasive organization. For this reason, the term Mafia is today used in many different contexts, such as the political⁵² and academic debates⁵³ or conspiracy theories.⁵⁴

As I will show in this chapter, the first studies on Mafia have been characterized by a careful observation of their hierarchies, or more precisely the study of the hierarchical configurations of these criminal organizations. This structural approach can be seen as the main framework which has led to the study of the Mafias as separated entities, but first and foremost the supporters of the structural approach are those who tend to identify Mafias by virtue of their hierarchical structures and how these are able to influence the behaviour of these organizations.⁵⁵ As I will show later on in this chapter, this kind of approach is obsolete and biased but has played a fundamental role in demonstrating the Mafia’s existence. In fact, it is important to be reminded how the debate on Mafias in its early days was purely ontological. In the opposite of what happened for the debate on terrorism, which is mainly epistemological, for decades academics and public institutions in general, have debated whether a criminal organization called Mafia exists or not. It is also because of the ontological nature of the

⁴⁷ D. Gambetta. “*The Sicilian Mafia*”. Harvard University Press (1993) p. 257

⁴⁸ See S. Correnti “*Breve Storia della Sicilia*” Newton & Compton (1998)

⁴⁹ G. Pitrè “*Usi e Costumi, Credenze e pregiudizi del popolo siciliano*”, Luigi Pedone-Lauriel (1889) volume II pp. 289-290

⁵⁰ I. Sales “*Storia dell’Italia Mafiosa*” Rubbettino (2015), p. 74

⁵¹ Oxford Dictionary “*Mafia*” ebook

⁵² S. Saeed “*Nigel Farage accuses the EU to behaving like a Mafia*” Politico. (2017)

⁵³ H. Brown Otopalik “*Academic Mafia*”, the Journal of the American Dental Association. Elsevier. (2000)

⁵⁴ See P.D. Gaubatz and Paul Sperry “*Muslim Mafia: Inside the Secret Underworld That’s Conspiring to Islamize America*”. World Net Daily Books (2009)

⁵⁵ I. Sales “*La Mafia come...*” *Ibidem*

debate on Mafia that the structural approach has gained the upper hand in the debate: it was suitable to demonstrate first and foremost the very existence of Mafia itself.

Another fact that I want to stress in introducing this literature review on the studies on Mafias is that I will not exclude the historical analysis from literature on the theories on Mafias. This choice is due to two main reasons: first of all to avoid what Foucault called ‘academism’ so the analysis of theories based only on the academic literature detached from the historical context in which theories have been formulated.⁵⁶ Secondly, because as highlighted by other authors, a comprehensive analysis of organised crime in the current academic debate cannot avoid anymore the use of historical perspectives on the subject.⁵⁷ Finally, because it is not inappropriate to say that in the debate on the existence of Mafias the contributions by academics have arrived in many cases after the ontological demonstration of the existence of these criminal organizations. The proof of the existence of Mafias, as I will show, has been provided by law enforcement agencies first, not by scholars, and consequently the academic analysis of this phenomenon has been greatly influenced by the work of police forces. In sum, we cannot separate the ontological debate on Mafias from the academic formulation of the structural approach and for this reason I will not separate the historical context on which this debate has taken place from the analysis of academic theories.

2.2 The positivist theories on Mafias

In the eighteenth century, southern Italy was characterized by a diffuse and multiform use of violence. In his book *Borboni, Criminali e Patrioti (Bourbons, Criminals and Patriots)*⁵⁸, the historian Enzo Ciconte illustrated how the different social classes were involved in this use of violence and their strategic reasons behind it: 1) The aristocracy and the landowners used violence to defend their privileges and proprieties; 2) The new ascending bourgeoisie used it to defend its social rise; 3) Popular classes practised it as an instrument for a rapid enrichment.⁵⁹ The power of Mafias lay in their ability to conjugate and unify all the interests of these social classes with an efficient use of violence, and this helps to comprehend their success and the important role that they played in the unification of Italy in the mid-eighteenth century.

⁵⁶ M. Foucault and S. Hasumi “*De l’Archéologie à la dynastique*”. Umi (1973)

⁵⁷ J. Windle, J. F. Morrison, A. Winter and A. Silke: “*Historical Perspectives*” *Ibidem*

⁵⁸ E. Ciconte “*Borbonici, Patrioti e Criminali*”. Salerno Editore (2016) ebook

⁵⁹ E. Ciconte, “*Borbonici, Patrioti....*” *Ibidem*

Soon after the unification, the authorities of the newly born Kingdom of Italy started to report the existence of some secret criminal sects in the south.⁶⁰ The ruling élites of the state already knew the existence of such organizations but they were scared that the revelation of their existence and of the cooperation between the Kingdom and the Mafias would have undermined the legitimacy of the new state.⁶¹ Moreover, the post-unitary period turned out to be very complex to handle, given the presence of Mafias together with an remarkable socio-economic inequality between the north and the south exploded many times in riots and insurgencies. The increasing frustration of the Italian authorities unable to pacify the south offered a favourable ground for the development of the positivist theories on Mafias.

Christopher Duggan has brilliantly summarised the role of positivists in this historical period:

“Their ideas became fashionable in the late 1870’s and 1880’s and coincided with the disillusionment felt by many intellectuals (...) Men such Cesare Lombroso, Enrico Ferri and Giuseppe Sergi were convinced that they had turned the study of crime into science. (...) As with other systematisers of the late nineteenth century, a fervent secular faith inspired their perceptions.”⁶²

It is important to add how the arguments of the positivists on the study of Mafia were also based on the ideas of the so-called “Sicilianists”, a varied group of Sicilian based thinkers which gave birth to a school of thought, which has categorically denied the existence of Mafia as a criminal organization. The most well-known exponent of this intellectual current was the Sicilian anthropologist Giuseppe Pitré who in his book of 1875 *Fiabe, novelle e racconti popolari siciliani* (“*Sicilian Fairy Tales, Stories, and Folktales*”) defined mafia as a form of social behaviour and not as criminal organization.⁶³ As remarked by Cicone: “Since that the idea of a common organization, which was keeping Mafiosi together, was excluded, the doors were opened for the most weird and immaterial explanations”.⁶⁴

Relying on anthropological analysis, phrenology and the use of quantitative methods, the positivist school of criminology linked the study of crime to the concept of race. The main example of these theories is the work of the criminologist Cesare Lombroso and more specifically his 1876 book

⁶⁰ For a review of these reports see E. Cicone “*Storia criminale*”. Rubbettino (2008)

⁶¹ See G. Di Fiore “*Controstoria dell’Unità d’Italia*”. BUR (2007)

⁶² C. Duggan. “*Fascism and the Mafia*” Yale University press (1989) p. 45

⁶³ See G. Pitré. “*Fiabe, novelle e racconti popolari siciliani*” Donzelli (2013)

⁶⁴ E. Cicone “*Storia Criminale*” Rubbettino. (2008) p. 81

“*L'uomo delinquente*” (“*The delinquent man*”).⁶⁵ In this work Lombroso analysed the phenomenon of crime in relation to a wide range of factors (such as climate, orography, ethnicity) but what is important to highlight here is how this is arguably the most evident synthesis of the positivist approach. The characterising elements of these analytical frameworks to understand Mafias are:

- 1) **The use of quantitative methods:** Using the same statistical methods adopted by the French positivist school, for example in the works of André Michel Guerry, Lombroso believed that these can be used to prevent and study every type of crime in relation to its perpetrators.⁶⁶ Lombroso also tried to theorise what he called the criminal calendar, according to which a certain type of crime can happen in a specific period of the year because of the influence exercised by the climate.⁶⁷
- 2) **The concept of criminal atavism:** this idea is related to the racial theories adopted by Lombroso who writes: “It is because of the racial influence that some type of crimes are predominant in some regions”.⁶⁸ Using these racial theories Lombroso conceived the theory of criminal atavism that according to the author is: “[an attitude to crime which *e.n.*] are collocated in some individuals who are fatally keen to commit crimes”⁶⁹.
- 3) **The Mafia is a form of racial deviance:** Lombroso analyses Mafia as a specific form of criminal atavism, not as a criminal organization, related to the racial impurity of part of the Sicilian population (due to the previous Arab domination).⁷⁰ Sicilians are implicitly violent, and they live in a warm region and this explains the presence of Mafia in their land.⁷¹ Consequently, the Mafia should not have been regarded as a criminal association but first and foremost as the spirit of an inferior race.⁷²

⁶⁵ C. Lombroso “*L'uomo delinquente*”. Hoepli (1876)

⁶⁶ C. Lombroso “*L'uomo...*” *Ibidem* p.7

⁶⁷ C. Lombroso “*L'uomo...*” *Ibidem* p. 10

⁶⁸ C. Lombroso “*L'uomo...*” *Ibidem* p. 20

⁶⁹ C. Lombroso “*L'uomo...*” *Ibidem* p. 32

⁷⁰ C. Lombroso “*L'uomo...*” *Ibidem* p. 19

⁷¹ C. Lombroso “*L'uomo...*” *Ibidem* p. 19

⁷² C. Lombroso “*L'uomo...*” *Ibidem* p. 19

Other scholars supported the conclusions reached by Lombroso. In 1897, the sociologist Alfredo Niceforo published his book “*La delinquenza in Sardegna*” (“*Delinquency in Sardinia*”)⁷³ in which the author claimed that the presence of crime on the island was linked to the atavistic racial backwardness of the inhabitants. In 1898 Niceforo applied the same theoretical framework to the rest of the South in his book “*L’Italia Barbara Contemporanea*” (“*Contemporary Barbarian Italy*”).⁷⁴ Even in this research Niceforo assesses how the populations from the South were part of a different race compared to the one of the North, and that consequently their involvement in crime was due to the criminal atavism linked to their race. The solutions proposed by Niceforo were even more extreme than his theories: “The damned race which occupy the Sicily and the Mezzogiorno should be treated with iron and fire”⁷⁵

At the beginning of the twentieth century some studies have tried to confute these theses. For example, in his book “*Che Cos’è la Mafia?*” (*What is the Mafia?*) the scholar Gaetano Mosca, defines it as a criminal organization and as a form of social deviance at the same time.⁷⁶ Mosca was clearly sceptical about the idea that the Mafia can be linked to some ethnic peculiarities of the Sicilians: “The spirit of the Mafia is not exclusively related to Sicily, it is, and it was, present in many other parts of the world, wherever social justice has proved to be weak, unable to eradicate and substitute the system of private revenge”.⁷⁷ In sum, Mosca substitutes the racial theories of positivists with a multidisciplinary approach aimed to look more in-depth at the social and historical roots of this criminal phenomenon. In the same vein, the Inspector of the Royal Police Antonio Cutrera in his 1900 book “*La Mafia e i Mafiosi*” (“*Mafia and the Mafioso*”) recognised how the Mafia is a product of the Sicilian society but he refuted at the same time the scientific determinism of the positivists.⁷⁸ Cutrera argues how it is not race which has generated Mafia but a series of historical and social factors (such as the presence of absolutist governments and the ineptitude of the local bureaucracy).⁷⁹ Moreover, Cutrera’s book represents one of the first examples of analysis of the relations between Mafia and politics demonstrating how the dangerous propagation of Mafia’s influence must also be considered in relation to the different power struggles in Italian society.⁸⁰ Another important contribution to the critics on positivists is the one by the Calabrian thinker Roberto Marvasi, who in

⁷³ See A. Niceforo “*La delinquenza in Sardegna*” Sandron (1897)

⁷⁴ See A. Niceforo “*L’Italia barbara contemporanea: Studi e Appunti*” Sandron (1898) ebook

⁷⁵ Quoted in V. Teti “*La Razza Maledetta: origini del pregiudizio antimeridionale*” Manifesto Libri (2011) p.97

⁷⁶ G. Mosca “*Che cos’è la Mafia?*” Elison Publishing (2015) ebook

⁷⁷ G. Mosca *Ibidem*

⁷⁸ See A. Cutrera “*La Mafia e i Mafiosi*” Alberto Reber (1900)

⁷⁹ A. Cutrera. *Ibidem* p.189

⁸⁰ A. Cutrera. *Ibidem* p.189

1928 published his book “*Malavita contro Malavita*” (*Mob against Mob*).⁸¹ In his book Marvasi argued how the Fascist regime was itself a form of organised crime and that the recent crackdown operated against the Mafia in Sicily targeted only the Mafioso who refused to obey the regime, which was already an ally of a part of the Mafia.⁸² Despite these contributions the positivist school was able to gain the upper hand in the debate on Mafia at the beginning of twentieth century and the heritage of this pseudo-scientific approach had a deep impact on the conception of Mafia in Italian academia and political attitude to this phenomenon, as summarised by Duggan: “Their most important legacy [the Positivists’ one *e.n.*] was in the realm of attitudes. Northern views of the South as a degenerate region were reinforced.”⁸³

2.3 The American structural approach

In the United States between the end of the nineteenth century and the 1920s the academic debate was not focused on the Mafia itself but on organised crime in general.⁸⁴ Some hypotheses on the existence of the Mafias in the US have been made already at the end of the eighteenth century but just as in Italy the positivists aimed to explain the phenomenon through racial determinism. More specifically, in America the existence of these criminal “sects” was explained with the so called “alien conspiracy” theory.⁸⁵ According to this, the phenomenon of organised crime in the US must be seen as something imported by immigrants to America (for instance by the Irish and the Italians) and was merely confined to the lower classes and the city slums.⁸⁶ These theories were accepted without any empirical evidence. Already during the 1920s Al Capone was the leader of alcohol smuggling in the prohibition era and him and his organization enjoyed good relations with high level politicians in Chicago⁸⁷. For a wide range of reasons between the 1920s and 1940s the Mafia disappeared from the debate within the American academia.⁸⁸ Mafia started to be studied again at the beginning of the 1950s, and not only by academics themselves.⁸⁹ The novel *Chicago Confidential*⁹⁰ and its sequels,

⁸¹ R. Marvasi “*Malavita contro Malavita*” E.S.I.L. (1928)

⁸² R. Marvasi *Ibidem* p.19

⁸³ C. Duggan *Ibidem* p.

⁸⁴ F.Varese “*What is Organised Crime?*” in “*Redefining Organised Crime: A Challenge for the European Union?*” edited by Stefania Carnevale, Serena Forlati and Orsetta Giolo. Hart Publishing, Oxford pp.27-56 (2017)

⁸⁵ L. Paoli “*Paradoxes of Organised Crime*”. *Crime, Law and Social Change*, Vol.37 No.1, pp. 51-97 (2002)

⁸⁶ M. Woodiwiss, “*Organized Crime and American Power*” University of Toronto Press (2001) ebook

⁸⁷ R.M. Lombardo “The causes of traditional Organised Crime. Comparing Chicago and New York” in J. Windle, J.F. Morrison, A Winter and A. Silke, “*Historical Perspectives on Organized Crime and Terrorism*” Routledge (2018)

⁸⁸ K. Von Lampe “*Not a process of enlightenment: the conceptual history of organized crime in Germany and the United States of America*” *Forum on Crime and Society* (2001)

⁸⁹ L. Paoli *Ibidem*

⁹⁰ See J. Lait and L. Mortimer, “*Chicago Confidential*” Crown (1950)

written by the journalists Jack Lait and Lee Mortimer for example, exercised a certain influence on the American conception of Mafia. In these books the Mafia is pictured as a hierarchical organization involved in any type of crime, but it is first and foremost, composed of foreign people and its behaviour is completely opposite to the founding principles of the American Way of Life. In May 1950 the work of the United States Senate Special Committee to Investigate Organised Crime in Interstate Commerce officially began under the chairmanship of Tennessee senator Estes Kefauver. The conclusions of the Committee were unequivocal: “there is a nationwide crime syndicate known as the Mafia, whose tentacles are found in many large cities (...) Its leaders are usually found in control of the most lucrative rackets”.⁹¹ Despite the ground-breaking assessment on the existence of Mafia, the conclusions of the committee were presenting many limits, among which the most important one was the link between Mafia and the so-called “alien conspiracy”⁹². Moreover, organised crime was seen as a pure criminal fact and there was no room for any form of reasoning about the relations between politics and organised crime. As categorically assessed by the Kefauver Committee: “The domination of Mafia is based fundamentally on “muscle” and “murder”.⁹³ Nevertheless, the work of the Kefauver Committee pushed academia to question again the nature and shape of organised crime in America.⁹⁴

The first proper academic formulation of the structural approach in the US appeared in 1969, when the American sociologist and criminologist Donald Ray Cressey published his book *Theft of a Nation*.⁹⁵ This study was the final outcome of the work of the author as consultant for the President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice. The main points of Cressey’s theories on Mafia studies can be summarised as follows:

1) A **“Sicilian-centric” approach**. In all of his works Cressey underlines how Mafia should always be regarded as a phenomenon linked to Sicilian culture and that consequently the presence of the Mafia in the US is linked to the transplant of the organization in America through immigration. In some parts of *Theft of a Nation* is evidence of the permanence of the “alien conspiracy” background: “The immigrants brought with them the customs of their homeland and included in those customs are psychological attitudes toward a wide variety of social relationships. At the same time, the

⁹¹ U.S. Senate “*Third Interim Report of the Special Committee to Investigate Organized Crime in Interstate Commerce (Kefauver Committee)*” (1951)

⁹² See Moore W.H., “*The Kefauver Committee and the Politics of Crime, 1950-1962*” University of Missouri Press (1974)

⁹³ U.S. Senate *Ibidem*

⁹⁴ F. Varese “*What is...*” *Ibidem*

⁹⁵ See D.R. Cressey “*Theft of a Nation*” Harper & Row Publishers (1969)

immigration established an obvious and direct route for further diffusion of the customs of Sicily to the United States".⁹⁶ Moreover, in *Theft of a Nation*, Cressey highlights how being Sicilian is a fundamental requisite to be part of the Mafia, ignoring the fact that the Mafia was not only a "Sicilian affair". In fact, Cressey was well aware of the fact that Mafia was relying also on the support of non-Italian people to commit its crimes but the author had deliberately downgraded these figures: "There is no question that today some organized-crime units are led by men whose ethnic backgrounds are not Italian or Sicilian. Some of them have been operating since Prohibition days. But it is quite possible that these men are merely tolerated, not accepted as equals".⁹⁷

2) Structural and Bureaucratic approach: In *Theft of a Nation*, as well as in his book *Criminal Organization(s): Its Elementary Forms*,⁹⁸ Cressey underlines how the Mafia and its power must be understood through the study of its hierarchical structures and in doing this the author analyses Mafia through the lens of the Weberian model of bureaucratic power.⁹⁹ Consequently, Mafia and organised crime in general are perceived as rigid structures characterized by a well-defined hierarchy, very similar to the assembly line of a factory. This conception is perfectly evident in the first chapter of *Theft of a Nation* where the author describes the Mafia with these words: "They work for someone, who works for someone, who works for someone"¹⁰⁰ For Cressey, Mafia is a great enterprise of crime that creates more complex structures every time it aims to enter into a new illicit market.¹⁰¹ The involvement of Mafia in different illegal activities is possible only because of the division of labour within the organization.¹⁰² Every time Mafia is entering a new market, the Mafioso acquire different skills to use them in a new sector. Consequently, to this bureaucratic approach was the conclusion that Mafia should always being considered as a perfectly rational actor within the underworld.

3) The threat to the free market

In all of his works Cressey warns about the threat that organised crime represents for the American way of life and consequently for the free-market economy. "The threat of organized crime to America is similar to the threat any potential monopoliser poses to a small businessman: "this man can hurt me."¹⁰³ Cressey pushes this concept even further describing Mafia as an opposed force to any form

⁹⁶ D.R. Cressey "Theft of" *Ibidem* p. 8

⁹⁷ D. R. Cressey "Theft of...." *Ibidem* p.10

⁹⁸ D.R. Cressey "*Criminal Organization(s): Its Elementary Forms*" Heinemann Educational Books London. (1972)

⁹⁹ L. Paoli *Ibidem*

¹⁰⁰ D.R. Cressey "Theft of...." *Ibidem* p.2

¹⁰¹ D.R. Cressey "Theft of...." *Ibidem* p.2

¹⁰² D.R. Cressey "Theft of..." *Ibidem* p. 34

¹⁰³ D.R. Cressey "Theft of...." *ibidem* p.7

of deregulation of the market. The author for example argues that Mafia's enrichment through black-market labour is linked to the unionisation of the American job market.¹⁰⁴ In sum, Mafia risks undermining American values at their core and since these values cannot be separated from the free-market economy Mafia must be seen as a foreign bureaucratic criminal organization, whose final aim is to monopolise the illegal markets as well as part of the legal ones.

4) Mafia's power through corruption

Cressey has highlighted how the Mafia was an organization deeply contradictory to America as both a country and a system of values. This quasi-ideological conception clashes with the fact that many American officials, as well as politicians and businessmen, were cooperating with the Mafia and asking for its services.¹⁰⁵ Cressey explained this evident contradiction between its theories and the practice with the concept of corruption. Through money, favours and "presents", the Mafia was able to buy the loyalty of corrupted officials and consequently to gain protection. Cressey granted particular importance to corruption in organised crime studies, even assessing that within the division of labour of a criminal organization the presence or the absence of an individual tasked with corruption activities, the so-called corruptor, was fundamental to determine the nature of the organization itself.¹⁰⁶ In his categorisation of criminal organizations the author represented this role as one of the fundamental characteristics to determine if a criminal organization can be considered a Mafia.¹⁰⁷ In sum, material exchanges and financial exchanges were the only ways through which Mafia was earning the protection of the local authorities and Mafia can eventually bribe officials but these will never ask cooperation from the Mafia.

Within American academia there were also supporters of a more flexible and articulated approach in opposition to the structural one. Frederic Thrasher for example, already noted in the 1920s the problems linked to the use of the structural approach in the study of organised crime. In his 1926 book *The Gang: A Study of 1,313 Gangs in Chicago*, Thrasher warns of the fact that: "Organised Crime must not be visualised as a vast edifice of hard and fast structures"¹⁰⁸. In the same vein Raymond Moley highlighted how the relations with politics and some political conditions helped organised crime in being successful.¹⁰⁹ Even from a methodological perspective, Peng Wang has noted how Cressey has relied too much and in a non-critical way on classified materials and on law

¹⁰⁴ D.R. Cressey "*Theft of....*" *Ibidem* p.95

¹⁰⁵ United States Senate *Ibidem*

¹⁰⁶ D.R. Cressey "*Criminal Organization(s)....*" *Ibidem* p.27

¹⁰⁷ D.R. Cressey "*Criminal Organization(s)....*" *Ibidem* p. 35

¹⁰⁸ F. Thrasher, "*The Gang: A Study of 1.313 Gangs in Chicago.*" Chicago University Press (1927) p.416

¹⁰⁹ R. Moley, "*Politics and Crime*" *Annals of the American Academy and of political and Social Science*, Vol. 125, pp. 78-84 (1926)

enforcement testimonies.¹¹⁰ Despite these critics, Cressey's theories influenced the studies on mafias for the following decades and they will be the starting point for the development of the structural approach even in Italy.

2.4 The Italian Structural approach

In February 1986 in Palermo, with the opening of the so-called "Maxi Trial" (*Maxi processo*) on Mafia, Italy had its own Kefauver Committee. The ontological nature of the trial has been highlighted by the historian Salvatore Lupo: "This time it was not a socio-anthropological context hard to define and delimit, nor a traditionalist cultural code, not even a generic form of antisocial behaviour to be on trial but a collective subject that can be indicated with a specific name".¹¹¹ To achieve this objective, law enforcement agencies focused their efforts in drawing the hierarchical structure of this association: "The crimes committed by the single mafioso cannot be described without beginning from a system of violent relations within an organization".¹¹² To demonstrate the existence of the Organization almost the entire prosecution plan was built on the revelations given by the former Mafia's boss Tommaso Buscetta, which constituted the so-called "Buscetta theorem" - a detailed reconstruction of the internal hierarchy of the Mafia.¹¹³

After the Maxi Trial the existence of Mafia as a criminal organization cannot be denied anymore but some authors were still sceptical on this point. Christopher Duggan for instance, in his book *Fascism and the Mafia* wrote that: "Every serious writer on Sicily, beginning with Romualdo Bondadani in 1876, has agreed that "the mafia" was not a secret society, but a way of life or an "attitude of mind"¹¹⁴. In sum the idea of the existence of a criminal organization called Mafia was still hard to believe for part of academia.

It is in this historical and academic context that the first academic formulation of the structural approach in Italy was published. The book *The Sicilian Mafia*¹¹⁵, written by the social scientist Diego Gambetta, describes the Mafia as a peculiar criminal economic enterprise specialised in the selling of protection, but the purpose of Gambetta's theories was more ambitious: "This book aims to make a contribution by showing that the parallel between the Mafia and the state has clear limits, and consequently that the view of the mafia as a legal system in its own right does not actually stand

¹¹⁰ P. Wang "The Chinese Mafia: Organised Crime, Corruption and Extra-legal protection" Oxford University Press (2017) ebook

¹¹¹ S. Lupo, "1986. Il Maxiprocesso" Edizioni Laterza (2008) ebook

¹¹² S. Lupo *Ibidem*,

¹¹³ D. Puccio-Den "Judging the Mafia: the categorization under law and moral economies in Italy (1980-2010)" Diogenes Vol.60 No.4, pp. 12-26 (2015)

¹¹⁴ C. Duggan *Ibidem*

¹¹⁵ See D. Gambetta. "The Sicilian Mafia". Harvard University Press (1993)

up.”¹¹⁶ In sum, Gambetta aims to challenge the theories which have highlighted the relation between Mafias and politics or more broadly the conception of Mafia as an autonomous power-actor. Another characteristic of the theoretical framework used by Gambetta is the perfect rationality that according to the author characterises Mafia’ strategy: “The Mafia (...) is an industry which like many others, is managed consistently with its own peculiar requirements and constraints. In this sense too, therefore it can be regarded as rational. Even the most outlandish behaviour makes good economic sense.”¹¹⁷ Gambetta’s description of the Mafia is marked by evident elements of the structural approach as well: “[Mafia *e.n.*] is centralised and hierarchical, for we know that in this market the use of violence is essential, and, regardless of other considerations, the efficient deployment of force requires an organization of this type”.¹¹⁸

Other recurring elements in Gambetta’s theory are:

1) The failure of the State in regulating the market. Gambetta assesses how the power of Mafia, as well as a form of consensus that it enjoys, is linked to the fact that the Italian state was not able to provide protection for transactions in certain markets. In this context Sicilians started to rely increasingly on the Mafiosi to obtain protection. Gambetta aims to present the liberal market as the tool that should be used to defeat Mafia: “This unfortunate outgrowth of antiliberal thinking gnaws at the legitimacy of the Italian state and colludes in the destruction of southern society. Much of the future relevance of the Mafia will depend on whether and how this conundrum is resolved.”¹¹⁹

2) For the Mafia protection is more important than violence

To explain the exercise of violence by the Mafia, Gambetta has analyzed it as an element that is always subordinated to the economic aims of the organization. Gambetta explains that Mafia exercises violence mainly as an instrument to ensure the protection of one or more subjects involved in an exchange in legal or illegal markets as well as a tool to protect the organization itself.¹²⁰ This kind of assumption has proved to be wrong in many, documented,

¹¹⁶ D. Gambetta “*The Sicilian ...*” *ibidem* p. 7

¹¹⁷ D. Gambetta “*The Sicilian ...*” *Ibidem* p. 10

¹¹⁸ D. Gambetta “*The Sicilian ...*” *Ibidem* p. 68

¹¹⁹ D. Gambetta “*The Sicilian ...*” *Ibidem* p.7

¹²⁰ See D. Gambetta “*The Sicilian ...*” *Ibidem*

historical cases when the use of violence by the Mafia proved to be related not to economic reasons, but to the will of exhibiting its power.¹²¹

The Sicilian Mafia opened a new way to the study of Mafias in Italy within the framework of the structural approach. One of these examples is the 2002 paper “La Mafia” (“The Mafia”) written by the Italian academic Raimondo Catanzaro who used the same economic background to describe the activities of the organization.¹²² From a general perspective the studies by Catanzaro represent a step forward toward a more articulate study of the Mafia where the relations between political institutions and the Mafia start to be perceived in many cases as complementary.¹²³ Despite this, his studies are still purely structural since the author defines Mafia only in regards to a specific hierarchical configuration, which must be present in order to label a criminal organization as a Mafia.¹²⁴

At the beginning of the 2000s some authors criticised the economic and structural framework on which the theories by Gambetta were based. What characterises the methods of this school of thought is the use of a multidisciplinary approach. Isaia Sales for example, demonstrated how the so-called “moral forces” of the free market do not act as bouncers for the entry of Mafias in the legal economy. In the general framework of liberalism mafias are subjects, whose presence is not less legitimate than others, moreover they can be even convenient for the market in certain situations.¹²⁵ The same type of arguments have been developed by other authors such as Santino, who in his book “*Mafie e Globalizzazione*” (“*Mafias and Globalization*”) showed how the progressive liberalization of financial capitals acted as a multiplier of influence for the Mafias.¹²⁶ In the same vein, the historian Francesco Forgione improved the understanding of the relations between politics and Mafias with his 1994 book “*Amici come prima*”¹²⁷ (“*Friends again*”). It is important to stress here how Forgione considers the political element of the Mafia predominant compared to the economic one and consequently the framework used by Gambetta (focused on economy) completely subverted the result. In sum, during these years the limits of the structural approach have come out and they have been overcome through the developing of some new approaches. For the sake of clarity, it is important to briefly address those limits.

¹²¹ See P. Arlacchi “*Gli Uomini del Disonore*” Il Saggiatore (2010)

¹²² See R. Catanzaro, “*La Mafia*” in U. Gatti, M. Barbagli (a cura di), “*La criminalità in Italia*”, Il Mulino (2002)

¹²³ See R. Catanzaro *Ibidem*

¹²⁴ L. Paoli *Ibidem*

¹²⁵ See I. Sales & S. Melorio “*Le mafie nell’economia globale*” Guida editori (2017)

¹²⁶ See U. Santino “*Mafie e Globalizzazione*” DG Editore (2007)

¹²⁷ See F. Forgione “*Amici come prima*” Rizzoli (1994)

3. The Limits of the structural approach

3.1 Limit number one: Mafias change

The structural approach aims to take a picture of Mafias in a more or less specific moment. If this picture conforms to certain standards, then an observed criminal organization might be considered a Mafia. This attitude denotes a first weakness that consists in not acknowledging how Mafias' structures are not static. For instance; in the 1980s Tommaso Buscetta helped the Italian judges to understand the crucial role played by the *Commissione* (Commission), an organ responsible to settle the disputes within the Mafia which was present even within the American Cosa Nostra. Still the changing needs of the organization across decades have brought about the abolition of the Commission that today doesn't exist anymore.¹²⁸ Moreover, the structural approach was not considered in its first formulations how the Mafias have among them very different structural configurations. This is evident for what concerns the phenomenon of the *camorra*. In fact, despite being a Mafia, camorra has never had a common unitary leading institution, like the Commission.¹²⁹ The same can be said for the Calabrian "Ndrangheta, which is probably the Italian criminal organization which has changed its structure most across the years.¹³⁰

Also the pure structural approach as theorised by Cressey or Gambetta does not allow scholars to study the relations between Mafias and "white-collar" crimes, which are fundamental to understand Mafias' power in our age.¹³¹ The reason of this form of underestimation is due to the fact that these people who cooperate with Mafia are not Mafioso themselves, they are mostly professionals who decide to use their skills to help these organizations for different reasons, but since the structural approach is mostly focused on the study of the hierarchies of Mafias this kind of relationship has little interest for its followers.¹³²

3.2 Limit number two: the hierarchical structures in the underworld are increasingly similar.

¹²⁸ F. Varese "*Vita di Mafia*" Einaudi (2017) p. 94

¹²⁹ See I. Sales "*La camorra, le camorre*" Editori Riuniti (1988)

¹³⁰ See N. Gratteri and A. Nicaso "*Padrini e Padroni*" Mondadori (2016)

¹³¹ See N. Gratteri and A. Nicaso "*Fiumi d'Oro*" Mondadori (2017)

¹³² See N. Gratteri and A. Nicaso "*Padrini....*". *Ibidem*

The aim of the structural approach is to show and define Mafias because of their hierarchical configuration but in our age different criminal organizations tend to have quasi-identical structures. Academia has studied the structural and hierarchical configuration of many of them, from Mafias¹³³ to drug cartels¹³⁴, from gangs¹³⁵ to terrorist groups¹³⁶. The increasing amount of pressure by international and national law enforcement agencies has pushed these criminal organizations to adopt the same kind of solutions and consequently they have taken a very similar shape. Speaking to the Washington Institute in 2012, the then Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defence, William Wechsler summarised this argument explaining how different criminal organizations have become a flat, decentralised and highly adaptable network instead of classic hierarchical organizations.¹³⁷ This changing process is even more evident in the case of the structural evolution of Al-Qaeda. As assessed by Milward and Raab: “Al Qaeda seems to have become a metaphor for a very decentralised network of cells operating independently in many countries”.¹³⁸ The same tendency has been confirmed also by more recent studies on the configuration of the criminal organization such as in the case of the Latin American drug cartels, which have “organised into a “horizontally-structured business cartel”¹³⁹ and this has increasingly blurred the lines from one threat to another.¹⁴⁰ In sum, the hierarchical configuration of Mafias cannot be considered a distinguishing element in comparison to other criminal organizations.

3.3 Limit number three: the structural approach is inductive.

The mere description of Mafias’ hierarchy was not sufficient to give a proper sense of the presence and the expansion of this criminal phenomenon. It is for this reason that the supporters of the structural approach have always needed to link Mafias to a broader, single, theoretical framework. As showed above, the American structuralists have linked the existence of Mafia to the alien conspiracy and to the structures of the business corporations, while the Italian ones have studied Mafia as a form of enterprise in a specific market. What all these different studies have in common is an inductive attitude. For example, the relations between politics and Mafia have been underestimated or ignored by the structuralists since they were contradictory to their assumptions. It

¹³³ S. Agreste, S. Catanese, P. De Meo, E. Ferrara and G. Fiumara. “*Network, structure and resilience of Mafia syndicates*” Information Sciences Vol.351, pp. 30-47 (2016)

¹³⁴ H.B. Milward and J. Raab “*Dark Networks as Organizational problems*”. International Public Management Journal Vol.9 No.3, pp. 333-360 (2007)

¹³⁵ See S.H. Decker and B. Van Winkle. “*Life in the Gang*” Cambridge University Press (1996)

¹³⁶ C. Morselli, C. Giguère and K.Petit “*The efficiency/security trade-off in criminal networks*” Social Networks Vol. 29 pp. 143-153 (2007)

¹³⁷ W.F. Wechsler “*Combating Transnational Organised Crime*”. Washington Institute (2012)

¹³⁸ H.B. Milward and J. Raab *Ibidem*

¹³⁹ C. Dishman “*Leaderless Nexus*” Studies in conflict and terrorism, Vol. 28 No. 3, pp. 237-252 (2005)

¹⁴⁰ T.M. Sanderson *Ibidem*

is ironic to see how the method that won the ontological debate on Mafia has become ontological itself, since the comprehension of Mafia outside the quasi-dogmatic frameworks proposed by the structuralists is always underestimated or considered incorrect. For this reason, the inductivism linked to the structural approach renders it inadequate to the study of this phenomenon.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have showed how: 1) the study of Mafia needs to be done through a flexible and multidisciplinary method which allows researchers to analyse this phenomenon as in-depth as possible. This sort of approach will be crucial to the aim of this research for two reasons: first to obtain a framework able to lead us on the following comparative analysis between the Sahelian Jihadi Groups and the Haqqani Network on the one hand and the Mafia on the other; secondly to make sense of the evolutionary process undertaken by the terrorist groups observed in order to move beyond the profit vs. ideology dichotomy. 2) The Mafia cannot be described simply as a super-gang built around a specific hierarchy. Its evolution and its ability in creating relationships with a wide range of subjects deserve a more careful observation of their roots instead of a mere observation of their structures. In this sense, the structural approach has failed in avoiding that form of inductivism that gives only a partial vision of the subject. The main lesson that can be learned from this, is the necessity of using a multidisciplinary approach. In the next chapters I will adopt the definition of Mafia given by the Italian historian Isaia Sales, which will allow me to show the different evolutions of Mafias in the economic and political sector as well as in their relationship with external power actors. The multidisciplinary approach represents, in opposition to the structural one, the main road that I will follow in the development of this research to build the necessary framework for the formulation of the theory of the Islamist Mafias.

CHAPTER II

The Definition of Mafia through the Sales' model

Introduction

In the first chapter I have showed how for many decades the studies on Mafias were the perfect exemplification of the parable of the blind men and the elephant: every author used different approaches to make sense of what a Mafia is but they were only able, at best, to describe a small part of the bigger picture. In fact, through the “alien conspiracy” of American academia,¹ Gambetta’s economic approach,² or even through the racial determinism of the Italian Positivist school, none of these authors has been able to give an all-inclusive definition of Mafia. All these academic contributions were very far from defining this criminal phenomenon, as we know it today as an organization able to build relationships with a wide range of institutions and power actors regardless of their social class, ethnic background or political ideologies.³

It is in this context that in 1995 the Italian historian Umberto Santino introduced the so-called ‘paradigm of complexity’ into studies on Mafias.⁴ The author assessed how, to really understand and define these criminal organizations, it is crucial to leave aside any partial approach to embrace an holistic one, in order to show the multiple interests and dynamics that characterise these criminal phenomena.⁵ In virtue of the paradigm of complexity, according to Santino, the Mafias must be understood as:

“A cluster of criminal organizations, the most important of which, though not the only one, is *Cosa Nostra* [The Sicilian Mafia, *e.n.*]. Such organizations operate within a wide and articulate relational context, shaping a system of violence and illegality, aimed at

¹ See D.R. Cressey “*Theft of a Nation*” Harper & Row (1969)

² See D. Gambetta “*The Sicilian Mafia*”. Harvard University Press (1993)

³ A. Dino “*La Mafia devota*” Editori Laterza (2015) ebook

⁴ See U. Santino “*La Mafia interpretata*”. Rubbettino (1995)

⁵ U. Santino *Ibidem* p. 131

accumulating capital and gaining power through the use of a cultural code and the enjoyment of social consent.”⁶

This definition is important to start to understand the paradigm of the Islamist Mafias as well. In this context it is important to highlight some of the elements mentioned by Santino: a) the concept of a cluster of criminal organisations which is useful to overcome the structural perspective in the studies on Mafias. According to the paradigm of complexity two criminal organisations with two different hierarchical structures can be both considered as Mafias. As we will see in the chapters on the case studies even if the Sahelian Jihadi Groups and the Haqqani Networks show two different organisational structures they can be both considered Mafia; b) the concept of articulate relational contexts will be useful to make sense of the different power relationships implemented by the Islamist Mafias with some, in theory, antithetical political entities (such as the political governments); c) gaining power is useful in order to understand how the objectives of the Islamist Mafias within the crime terror nexus cannot be summed up as purely economic. Put succinctly the reasoning in terms of “accumulating capital” and “gaining power” conjunctly are the methodological tools that can be used to overcome the ‘profit vs. ideology dichotomy’ mentioned in chapter I. The objectives of gaining money and gaining political influence are in no way mutually exclusive; d) the concepts of cultural code and social consent are useful to understand: 1) why Mafias and Islamist Mafias are functional to the conservation and the implementation of some power systems; 2) where their social legitimacy comes from and why this is resilient even to dramatic political changes; 3) in which ways the Mafias and the Islamist Mafias have been able to conjugate crime oriented activities with a rhetoric and ideological constructs which should be completely opposite to those.

In the context of the academic debate on Mafias, the introduction of the paradigm of complexity has paved the way for other more appropriate definitions of Mafias, including the one that will be the object of this chapter and that will be adopted for the rest of this thesis. Before introducing the model by Isaia Sales it is important to underline two key concepts: 1) the model is characterized by a multidisciplinary approach; 2) in this chapter, each element of the model will be analysed in-depth in order to not leave any room for any form of incomprehension or intellectual ambiguity. It is logical that to define the Islamist Mafias it is crucial to understand first of all what a Mafia is, and for this reason the following analysis must not be considered as a sterile coverage of the different aspects of this phenomenon. In fact, as I will show in the rest of this thesis every characteristic of the Sales’

⁶ U. Santino *Ibidem* p. 135

model will be found in the Islamist Mafias too, even if with some minor differences, in the definition of the Islamist Mafias in the next chapter.

Before proceeding to the analysis of the five elements model, a few words need to be spent on the choice of this specific definition. As I have showed in the first chapter the structural approach proved to be ineffective in defining the phenomenon of Mafia in all of its complexity. The use of a monodisciplinary approach to define these organisations is in some cases incomplete (for example in the case of Gambetta) or worse, misleading (in the cases of Cressey and the Italian positivists). Consequently, this innovative new model restricts the decision on the multidisciplinary approaches. Still, even in this school of thought there are not satisfactory definitions of the Mafias' as well. If we take for instance the works of authors such as La Spina, it can be found how in these descriptions authors have focused on a strictly juridical approach, they analyse the Mafias more as law enforcement agents than scholars relying principally on sources such as court rulings.⁷ Other authors as Benigno, despite their remarkable archival work, are not keen on digging in the controversial aspect of the relationship between Mafias and states and they describe these criminal organisations as dysfunctional criminal elements which occasionally become functional to the ruling élites, a fact which, as I will show, it is historically unfounded.⁸ Given the limits of these models, the Sales' one proves to be useful for the purpose of this work for a wide number of reasons: 1) The elaboration of a definition as a model rather than a discursive one, allows the multidisciplinary approach to express itself in full, avoiding the inductive trap characterising the structural approaches reviewed in chapter I; 2) The depiction of each single element in general terms allows me to apply this definition, of course according to the basis of empirical findings, also to other political or cultural contexts which are not the Italian one as in the case of the Islamist Mafias. 3) The historical approach on which the multidisciplinary of the model lies, allows us to avoid what can be called the trap of stillness and staticity. In analysing historically each of the element of the Sales' model we can look at how Mafias (and Islamist Mafias) adapt to change and build their resilience. In sum, while authors such as Gambetta, Benigno and others have snapped a picture of what Mafias were in a certain historical moment, Sales shot a movie about how Mafias were and what they are today. This approach is by consequence perfectly functional to the aims of this thesis, which is, in the end, to show also how an evolutionary process of these criminal organisations took place. 4) Another element in favour of the choice of this model as a definition, as I will show below, is the explicit refusal to adhere to any 'ethnicist' explication of Mafias; an element which is not only more correct than a purely scientific

⁷ A. La Spina "Riconoscere le organizzazioni mafiose, oggi: Neo-Formazione, trasformazione, espansione e repressione in prospettiva comparata." In M. Santoro "Riconoscere le Mafie" Il Mulino (2015) pp. 95-122

⁸ See F. Benigno "La Mala Setta" Einaudi (2015)

perspective but also appropriate for the purpose of this thesis. Since this work will take into account also the ‘Islamic’ rhetoric and ideology of the Islamist Mafias, it is important to undertake this intellectual path without leaving any room for misunderstandings or ambiguous interpretation on the relationships between religion and the Islamist Mafias.

This chapter will be structured as follows: in the first section I will contextualize the Sales’ model explaining when and why it was introduced for the first time. From sections three to seven I will present each component of the model together with some examples of their practical functioning. In the conclusion I will explain the relevance of this model for the theory of the Islamist Mafia.

1. The five elements model by Isaia Sales

What I call the five elements model has been theorised by the Italian historian Isaia Sales in his 2015 book “*Storia Dell’Italia Mafiosa*” (*History of Mafioso Italy*).⁹ The aim of Sales’ work was to answer to one single research question: why have the Mafias been successful? More precisely: why have the Mafias been able to be so resilient for such a long historical period and how have they managed to increase their power across the centuries? With this model Sales wants to give an answer to these questions, which intellectually distant from the ethnic determinism that has characterized part of the preceding research on Mafias.¹⁰ This point is made really clear by the author in the introduction: “[The *e.n.*] culturist interpretations are the shortcut of those who refuse to follow the main road of historical research”.¹¹

With the adoption of an historical approach, Sales has been able to create a model that is both theoretically flexible. In doing so, the author has isolated five constants in the history of these criminal organizations that are also the characteristics of Mafias as a criminal phenomenon. According to Sales a criminal organization, to be considered a Mafia, must show the following elements:

- 1) It must enjoy a form of social recognition or legitimation from a determined society.

⁹ See I. Sales, “*Storia Dell’Italia Mafiosa*” Rubbettino (2015)

¹⁰ I. Sales “*Storia Dell’Italia...*” *Ibidem* p.13

¹¹ I. Sales “*Storia Dell’Italia...*” *Ibidem* p.34

- 2) It must be in relation with those institutions that should be in charge of combatting, or generically contrast, the criminal organization itself.
- 3) It must be involved in money laundering activities.
- 4) It must have a “criminal ideology”.
- 5) It must show some “administrative characters”.

From a first observation of this model it is perceivable how it embraces the manifestations of Mafias in different fields. The elements 1 and 4 for instance, are the social roots of Mafia. The element 2 shows the relations between Mafia and politics. The number 3 explains the economic roots of Mafias’ power. Finally, the fifth element highlights the governmental attitude of Mafias that manifests itself in all the preceding fields.

The analysis of the components of this model will be structured as follows: I will start by quoting the definition of every element given by the author himself, and then I will give some practical example of the application and functioning of these characteristics. This in-depth analysis is due to 4 main intellectual reasons: 1) A mere mention of the elements of the Sales’ model would not provide an exhausting explanation of what a Mafia is and consequently what an Islamist Mafia is. 2) Some of the elements of the model are characteristic of other criminal organisations as well and without a detailed description of these it would be difficult, if not impossible, to highlight the peculiarities of the Islamist Mafias’ theory in comparison to other interpretative models of the crime terror nexus or to other criminal phenomena in general (such as gangs or drug cartels. 3) from an intellectual perspective in this chapter I will start to show which elements will be present in the case of the Islamist Mafias as well. 4) Finally, this detailed description is important to make sense of the complexity of Mafias and Islamist Mafias as multidimensional criminal phenomena. Put succinctly this analysis aims at explaining in-depth what Mafias really are and above all, to start to underline the similarities between these criminal organisations and the Islamist Mafias.

2. First element: the social identification/recognition of Mafias.

“A Mafioso criminal organization is surrounded by the “recognition” of a social environment that perceives the Mafioso behaviour as not unrelated or external to its interpretative codes of reality”.¹²

The Mafioso enjoy a form of social recognition. It means specifically that their behaviour and their actions are not considered as “external” or “diverse” by the rest of the society in which they are borne or present. Consequently, this first element poses a theoretical problem that needs to be addressed: if these societies recognise the Mafia as legitimate does this mean that the positivist school was right in defining Mafia as characteristic of backward races?¹³ The answer is complex. On the one hand it is definitely true that the Mafias cannot be perceived as an external phenomenon in relation to the societies in which they are borne.¹⁴ Giovanni Falcone made this point really clear: “We cannot sustain that its [the Mafia’s ones *e.n.*] principles are completely opposed to the ones of the rest of the social fabric in which the Mafia is settled.”¹⁵

It is in this context that some authors have talked of “Mafioso behaviour” from a sociological perspective. In his ground-breaking book “*La Mafia imprenditrice*” (translated into English with the name “Mafia Business”) the sociologist Pino Arlacchi defines this specific behaviour as: “part of a cultural system centred on the theme of honour achieved through the use of the individual violence”.¹⁶ Behaving in a Mafioso way means: “to get respect, being a men of honour”.¹⁷ Consequently, the positivists, but also more recent authors such as Duggan, were not completely wrong in talking about a Mafioso sentiment or spirit in southern Italian society but their conception of this was inductive.¹⁸ The Mafioso behaviour in fact must not be seen as the general one of the entirety of these societies, but as an extremist interpretation of some social customs that are present within them. Using Falcone’s words again: “These rules [the ones of the Mafia, *e.n.*] (...) represent the *exasperation* of values and behaviours which are typically Sicilians”¹⁹ or more precisely: “The sense of honour, of friendship, the respect of traditions, are not negative values themselves but it is negative the distortion, the interpretation of them made by part of the population”.²⁰ In sum, the Mafias are able to “hijack”

¹² I. Sales, “*Storia Dell’Italia....*” *Ibidem* p. 207

¹³ See C. Lombroso “*L’Uomo Delinquente*” Hoepli (1876)

¹⁴ See P. Arlacchi “*La Mafia imprenditrice*” Il Saggiatore (2010)

¹⁵ G. Fiume and G. Falcone, “*La Mafia tra criminalità e cultura*”. Meridiana (1989)

¹⁶ P. Arlacchi “*La Mafia...*” *Ibidem* p. 29

¹⁷ P. Arlacchi “*La Mafia...*” *Ibidem* p.27

¹⁸ See C. Duggan “*Fascism and the Mafia*” Oxford University Press (1989)

¹⁹ G. Falcone and M. Padovani, “*Cose di Cosa Nostra*”, BUR (2012) p. 71

²⁰ G. Fiume and G. Falcone *Ibidem*

some social values and norms already present in the social fabric and to bend them to their proper interests.

The analysis of this first ‘sociological’ element of Mafias offers the opportunity to highlight a first similarity between those and the Islamist Mafias. From a general perspective the “hijacking” mentioned above is already present in Muslim societies in relation to the phenomenon of the jihadi terrorism. It is true that some terrorists are Muslims and that some of their beliefs are considered positively by the rest of the *ummah* as well.²¹ At the same time, it is true that the interpretation of Islam made by terrorist groups is the exasperation (and occasionally the reinvention) of these values which represent a misinterpretation of Islam as a religion. In brief: just like not all Muslims must be considered terrorists, even if they share the same religion, not all the people who grew up in the same social environment of the Mafias are Mafioso, even if they share some common values or beliefs.

After having solved this conceptual conundrum it is important to understand the elements that characterise Mafioso behaviour. For the sake of brevity here I will analyse the four most important ones that will be also found in the social environment of the Islamist Mafias. The presence of these elements is crucial to understand, also in the case of the Islamist Mafias, not only why such organisations enjoy a form of social legitimacy but also why the legitimate power actors have decided to use them in order to safeguard the stability in the local political environments.

a) *Honour*

The concept of honour in Mafioso societies is neither metaphorical nor abstract. In these social environments it represents “the unity of measurement of the *value* of one person, one family, one thing”.²² Through this peculiar conception of honour the members of these societies can measure the wealth between one individual and another and they can draw some hierarchical relations within their social context. As it will be showed in chapter III the honour has the same values also in the Tuareg and Pashtun societies where the Islamist Mafias are borne.

There are two characteristics of the Mafioso conception of honour that need to be mentioned here:

²¹ A. De Georgio, “*Viaggio nel Nord del Mali dove si rimpiange il welfare jihadista*” Limes, rivista italiana di geopolitica (2015)

²² P. Arlacchi “*La Mafia...*” *Ibidem* p. 29

1) Honour transcends the mere economic value of a person or one thing. It is related to the economic value of an object in part, but it is also related to a form of social conduct that characterise the men and women of honour. In the Mafioso societies, the ideal type man of honour coincides with a peculiar concept of “virility” (which must be consider as a form of toxic masculinity) while the one of the woman of honour coincides with the “virtues” of virginity and being prudish.²³ This ideal of virility strictly linked to the use of violence, which is developed also through these archetypes and/or gender roles it is present also among the Pashtuns²⁴ and the Tuaregs²⁵: for the Mafioso and Islamist Mafioso societies the honourable man is the warrior, the honourable woman is the virgin.

2) The concept of honour in these societies is not only related to the self-consideration of individuals. To be effective the honour *must be* recognised by the other members of the community. In this sense the Mafioso societies are not different to the Chicanos ones studied by Ruth Horowitz in the United States:

“under this code [the one of honour *e.n.*], individuals are dependent on others’ public evaluations of their actions (...) since these actions reflect on the self and their validity can always be challenged, individuals must constantly be ready to assert and reassert their claims”.²⁶

b) **Possession**

If honour is a measure of wealth, logically the concept of possession is highly considered in the Mafioso societies. The first obvious consequence of this is that the concept of honour and things owned are directly proportional: the more the things possessed the more honourable and respectable their owner is considered.²⁷

There are two main characteristics concerning possession and the mafioso within these societies:

1) The objects possessed by a Mafioso enjoy a sort of “sacredness” for the other members of the community. This is what happened for example with the so-called “Mafia’s sacred cows” in Calabria.

²³ P. Arlacchi “*La Mafia...*” *Ibidem* p. 29

²⁴ See D.B. Edward “*Heroes of the age: moral fault lines on the Afghan frontier*” University of California Press (1990)

²⁵ S. J. Rasmussen, “*Within the Tent and at the Crossroads: Travel and Gender Identity among the Tuareg of Niger*” *Ethos* Vol.26 No. 2 pp. 153-182 (1988)

²⁶ R. Horowitz, “*Honor and the American Dream*”, Rutgers (1992) p.22

²⁷ P. Arlacchi “*La Mafia...*” *Ibidem* p. 75

The animals owned by a Mafioso are allowed to circulate freely in the other farmers' lands without being bothered, since every affront to them would be interpreted as a direct insult to the owner's honour, and it should be avenged with blood.²⁸

2) This extremist consideration of possession is applied not only to objects and animals but especially to the people who are related to a Mafioso. He must be able to defend with violence his family members or his friends from every insult to their honour that may come from another "competitor" in the community. This is evident especially for what concerns the women who, in the context of the Mafioso society, are an object of possession for the males of the family and they must be defended with violence as every other property.²⁹ Even when women act in a "rebellious" way, for example cheating on their husbands and consequently insulting their honour, they must be killed in order to avenge the honour of the man.³⁰ A form of customary justice is also characteristic of the Islamist Mafioso societies as we will see later on.³¹

c) Violence

Violence in the Mafioso societies is a crucial component for the functioning of the entire social system. Violence is the main instrument to achieve honour and consequently the exercise of it is not condemned but encouraged.³² Arlacchi, for instance, describes how within the Mafioso societies fighting and challenges are important moments of socialisation among the members of the community.³³ In this social context, dominated by the use of violence, it is interesting to note how all the social classes that are considered without honour (prostitutes, or illegitimate children for instance) can easily become targets of blind violence.³⁴ Moreover, the individual unable to exercise violence to defend its honour lose automatically any right within the community. It is interesting here to note how Arlacchi recalls the case of a man in the Calabrian town of Taurianova who did not kill the lover of his ex-wife. As a consequence, he has been forced to emigrate in the United States because "emigration represents, very often in cases as such, the only valid alternative to the civil death"³⁵.

²⁸ E. Ciconte "Dall'Omertà ai Social" Edizioni Santa Caterina (2017) pp. 83-84

²⁹ C. Gozzoli, A. Giorgi and C. D'Angelo, "Ndrangheta in Lombardy: Culture and Organizational Structure" World Futures Vol. 70 No.7, pp. 401-425 (2014). See also A. Perry "The Good Mothers" Harper Collins (2018)

³⁰ P. Arlacchi "La Mafia..." *Ibidem* p.31

³¹ H.M. Khan "Islamic Law, Customary Law, and Afghan Informal Justice" USIP (2015)

³² P. Arlacchi "La Mafia..." *Ibidem* p.35

³³ P. Arlacchi "La Mafia..." *Ibidem* p. 32

³⁴ P. Arlacchi "La Mafia..." *Ibidem* p. 36

³⁵ P. Arlacchi "La Mafia..." *Ibidem* p. 31

The use of violence as a regulator of the individual status in Mafioso societies is paired with the concept of revenge (*vendetta* in Italian). The relation between revenge and violence in the Mafioso societies has been summarised by Blok: “In a world of failing States, *vendetta* is not only accepted but also encouraged as a social necessity”.³⁶ What it is interesting to stress here is that, as I will show in the next chapter the concept of revenge enjoys the same regulatory role also in the Islamist Mafioso societies. It is important to understand how, in these communities, violence is not only used in a conservative way, to preserve the honour already acquired, but also to increase it. In this sense the participation in brawls or shootings is perceived as proof of honour because of the ability of someone in exercising violence. The former Mafia boss Antonino Calderone, remembers how the Mafioso Luciano Liggio raped and killed the mother and the daughter of the family that was hiding him when he was a fugitive.³⁷ Liggio had also successively killed the father/husband of his victims.³⁸ It can be argued how from a Mafioso perspective these acts are not considered as “bad” or “nonsense” in general, but as an expression of the value of the man, of his ability to impose himself through violence and proof of his honour.

d) Unregulated competition.

Despite the presence of some customary norms, which create a general framework in which violence should or must be used, the Mafioso social environment is far from being stable. “The competition for honour is open and everybody can participate in it”³⁹ and it is because of this openness that the Mafioso societies are characterized by a dog-eat-dog warfare described by some authors as a “Hobbesian chaos”.⁴⁰ Consequently, the social environment in which the Mafias are borne and have developed is characterized by a high level of instability.⁴¹

In conclusion, there are two considerations that need to be made:

1) The values and the codes of conduct that characterise the Mafioso behaviour and societies cannot be perceived as separated from the societies in which Mafias are present. They are extremist versions of some social values which are already present in these societies and which are not negative by

³⁶ A. Blok “*Anthropology of Mafia*” International Encyclopedia of Social and Behavioural Sciences ebook (2015)

³⁷ P. Arlacchi and A. Calderone, “*Gli uomini del disonore*”, Il Saggiatore (2010) pp. 145-146

³⁸ P. Arlacchi and A. Calderone, “*Gli uomini*” *Ibidem* 145-146

³⁹ P. Arlacchi “*Mafia, Contadini e Latifondo nella Calabria tradizionale*” Il Mulino (1980) p.129

⁴⁰ P. Arlacchi “*Mafia, Contadini....*” *Ibidem* p. 63

⁴¹ P. Arlacchi “*La Mafia...*” *Ibidem* p.35

themselves. Still, it is because of these common social values that the Mafioso and the Mafias are recognised and legitimised, by their societies.

2) The code of conduct related to honour is problematic in its enforcement. Even if some rules are established, their customary nature rends these societies highly instable and violent. This Hobbesian dilemma cannot be completely solved by the mere social recognition and for this reason other forms of legitimations are needed to achieve stability.

As I will show in chapter III, this interrelation between violence, honour and instability is characterising also the Islamist Mafioso societies which face the same Hobbesian dilemma. For all these societies there is only one solution to achieve some sort of stability: to find an external patron.

3. Second element: the relationships with the legal powers

“A criminal organization is a Mafia if those who are in charge of the repression of crime and of government are in relation with it.”⁴²

In his 1938 book *Power*, Bertrand Russell distinguishes three main typologies of power characterising the history of humankind: political, religious and economic.⁴³ What rends the Mafias peculiar in comparison to other forms of organised crime is their ability to be in relation with all of these powers simultaneously. As I will show in the next two sections, the relationships between Mafias and legal actors or institutions cannot be summarised as merely predatory or as the outcome of corruption in general. To offer a more detailed and precise analysis of these links I will analyse the relationship between Mafias and political and religious institutions in this paragraph while, following the structure of Sales’ model, the analysis of the relationship with economic actors will be the subject of the next one.

a) Relations with political powers

⁴² I. Sales “*Storia dell’Italia...*” *Ibidem* p. 208

⁴³ See B. Russell, “*Power*” Routledge (2004)

The relationship between Mafias and what, for brevity, I will call the political powers is a process which can be divided in two stages: in the first one the Mafias receive recognition, in the second one the political powers gain a useful ally that can be employed for the implementation of certain decisions/strategies or for the achievement of certain objectives.

I have shown how the Mafioso and the Islamist Mafioso societies are characterized by very similar behavioural codes which lead them to a Hobbesian dilemma that rends them violent and instable. It is in this context that the relationship between Mafias and political powers must be understood first of all as a source of stability from the Mafias' perspective. The recognition from official political powers in fact is based on the recognition of the ability of the Mafioso in using violence, a skill that the political actors will use to achieve some of their objectives. In sum, the political institutions recognise the monopoly of force by the Mafioso and the Islamist Mafioso above a certain community.⁴⁴ The consequence of this recognition in the context of the Hobbesian chaos is that this permanent state of conflict is in some ways frozen.⁴⁵ Still, even when political actors recognise the power of Mafia the Hobbesian chaos does not stop completely. On the contrary, the element of unregulated violence which characterise Mafioso and Islamist Mafioso societies based on the entanglement between honour and violence will continue to exist. Put succinctly, even after the recognition from the official power actors, the single Mafioso will always have to be able to defeat all the challengers that may attempt to replace him. Despite this, the creation of this metaphorical "bridge" between the Mafioso and the state is useful to contain, or reduce, the "negative externalities" related to the Hobbesian chaos (for example an uncontrolled rise of the level of violence). This state of play has been described also by Arlacchi, according to whom the legitimation of Mafias by the official power actors is due to the merging of two necessities: a) the one of the State which aims to maintain the public order; and b) the one of the Mafioso that want to stabilise their position in the Hobbesian chaos.⁴⁶ The outcome of this situation will be a form of cohabitation between: "formal state law, which defines murder as a serious crime on the one hand and on the other hand, local, popular or "customary" law, which operates on the principle of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth".⁴⁷

It is from this balance of power that we have to start to analyse the relation between Mafias and politics, which across the decades has represented "one of the main features of Mafias around the

⁴⁴ P. Arlacchi "*La Mafia...*" *Ibidem* p. 58

⁴⁵ P. Arlacchi "*La Mafia...*" *Ibidem* p. 43

⁴⁶ P. Arlacchi "*La Mafia...*" *Ibidem* p. 58

⁴⁷ A. Blok "*Behaviour Codes in Sicily*", *Behemoth, a Journal of Civilisation* No.2, pp. 57-70 (2010)

world”.⁴⁸ It is important first of all to avoid two common misconceptions about these relations: 1) Mafias do not interact with politics and politicians only through corruption as assessed by some authors⁴⁹; 2) the relationship between Mafias and political authorities is not predatory at all but based mainly on convenience.⁵⁰ Consequently any analogy between Mafias and social banditry is not appropriate to define these relations.⁵¹ The consequent question is: how to describe the relationship between the Mafia and politics? Starting from Arlacchi’s model of the three fields of application of Mafioso power (protection, repression and mediation),⁵² and merging it with the visual concept of the continuum used by Makarenko⁵³ to define the crime terror continuum, I want to propose a new framework to make sense of the relations between the Mafioso power and the legitimate ones.

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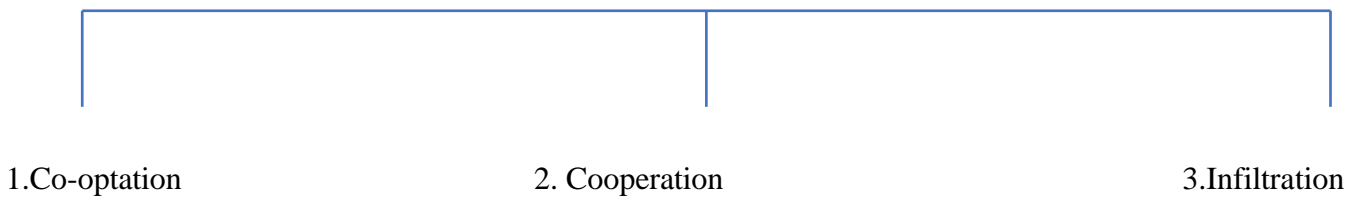


Figure 5: The Mafia Power continuum

Putting the relations between Mafias and politics on an imaginary continuum, three potential scenarios in which these powers interact can be identified. The first is the one of *co-optation*, that coincides with the first field of application of Mafioso power theorised by Arlacchi.⁵⁴ Here, the protection between Mafias and politics is two-way. On the one hand politics ensures impunity for the Mafioso that in turn ensure order through the use of violence.⁵⁵ Examples of this kind of relation can

⁴⁸ G. De Feo and G.D. De Luca, “*Mafia in the Ballot Box*”, American Economic Journal Vol.9 No.3 pp. 134-167 (2017)

⁴⁹ See D. R. Cressey *Ibidem*

⁵⁰ I. Sales “*Storia dell’Italia...*” *Ibidem* p.156

⁵¹ A. Blok “*Honour and...*” *Ibidem* p.21

⁵² P. Arlacchi “*La Mafia...*” *Ibidem* pp. 43-58

⁵³ T. Makarenko “*The crime terror continuum: tracing the interplay between Transnational Organised Crime and Terrorism*” Global Crime Vol.6 No.1, pp. 129-145 (2004)

⁵⁴ P. Arlacchi “*La Mafia...*” *Ibidem* pp. 47-48

⁵⁵ P. Arlacchi “*La Mafia...*” *Ibidem* p. 61

be the counter sabotage operations conducted by the American Cosa Nostra in the docks of New York, during the Second World War.⁵⁶ Another example is the one of the use of Mafias by the Kingdom of Italy to repress the revolts in the countryside after national unification⁵⁷ or the cooperation between Mafia and national authorities against communism in the US⁵⁸ and in Italy during the Cold War.⁵⁹

Concerning this first point of the continuum is important to remember how these relations are characterized by convenience rather than fear:

“The relationships with Mafioso, from the perspective of the owners of political or institutional power are not due just to fear, or only to it, but to something deeper: to the conviction that even violence, if disciplined and controlled, can contribute to the regulation of the society and to its territorial government”.⁶⁰

The second point of the continuum is the one of *cooperation*. In comparison to the first one here it is not the State that asks the Mafias for their services but in this situation the interests of both actors are coincidental. This kind of relationship matches with the other two fields of application of the Mafioso power theorised by Arlacchi, the one of repression⁶¹ and the one of mediation.⁶² In the case of repression the functioning of this relationship is very simple and intuitive: the Mafias and the states can cooperate against common enemies. An example of this scenario is the case of Italy during the Cold War. At that time, in fact, demonstrations by Sicilian farmers, influenced by the spread of socialist and communist ideologies, were perceived as a danger from both the Italian government and the Mafioso who were ruling the countryside.⁶³ On some occasions the Mafioso used violence to repress these revolts and kill the leaders of demonstrations, as happened with the slaughter of Portella della Ginestra, near Palermo.⁶⁴ Even in this part of the continuum the relationship between Mafioso and the political power is based on impunity: the State will protect the Mafioso from any form of persecution.

⁵⁶ J. Cockayne, “*Hidden Power*” Oxford University Press (2016) pp. 150-152

⁵⁷ E. Cicone, “*Borbonici, Patrioti e Criminali*” Salerno Editrice (2016) ebook

⁵⁸ J. Cockayne *Ibidem* p.249

⁵⁹ See U. Santino “*La Democrazia bloccata: la strage di Portella della Ginestra e l'emarginazione delle sinistre*” Rubbettino (1997)

⁶⁰ I. Sales “*Storia dell'Italia...*” *Ibidem* p. 208

⁶¹ P. Arlacchi. “*La Mafia...*” *Ibidem* p.49

⁶² P. Arlacchi. “*La Mafia...*” *Ibidem* p. 52

⁶³ J. Cockayne *Ibidem* pp. 192-193

⁶⁴ See U. Santino “*La Democrazia bloccata....*” *Ibidem*

The third point is the one of *infiltration*. It is here where the Mafias try to infiltrate their men within the state's institutions. This process is not achieved only through the use of hidden or secret instruments. Indeed, it is the opposite that is true; the bulk of infiltration is achieved by the participation of Mafia's men in the legitimate political processes such as the elections.⁶⁵ In this context Mafia is able to move votes, and potentially to elect one of its associates that will use his or her legitimate authority in the interests of the organization: for example diverting public expenditure to enterprises owned by the Mafias.⁶⁶

b) Relations with religious powers

The relationships between Mafias and religious institutions works in the same way as other political actors and consequently the Mafia power continuum can be applied even to them. The Church has not avoided asking for Mafia's help in order to implement its own political agenda (*co-optation*). From the fundraising activities to the regulation of public order during the processions the religious authorities have resorted to the exercise of violence by the Mafias.⁶⁷

This form of relationship has been summarised by Gratteri and Nicaso:

“The bosses can guarantee for an assiduous presence to the Masses on Sundays, for the participation to fraternities linked to a certain parish, [they can guarantee also *e.n.*] for a crucial organizational role during religious ceremonies and especially during the fest days of the patron Saint but first and foremost they give generous donations and quarters, as well as other forms of contributes for the sustainment of the clergy, for the beneficence to the poor, the orphans, the widows and the jail inmates.”⁶⁸

The same form of relationship can be noted for what concerns the safeguarding of sanctuaries from robberies.⁶⁹

In some historical periods the Mafias and the Church have also cooperated against common enemies (*cooperation*). This was especially true again during the Cold War when the Church and the Mafia

⁶⁵ G. De Feo and G.D. De Luca, *Ibidem*

⁶⁶ G. De Feo and G.D. De Luca, *Ibidem*

⁶⁷ N. Gratteri and A. Nicaso “*Acqua Santissima*”, Mondadori (2013) ebook

⁶⁸ N. Gratteri and A. Nicaso *Ibidem*

⁶⁹ N. Gratteri and A. Nicaso *Ibidem*

fought together against communism.⁷⁰ During the 1960s and the 1970s, in Italy, was not uncommon to hear priests condemning the Communists, or Communism in general, while denying the existence of Mafia. One of the most known examples of this attitude is the one of the Calabrian priest Giovanni Stilo who, when he was accused of being a Mafioso claimed that: “Mafia does not exist, it has been invented by Communists to fool the poor people”.⁷¹

The Mafias have also infiltrated the Church (*infiltration*) in order to use its moral authority for their purposes such as, steal money or more simply to use the good offices of the priests themselves.⁷² As reported by some former Mafia members there have been many cases of priests who were members of the Mafia.⁷³

It is important also to highlight how even the religious authorities have contributed to a process of legitimisation of Mafioso power. The Church, just as the state, recognises the monopoly of the force exercised by the Mafioso and consequently it legitimises it: “As said by Weber a power, to be as such, must be recognised by another one (....) Mafias in general want to be recognised by the ecclesial power reinstating a feudal model, just like the emperors used to be legitimated by the popes”.⁷⁴

There are many examples that show how the Church has spent its energies and resources to legitimise the Mafias. In the Neapolitan neighbourhood of Scampia, for example, the priests used to bless religious statues in the so-called “*piazze di spaccio*” (drug dealing squares) ruled by the camorra (the Campanian Mafia).⁷⁵ In doing so, the legitimisation involved not only the camorra but also the drug business itself.⁷⁶ The same dynamic can be seen also for what concerns the processions that in many cases are used to celebrate the Mafias’ bosses in a sort of personality cult.⁷⁷

Alessandra Dino has distinguished four main themes within the “apologetic process” led by the Church toward Mafias:⁷⁸ 1) The Mafia is presented as a charitable organization that defends the weakest members of society; 2) Mafia is considered or pictured as a more efficient authority in comparison to the ones of the State; 3) Mafia is perceived as a political ally; 4) Mafia is considered

⁷⁰ See I. Sales “*I Preti e I Mafiosi*” Dalai (2010)

⁷¹ N. Gratteri and A. Nicaso *Ibidem*

⁷² N. Gratteri and A. Nicaso *Ibidem*

⁷³ P. Arlacchi and A. Calderone, *Ibidem* p. 31. See also I. Sales “*I Preti....*” *Ibidem* p. 67

⁷⁴ Limes, rivista italiana di geopolitica “*Come Scampia è diventata Scampia e come Scampia può risorgere*”. (2016)

⁷⁵ Limes, rivista italiana di geopolitica *Ibidem*

⁷⁶ Limes, rivista italiana di geopolitica *Ibidem*

⁷⁷ A. Dino *Ibidem*

⁷⁸ A. Dino *Ibidem*

as an organization respectful of the so-called “traditional values” (they are against abortion and divorce for example).⁷⁹ In some cases, in order to increase their status in front of their communities, the Mafioso have not hesitated to show themselves together with the highest religious authorities. For example, one of the most important members of Cosa Nostra, Angelo Siino, has driven the car used by Pope John Paul II during one of the pontiff’s visits to Sicily.⁸⁰

In conclusion, it is evident from this analysis how the ability of the Mafias in creating these power relations cannot be seen as the mere consequence of an efficient use of violence but also of their ability to act as catalyst for a series of interests, their own and the ones of other powers. As we will see in the next chapters the Islamist Mafias have shown this same ability and the Mafia power continuum introduced in this section can be applied even in their cases. In this context it is important to reassess how for Mafias and Islamist Mafias these relationships have been crucial to remain violent and resilient to political changes and how a not negligible part of their power lies in their ability to cultivate these relationships. Another important observation to make here is that the link between power actors and the Mafias is continuative - they live in constant relations with the official power actors. Put succinctly, Mafias and Islamist Mafias are an informal appendix of a power system, not its nemesis. As Calderone said: “The Mafioso wants the power and he takes it (...) but the bulk of his power is given by the others”⁸¹

4. Third element: The money laundering activities or the “economic ambivalence”

“A criminal organization is a Mafia if it reinvests the capitals accumulated through the use of violence in the legal economy, without never leaving permanently the illegal business even when it has taken roots in the legal markets, and without restraining its activities only o the predatory ones”⁸²

⁷⁹ A. Dino, *Ibidem*

⁸⁰ I. Sales “*I Preti.....*” *Ibidem* p.39

⁸¹ P. Arlacchi and A. Calderone, *Ibidem* p.135

⁸² I. Sales “*Storia dell’Italia....*” *Ibidem* p. 209

Sales' words here must not be interpreted as related only to the involvement in money laundering activities. What he wants to show is the ambivalence that characterises Mafias from an economic perspective. The Mafias are present in legal economies and illegal ones; they are involved in illicit business but also in the licit ones. In sum, they are always in a sort of metaphorical tension between the underworld and the upper world for what concerns economy.

Another concept that must be kept in mind to understand the nature of the economic power of Mafias is how this is a derivation of the proficient use of violence. In relation to these organizations it can be applied the reasoning on power done by Bertrand Russell: economic power is always derivative in comparison to the use of force.⁸³ The presence of the Mafias in an economic system can manifest itself in two ways: in the context of the economic enterprises, and in the cooperation with legal economic actors.

a) The Mafioso enterprise

In analysing the American Chicano communities, Ruth Horowitz has shown how they were characterized by a sort of sociological and psychological divide.⁸⁴ The Chicanos were always facing the dilemma between achieving the honour and respect of their communities and at the same time to realise their own American Dream, which was perceived also as the achievement of economic success.⁸⁵ It is interesting to see here how, despite the similarities between the Chicano code of conduct and the one of the Mafioso, the latter have been able to conjugate the preservation of their social norms on the one hand and the achievement of economic wealth on the other.⁸⁶

Just like other criminal organizations the Mafias have reinvested the capital accumulated from illegal activities into the legal ones: this is the main reason why many Mafioso have become entrepreneurs creating the so-called "Mafioso enterprise".⁸⁷ This specific economic subject is able to achieve three main "competitive advantages" in comparison to the legal ones:⁸⁸

⁸³ B. Russell, *Ibidem* p.95

⁸⁴ R. Horowitz, *Ibidem* pp. 24-25

⁸⁵ R. Horowitz, *Ibidem* p.78

⁸⁶ I. Sales "Coca e Capitali il binomio dell'economia mafiosa". Limes, Rivista Italiana di Geopolitica (2016)

⁸⁷ P. Arlacchi "La Mafia..." *Ibidem* p.100

⁸⁸ P. Arlacchi "La Mafia..." *Ibidem* p. 101

- a) The *discouraging of competition*: through the use of violence the Mafioso can threaten, damage or harm all their potential competitors within a specific market
- b) The *wage compression*: the use of violence and the illicit nature of the capital used in the legal market allow the Mafioso enterprise to evade taxes but also to avoid paying its employees or to pay them less than others competitors. If an employee tries to revolt he or she can be threatened or killed.
- c) The *financial assets*: The capital of the Mafioso enterprises are illicit and not related to the profits of the company. The absence of taxation on the illegal revenues, together with the remarkable amount of money earned from their illicit activities (e.g. the drug traffic), allow the Mafioso enterprises to rely on bigger financial disposals in comparison to the non-Mafioso ones.

In virtue of these comparative advantages we should not be surprised at the remarkable economic success enjoyed by the Mafioso enterprises that today are present in a wide range of sectors across the globe.⁸⁹

Still, there is a paradox that characterises the relationship between Mafioso enterprises and the surrounding economic environment that must be assessed: they don't produce any form of economic growth for the community. More specifically the Mafioso enterprise: "produces wealth but it limits development at the same time".⁹⁰ Champeyrache, who analysed this paradox through the paradigm of the "artificial scarcity", has given a good explanation of this.⁹¹ According to the author, the Mafias are interested in the creation of a financial dependence between them and the rest of the community from an economic perspective.⁹²

The reasons why the Mafias are not interested in producing stable forms of economic development are twofold: 1) because they are not interested in becoming an accountable power. The promotion of any form of development would necessarily lead in becoming a liable power and this is in contrast to

⁸⁹ See F. Forgione "*Mafia Export*". Baldini Castoldi Dalai Editore (2009). To see how the Mafias infiltrate the legal economy (for example the food sector) see H. Roberts, "*How the Mafia got our food*", Financial Times (2018)

⁹⁰ I. Sales and S. Melorio "*Mafie nell'economia globale*" Guida Editori (2017) p.86

⁹¹ C. Champeyrache "*Artificial Scarcity, Power and the Italian Mafia*" Journal of Economic Issues Vol.48 No.3 pp. 625-640 (2014)

⁹²C. Champeyrache *Ibidem*

the “visible occultation” that is characterising the Mafias⁹³; 2) because the economic development in the areas where the Mafias are borne can be counterproductive in the long term. In fact, it might potentially undermine the social codes and the power relations that are crucial for the maintenance of their power.

b) *The support to the legal economic enterprises*

Just as for political powers the Mafias enjoy a form of legitimation from the legal actors present in the economy. This happens for two reasons: first, the Mafias are not considered incompatible with the spirit of the free market that today is animating the global economy.⁹⁴ In this sense Sales and Melorio are right when they assess how, from an economic perspective, the relation between Mafias and the free market is characterized by a certain degree of hypocrisy: “ [it is evident how *en*] the economic criminality is against the rule of law but not against the market rules”.⁹⁵ In sum, the great capitals owned by the Mafias are not pushed back by the “moral forces” which are supposed to animate the free market and that should act as gatekeepers between the licit and illicit revenues.⁹⁶

Secondly, there is a more practical reason for the legitimation of Mafias by the economic actors: Mafias are efficient and cheap. For example, the Mafias can use violence against workers to help a determined enterprise in achieving wage compression.⁹⁷ Jacobs and Peters have showed for instance, how the American Cosa Nostra has been used to threaten and extort the members of the Labour Unions in the US.⁹⁸ Similarly, the Mafioso have been used in southern Italy to break up the demonstrations of the local Labour Unions.⁹⁹ The Mafias can reduce costs even in taking part into a determined economic process. The most evident example of this is the one of illegal waste dumping in Italy. In this context, many “legal” entrepreneurs have asked the Mafias to dump toxic waste in order to minimise the costs of the process.¹⁰⁰

What is important to see in the relationship between the Mafias and the economic actors is how it proves that the Mafias must not be considered a product of an ethnic deviance: “the Mafioso method

⁹³I. Sales “*Storia dell’Italia...*” *Ibidem* p. 95

⁹⁴I. Sales “*Coca e capitali...*” *Ibidem*

⁹⁵ I. Sales and S. Melorio *Ibidem* p.8

⁹⁶ I. Sales “*Coca e Capitali...*” *Ibidem*

⁹⁷ J. B. Jacobs and E. Peters, “*Labour Racketeering: the Mafia and the Unions*” *Crime and Justice* Vol.30 pp. 229-282 (2003)

⁹⁸ J. B. Jacobs and E. Peters, *Ibidem*

⁹⁹ See U. Santino “*La Democrazia bloccata...*” *Ibidem*

¹⁰⁰ I. Sales “*Storia dell’Italia...*” *Ibidem*. P.354

is exportable because it is abided to economic reasons and conveniences, everything else is pure invention and historic falsification”.¹⁰¹ Consequently, it is important to assess how the diffusion of the Mafias across the globe, from an economic perspective, demonstrates how some interpretations on this topic are wrong.¹⁰² What it is important to stress on the nature of the ‘economic relationships’ of the Mafia is how just as the political ones are based on convenience, they are based on functionality. This characteristic is important to understand how the Mafioso method can be replicated also in different economic context which are keen to profit from this functionality. As I will demonstrate in the next chapter this attitude is at the root of the Islamist Mafias’ economic relationships as well. In conclusion it is important to understand how the Mafioso economic method is able to replicate itself in every place in which their services find legitimacy or just demand, in Italy¹⁰³ as in the rest of the world.¹⁰⁴

5. Fourth element: The criminal ideology

*“A Mafioso criminality is an ideological one. The Mafioso have a way of thinking that matches with a real ideological construct, in the sense of transforming their own interests in values”.*¹⁰⁵

The power of Mafias is definitely related to their ability in the use of violence but it is important to remember how this has always being conjugate with a holiness, which exalts the exercise of it.¹⁰⁶ In this sense, the Mafioso are not different from soldiers,¹⁰⁷ or terrorists:¹⁰⁸ they need an ideological motivation to justify the use of violence.

For the rest of this section I will adopt the definition of ideology proposed by the Canadian sociologist Guy Rocher according to whom ideology is:

“a system of ideas and judgments, outspoken and generally organized, which is functional to describe, explain, interpret, or justify the situation of a community or a group and which,

¹⁰¹ I. Sales “*Storia dell’Italia...*” *Ibidem* p. 43

¹⁰² A. M. Lavezzi “*Economic structure and vulnerability to Organised Crime: Evidence from Sicily*” *Global Crime* Vol. 9 No.3 pp. 198-220 (2008).

¹⁰³ I. Sales “*L’Italia riunita dalle Mafie*”. *Limes*, rivista italiana di geopolitica (2018)

¹⁰⁴ I. Sales “*Coca e Capitali...*” *Ibidem*

¹⁰⁵ I. Sales “*Storia dell’Italia.....*” *Ibidem* p.209

¹⁰⁶ V. Teti “*E la processione dei boss torna a Polsi*” *Corriere Della Sera* (2010)

¹⁰⁷ See E. Burke “*An Army of tribes*” *Liverpool University Press* (2018)

¹⁰⁸ See G. Kepel “*Oltre il Terrore e il Martirio*” *Feltrinelli* (2009)

taking a wide inspiration from certain values, establishes a precise orientation of the actions of this group or community”¹⁰⁹

From a general perspective the Mafioso ideology, along with every ideology as stated by Rocher in the definition above, starts from a series of theoretical concepts which needs to be organised and to become outspoken. For this reason, it can be argued how in order to do so this ideology needs symbols which in their turn need to be translated in rituals. Bearing in mind these characteristics or necessities, the Mafioso ideology can be described as based on the merger between the extreme interpretation of the social codes showed in the third section of this chapter and some religious constructs and symbols. The similarity between the Mafioso ideology and religion has been noted by Giovanni Falcone: “To become a member of the Mafia it is equal to convert to a religion. You don’t cease to be a priest nor a Mafioso”.¹¹⁰

The Mafioso ideology is able to exercise some attraction even toward people outside the organization. It is in this sense that some authors have defined the Mafia as “an organization able to attract *mediocre men*, with the promise of *heroic conquest*”.¹¹¹

It is necessary to clarify how the Mafioso ideology is a complex system of beliefs and rituals that cannot be undertaken just by the rule of the *omerta* (intended as the code of silence or a generic idea of true manhood) as has been done by some authors.¹¹² The ideological constructs and the symbolism used by the Mafia are something that embraces the entire life of the Mafioso together with the one of their families. Moreover, it is something so internalised that goes far beyond the mere concept of the conspiracy of silence. This ideology is also characterized by a form of fatalism according to which the men of the organization do not need even to think at all: everything is pre-ordered and prescribed.¹¹³ Even in this case, for the sake of brevity, I will mention only five characteristics some of which, will be found in Islamist Mafias’ criminal ideology as well.

1) Loyalty and stability for the organization: The first aim of the Mafioso ideology is to guarantee the *stability and the complete loyalty to the organization* by its affiliates. As summarised

¹⁰⁹ G. Rocher “*Introduzione alla sociologia generale*” Surgarco edizioni (1992) p. 105

¹¹⁰ G. Falcone and M. Padovani *Ibidem* p.111

¹¹¹ R. Siebert, “*Dinamiche Psiciche, condotte violente: uomini e donne di Mafia*” in G. Lo Verso “*La Mafia Dentro*” Franco Angeli Editore (1998) p. 110

¹¹² P. Arlacchi “*La Mafia...*” *Ibidem* p. 28

¹¹³ L. Ferraris, “*Mafia e Psicopatologia. Spunti di riflessione tratti dai percorsi terapeutici di alcuni pazienti*”, in G. Lo Verso “*La Mafia dentro*” Franco Angeli Editore (1998) p. 177

by Francesco Calderoni: “ [the *e.n.*] fostering of a shared culture based on rituals, affiliation ceremonies, formal ranks and mythology”¹¹⁴ is crucial to avoid defections and to maintain a sense of belonging to the same organization.¹¹⁵ Antonino Calderone, quoting the words of a Mafia boss during his affiliation ceremony, has given an important insight about this role of the criminal ideology:

“You enter Cosa Nostra through blood and you can exit through blood only (...) you cannot leave, you cannot betray Cosa Nostra because is more important than everything. It comes before your father and your mother and before your wife and your children”.¹¹⁶

This kind of assertion must not be dismissed as a mere propagandistic exercise; the history of Mafias is full of cases in which family relationships have been sacrificed to the interests of the organization. This is the case for example of the former ‘Ndrnagheta member Luigi Bonaventura who, after having decided to cooperate with the police in Italy, has been the victim of two murder attempts by his own father.¹¹⁷ The same can be said about weddings and baptisms, which are both family ceremonies that are used to seal the peace between different families, repeating the same dynamics of the European aristocracy in medieval times.¹¹⁸ In this first component, the function of ideology in the Mafias is not different from the one of other criminal organizations, even ancient ones, such as the Dutch *Bokkeryders* studied by Blok.¹¹⁹ Still the level of pervasiveness reached by the Mafioso ideology rends it far more powerful in comparison to the ones of the other criminal organizations. The Mafioso ideology in fact is able to produce a real phenomenon of radicalisation. In fact, just like in the case of terrorist organisations, the penetration of ideology in the daily life of a subject is so deep that it can produce a complete upheaval in his or her behaviour as other examples in this section will show.

2) The Mafioso Superman

The daily life of the Mafioso is characterized by the incompatibility between acts and principles (for example the act of killing cannot be justified by the religious values of the Mafioso ideology). To overcome these contradictions the Mafioso have created, across the centuries, a conception of

¹¹⁴ F. Calderoni “*Structure of Drug trafficking Mafias*” *Crime, Law and Social Sciences* Vol.58, pp. 321-349 (2012)

¹¹⁵ See E. Ciconte “*Riti criminali. I codici di affiliazione della ‘Ndrangheta*”, Rubbettino (2015)

¹¹⁶ P. Arlacchi and A. Calderone *Ibidem* p. 55

¹¹⁷ N. Gratteri and A. Nicaso “*Acqua Santissima*” *Ibidem*

¹¹⁸ N. Gratteri and A. Nicaso “*Acqua Santissima*” *Ibidem*

¹¹⁹ A. Blok “*Honour and Violence*”, Polity Press (2001) pp. 29-43

themselves, which is very similar to the ‘superman’ theorised by Nietzsche¹²⁰ or to the *takfiri* ideology of some juridical schools within Islamic theology.¹²¹

“Not all the men are on the same level and consequently not all the lives, on the Mafioso eyes, have the same value”.¹²² Just like for Islamist terrorists, human beings that refuse to adhere to their conception of religion are considered less than human and can be killed, for the Mafioso all the individuals outside the organization are dehumanised as well: in both cases the distinction between the guilty and the innocent is completely erased.¹²³ From here it is evident how Sales is right in saying that the Mafioso ideology is a racist one.¹²⁴ It is also easy to understand the words of Calderone when he claimed that: “we are Mafioso and the others are just common men”.¹²⁵

The ideological construct of the “Mafioso Superman” influences also the relationships with other criminal organizations and between the Mafioso themselves.

For what concerns the first it is important to remember the case of the former Cosa Nostra boss Tommaso Buscetta who openly expressed his contempt for the terrorists who were locked up with him in the same prison.¹²⁶ Buscetta considered the terrorists as men without honour that were killing innocent civilians, something that a Mafioso, according to him, would never do.¹²⁷ For Buscetta, the Mafioso are men of honour, which, despite their involvement in crimes, act according to certain principles and values that other criminals cannot comprehend nor respect.¹²⁸

For what concerns the relationship with other Mafioso it is interesting to note the use of the ideological construct of the Mafioso superman in relation the phenomenon of the so-called “*pentiti*”, (repents - the cooperating witnesses). Paradoxically, many Mafioso who decided to cooperate with the law refuse to be labelled as traitors, accusing their former partners in crime of treason.¹²⁹ Buscetta defined himself as man who is still loyal to the ideals of the organization that have been betrayed by the actual members of Cosa Nostra.¹³⁰ According to Buscetta they are the ones that have sacrificed

¹²⁰ See F. Nietzsche “*Thus spoke Zarathustra*” Oxford World Classics (2008)

¹²¹ See G. Kepel, “*Jihad*”, Carocci Editore (2013)

¹²² P. Arlacchi “*La Mafia.....*” *ibidem* p.135 it is interesting to see how the author defines here this racist ideology as “very little Western”

¹²³ R. Siebert *Ibidem* p.110

¹²⁴ I. Sales “*Storia dell’Italia....*” *Ibidem* p. 209

¹²⁵ P. Arlacchi and A. Calderone *Ibidem* p. 12

¹²⁶ P. Arlacchi and T. Buscetta “*Addio Cosa Nostra*” BUR (1994) p. 200

¹²⁷ P. Arlacchi and T. Buscetta *Ibidem* p.200

¹²⁸ P. Arlacchi and T. Buscetta *Ibidem* p.201

¹²⁹ P. Arlacchi and T. Buscetta *Ibidem* p.3

¹³⁰ P. Arlacchi and T. Buscetta *Ibidem* p.4

the rules of the “old Mafia” to embrace those of a new one that is an organization with no honour and characterized only by the pursuit of economic profits¹³¹.

The same ideology has been used by the Mafioso to ridicule and discredit, according to the Mafioso beliefs, the *pentiti*. In this regard the case of Rosaria Basile, the wife of the witness Vincenzo Scarantino is emblematic. When her husband decided to cooperate with the authorities, she did not hesitate to “accuse” him of being homosexual during his trial.¹³²

These examples show how the Mafioso ideology can be easily used in an instrumental way - something that characterises the criminal ideology of the Islamist Mafias as well.

3) The religious components of the Mafioso ideology

The entire Mafioso ideology is characterized by many symbols and words that are deeply related to Christianity. It is important to underline this peculiarity, because overt religious symbolism will obviously be found in the ideology of the Islamist Mafias as well.

The most known example of the use of religious symbols by the Mafias is one of the affiliation ceremonies. During these, the leaders of the organizations quote the name of saints and undertake symbolic religious actions like the burning or the spilling of blood on holy cards. It is important to remember also how both of these elements have been present in such ceremonies for centuries.¹³³

The Mafioso bosses as well increase their authority through the use of the same religious symbolism. Bernardo Provenzano, one of the most important leaders of Cosa Nostra, used many references from the Holy Bible and religious metaphors in communications with the other members of the organization.¹³⁴

It is important to highlight how these religious elements change the self-perception of the Mafioso who believe themselves to be, in some ways, chosen by God.¹³⁵ The ‘Ndrangheta boss Rocco Bellocco, for instance, wrote a poem in which he told how God helped him to escape capture on many

¹³¹ P. Arlacchi and T. Buscetta *Ibidem* p.5

¹³² B. Cayli “*Performance Matters more than Masculinity*” *Aggression and Violent Behaviour* Vol.29 pp. 36-42 (2016)

¹³³ E. Ciconte “*Riti criminali.....*” *Ibidem*, p. 10

¹³⁴ R. Merlino, “*Con il Volere di Dio. Bernardo Provenzano and Religious Symbolic Ritual*”. *Modern Italy* Vol.17 No.3 pp. 365-381 (2012)

¹³⁵ N. Gratteri and A. Nicaso “*Acqua Santissima*” *Ibidem*

occasions.¹³⁶ It is interesting to note here how the exaltation of this sort of predestination by the Mafioso is also a characteristic of jihadi terrorist organisations as demonstrated by Creswell and Haykel who have analysed extensively the role and the meaning of poetry in modern jihadi groups.¹³⁷ Moreover, the attitude mentioned above is also coincident with the one of the jihadists who claimed how God helped them on the battlefield through miracles.¹³⁸ These almost fanatic demonstrations of faith offer other proof of how the points of contact between these two apparently distant cultural and ideological realities (the Mafioso and the Jihadists one) are in reality more evident than we think.

4) The role of ideology in the administration of violence

The Mafioso ideology is crucial also to justify the Mafioso's involvement in crime and the use of violence not only in front of the society but also from a psychological perspective.¹³⁹ Calderone gave an example of the power of this belief in describing how he was perfectly able to not feel guilty for the homicides committed.¹⁴⁰ The use of religion in this sense shows how the Mafioso ideology is a sort of reversed Calvinism: the relationship with God and the everyday work can be totally separated.¹⁴¹ In sum, the Mafioso ideology is able not only to create a mere way to legitimise violence, but also a sort of internalisation that is able to resolve any crisis of conscience.¹⁴²

The specific relation between the religious part of the Mafioso ideology on the one hand and the act of killing on the other, has been analysed by Alessandra Dino which has rightly defined the Mafioso's God as a private deity, bended to the interests of these organizations:

“A God, the one of the Mafioso, keened and constricted in a conceptual paddock of power and violence; he is able also to accomplish revenges, through the mediation of men, and specifically of the Mafioso. In the name of this God, the illicit become licit, the oppression becomes justice, the intimidation becomes respect, in brief, the subordination becomes a diffuse costume and a normal condition for the entire community.”¹⁴³

¹³⁶ N. Gratteri and A. Nicaso “*Acqua Santissima*” *Ibidem*

¹³⁷ R. Creswell and B. Haykel “*Poetry in Jihadi Culture*” in T. Hegghammer “*Jihadi Culture*” Cambridge University Press (2017) pp.22-41

¹³⁸ L. Farral and M. Hamid “*The Arabs at War in Afghanistan*” Hurst and Co. (2015) pp. 298-299

¹³⁹ Limes, rivista italiana di geopolitica *Ibidem*

¹⁴⁰ P. Arlacchi and A. Calderone *Ibidem* p. 203

¹⁴¹ A. Dino *Ibidem*

¹⁴² A. Dino *Ibidem*

¹⁴³ A. Dino *Ibidem*

In the context of this work it is interesting to recall the words of De Giorgi who has compared the Mafioso ideology with a crusader one, something that characterises even the ideology of the Islamist Mafias:

“Above this religious mentality it is implanted a holy imaginary of war. The one of the Mafioso is a war religiosity, which implies a “crusader” faith against the infidel. The Mafioso recall himself to a superior code of justice of which he is the depositary and the rightfully enforcer, and also to an idea of honour which considers shameful the betrayal. Homicides can be committed and be in peace with God at the same time.”¹⁴⁴

This excerpt is important because it shows how the Mafioso have undertaken a process of juxtaposition concerning the religious elements of their ideology with their criminal acts, a dynamic which will be replicated by the Islamist Mafias as well. Put succinctly, just like the Mafioso have a crusader mentality, the Islamist Mafioso have a jihadi one according to which their personal enemies and the enemies of God are coincidental and the work for God and their criminal business too. This excerpt is also important in the context of the analysis of the Islamist Mafias within the crime terror nexus as it shows how a form of religious belief can coexist with the involvement in criminal activities.

5) The Mafioso biopower

In relation to the Mafioso ideology there is an aspect that has been very little studied so far but that I find important in order to understand the level of pervasiveness of it: their biopower. The ideological constructs of the Mafioso have been able to influence the biological existence of the individuals in creating that form of biopower theorised by Michel Foucault.¹⁴⁵ Because of the Mafia and of being a Mafioso, these individuals are able to overcome any instinctive form of preservation which characterises the existence of human beings from a biological perspective, because: “Mafias are similar to military or religious organizations which pretend the entirety of the person who belongs to them (or who is part of them).”¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ F. De Giorgi, “*La Questione del Mezzogiorno: società e potere*” Cristiani d’Italia (2011)

¹⁴⁵ See M. Foucault. “*Nascita della Biopolitica. Lezioni al Collège de France (1978-1979)*”. Feltrinelli (2015)

¹⁴⁶ I. Sales “*Storia dell’Italia....*” *Ibidem* p.232

There is an interesting case, which should be mentioned here that is also useful to offer another proof of the similarity of the radicalisation processes in the Mafioso and jihadi ideologies. As recalled by Calderone, the Mafioso Stefano Giaconia once arrived at a top-level meeting of the organization wired with explosives on his body and ready to blow himself up: a real suicide bomber but for the cause of Cosa Nostra. Just like suicide bombers in jihadi organisations, Giaconia won any self-preservation instinct and was ready to kill (even himself) for the sake of the organization.¹⁴⁷ Tommaso Buscetta explained how the Mafioso ideology is so penetrating that it regulates even the daily life of the members of the organization in every single physical action:

“Even now that I’m not a member of Cosa Nostra anymore I have the habit to never pose questions to the people surrounding me. It’s a well-rooted habitude (...) it is an acquired *forma mentis* that impresses even myself when I analyse my behaviours. (...) I remember how, back in the day, it was perceived as wrong the fact that a man of honour used to buy a newspaper because he might read an article about the crime beat.”¹⁴⁸

This excerpt shows another striking similarity on the outcomes of the Mafioso and Jihadi ideology and in the radicalisation processes that they are able to produce. In this sense we can see how the power of the Mafioso ideological construct is able to shape the daily life and behaviour of its followers even outside the strictly “military” context, just as the Jihadi ideology does towards its believers.¹⁴⁹

As showed by some authors this mentality can replicate itself not only within the organizations but also in the rest of the society, especially in the youth who grow up in the Mafias’ territories.¹⁵⁰ It is interesting in this context to recall the case of the Melito rapes, when a mother remained silent about her daughters’ rape by the son of the local Mafioso boss and asked her daughter to accept it without any form of reaction.¹⁵¹ The Mafioso biopower, can also be seen in other less known cases, such as the one of a Sicilian Mafioso who plotted the murder of his own daughter because of her relationship with a policeman.¹⁵² All these cases show how belonging to the Mafia is able to break even the normal biological relationships, safeguarding both the honour of the single Mafioso and the loyalty to the

¹⁴⁷ P. Arlacchi and A. Calderone *Ibidem* p.67

¹⁴⁸ P. Arlacchi and T. Buscetta *Ibidem* p.86

¹⁴⁹ T. Hegghamer “*Non-Military practices in Jihadi Groups*” in T. Hegghammer “*Jihadi Culture*” Cambridge University Press (2017) pp.171-201

¹⁵⁰ M. Di Blasi, P.Cavani, S. La Grutta, R. Lo Baido and L. Pavia: “*Growing in Mafia Territories*” World Futures, The Journal of New Paradigm Vol. 71, No.8 pp. 173-184 (2015)

¹⁵¹ A. Candito “*La discesa negli inferi di una ragazzina*” Corriere Della Calabria (2016)

¹⁵² The Guardian “*Mafia Boss accused of ordering hit on his daughter over a policeman lover*” (2017)

organization, disciplining even the acts of the Mafioso as a biological being. In sum, the power of the Mafioso ideology manifests itself also through the Mafias' biopower.

6. Fifth Element: The “administrative character” or Mafias' governmentality

*“A Mafioso criminality has some administrative characteristics (...) It is above all the **pizzo** [e.n. the racket/extortion] that shows the administrative character of Mafias, their becoming a State within the official State, intervening directly in the taxation of citizens which are employed in economic activities”.*¹⁵³

As made clear by Sales here, the fifth element of Mafias is their ability to act as an administration able to implement a parallel set of norms above a certain community within a certain territory. Using the theories by James Cockayne on this subject I will refer to this characteristic using the term *governmentality*.¹⁵⁴ The ability in exercising the administration of the community is one of the most important attributes of the ideal type of the Mafioso that: “Must be able to carry out government activities if he wants to die in his bed honoured and revered as a gentleman. The Lion must be complemented by the Fox.”¹⁵⁵ It is also because of this ideal typical meaning of *governmentality* that the Mafioso rarely left the territories under their control: their status coincides with their role in administrating a determined area. Without it the Mafioso lost both.¹⁵⁶

The Mafioso *governmentality* manifests itself in two ways: *within* the organization and *outside* of it.

a) Internal Governmentality.

The first concept to assess while studying the *governmentality* within the Mafioso organisations is how their internal rules have been repeated and confirmed across the centuries.¹⁵⁷ At the same time

¹⁵³ I.Sales “*Storia dell'Italia...*” *Ibidem* p.211

¹⁵⁴ J. Cockayne *Ibidem* pp. 23- 25

¹⁵⁵ P. Arlacchi “*Mafia, contadini...*” *Ibidem* p.131

¹⁵⁶ L. Patronaggio “*I valori tradizionali della Mafia attraverso l'esperienza dei collaboratori di giustizia*” in G. Lo Verso “*La Mafia dentro*” Franco Angeli Editore (1998) p. 95

¹⁵⁷ E. Cicone “*Riti criminali.*” *Ibidem* p.10

the organization has showed its ability in being flexible and in creating on different occasions some institutions to settle the disputes within the organization.¹⁵⁸ Catino has identified three main reasons for the creation of these norms: a) to establish an organizational order, b) to contain conflicts and violence, c) to maintain the secrecy of the organization.¹⁵⁹

A clarification is needed concerning the role of governmental bodies in the Mafias:

These must not be seen, as done by Cressey, as the government or the board of directors of Mafias.¹⁶⁰ The Mafias must be intended as organizations characterized by a “decentralised decision making guided by a common culture – or *governmentality* – and centralised sanctioning power”.¹⁶¹ In sum those institutions, such as the *Commissione* in the Sicilian Cosa Nostra, must be considered as responsible for the regulation of violence within the organizations and not as governing body of them.¹⁶² Other examples of internal *governmentality* are the rules of the affiliation ceremonies or the rules that regulate the election of the members of the governmental bodies in the different Mafioso organizations.¹⁶³

While concluding this section it is important to stress two main points in relation to the internal governmentality in the jihadi groups. 1) Structures aimed at the internal governmentality of the jihadi organisations have always existed (let’s think about the Taliban’s shura or the hierarchical structure of the first Al-Qaeda). What it is important to understand is how an efficient system of internal governmentality is not the one that does not change but the one which changes but maintains the integrity of the organisation. As we have seen above the proficiency of Mafias internal governmentality (and of the one of the Islamist Mafias as we will see in the analysis of the case studies) has been their ability to adjust their structures without falling apart. 2) In the case of the Islamist Mafias’ internal governmentality there is a formal difference with the one of the Mafias. The organisations observed in this work do not have the same esoteric appeal or aesthetic adopted by the Mafias, for instance in the affiliation ceremonies. Nevertheless, as we will see in the proceeding chapters the Islamist Mafias are able to recall some common ideological and cultural elements in

¹⁵⁸ J. Cockayne *Ibidem* pp. 40-41

¹⁵⁹ M. Catino “*Mafia rules. The role of criminal codes in Mafia organizations*” *Scandinavian Journal of Management* Vol.31 pp. 536-548 (2015)

¹⁶⁰ See D.R. Cressey *Ibidem*

¹⁶¹ J. Cockayne *Ibidem* p. 40

¹⁶² See the historical reconstruction on the reasons why Sicilian Mafioso have agreed to create the *Commissione* in P. Arlacchi and A. Calderone “*Gli uomini del Disonore*”, *Il Saggiatore* (2010) pp. 111-123. Here Calderone explains how his brother Filippo has decided to promote the creation of this organ in order to end the internecine violence among the different Mafioso families in Sicily at that time.

¹⁶³ I. Sales “*Storia Dell’Italia...*” *Ibidem* p. 211

order to implement some forms of self-government. In this sense Cockayne's words mentioned above can be easily applied to the Islamist Mafias as well. In brief, the Islamist Mafias, unlike the Mafias have not adopted a set of specific rituals to implement their internal governmentality, nevertheless they have used a common cultural background and behavioural code in order to control the power dynamics within the organisations and here lies their similarity with the Mafias.

b) External Governmentality.

The first element that must be considered in relation to the external *governmentality* is how the presence of this parallel administration exercised by the Mafias does not limit or erode the sovereignty of the State. In this sense, it is useful to remember the concept of symbiosis in sovereignty recalled by Burgu.¹⁶⁴ The Mafias and the power of the State: “are separate but in a mutual interaction that is either beneficial to both or at least does not harm one while benefiting the other.”¹⁶⁵

In virtue of the protection guaranteed to Mafias by the political powers they are able to implement a parallel fiscal system alimented through the extortion,¹⁶⁶ a security system that is used to maintain a form of public order,¹⁶⁷ a set of institutions that implement all the norms related to *governmentality* or that mediate over the disputes within a certain community.¹⁶⁸

Some aspects of the *governmentality* are used to increment the legitimacy of the organizations. For instance, the Mafias use their financial capitals to create a parallel welfare system, shaping the phenomenon of so-called “criminal Keynesianism”.¹⁶⁹ In the same vein, usury can be understand as a form of illegal banking in which the Mafias invest a lot of effort and resource especially during periods of economic crisis when the real banks are not able to give credit.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁴ B. Burgu “Sovereignty” in L. Lawlor and J. Nale “*The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon*”. Cambridge University Press (2014) p. 463

¹⁶⁵ B. Burgu *Ibidem* p.463

¹⁶⁶ I. Sales “Storia...” *Ibidem* p. 211

¹⁶⁷ I. Sales “Storia...” *Ibidem* p. 211

¹⁶⁸ I. Sales “Storia...” *Ibidem* p. 102

¹⁶⁹ I. Sales and S. Melorio *Ibidem* p. 15

¹⁷⁰ I. Sales and S. Melorio *Ibidem* p. 15

Still, some forms of rivalry can manifest between states and Mafias at times. This is what Cockayne defines as the struggle within the “market for government” where the state and the Mafias do not compete for legitimacy itself but for the efficiency in administration.¹⁷¹ It is interesting to note in fact how the local populations do not only see the presence of Mafias in certain territories as legitimate but they also welcome it because they are considered more efficient institutions in comparison to the ones of the state.¹⁷²

In this context it is important to avoid confusion between the *governmentality* of Mafias with the so-called “Mafia States” phenomenon.¹⁷³ The Mafia States are a particular dysfunction of the legitimate governments within some specific countries, where the members of the security forces or the politicians are involved in illegal activities and consequently the state’s institutions are employed for the committing of crimes.

The ruling classes of the Mafia States achieve political power in order to commit crimes while the Mafioso don’t have any ambition of becoming a “visible power” at all.¹⁷⁴ It is for this reason that the Mafia becomes what Cockayne has defined as a “Hidden Power”. A political, economic and social actor tangible in all the effects but which is not interested in becoming official, visible and consequently accountable.¹⁷⁵ From the perspective of *governmentality*, the Mafias can be seen as one of the most evident examples of the absolute power from the Latin words “*ab solutus*” (without ties). They want to enjoy the staying in power without being held accountable for any political decision or policy implementation. The analysis of the case studies of this thesis will show how surprisingly not only have the jihadi groups implemented their external governmentality through the same means (welfare, tribunals and mediations) but also how the Sahelian Jihadi Groups and the Haqqani Network are pursuing the same objective in the long-term: the one of the Hidden Power.

Conclusion

The analysis of the Sales’ model shows three key concepts that are functional to the development of this thesis.

¹⁷¹ J. Cockayne *Ibidem* p. 268

¹⁷² Limes, rivista italiana di geopolitica *Ibidem*

¹⁷³ M. Naim “*Mafia States*” Council on Foreign Relation (2012)

¹⁷⁴ J. Cockayne *Ibidem* p.10

¹⁷⁵ J. Cockayne *Ibidem* p. 10

The first one is that the Mafia must not be understood as a mere criminal organization, from a structural perspective, but as a network of power relations. In this sense, the Mafias are not just the individuals who are formally part of the organization but a complex system of social norms, ideological beliefs and power actors of which the Mafioso criminal organizations are just the fulcrum. The Mafias act in this context protecting the status quo, preserving a pre-existent balance of powers as well as the norms of a determined social fabric. It is for this reason that some authors have talked about the “conservative nature” of Mafias.¹⁷⁶ Consequently, the Mafias must be seen more as a repressive force than a revolutionary one and more as a partner in power rather than a competitor.

The second key concept is that Mafias must be seen as a way to exercise power, the so-called “Mafioso method”,¹⁷⁷ and this can be replied in other contexts. It is evident from this perspective as the Mafias cannot be seen or interpreted as something mainly “Italian” or only linked to Italian society.¹⁷⁸ It is only in acknowledging this that we can make sense of how the Mafias have been able to successfully move in other countries, such as the US, or in other societies in general and to enjoy the same form of legitimacy there. Using the words that Gaetano Mosca wrote at the beginning of the twentieth century: “The spirit of the Mafia is not present only in Sicily. It is present, and has been present, in many other parts of the world everywhere the social justice is or has been unable to eradicate the system of the private revenge”.¹⁷⁹

Thirdly and most importantly in analysing in-depth each element of the Sales’ model we have started to see how the definitional elements of the Mafias can be transposed into the field of terrorism studies and are present within jihadi organisations in different contexts. More specifically, we have seen how jihadi and Mafioso organisations share some similarities from a cultural, social and political perspective. The overcoming of this theoretical barrier it is fundamental for the principal purpose of this thesis: to demonstrate the existence of the Islamist Mafias and the validity of this theoretical concept. In the next chapter, introducing the theory of the Islamist Mafias, I will show how these elements manifest themselves in practice within the societies and organisations analysed in this research and above all what kind of divergences or convergences can be observed between the Sales’ model and the Islamist Mafias’ conceptualisation.

¹⁷⁶ P. Arlacchi “*La Mafia...*” *Ibidem* p. 50

¹⁷⁷ P. Arlacchi “*La Mafia...*” *Ibidem* p.107

¹⁷⁸ I. Sales “*Storia dell’Italia...*” *Ibidem* p. 33

¹⁷⁹ G. Mosca “*Che cosa è la Mafia?*” *Elison Publishing* (2015) ebook

CHAPTER III

Definition and Theory of the Islamist Mafia

Introduction

The subject of this chapter is the definition of the Islamist Mafia from a normative and comparative perspective. More specifically, the aim is twofold: on the one hand this section will put the conceptualisation of the Islamist Mafia in the bigger context of the theories and the debate on the crime terror nexus; on the other it will analyse if and how the Sales model can be applied to the case studies of this thesis from a theoretical perspective. As we have seen in the previous chapter the birth of a Mafia is a complex process which is based on a wide range of different sources of legitimacy that need to be present in order to bring to the creation of one or more organisations animated by the same spirit (the Mafioso behaviour) and capable of implementing the same strategies to achieve their final objective (the one of the Hidden Power). In this context, the second part of this chapter aims at challenging two main theoretical conundrums: a) to show that the Mafias' paradigm can be transposed also to terrorist organisations; b) to show how the elements of the Sales model can be found also within terrorist organisations. In this chapter, for the sake of intellectual honesty, I will show also how some elements of divergence between Mafias and Islamist Mafias exist and how despite these the Sales' model remains applicable to these organisations. The chapter will be structured in the following way: in the first paragraph I will introduce a discursive definition of Islamist Mafia, and I give some clarification on its components in order to avoid any form of misunderstanding or ambiguities in general. In the second paragraph, I will test the concept of Islamist Mafias comparing it with other theories in the study of the crime terror nexus. This comparison will be useful in order to reiterate and highlight the innovative characteristics of my theory and the intellectual gaps that it aims to fill in the debate on the crime terror nexus. In the third paragraph, I will use the 'five elements' model by Sales, analysed in chapter II, to show how the case studies of this thesis fit into the model and consequently how the Sahelian Jihadi Groups (SJG) and the Haqqani Network (HN) can be considered Islamist Mafias.

Before proceeding with the development of this chapter it is important to give some methodological clarifications. First of all, the concept of the Islamist Mafia is a completely new theory that is in many

ways unprecedented in the literature of both terrorism and organised crime studies. This brings about I call the *innovation curse*. Since these terrorist organizations are being analysed as Mafioso ones for the first time it is impossible to have the same amount of details and insights that I have showed in the definition of Mafia in chapter II. The studies on Mafias are decades-old while the ones on Islamist Mafias obviously are not. From this assumption it is clearly understandable how even if it can be proved that these organizations are Islamist Mafias it is more difficult to demonstrate, for instance, that an Islamist Mafioso biopower exists. What is important to assess here is how the aim of this chapter is to start to prove how the theory of this thesis is correct in substance. For this reason, this chapter will focus more on a theoretical demonstration of the Islamist Mafias' existence, and the data that will support this theory will be showed and analysed more in-depth in the next two chapters. Hopefully, more in-depth studies in the future will add new characteristics to this framework but for the moment some elements which were present in the definition of Mafia in chapter II cannot be illustrated here.

Secondly, it must not be forgotten how the Islamist Mafias are, in my theory, the product of an evolutionary process undertaken by the Sahelian Jihadi Groups and the Haqqani Network. For the sake of clarity, an in-depth explanation of this evolution will be given in the chapters concerning the analysis of the case studies, but it will not be described here. In sum, in this chapter I will describe *what is* an Islamist Mafia, while in the following ones I will describe *how an Islamist Mafia works* and *how* some terrorist groups have become this new type of criminal organization.

1. The Definition of Islamist Mafia

From here on I will use the expression Islamist Mafias to define:

A cluster of criminal organizations that instrumentally use a political and religious ideology in order to commit criminal actions that are in opposition to the states' and religious laws. The main aim of these organizations is to ensure the enrichment of their members in economic, political and social terms through the activities of the organization. The members of the Islamist Mafias are not all necessarily Muslims, but they are nevertheless united by the common will to increment their power. The Islamist Mafia is a criminal phenomenon characterized by a high level of pervasiveness which enables it to forge power relationships

in a way and with subjects that the majority of common terrorist groups are not able to reach usually.

In this context it is important to clarify some points about the Islamic credentials of the Islamist Mafias:

- a) The word “Islamist” here is used to refer to a specific political ideology, according to which, Islam should be the main source of regulation and legitimacy of a political system or regime.¹ The adjective Islamist is related to this *political* ideology and not to Islam as a religion and nor even to Muslims as followers of this faith. Put succinctly, the Islamist Mafias are Islamist, only because they adopt an Islamist rhetoric and symbolism not because of their supposed religious fervour.

- b) The members (which must be intended as both the individuals who are part of the enabling network related to the Islamist Mafias and the “jihadists” on the ground) of the Islamist Mafias are not all Muslims. In fact, one of the most important characteristics of these organizations, that will be showed in-depth in the analysis of the case studies, is their ability to be supported by a wide range of different subjects who are not necessarily Muslims and that consequently have a little or no interest in shaping a political regime based on the Quran or the *sharia*. A clarification is needed on this aspect. The concepts of membership and support are often considered as separate in the study of terrorist organisations. Let us think, for example, to the studies on radicalisation which tend to distinguish between radicals which support the terrorist groups but are not involved in committing attacks and the proper terrorists.² This distinction is crucial and needs to be made when scholars analyse phenomena such as the lone actor terrorists, but it makes little sense in the context of the Islamist Mafias or the crime terror nexus at large. As I will show in the next chapters in fact, people like the former Burkinabe president Compaoré (a Christian) or the Turi tribe in Afghanistan (Shia Muslims) are not directly involved in the actions undertaken by the Islamist Mafias but they encourage these actions and, above all, they profit from the existence and the development of these criminal organisations. Even if they are not on field shooting and bombing with the Islamist Mafioso these actors gain money and influence from their criminal activities. For this reason, in a context in which people join the Islamist Mafias to increase their power the distinction

¹ See N. Ayubi, “*Political Islam*” Routledge (1991)

² P. Hedges “*Radicalisation: examining a concept, its use and abuse*” Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses, Vol. 9 No. 10, pp. 12-18 (2017)

between membership and support increasingly lose sense and appears in some ways forced. Curiously, this aspect of the membership vs. relationship dichotomy in terrorist groups coincides with the debate on the so-called “grey area” in the studies on Mafias (the implementation of activities who helps the Mafias by, for instance, bureaucrats and politicians who are not strictly members of the Mafias).³ The grey area concept has also been used recently from an economic perspective in the studies on terrorism, showing how some levels of problematisation are present regarding this issue despite the schematic distinction between supporters and members.⁴ What is important to highlight here is how even in the context of this work, which involves the analysis of Mafia and Mafioso phenomena, this distinction appears to be forced or unappropriated. As claimed by Santino, such differentiation remains relevant only for those who analyse Mafias through an organicist approach and the same can be said for the Islamist Mafias.⁵ As I have stated at the beginning of this thesis the concept of Islamist Mafias, as well as the definitional model adopted for it, refuses the structural approach because of its weaknesses and consequently such a distinction makes no difference nor for what the Islamist Mafias do in practice nor for the aims of this analysis. In sum, modern criminal phenomena are characterised by a presence of the so-called grey area where the difference between support and membership is blurred and its evaluation is linked mainly to the chosen interpretative approaches rather than to an honest evaluation of empirical facts. In the proceeding chapters the empirical data will show how this distinction makes little difference for the analysis of the Islamist Mafias too. In fact, the kind of support that some non-Muslim subjects offer to the organization is different and much more concrete and pragmatic than the ideological or rhetorical one analysed by authors such as Ebner.⁶ The relationship between Islamist Mafias and their non-Muslim supporters is characterized instead by a form of pragmatism similar to the one analysed by Gerges⁷ or Weiss and Hassan⁸ in relation to the Islamic State. Consequently, to define the Islamist Mafias as a criminal organisation whose membership is composed also by non-Muslims, is not wrong from a conceptual and factual perspective. It is just another of the many similarities between Mafioso and terrorist organisations which the literature has not fully problematised and explored yet.

³ R. Catanzaro and J. Castagna “A watershed year for both the Mafia and the state” Italian Politics Vol. 8 pp. 134-150 (1993)

⁴ N. Farooqi “Hawala” in A. Ledeneva “Global Encyclopaedia of Informality, Volume 2: Understanding Social and Cultural Complexity” UCL Press (2018) pp. 143-151

⁵ U. Santino and R. Sciarrone “Area Grigia e Borghesia Mafiosa” Centro Siciliano di Documentazione Giuseppe Impastato (2015)

⁶ See J. Ebner, “The Rage” I.B. Tauris (2017)

⁷ See F. Gerges, “ISIS: a history” Princeton University Press (2016)

⁸ See M. Weiss and H. Hassan “ISIS, inside the army of terror” Phaidon Press (2015)

- c) The value of Islam and Islamism for the Islamist Mafioso is purely instrumental. Of course, they use the main ideological themes of the Islamic epic in their propaganda but their use of those is biased and aimed only at the achievement of a form of legitimacy or recognition. In this sense it is useful to recall here the contributions by Platteau,⁹ Ahmad,¹⁰ and Calculli and Strazzari¹¹ who have given some important examples of this process of manipulation of Islam for the pursuit of specific political agendas. Put succinctly, Islamism as a political ideology and Islam as a religion are, in the hands of the Islamist Mafias, convenient tools that can be employed for the achievement of their aims.

Two other clarifications need to be given in relation to the objectives and the strategic thought of the Islamist Mafias. In the definition I have used the expression “*increment their power*” and for this reason it is important to specify how the aims of the Islamist Mafias differ from the ones of the common terrorist groups and other non-mafioso criminal organizations.

Specifically:

a) Islamist Mafias have a non-antagonistic relationship with official power actors.

The analysis of the case studies will demonstrate how the relationship between Islamist Mafias and legitimate power actors is forged more on cooperation rather than confrontation. Consequently, the Islamist Mafias, just like the Mafias, are more conflict-regulators than conflict-solvers. In this context it is important to give a lexical clarification. In this chapter, for the sake of brevity, I will define the expression ‘official power actors’ all the religious, political and economic institutions which are legitimised by the states’ laws. All these *legal* institutions stand in contrast to the Islamist Mafias as a criminal (so not legal) phenomenon. Not only the official power actors don’t fight these organizations, but they also use them to pursue their agendas. An objection could arise about this assumption, in relation to the involvement of the Islamist Mafias in civil wars and insurgencies. Still, as I will show in the rest of this thesis, the participation in wars does not interfere with the criminal interests of these organizations. Indeed, there is a growing literature on organised crime which has demonstrated that war can be an option for criminal groups in our time.¹² The idea according to which

⁹ J-P. Platteau. “*Political Instrumentalization of Islam and the Risk of an Obscurantist Deadlock*”. World Development Vol.39 No.2, pp. 243-260 (2011)

¹⁰ See A. Ahmad “*Jihad & Co.*” Oxford University Press (2017)

¹¹ See M. Calculli and F. Strazzari “*Terrore Sovrano*”, Il Mulino (2017)

¹² J. Cockayne “*Hidden Power*” Oxford University Press (2016) p.306

criminal organizations cannot be able to participate in war or mobilise an army, and that consequently every actor participating in insurgencies wants to achieve a political objective, is due to an outdated conception of Organised Crime which is increasingly dismissed by the evolution of conflicts on the ground. Bauer, for example, assesses how analysts should not be surprised by the ability of modern criminal organizations to have their own armies and to be involved in insurgencies.¹³ The same concept has been echoed by Muggah and Sullivan: “Put succinctly, cartels and gangs may not necessarily aim to displace recognised governments, but the net results of their activities is that they do.”¹⁴ The evaluation of the relationship between Islamist Mafias and civil wars offers another opportunity to challenge some preceding analysis on this subject. As we will see in the case studies (especially in the one of the Haqqani Network) the relationships of the Islamist Mafias with the states has been analysed according to the proxy warfare theoretical paradigm which tends to evaluate these relationships as “impermanent, temperamental and opportunistic”.¹⁵ What is interesting to note, in the proceeding chapters of this work is how the relationship between Islamist Mafias and power actors do not stop at end of a conflict but instead it changes in its nature. In the beginning states support these organisations to fight against an enemy but in the aftermath of civil wars they continue to support, or at least they tolerate, their parallel rule over a certain community. In sum the Islamist Mafias – states relationships shift from proxy warfare to what I call proxy governmentality and in doing so they became more evidently similar to the Mafias-states relationships.

Finally by focusing on the enrichment in terms of power (not money or influence) I want to go beyond the profit vs ideology dichotomy which has characterized the study of the crime terror nexus until today and that makes little or no sense anymore to analyse and explain both the phenomenon of convergence and the crime terror nexus in general.

b) The objective of the Hidden Power

If the Islamist Mafias do not want to achieve any political objective what is their real aim? The Islamist Mafias want to build a mutual beneficial relationship with official power institutions just like the Mafias. These criminal organizations aim to achieve a form of absolute power which is unaccountable by definition. In this sense, the Islamist Mafias are another field of application of James Cockayne’s theories on the Hidden Power.¹⁶ In brief, the Islamist Mafias will use a wide range

¹³ A. Bauer “*Ultime Notizie dal Mondo del Crimine*” CNRS Éditions (2013) p. 10

¹⁴ R. Muggah and J. P. Sullivan “*The coming Crime Wars*” Foreign Policy (2018)

¹⁵ A. Mumford “*Proxy Warfare*” Polity Books (2013) p. 16

¹⁶ J. Cockayne *Ibidem* p.10

of licit and illicit tools to gain influence over a specific community without any desire of becoming an accountable, explicit, visible power actor.

2. The Islamist Mafias in comparison to other theories on the crime terror nexus

I have illustrated above the definition of the Islamist Mafias from a normative and comparative perspective. Before applying this theory to Sales' five elements model analysed in the previous chapter it is important to compare the Islamist Mafias' theory with some relevant theories on the debate on the crime terror nexus. This analysis will be useful in order to start to test the theory itself and to highlight the innovations that it brings to the literature on the crime terror nexus.

2.1 The “Narcoterrorism” theory

As mentioned in chapter I, the term “narcoterrorism” was not borne in the academic context, but it was an expression used by the former Peruvian president Belaundé Terry to describe the surge of attacks made by drug cartels against security forces of his country in the 1980s. Despite this strictly “political” origin, the term narcoterrorism has been used also within academia and it has brought about the publication of a conspicuous number of studies on this topic.¹⁷ The entire narcoterrorism theoretical framework is characterized by the profit versus ideology dichotomy and for academics engaged in the study of this topic, narcoterrorism is characterized by the merging of two previously distinct criminal organizations: terrorists and drug cartels/traffickers.¹⁸ An appropriate definition of narcoterrorism is the one given by Hartelius who defines it as: “[...]a part of an illegal complex of drugs, violence and power, where the illegal drug trade and the illegal exercise of power have become aggregated in such a way that they threaten democracy and the rule of law”¹⁹

It is evident how the narcoterrorism theory is in many ways outdated and unable to give a proper explanation of the most recent evolutions (and convergences) of the crime terror nexus. First of all, the narcoterrorism model is always characterized by the alliance of two distinct criminal

¹⁷ A. Schmid “*Links between. Terrorism and Drug Trafficking, A case of Narco-Terrorism?*” International Summit on Democracy, Terrorism and Security (2005) see another example of this literature in P-A. Chouvy, “*Narco-Terrorism in Afghanistan*”. Jamestown Foundation (2004)

¹⁸ See D.J. Davies, “*Narcoterrorism – A Unified Strategy to Fight a Growing Terrorist Menace*”, Ardsley Transnational Publishers (2002)

¹⁹ J. Hartelius “*Narcoterrorism*” Swedish Carnegie Institute (2008)

organizations and it tends to exclude any form of convergence along the crime terror continuum. Moreover, the narcoterrorism framework analyses the alliances between terrorists and drug traffickers as a mere criminal fact ignoring how official power actors are in many cases involved in these illicit trades. Put succinctly, the advocates of the narcoterrorism framework tend to make sense of the drug-terror alliance as a rational choice made by two criminal organizations and they tend to downgrade the involvement of legitimate political actors in these merging processes. Also, the lenses of narcoterrorism cannot be used to describe the case studies which are the object of this thesis. As illustrated by Rosato in relation to the Sahel region; the Narcoterrorism approach tends to downgrade the role of protection exercised by the local elites towards the criminal organizations.²⁰ What the Islamist Mafia model does, and that the narcoterrorism framework doesn't, it is to avoid looking at the crime terror nexus as a mere criminal phenomenon in which authorities are not involved. Instead, with this new framework I want to look at the deep connections between certain political systems and these criminal organizations: how they meet and why they decide to cooperate. I analyse the phenomenon as both a proper merging between crime and terrorism under the same organization and above all I want to demonstrate how these criminal organizations are able to serve the official power actors in achieving their political objectives.

To conclude, it is important here to highlight another weakness of the narcoterrorism approach and of the literature linked to it: their excessive reliance on drug trafficking. As highlighted by part of the literature, it seems that for the supporters of narcoterrorism, the only way to prove the existence of the crime terror nexus itself is to demonstrate the active involvement of terrorists in drug trafficking.²¹ In following this approach, some authors tend to reduce the merging between terrorism and organised crime because organizations such as AQIM and the Haqqani Network “only” tax the drug convoys in their areas.²² On the contrary, the Islamist Mafias aim to overcome this sort of myopia and to show how drug trafficking is only one of the many illegal activities carried out by terrorists.

2.2 The strategic mimesis

A new interesting theory for the understanding of armed groups strategic behaviour has been formulated by Marina Calculli. In her 2018 book “*Come uno Stato*” (*As a State*) she analyses the relationship between Lebanese political institutions and Hezbollah from the birth of the latter until

²⁰ V. Rosato “*Hybrid Orders between Terrorism and Organised Crime: The case of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb*” *African Security* Vol. 9 No.2, pp. 110-135 (2016)

²¹ L.I. Shelley “*Dirty Entanglements: Corruption, Crime and Terrorism*” Cambridge University Press (2014) p. 113

²² W. Lacher “*Challenging the Myth of the Drug-Terror Nexus in the Sahel*” Kofi Annan Foundation, WACD, (2013)

today.²³ The specific aim of this book is to give an interpretative framework of the evolution of Hezbollah from armed group to legitimate power player. Calculli assesses how the Hezbollah has achieved this process of normalization through the “strategic mimesis”, a process that the author defines as: “a peculiar resiliency strategy by a non-state actor [in order to *e.n.*] produce a moral impediment for the State/States to push their rivalry toward a final and decisive confrontation”.²⁴

The reason why it is important to consider the strategic mimesis here, is because of the massive involvement of Hezbollah in criminal activities, which rends it today as one of the most analyzed cases in the crime terror nexus studies. Following the theory by Calculli it could be argued the even in the case of the Islamist Mafias the involvement in criminal activities could be part of a strategy aimed at competing with the state in terms of legitimacy and morality.

According to the definition given by the author three elements must be present in order to have a process of strategic mimesis: a) a non-state actor should compete in the supply of services typical of the state; b) there must be an imitation of rhetoric and moral assumptions of the state by a non-state actor; c) this competition should take place in the public sphere.²⁵

The theory of the Islamist Mafias cannot be fitted within the phenomenon of the strategic mimesis because it differs in all these three points. As I will show below the Islamist Mafias, through criminal Keynesianism (the parallel welfare system) for instance, are indeed able to perform some activities which are the prerogative of a state but in the cases of the SJG and the HN this form of welfare is not official and above all they cannot be administrated on such a large scale as done by Hezbollah.²⁶ Secondly, the Islamist Mafias do not mimic the states rhetoric nor their moral compass. On the contrary, these organizations already believe themselves to be morally superior in comparison to the states and this assumption is echoed by their propaganda. Moreover, this superiority is based on other sources of legitimations which differ from the one of the state (for example the tribal social codes) so the social legitimacy of the Islamist Mafia starts from completely different assumptions. Consequently, the rhetoric used by the Islamist Mafias is different from the one of the states’ and above all the Islamist Mafias tend to present themselves as the vanguard of a global moral and social order, not of a local one. Moreover, the relations between the Islamist Mafias and the state are not based on competition but more often on cooperation. Finally, the Islamist Mafias are not interested

²³ See M. Calculli “*Come uno Stato*”, Vita e Pensiero (2018)

²⁴ M. Calculli *Ibidem.* p.12

²⁵ M. Calculli *Ibidem* pp.44-45

²⁶ A. R. Norton “*Hezbollah*” Princeton University Press (2007) pp. 106-112

at all in competing with the states in the public sphere. If they were interested in such a kind of confrontation they would have already formed, as Hezbollah did, their own parties in order to compete at the ballot box. Instead, the SJG and the HN have categorically refused any form of “legalisation” or participation in the official political game, preferring instead to infiltrate the states’ institutions.

2.3 The Dirty Entanglements theory

In her book *Dirty Entanglements* Louise I. Shelley gives a systematic explanation of the relations between terrorism, organized crime and power actors intended as licit economic ones.²⁷ In examining the case of the attack on the In Amenas Oil refinery in 2013 the author explains the above-mentioned entanglements:

“As is discussed subsequently, some analysts of the crime-terror problem seek to define the problem as one linked to weak and fragile states. But as this Algerian and AQIM example illustrates, without the financial support and complicity of financial institutions, in the developed world, insurgent groups would have the capability to carry out such expensive attacks. (...) therefore, companies are not only the victims of terrorist attacks, such as in In Amenas, but are also the facilitators of this insurgent activity through their large payments to insurgent groups. This illustrates that crime and terrorism intersect with the legitimate economy in diverse ways”²⁸

Shelley aims to explain the new developments on the crime terror nexus through the interactions between terrorists, criminals and corruption. Shelley also puts her theory in a different context than the one of the crime terror nexus: “Crime and terrorist interactions are much more complex than models of divergence and convergence that were once posited.”²⁹

From a comparative perspective, *Dirty Entanglements* represents one step closer to the path followed by the Islamist Mafias’ theory. Shelley in fact recognises in part the presence of the links between criminal organizations and legitimate power actors but she reaches completely different conclusions. First of all, from an analytical point of view even Shelley analyses the entanglements as the outcome of the alliance of two separate subjects (terrorism and organised crime). These subjects do not merge

²⁷ See L.I. Shelley *Ibidem*

²⁸ L. I. Shelley *Ibidem* p.3

²⁹ L. I. Shelley *Ibidem* p.117

but they share a common “ecosystem” in which they interact and cooperate.³⁰ Shelley also argues how corruption is the element through which these alliances are forged.³¹

The characteristics of this system are far from the one of the Islamist Mafias. The use of the generic term/concept corruption in fact does not explain the wide range of interactions between terrorism and organised crime on the one hand and criminal organizations and power actors on the other. If, as Shelley argues, “terrorists, like organized criminals, having purchased the cooperation of law enforcement officials, border guards, or other officials, and so are able to accomplish operational goals”³² why sometimes do presidents and ministers also decide to co-opt terrorist organizations?

There is another aspect on which the Islamist Mafia differs from the Dirty Entanglements. According to Shelley it seems that the interactions between legitimate power actors and criminal organizations can occur only because of corruption.³³ This conception is far from the aim of my theory. The Islamist Mafias not only penetrate the state but is also in turn co-opt and cooperate with political institutions when they share the same objectives. A final consideration must also be done about the value of corruption in the analysis by Shelley. It seems in fact that the author is not able to look beyond the single episodes of corruption which have characterized some terrorist attacks in the past. In fact, in the areas where many terrorist organizations are operating it seems that corruption is more the normal status of things instead of an exceptional case and when corruption is systematic it is not corruption anymore, is an unofficial way to rule over a certain community.³⁴ It is this inability to investigate the relations between criminal organizations and political actors that puts the Islamist Mafias and the Dirty Entanglements’ theory on two different paths.

2.4 The Crime Terror Nexus theories in relation to the Islamic State

The rise and fall of the Islamic State and its project of the installation of a new caliphate has attracted the attention of many authors inside and outside academia. The studies on the crime terror nexus are not an exception to this, and in fact the IS has been analyzed also through the lenses of this field of research in terrorism studies.³⁵

³⁰ L. I. Shelley *Ibidem* p.117

³¹ L. I. Shelley *Ibidem* p.1

³² L. I. Shelley *Ibidem* p.86

³³ L. I. Shelley *Ibidem* p.5

³⁴ See I. Sales and S. Melorio “*Storia dell’Italia corrotta*” Rubbettino (2019)

³⁵ See. P. Cockburn, “*The Rise of Islamic State*” Verso books (2015)

The American novelist Don Winslow for example, has compared the similarities between IS and Latin American Drug Cartels from a communicative perspective in an article that appeared on the Daily Beast in 2015.³⁶ Through the lenses of what the author calls “terro-communication” Winslow highlights how the videos of beheadings and tortures, as well as the humiliation and dehumanization of the opponents, put the so-called Caliphate and the drug cartels on the same continuum.³⁷ Winslow highlights also how some common themes are present in both groups propaganda.³⁸ In the same vein, the journalist Hiba Khan has tried to debunk the religious ideology of Al-Qaeda and IS in an article written for the Independent in 2017.³⁹ Khan argues how these terrorist organizations are not concerned about the achievement of their political objectives but they are a product of the fact that “global gang violence has been Islamised”.⁴⁰ The author shows also how since both of these groups are involved in drug trafficking they should not be considered as purely religious but instead it must be noted how they use religion to hide their real, criminal, objectives.⁴¹

Even academia has tried to analyse the Islamic State through the lenses of the crime terror nexus. This is the case for example of the studies made by Phillips and Valasik.⁴² According to the authors there are four main similarities between the Islamic State and the American drug-selling gangs that allow us to consider the IS as a common street gang: 1) the presence of a “bureaucratic but spread-out structure”⁴³; 2) the attraction exercised on marginalised youth; 3) the similarity between their violence and criminality which are broad in scope; 4) the exploitation of women.⁴⁴ Another similarity highlighted by the authors is a hierarchical one: the IS, like street gangs, has a hierarchical chain of command which is also decentralised with independent groups or cells.⁴⁵ Other contributions within academia go even further and compare the Islamic State to the Mafia.⁴⁶ This is the case of authors like Éric Martel who published an article on this subject on the *Revue Française de Gestion* in 2016. Here the author highlights how the Islamic State is an organization characterized by a strong “ideological discipline” which is used to hide or justify its criminal activities just like the Mafia.⁴⁷

³⁶ D. Winslow, “What ISIS Learned from the Cartels” Daily Beast (2015)

³⁷ D. Winslow *Ibidem*

³⁸ D. Winslow *Ibidem*

³⁹ H. Khan “Isis and al-Qaeda are little more than glorified drug cartels, and their motivation is money not religion” The Independent (2017)

⁴⁰ H. Khan *Ibidem*

⁴¹ H. Khan *Ibidem*

⁴² M. Phillips and M. Valasik “Understanding modern terror and insurgency through the lens of street gangs: ISIS as a case study” Journal of Criminological Research, Policy and Practice Vol.3, No. 3 pp. 192-207 (2017)

⁴³ M. Phillips and M. Valasik *Ibidem*

⁴⁴ M. Phillips and M. Valasik *Ibidem*

⁴⁵ M. Phillips and M. Valasik *Ibidem*

⁴⁶ É. Martel, “L’organisation État islamique, est-elle une structure mafieuse ?” *Revue Française de Gestion* No. 260 pp. 160-168 (2016)

⁴⁷ É. Martel *Ibidem*

Particular attention must be given to the analysis of the aims of the Islamic State proposed by the author: “Just like the Mafias, its [the IS one *e.n.*] primary objective is to defend an old ruling class which, in the case of Iraq, is similar to the elite of an ethnic and religious group: the Iraqi Sunni.”⁴⁸ In sum the Islamic State must be perceived as the armed wing of a religious group or élite which is in search of its place within a specific political environment.

After having seen these contributions and comparisons between the IS and organised crime or Mafias, a question arises: can the Islamic State be considered an Islamist Mafia too? The answer is no, and for many reasons. First of all, the Islamic State is an organization with a clear political project: the creation of a state. This aim puts it in a different context in comparison to the Islamist Mafias for two reasons: 1) the Islamic State is not willing to create any form of stable cooperation with official power actors and political institutions. Some alliances can be done with states but are, in the end, very short and always instrumental to the *political* objectives of the group.⁴⁹ 2) The Islamic State is not interested in remaining a hidden power as the Islamist Mafias are. It wants to be perceived as a state and as a tangible political and administrative authority.⁵⁰ Of course it cannot be ignored the fact that the Islamic State is involved in criminal activities, and that a criminal component is present in its activities,⁵¹ but this does not necessarily mean that the involvement in criminal activities and the commitment of crimes are the main objective of the organization.⁵² Moreover, it is often underestimated that the Islamic State has created more forms of cooperation with other criminal organizations than with proper political actors.⁵³ Do the IS leaders sit in a presidential office as the leaders of the SJGs did? Does the Islamic State enforce a tribal code of conduct and use it as a source of legitimacy as the Haqqani Network does? The answer is: of course not. Here lies the main difference between the Islamic State and the Islamist Mafias: for the latter the search of an absolute and adaptable form of power must always remain hidden, local, and at the service of power actors which are recognized by these organizations.

From these assumptions it is more appropriate to consider these contributions on the IS criminal nature for what they are: some intellectual contributions which want to challenge the prejudices which tend to underpin Islam and Muslims to terrorist groups.

⁴⁸ É. Martel *Ibidem*

⁴⁹ See C. Lister “*The Syrian Jihad*” Hurst Publishers (2015)

⁵⁰ A. Anfinson “*The Treachery of Images: Visualizing “Statehood” as a Tactic for the Legitimization of Non-State Actors*” *Terrorism and Political Violence* pp.1-19 (2019)

⁵¹ P. Cockburn, *Ibidem* p.12

⁵² L. Pollichieni “*Lo Stato Islamico continuerà a combattere*”, *Limes*, Rivista italiana di Geopolitica (2018)

⁵³ See C. Lister *Ibidem*

3. The application of the Islamist Mafias' theory to the Sales' model

To prove the existence of an Islamist Mafias it is crucial to compare the case studies with the definitional model introduced in chapter II. In this chapter I will test this possibility from a theoretical perspective. It is important to remember that, according to Sales, a criminal organization to be labelled as a Mafia must show five main characteristics: a) social recognition; b) have a relationship with legitimate power actors; c) have an economic ambivalence in relation to a productive system; d) be characterized by a criminal ideology; e) enforce a form of governmentality.

3.1. The social recognition

The Islamist Mafia, like the Mafias, enjoys a form of social recognition among the members of its society. The Islamist Mafias are the product of their social environment and their members are, metaphorically, the incarnation of some code of conduct and of a way of life that cannot be considered external nor detached from the societies in which they are present. It is important to remember here how my analysis on the social recognition of the Islamist Mafias is not characterized by any form of ethnic determinism. According to my research it is not possible to say if the behaviour of the Islamist Mafioso can be analysed as an extremist interpretation of these social customary norms (something which is instead clear in the case of Mafias). Nevertheless, what can be assessed is how these criminal organizations use these behavioural codes in an instrumental way as I will show in the next chapters. For now, it is important to verify whether the societies from which the Islamist Mafias are borne show the same social and behavioural elements as the Mafioso ones and if consequently they face the same Hobbesian dilemma illustrated in the previous chapter. Put succinctly, in order to understand if an Islamist Mafia exists it is important to verify if Islamist Mafioso societies exist too .

A first misconception that must be already addressed here is that the importance of the social behavioural codes must not be underestimated, and it cannot be generically linked to the Salafi ideas which characterises other jihadists groups in the world. As pointed out by Ressler and Brown in the case of the Haqqani Network it is the adherence of this organization to some pre-existent social norms which allow them to enjoy a popular support that other terrorist groups do not have.⁵⁴ The same popular legitimacy has also been noted in the cases of the Sahelian Jihadi Groups.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ D. Ressler and V. Brown “*Fountainhead of Jihad*”, Oxford University Press (2013) p.53

⁵⁵ V. Rosato *Ibidem*

It can be assessed from a general perspective how the literature and data denotes how Islamist Mafioso and the Mafioso societies share some analogous social elements which are the one of honour, the one of ownerships as an element for the increase of the social status and also the problems of the unregulated violence:

a) The theme of honour

The concept of honour as a hierarchical and regulative element from a social perspective is characteristic of both the Tuareg and the Pashtun societies. This characteristics has been noted by Stephen Harmon in his studies on the Sahelian instability in relation to the Tuaregs: “[The Tuareg *e.n.*] practice an *honour/shame* culture. At the centre of this honour/shame culture was the *temushaga*, the way of the Imushagh, which meant knowledge of the honour and shame and knowledge of the one’s lineage (*temet*) [*italics mine*].”⁵⁶ In the same vein, in his studies on Pashtuns and the Afghan civil war Isac Kfir noted how:

“At the core of *Pashtunwali* [the Pashtun’s code for social conduct *e.n.*] is *badal* (honour, though some define it as revenge). *Badal* is mainly personal but it also has bearing on the group, as it means that an offense of any form or magnitude demands retaliation, which is not only a personal duty, but a family one that also effects the sub-clan, the clan and the tribe. Characteristics of the *Pashtunwali* are: *melmastia* (hospitality) and *badragga* (safe conduct) and these are linked to *badal* in that they refer to how one treats one's guests; failure to treat one's guest properly amounts to an offence on one's honour.”⁵⁷

In sum in both these societies, just as in the Mafioso ones, there is a strong social value for the concept of honour which is binding not only on an individual basis but also on a collective one. In this context, it is also useful to recall the words of Lecoq in relation to the Tuareg societies: “The Imush [the caste of warriors in Tuaregs’ society *e.n.*] distinguish themselves by a culture of honour and shame, which is *quite common among Mediterranean cultures*, and most anthropologists classify them precisely on the grounds of this particular trait [*Italic mine e.n.*].”⁵⁸ So Lecoq recognises a similarity between the Tuareg society and the Mediterranean ones in which the Mafioso behaviour appears, as an extreme version of the social code of conduct.

⁵⁶ S. A. Harmon, “*Terror and Insurgency in the Sahara-Sahel region.*” (Routledge, 2014) ebook

⁵⁷ I. Kfir “*The Role of the Pashtuns in understanding the Afghan Crisis*”, Perspectives on Terrorism (2009)

⁵⁸ B. Lecoq “*Disputed Desert*” Brill (2010) p.5

b) The concept of ownership

As a consequence of the honour-based culture even in the Islamist Mafioso societies ownership and property have a strong social value. Even in these societies, one of the greatest insults for someone's honour is the damage or the theft of property. As noted by Zeman on Pashtun societies: "A man's *namus* [honourability] is expressed through his ability to dominate and defend his property, including his household and his wife and female relatives."⁵⁹ Even in the Islamist Mafioso societies the increase of the things/persons possessed is considered positively within the social environment. As Lawrie has written about the Pashtun: "(...) are interested in three things *zan*, *zar* and *zamin* (women, land and gold)".⁶⁰ The concept of ownership is sometimes related to the social status of an individual and it can be lost together with the things he or she owns: "The ideology of equality among the Pushtun is so strong that once a man is no longer able to demonstrate his autonomy as an independent landowner he is no longer be considered a Pashtun".⁶¹ What is important to stress here is how this conception of ownership as practiced by the Pashtun, especially concerning women, is different from the purely Islamic one prescribed by the Quran. In this sense, Chaudhary is right in highlighting how the fundamental elements of the Pashtunwali concerning ownership were more influenced by the Pashtun's tribal identity than Islam proper.⁶² In the context of the Islamist Mafias this is, paradoxically, a divergence which becomes a convergence toward our definitional approach. Just like the Mafias have built their legitimacy on a strictly social support related to the adherence of some pre-existent behavioural customary codes the Islamist Mafias did the same. This concept will be clearer from a practical perspective when I will illustrate in the fifth chapter how the Haqqanis were unsuccessful in their uprising against the Kabul regime when they didn't strengthen their social credibility.

The social value of private property is highly considered even among the Tuaregs even if the relationship between honour and ownership is in some cases blurred or less direct than in the Pashtun societies. Some anthropologists such as Moritz regard Tuareg societies as systems ruled by what he

⁵⁹ Philip M Zeman "Tribalism and Terror" Small Wars & Insurgencies Vol.20 No.3 pp. 681-709 (2009)

⁶⁰ W.G.A. Lawrie "The Way of the Pathans" RUSI Journal (2002)

⁶¹ P. Titus "Honour the Baloch, Buy the Pushtun: Stereotypes, Social Organization and History in Western Pakistan" Modern Asian Studies, Vol. 32 No.3 pp. 657-687 (1998)

⁶² M.A. Chaudhary "Honour Crimes in Pakistan: the case studies of the Pukhtun and the Punjabi societies" Anthropos Vol. 109 No.1 pp. 196-206 (2014)

calls an “open property regime”, a collectivist system where some vital goods are put in common.⁶³ This kind of conceptualisation of the role of ownership among the Tuareg is indeed simplistic and it does not take into account the social value that ownership plays in these societies. In fact, as demonstrated by other studies, such as Schlegel’s ones, it has been showed how in many events in a Tuareg’s communities life the concepts of honour and possession are deeply intertwined.⁶⁴ This is especially true for what concerns wedding arrangements in which a wealthier woman is considered more honourable than a less wealthy one.⁶⁵ Moreover, the presence of some goods occasionally put in common does not restrict, nor elide the link between possession and honour which is often regulated through the use of violence.⁶⁶ As reported by Rasmussen for instance, conflicts over properties are solved also with sword fights among contenders who in this way defend their respectability together with their properties in front of the rest of their community.⁶⁷ Finally, Tuareg’s philosophy towards warfare offers another example of the triangulation between honour, possession and violence. In fact, according to the *temushaga* there are some types of wars allowed which are aimed solely at the increase of the things possessed by the attackers.⁶⁸ These war scenarios are respectively the *tewet* and the *akafal* in which at the end of both the winner can legitimately take the opponent’s possessions as booty.⁶⁹ In sum, the ownership of goods is considered a legitimate reward for the honour of a single individual and consequently honour and possession are directly proportional among them.

c) Unregulated violence and conflict

As we have observed in the preceding chapter for what concerns the Mafioso societies, the customary norms based on honour encourage the use of private violence as a tool for social progression and enrichment in general. The same is true for the Islamist Mafioso societies. What it is interesting to note in relation to Islamist Mafioso societies is how even for Pashtun and Tuaregs the legitimization and the encouragement of the use violence is articulated through the duty of revenge. This link between revenge and violence among Pashtuns has been shown by Benson and Siddiqui:

⁶³ M. Moritz “*Open Property regimes*” International Journal of the Commons Vol. 10 No. 2, pp. 688-708 (2016)

⁶⁴ A. Schlegel “*Status, Property and the Value on Virginity*” American Ethnologists, Vol. 18 No. 4, pp. 719-734 (1991)

⁶⁵ A. Schelegel *Ibidem*

⁶⁶ S. Rasmussen “*Disputed Boundaries: Tuareg Discourse on Class and Ethnicity*” Ethnology Vol. 31 No. 4, pp. 351-365 (1992)

⁶⁷ S. Rasmussen “*Disputed Boundaries....*” *Ibidem*

⁶⁸ B. Lecoq *Ibidem* p.204

⁶⁹ B. Lecoq *Ibidem* p.204

“*Badal* can be roughly translated as retaliation or revenge, or as the balancing of an action with a reaction of similar weight and severity. In other words, *Badal* is a recognized right to extract proportional retribution. This right applies to individual Pashtun as well as for families, sub-tribal groups and tribes. *Badal* instils enforcement incentives (incentives to pursue and punish offenders) in a legal arrangement that does not recognize an executive with coercive power to police and punish. Indeed, *Badal* is both a right and an obligation. Victims are obliged to pursue retribution.”⁷⁰

The concept of revenge is expressed within Tuareg societies with the word *egha*, and even in this case is related to violence. As noted by Lecoq:

“*Egha* is closely connected to two other important concepts in Tamasheq society; *eshik*, honour, and *takaraket*, shame. *Egha* is the debt one contracts against those who have stained one’s honour and who have thus caused one’s shame. (...) Acts of revenge are not necessarily committed against those who caused the original feelings of wrath. They can be inflicted upon others who embody the same entity that caused the wrath.”⁷¹

Ethnographic works among the Tuareg communities give important information on the nature of revenge in these societies which is not negligible for the purpose of this thesis: the duty of *egha* can become intergenerational at its fullest and it can last until the contenders do not appease or they do not consider themselves satisfied.⁷² This characteristic of the relationship between collective/individual honour and violence is characteristic also of the Pashtun societies where: “[the violation of the tribal law *e.n.*] can lead to a ‘blood feud’ that can develop into long term feud between families, clans or tribes”.⁷³ Moreover, both these already turbulent social environments are further complicated by the fact that retaliation cannot be strictly aimed at the original authors of the wrath but also to his/her relatives.⁷⁴

Even within the Islamist Mafioso societies the effective use of private violence can led to the highest ranks of the society. It is for this reason that in both Tuareg and Pashtun societies the warrior figure

⁷⁰ B.L. Benson and Z.R. Siddiqui, “*Pashtunwali - Law for the Lawless, defense for the stateless*” International Review of Law and Economics Vol. 37, pp. 108-120 (2013)

⁷¹ B. Lecoq *Ibidem* p.186

⁷² B. Lecoq *Ibidem* p.268

⁷³ Philip M. Zeman “*Tribalism....*” *Ibidem*

⁷⁴ Philip M. Zeman “*Tribalism....*” *Ibidem* for examples of this characteristic in Tuareg societies see B. Lecoq *Ibidem* p.186

is remarkably considered. This is clearly visible in the case of the first ones in which the *imushagh* (warriors) occupy the top positions of the community.⁷⁵ In the Islamist Mafioso societies the figure of the ‘honourable man’ (a characteristic of the Mafioso ones) is substituted by the one of the ‘honourable warrior’. Warriors tend to be the highest social class in these societies because of their ability in exercising violence and in obtaining two advantages in comparison to the rest of the population: 1) their ability to preserve their honour; 2) their ability to preserve theirs and potentially gain the other’s possessions. In the Islamist Mafioso societies, the tales of warriors and their epics are related to the preservation and transmission of the main elements of the social codes of conduct above all the one of the use of private violence.⁷⁶

Within this competition for honour every player is constantly menaced by the others. This dog-eat-dog warfare has been pictured by Glatzer who wrote about the Pashtun societies: “social and economic inequality, which of course exists, is not given by nature or birth but it is achieved individually and is threatened and open to change at any time.”⁷⁷ These conclusions are not so distant from the ones made by Arlacchi about the mafioso societies, as discussed in the previous chapter⁷⁸. The same status of unregulated warfare emerges also from the Tuareg societies which are characterized by the everlasting duty to avenge any confrontation against individual honour as well. The relevance of the all-out warfare characterising the Tuareg society has been one of the main causes which has prevented the Tuareg from creating a unified political authority.⁷⁹

What is important to point out at the conclusion of this analysis are mainly two factors: 1) the deep behavioural and cultural similarities which are present between Mafioso and Islamist Mafioso societies; 2) the outcome of the codes of conduct which regulate the daily life in these social contexts produce an everlasting form of instability. Put succinctly, the Islamist Mafioso societies after centuries of life according to their codes of conduct have found themselves unable to put an end to their internal feuds together with their inability to transform their codes into proper laws and, by consequence, their societies into political states or authorities. This poses for the Islamist Mafioso societies the same Hobbesian dilemma experienced by the Mafioso ones. The *Pasthunwali* and the *Temushaga* as customary codes are able to impose a form of regulation to social interactions and,

⁷⁵ B. Lecoq *Ibidem* p.5

⁷⁶ B. Lecoq *Ibidem* p.186

⁷⁷ B. Glatzer, “*The Pashtun Tribal system*”, in G. Pfeffer and D.K. Behera “*Concepts of Tribal Society*” Concept Publishers (2002) p.271

⁷⁸ See P. Arlacchi “*La Mafia imprenditrice*” Il Saggiatore (2010)

⁷⁹ B. Lecoq *Ibidem* p. 268

arguably, the exercise of violence.⁸⁰ Still, the great limit of these codes is that they are not able to bring stability to the social system as whole. Even in the case of the Islamist Mafioso society this Hobbesian dilemma can only be solved through patronage, or better, by the influence of external actors who are the only one able to freeze the conflict and to avoid the production of the negative externalities related to it. The social basis for consensus on Mafioso and Islamist Mafioso societies relies on the same elements and they produce the same problems. For the aim of this thesis we need to understand now if the external patronage on these communities takes the same dynamics highlighted in the previous chapter.

3.2. Relations with legal powers

In the second chapter I showed how the relationship between Mafia and legitimate power actors is a crucial element which distinguishes Mafia from other criminal organizations. The relationship between Mafia and power is not merely predatory and cannot be reassumed only with corruption. To demonstrate the existence of the Islamist Mafias it is mandatory to demonstrate the presence of this kind of relations.

To verify the compatibility or at least the similarities between the Mafias and the Islamist Mafias relationships with official power actors it is useful to propose even here the Mafia-power continuum introduced in the previous chapter.

⁸⁰ A. De Georgio, “*Viaggio nel Mali del Nord dove si rimpiange il welfare jihadista*” Limes, rivista italiana di geopolitica (2015)

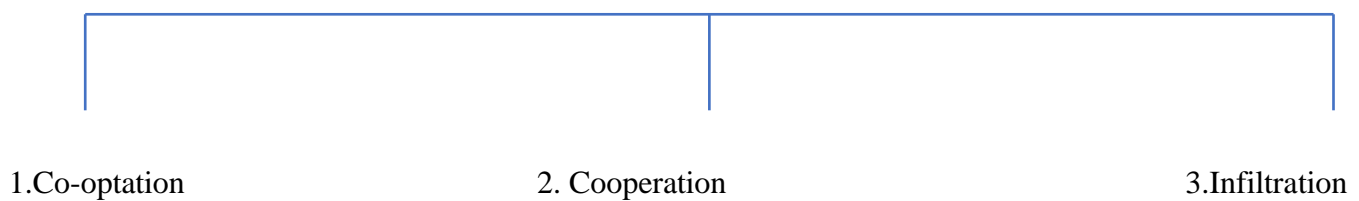


Figure 6: The Islamist Mafia-Power continuum

Even in the case of the Islamist Mafias the interaction between them and the official political players can be categorised into three main scenarios: co-optation, cooperation and infiltration. For the moment, I will give a general theoretical explanation of these relationships while the empirical findings which corroborates this model will be introduced in the case studies chapters.

The phenomenon of *co-optation* (the protection of Mafias by power actors which use them to achieve some common objectives) can be traced also in relation to the Islamist Mafias. In the case study chapters we will see how this has been mainly related to the use of violence for both, but in the case of the Haqqani Network, it was originated by the use of the organisation as an element of the proxy warfare between the West and the USSR.⁸¹ In the case of the Sahelian jihadi groups the phenomenon of co-optation was created in a different context and with slightly different aims. As in the case of the Network local institutions were interested in co-opting armed groups with a strong tribal base and strategically proficient in the use of violence in order to achieve two main objectives: 1) to keep some

⁸¹ D. Rassler and V. Brown “*Fountainhead of Jihad*”, Oxford University Press (2013) p.130

separatists movement under control⁸²; 2) to do the same with politically-violent groups active in the Sahel region.⁸³ What is important to understand in this first part of the continuum is how just like in the case of Mafias, the Islamist Mafias were co-opted for the very same reasons: their ability to use violence and their ethnic credibility and legitimacy. Another similarity between the two case studies which will be analysed in-depth in the next chapters is how the Islamist Mafias were both co-opted by their nation states but also by other powers active in their area. In observing the phenomenon of co-optation of the Islamist Mafias another historical similarity with the Mafias emerged. As will be shown in the case study chapters, the legitimate power actors might have underestimated how the proximity between tribal militias and terrorist organisations have in some ways favoured the merging between these two originally distinct phenomena. This similarity recalls the same dynamic which some historians have seen as the outcome of the proximity between Italian freemasons and criminals in the same jails during the pre-Unification period.⁸⁴

The second point of the continuum is the one of *cooperation*. Here it is not the official power actors that ask the Islamist Mafia for its services, but their reciprocal interests are coincidental, so they can cooperate. What is very interesting to note in relation to the Islamist Mafias is how in this segment of the continuum the relations between Islamist Mafias and religious power actors become more evident. On a conceptual perspective what should be noted here is how in the cooperation segment the role of the Islamist Mafias changes, even if slightly. Of course, at the base of the phenomenon of cooperation remains the ability of the Islamist Mafias in employing violence and in catalysing social legitimacy but at this stage the official power actors are more interested in their ability to govern rather than in the mere use of violence against one or more enemies. As we will see in the case studies analysis the Islamist Mafias here do more than threatening or using violence, but they start to increasingly settle disputes or monitor on field some businesses or dangers on behalf of the states' institutions. This is why for instance the SJGs started to escort drug convoys in the Sahel⁸⁵ or the Haqqani Network cooperates with NGOs.⁸⁶

It is important to note how the analysis of the cooperation segment shows more evidently the relationships between Islamist Mafias and the local religious institutions. In this case the cooperation with such authorities is facilitated by the sharing of a common ideological and political agenda which

⁸² J. C. Seely "A Political Analysis of Decentralisation: Coopting the Tuareg Threat in Mali" The Journal of Modern African Studies Vol.39 No.2, pp. 499-524 (2001)

⁸³ A. Morgan "The causes of the uprising in northern Mali" Think Africa (2012)

⁸⁴ See I. Sales "Storia dell'Italia Mafiosa" Rubbettino (2015)

⁸⁵ N. Gratteri and A. Nicaso "Oro bianco" Mondadori (2016) p.172

⁸⁶ D. Ressler and V. Brown *Ibidem* pp.108-109

occasionally culminate in a propagandistic and rhetoric support of the terrorist actions by the religious establishment.⁸⁷ This kind of support does not remain purely rhetorical since in some case the cooperation brings also to diplomatic cooperation between religious institutions and the Islamist Mafias.⁸⁸ To conclude on this theoretical analysis on the cooperation segment it is important to stress how in the case of the Islamist Mafias there is a divergent element in comparison to the case of Mafias. The latter have always denoted a certain level of governmentality in their relationship with official power actors while in the case of the Islamist Mafias the element of governmentality becomes more evident when they start to cooperate with the legal institutions.

The third point of the Islamist Mafias Power continuum is the one of *infiltration*. However, it is important to recall how this point of the continuum is the most difficult to prove and analyse because of the lack of information strictly related to it and to the study of criminal organizations in general. Nevertheless, as I will show in the case studies' analysis, the elements of infiltration of the local power systems are manifest in the cases of the Sahelian Jihadi Groups and of the Haqqani Network even if in different ways. In fact while the SJG have elected some of their members within national and local political institutions, the infiltrations implemented by the Haqqani Networks are in some ways less sophisticated than the ones used by the SJGs. In fact, as we will see later on according to the data it cannot be assessed that the HN has been able to elect some of its members but decided instead to rely on corruption and to support other political candidates to infiltrate the institutions.⁸⁹ Despite this slight discrepancy between the case studies, the comparison between Mafias and Islamist Mafias is marked by a strong convergence in their strategies in the local political context. What it is interesting to note, as I will show in detail in the following chapters is how Islamist Mafias tend to not use a great amount of violence in order to physically block the electoral processes as is commonly believed. For these reasons, the infiltration of their men in the elections and the legitimate institutions together with their lack of interest in using violence against polling stations, not only recalls evidently the infiltration protocols of the Mafias showed in the previous chapter but also they are symptomatic of a completely different nature of the political aims of the Islamist Mafias. It seems in fact that these criminal organizations are keener to create a parasitic relationship with political powers instead of an antagonistic one aimed at overthrowing them. The infiltration process involves also the relationship between the Islamist Mafias and the religious institutions. In this sense, there is another slight divergence between the Haqqanis and the SJGs. On the opposite of what happens with the proper political institutions in this context the SJGs tend to rely more on the proper infiltration of its men

⁸⁷ International Crisis Group “*The Insurgency in Afghanistan’s Heartland*” (2011)

⁸⁸ RFI “*Cessez-le-feu au Nord du Mali: la lettre très commentée d’Iyad Ag Ghali*” (2016)

⁸⁹ International Crisis Group, “*The insurgency.....*” *ibidem*

within the local religious institutions.⁹⁰ On the other hand, the Haqqanis have already enjoyed some form of religious credibility especially by virtue of the fact that Jalaluddin Haqqani, the founder of the Network, had undertaken advanced religious studies during his youth and was considered as a mawlawi.⁹¹ Still, the HN has exploited, as we will see in the fifth chapter, these credentials of its founder to create a network of madrassas during the period of the war against the USSR, through which it has been able to move some remarkable amounts of money and men to employ them in its activities. In brief, both these organisations have cultivated important relationships with the local religious establishments but while the SJG have infiltrated them the Haqqanis have exploited its religious credentials to create a parallel system of religious authorities.

3.3 The money laundering activities or the “economic ambivalence”

The Islamist Mafias are not just useful tools in the hands of political actors, but they are also functional for the economic systems in which they are present. The Islamist Mafias can manifest themselves in the economy in two ways: a) cooperating with licit economic actors; b) becoming entrepreneurs themselves. From a preliminary perspective it should be assessed how the Islamist Mafioso enterprise does not present some remarkable divergences from other political violent armed groups around the globe. Still, their support to legal economic enterprise (and so their relationships with legal economic actors) it is in some ways peculiar in relation to other armed groups.

a) The Islamist Mafioso enterprise

Just like the Mafia the Islamist Mafia is a criminal organization able to generate high economic revenues. The Islamist Mafias as well are interested in reinvesting the money earned through their illicit affairs in the legal economic system for two reasons: to increase their grip over their social environment and obviously to launder their dirty money.

Unfortunately, a lack of reliable data does not allow me to push the analysis of the economic relationships of the Islamist Mafias more in-depth. Specifically, we do not know if the Islamist

⁹⁰ M. Bøås, “Guns, Money and Prayers. AQIM’s Blueprint for Securing Control of Northern Mali” CTC Sentinel Vol. 7 No.4, pp.1-6 (2014)

⁹¹ See V. Brown and D. Rassler *Ibidem* p.38

Mafioso enterprise can reach all the same competitive advantages achieved by the Mafioso enterprise. Nevertheless, from a preliminary perspective some characteristics of the Islamist Mafioso enterprises can be assessed and will be showed in-depth in the following chapters, but to briefly summarise:

- 1) The Islamist Mafias are able to discourage competition in a certain market. This is of course due mainly to their ability in the use of violence which can be used to monopolise a market sector just like in the case of Mafias.⁹² As we will see later on, this is especially true for the Haqqani Network who have not hesitated in using their credentials in order to discourage other potential competitors in the industry sector in the city of Khost.⁹³
- 2) The Islamist Mafioso enterprise just like the Mafioso one, is constituted by activities characterised by low-skilled labour.⁹⁴ The Islamist Mafioso enterprises are mainly small shops, auto parts dealerships and others. In this sense they are perfectly identical to the Mafioso enterprises.
- 3) The Islamist Mafioso enterprises, like the Mafioso ones, are characterised by a remarkable financial availability linked to their revenues from illicit activities.⁹⁵

The analysis of the case studies denotes a certain level of divergence in their respective implementation of the Islamist Mafioso enterprises. The findings that I will illustrate in the fifth chapter in fact denotes a superior level of complexity of the enterprises owned by the Haqqanis in comparison to the ones of the Sahelian Jihadi Groups (they are more diffuse, able to gain contracts from the government, who can rely on an important amount of funding from international donors). The SJGS instead tend to rely more on small businesses and they do not seem to be able to control an entire economic sector in some areas as the Haqqanis do. Nevertheless, the similarities with Mafioso enterprise showed in chapter II and the common similarities mentioned above denoted a strong level of convergence between the two models.

⁹² G. Peters “*The Haqqani Network financing: the evolution of an industry*” Combating Terrorism Center at WestPoint (2012)

⁹³ G. Peters *Ibidem*

⁹⁴ Financial Action Task Force, “*Terrorist Financing in West and Central Africa*” (2013)

⁹⁵ S. Daniel “*AQMI, l’industrie de l’enlèvement*”. Fayard (2011) p.188

b) Supporting legal economic enterprises

Just like the Mafia the Islamist Mafia is not considered as incompatible with the market's spirit. On the contrary, its ability to infiltrate the legal economies is also related to the ability of this criminal organization to supply more convenient options in terms of costs and efficiency to the legal market operators.

The Islamist Mafias are able to capitalise on their Islamic credentials when dealing with the legal enterprises, moreover, their use of violence and their political connections make them a more stable business partner in contexts characterised by civil wars and frequently changing power landscapes. In this sense it is useful to recall here the words of Gretchen Peters on the Haqqani Network: "(...) businessmen credit the Haqqanis with a more pragmatic and long-term perspective on business deals and relationships, describing network leaders as more reasonable than the Quetta Shura [the Taliban *e.n.*] about late payments and the logistical difficulties that Afghan traders encounter from time to time".⁹⁶ The contrast between the Taliban and the Haqqanis highlighted in this passage is symptomatic of their credentials which seem not only more credible but also more reasonable than the ones of other extremists. Put succinctly, legal entrepreneurs tend to search more for the support of the Islamist Mafias than other terrorist groups because they know that they are more pragmatic than more extremist armed groups an element which is crucial for this organisation to cultivate their wide spectrum of relationships with different partners as we will see in the next chapters. In this context, another remarkable divergence between the Islamist Mafias and other violent groups active in their areas is also their ability to protect private properties and consequently to forge relationships based on reciprocal recognition and protection. This difference was evident for instance in the case of the Gao occupation during the Malian civil war of 2012. Local shopkeepers and businessmen recall how the Islamist Mafias, on the opposite side of the Tuareg separatists of the MNLA, were not only giving services but also protecting properties, preventing thefts and looting.⁹⁷ The above mentioned credentials conjugated with an effective protection of properties which helped the Islamist Mafias (both the Haqqanis⁹⁸ and the SJGs⁹⁹) in cultivating some remarkable business relationships with bigger donors and local shopkeepers.

⁹⁶ G. Peters, *Ibidem*

⁹⁷ S. A. Harmon *Ibidem*

⁹⁸ L. Harper, "Supporters "Are in the Oil Industry": Declassified DIA Cables Show Haqqani Network Revenue Streams" NSA Archives (2016)

⁹⁹ A. Ahmad *Ibidem* p.175

Finally, from a conceptual perspective a further element of convergence between Mafias and Islamist Mafias is their functionality to the local market systems. It must be not underestimated in fact how, to be considered as Mafias, the Islamist Mafias too need to fill the right spots in the bigger context of the local economies. Put succinctly they need to sell some services at a competitive price and they need to satisfy a certain demand. In this sense the Islamist Mafias have positioned themselves on that grey area where the local legal and illegal markets intersect and they do that in the most simple but proficient way: using violence in order to keep their entire system working by providing for instance the passage of smuggled goods. This ability should not be underestimated since the black markets represent not only an economic opportunity but also a possibility to increase their social legitimacy. As rightly noted by Aisha Ahmad, the ability of these organisation to keep the smuggling routes open and secure it is not only functional for the local businessmen who can cultivate their enterprises, avoiding to pay taxes, but also for the local population which see the black market goods as the only means for their livelihood.¹⁰⁰ In this context, the relationship between the Islamist Mafias and the security provided for the local smuggling is coincident with the protection provided by the Mafias to the local businesses but on a bigger geographical scale. The region substitutes the neighbourhood, but the systems are identical: the Mafias give what the state is unable or unwilling to give.

3.4 The criminal ideology

According to Sales' model a criminal organization to be a Mafia must have a criminal ideology. It must use some symbols and beliefs in order to legitimise its actions and to enhance the cohesion among the organization's ranks. According to my research the Islamist Mafias have a criminal ideology as well. This consists of a mix of the social codes showed above, some ideological constructs, and some symbols of the Islamic tradition. In sum in the view of the Islamist Mafias, Islam and the social codes are the tools through which they can bend these ideals to their own necessities.¹⁰¹

Just like the Mafioso one, the criminal ideology of the Islamist Mafias is also able to create some form of attraction even among people who are not part of the organization, as highlighted by Baldaro: "radical Islam preached by Jihadists groups and the huge profits created by drug trafficking became tempting messages for part of the population which felt excluded by the main flux of redistribution

¹⁰⁰ A. Ahmad *Ibidem* p.175

¹⁰¹ V. Asal, B. Milward and E.W. Schoon "When terrorist go bad: analysing terrorists organizations involvement in drug smuggling". *International Studies Quarterly* Vol. 59, pp. 112-123 (2015)

of wealth”.¹⁰² As we will see in the rest of this thesis this kind of attraction exercised by the ideological constructs of the Islamist Mafias not only produce legitimacy for their activities but it becomes also a tool for recruitment. Put succinctly, even in the case of the Islamist Mafias their ideology is able to give a sense of belonging and power to individuals which would be, otherwise, perfectly anonymous. In this sense, the Islamist Mafioso ideology is at the same time a glue and a magnet. It improves the internal cohesion of the organisations and attracts recruits. Another general characteristic which emerges from the analysis of the Islamist Mafias’ ideological creed is how, just like in the case of Mafias, their ideology is built on social or religious elements according to their necessities. This latter aspect has created debates and a further level of problematisation in academia as we will see below.

According to my research the main characteristics and aims of the criminal ideology of the Islamist Mafias are: the use of religious and political symbols to ensure the stability of the organisation, the use of religious symbols to improve their social legitimacy and the use of political and religious ideological constructs to deny or justify the involvement in criminal activities,:

1) Loyalty and stability for the organization

The Islamist Mafias are active in particularly unstable regions, characterized often by a high level of political fragmentation which is not only affecting the State’s institutions but also the armed groups themselves. These organizations are characterized by a great fluidity and the political landscape is built on shifting alliances.¹⁰³ To maintain stability in the ranks, many different armed groups tend to change continuously their internal hierarchies in order to prevent any form of splits.¹⁰⁴ It is in this context that the “Islamic credentials” of the Islamist Mafias play an important role in maintaining the organising cadres’ stability and consequently their members loyal.¹⁰⁵

A clarification must be done here about a debate within academia. Some authors such as Aisha Ahmad assess how Islam is the most appropriate ideological glue to overcome the ethnic and tribal divides

¹⁰² E. Baldaro, “*A Dangerous Method: How Mali Lost Control of the North and Learned to Stop Worrying*” *Small Wars and Insurgencies* Vol.29 No.3, pp. 579-603 (2018)

¹⁰³ N. Desgrais, Y. Guichaoua and A. Lebovich “*Unity is the exception. Alliance formation and deformation among armed actors in Northern Mali*” *Small wars and Insurgencies* Vol.29 No.4, pp. 654-679 (2018) for an explication of the same fluidity in Afghanistan see B. R. Rubin “*The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*” Yale University Press (1995)

¹⁰⁴ N. Desgrais, Y. Guichaoua and A. Lebovich *Ibidem*

¹⁰⁵ A. Ahmad *Ibidem* p.58

among the armed groups and the rest of the society.¹⁰⁶ Other authors instead have assessed how ethnic homogeneity is more useful than religion to create stability for criminal organizations.¹⁰⁷ As we will see in the next chapters an observation of the Islamist Mafias produces an ideal third way in this debate. In fact, the stability of these criminal organizations is achieved not by choosing Islam instead of tribal credentials or vice versa but in mixing these two ideological frameworks together. In this sense it is important to recall here the studies by Scheele on the smuggling enterprises in the Sahel:

“Tribes are the main references to intervene in case of family crisis or regional conflicts and this is also at the heart of the “Mafias”. All the people who are socially successful try to categorise this success *in a conformal way with the religious exigencies and in conformity with the tribal excellence* [italics mine]”.¹⁰⁸

In this sense, the Islamist Mafias proves how Ballina’s assumptions on the coexistence of religious and tribal/ethnic ideologies during convergence processes on the crime terror nexus are more appropriate than to explain them from an ideological perspective.¹⁰⁹ In contexts characterized by conflictual relations with the states and volatile alliances among armed groups the tribes and religion are *together* the main unifying factors, which are exploited by the Islamist Mafias.

From a conceptual perspective, this coexistence appears evident in the case of JNIM¹¹⁰ and the Haqqani Network¹¹¹ who have played, according to their needs, the card of Islam or tribal credentials. What it is important to remark here is how this utilitarian approach to tribal ideals and religious notions and symbols is not a characteristic unique to the Islamist Mafias but of other armed groups as well.¹¹² What makes them very similar to the Mafias, as we will see below is how these ideological twists will be used especially to justify the involvement in criminal activities that are ideological opposites to their creed.

¹⁰⁶ A. Ahmad *Ibidem* p.172

¹⁰⁷ V. Asal, B. Milward and E.W. Schoon *Ibidem*

¹⁰⁸ J. Scheele “*Tribus, États et Fraude: La Région Frontalière Algéro-Malienne*”, *Études rurales* No.184, pp. 79-93 (2009)

¹⁰⁹ S. Ballina *The Crime-Terror continuum revisited: A model for the study of hybrid criminal organization*” *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism* Vol.6 No.2, pp. 121-136 (2011)

¹¹⁰ S. Altuna Galan “*Jamā'at Nusrat al-Islām wa-l-Muslimīn: a propaganda analysis of al-Qaeda's project for the Sahel*” Real Insituto Elcano (2018)

¹¹¹ International Crisis Group, “*The Insurgency....*” *Ibidem*

¹¹² T. Ruttig, “*How Tribals are the Taliban?*” in S. Bashir and R. D. Crews “*Under the Drones*” Harvard University Press (2012) pp. 102-135

2) The religious components of the Islamist Mafioso ideology

The Islamist Mafias are co-opting Islam from a general perspective, just like Mafias have co-opted symbols and values of Christianity, using some religious themes in their propaganda and which are important for the construction of the criminal ideology. Despite this general assessment there is a certain degree of divergence between Mafias and Islamist Mafia in the use of such religious concepts and symbols. In fact, as we have seen in the case of the Mafias' affiliation ceremonies above, the Islamist Mafias do not tend to use religious symbols in the context of invented rituals. Put succinctly, the religious symbolism in the case of the Islamist Mafias is not adopted to create new rituals. This characteristic highlights a sort of difference with other terrorist organisations, for instance ISIS, which through their propaganda have created rituals which symbolise the renunciation of its fighters previous identity and their rebirth as new men and women in the Caliphate's lands.¹¹³

From a general perspective, in looking at the religious components of the Islamist Mafioso ideology we will find concepts of Islam adapted to the groups' convenience. If we take for instance the element of *takfir* - the excommunication – in the groups' propaganda we see how it is often proclaimed and repeats the same social categories or institutions numerous times.¹¹⁴ The groups' use of the concept of *shahada* which is purely religious and used interchangeably with the one of *bay'a* which has instead purely political implications and both of these concepts are used in reference to the loyalty to the organisation.¹¹⁵ Further examples of this exploiting of Islam for the organisations' purposes are perceivable for what concerns the concepts of jihad and mujahidin. Concerning the first, the Islamist Mafias easily connect it to the themes of honour/dishonour and in doing so they exercise again the merging between tribal and religious elements highlighted above.¹¹⁶ From the perspective of the Islamist Mafias, as we will see in the next chapters, the *jihad* must be seen as related to the war against the enemies of the organization more than the enemies of Islam.¹¹⁷ This was especially clear in the case of the use of *jihad* to wage war against other Muslims or more specifically to the opponents of their organisations. A remarkable ideological similarity between Mafias and Islamist Mafias is perceivable for what concerns the use of the mujahidin construct. It seems in fact how through the exploitation of this mujahidin construct the Islamist Mafias do what Mafias do with their crusader mentality or faith seen in the previous chapter: they dehumanize and depict their opponents as the

¹¹³ M. Krona and R. Pennington "The Media World of ISIS" Indiana University Press (2019) p.63

¹¹⁴ S. Altuna Galan *Ibidem*

¹¹⁵ V. Brown "The Facade of Allegiance" CTC Sentinel Vol.3 No.1, pp. 1-6 (2010)

¹¹⁶ S. Altuna Galan *Ibidem*

¹¹⁷ S. Altuna Galan *Ibidem*

enemy of faith or tribal purity.¹¹⁸ In this sense we can argue that the Islamist Mafioso ideology is racist just like the Mafioso one.¹¹⁹

Another interesting similarity between the Islamist Mafioso and the Mafioso ideology is the one of the miracles. These ones are used mainly for propaganda purposes in order to play to a sort of mysticism that aims to show the organization as holy, pure, and chosen by God, and in this sense they are not different from the Mafioso celebrations of miracles seen in chapter II.¹²⁰ In the words of the Islamist Mafioso, raids are blessed, any positive element on the battlefield is a miracle and is also pictured together with the apparition of holy horses, and armies fighting on the same side as the Islamist Mafioso.¹²¹ It is very difficult to understand whether these elements are the outcome of fanaticism or the wise use of propaganda, but two things are certain: 1) they help in embedding the actions of the Islamist Mafias in a religious context;¹²² 2) they are another good tool to attract new recruits.¹²³

3) The role of ideology in the denial of criminal activities.

In the case of Islamist Mafias, the most important necessity from an ideological perspective is not the justification of violence itself, they depict themselves as Gods' armies, but the involvement of the organizations in criminal activities. Since the Islamist Mafioso claim to be holy warriors in a war context the recourse to violence is already legitimised by the surrounding environment. What the Islamist Mafioso need to justify is their involvement in *haram* (forbidden) acts according to Islam and Islamic law. The involvement in such kind of criminal activities could erode their social legitimacy and consequently here lies another dilemma for the Islamist Mafias: on the one hand they need to be involved in *haram* activities, on the other they cannot lose their grip on society. The most evident example of this ideological dilemma is the one of drug trafficking. In this sense we cannot argue, as some authors have, that the involvement in drug trafficking does not pose an ideological contradiction.¹²⁴ It is indeed more accurate to say that ideologies do not pose a contradiction from a tactical perspective but still represent a problem for legitimacy.¹²⁵ In this sense the Islamist Mafias both adopt a 'don't ask don't tell' attitude conjugated with a propagandistic effort to increase their

¹¹⁸ S. Altuna Galan *Ibidem*

¹¹⁹ P. Arlacchi "La Mafia imprenditrice" Il Saggiatore (2010) p.135

¹²⁰ L. Farral and M. Hamid "The Arabs at war in Afghanistan". Oxford University Press (2015) pp. 298-299

¹²¹ S. Altuna Galan *Ibidem*

¹²² B. Mesa "In Mali Jihadists mix religion and drugs" Al Monitor (2012)

¹²³ L. Farral and M. Hamid *Ibidem* p. 299

¹²⁴ V. Asal, B. Milward and E.W. Schoon, *Ibidem*

¹²⁵ A. Ahmad *Ibidem* p.58

Islamic credibility as soon as they are accused of being involved in drug smuggling or other criminal activities.¹²⁶ In this sense the Islamist Mafias tend to use religion to dismiss their involvement in criminal activity, depicting themselves as too faithful to be criminals. Whether this strategy could work among the local population is arguable, but it is important in order to highlight the fact of how these criminal organisations tend to instrumentally use religion and consequently how their effective religious motivations are, at least, questionable. In the following chapters, we should not be surprised to find jihadists commanders dismissing their accusers on their involvement in drug trafficking as fabrication from the West or to see the propaganda efforts of these organisations to increase as soon as they are accused of being traffickers. The divergence between Mafias use of ideology to justify its involvement in crimes and the Islamist Mafias use of it to deny it are in the end symptoms of the interested use of religion for more pragmatic and less holy aims.

As we have seen this analysis of the ideological creed of the Islamist Mafias shows a certain degree of divergence in comparison to the Mafias. In fact, in the above-mentioned list the elements of the biopower and of the supermanhood are missing. In this sense it cannot be assessed that these two characteristics are lacking but the verification of their existence would need more in-depth research and they will take us very far from the aims of this work. For the moment two hypothesis can be made about these missing characteristics: 1) The ideological construct of supermanhood already exists for the Islamist Mafias but it is indistinguishable from the exaltation of the figure of the mujahideen. Put simply the ‘honourable warrior’ figure in the Islamist Mafioso societies substitutes the one of the ‘honourable man’ of the Mafioso ones from an ideological perspective.; 2) for what concerns biopower, so the ideological regulation of the biological existence shown in chapter II, there are no data which can confirm a proper influence exercised by the Islamist Mafioso ideology. Arguably the Islamist Mafias could already have achieved some form of such control because they already present the behavioural codes analysed above.¹²⁷

3.5 Governmentality

According to the Sales’ model, if the violence used by a criminal organization does not allow it to implement the control of a given territory and a population then that organization cannot be labelled

¹²⁶ A. Ahmad *Ibidem* p. 58

¹²⁷ For an example of biopower within the *Pashtunwali* see R. Tapper and N. Tapper “*Eat this, It’ll d Do You a power of Good*”: *Food and Commensality among Durrani Pashtuns*” *American Ethnologist* Vol.13 No.1, pp. 62-79 (1986). For examples related to the *Temushaga* see S. J. Rasmussen “*The slippery sign: Cultural Constructions of Youth and Youthful Constructions of Culture in Tuareg Men’s Face-Veiling*” *Journal of Anthropological Research* Vol.66 No.4, pp. 463-484 (2010)

a Mafia. In the case of the Islamist Mafias there are examples that show how they have been able to implement this governmentality on the areas under their rule.

From a conceptual perspective the Islamist Mafias' show some peculiarities in their implementation of governmentality. First of all the implementation of a parallel judiciary system and of the mechanisms for disputes settlement is based, opportunistically, on the mix between tribal and religious credentials. As we will see in the case studies analysis, the Islamist Mafias tend to rely on religious norms or social codes in order to deal with disputes within the areas under their control. In this sense we cannot avoid a form of divergence from the Mafias which instead tend to rely more on their social credibility. Secondly, in the areas under their control the implementation of welfare systems by the Islamist Mafias is based also on an indirect administration of welfare. This is based on the reliance to actors external to the organisations such as NGOs¹²⁸ or foreign relief agencies¹²⁹ which actually provide the necessary services for which the Islamist Mafias take credit. In this sense the "criminal Keynesianism" of the Islamist Mafias reflects their ability to get in touch and to cultivate some relationships with official power actors. From a conceptual perspective the success of the Islamist Mafias' welfare system, just like in the case of Mafias, is due also in relation to its perception as more efficient and fairer than the one of the state. Other aspects of the Islamist Mafias internal and external governmentality are instead perfectly aligned with the ones of the Mafias highlighted above. First of all, from a structural perspective both the organisations implement extortions¹³⁰ which, according to Sales, is the most evident manifestation of the control exercised by Mafias above their communities. Just like Mafias, the use of violence by the Haqqanis and the SJGs has a regulative and not predatory nature.¹³¹

For what concerns the internal governmentality of these criminal organisations, it is sufficient to assess for now how just like in the case of Mafias, the Islamist Mafias are characterised by a of non-permeability in relation to any other criminal organization active in their areas. Put succinctly the Islamist Mafias are and want to remain independent. The case of the Malian civil war¹³² and of the Haqqanis' relationships with the Taliban and in part with Al-Qaeda¹³³ both confirm this tendency. As we will see in the next chapters, disputes have occurred within these organisations concerning

¹²⁸ A. Jackson, "*Life under the Taliban Shadow Government*" Overseas Development Institute (2018)

¹²⁹ S. Harmon *Ibidem*

¹³⁰ For the case of the Haqqani Network see G. Peters *Ibidem* for the SJGs one A. Tazaghart, "*AQMI: enquête sur les héritiers de Ben Laden Au Maghreb Islamique*" Jean Picollec (2011) p. 62

¹³¹ S. Harmon, *Ibidem*

¹³² S. Daniel "*Les Mafias...*" *Ibidem* p.89

¹³³ D. Rasler and V. Brown *Ibidem* p.9

leadership, money issues and occasionally objectives but just like in the case of Mafias, bloodlines and tribal credibility have helped the organisation to remain cohesive.

Conclusion

The theory of the Islamist Mafias aims to explore and highlight two controversial realities about the crime terror nexus and terrorist groups in general.

First of all, terrorist groups cannot be generically analysed as opponents of a pre-existing power system. Outside the simplistic dichotomy of the State versus Terror, terrorism can be seen as a different form of sovereignty which sometimes challenges the state while in other cases it can be allied with it.¹³⁴ To use the words of Macri and Cohen: “ (...) these criminal groups [the terrorist ones *e.n.*] try to integrate themselves in the socio-economic structures through the entering of the institutional fabric, political and economic in realising connivant relationships and alliances with the bureaucratic and administrative apparatus, with the political and economic power and in doing so they become hidden power centres”¹³⁵ In sum this is the preeminent assumption of my theory: terrorist groups can evolve and become a useful tool in the hands of the ruling classes.

Secondly, in bending and adapting political ideologies and tribal codes of conduct, the Islamist Mafias have created a new method for the exercise of power. Just like the Mafias have the “Mafioso method” the Islamist Mafias have their own “Islamist Mafioso method”. This method, as it will be shown in the following chapters, adapts to the surrounding environments and can sometimes lead to outcomes such as declarations of war or the use of suicide bombers, but still all these actions are related to a different aim: to remain hidden and to increase the influence of the Islamist Mafias. In this chapter we have laid down the conceptual elements which define the Islamist Mafias. We have seen how despite the bulk of these elements aligning with the ones of the Mafias some divergences are present because of the absence of data or for the different cultural and political environment in which these organisations are borne. It is now important to see if this conceptualisation of Islamist Mafias will pass the test of empirical observation. In the next two chapters we will use the definitional model of Sales to analyse the study of the crime terror nexus and this comparison will be integrated with an historical approach in order to make sense of the convergence process from terrorism to crime

¹³⁴ F. Strazzari and M. Calculli *Ibidem* pp. 55-56

¹³⁵ M. Cohen and V. Macri, “*L’asse del caos*” Aracne Editrice (2013) p.31

undertaken by these organisations. At the end of those we will see if the constitutive elements analysed up to now are present within the HN and the SJGs and by consequence if the Islamist Mafias exist.

CHAPTER IV

Case Study: the Sahelian Jihadi Groups

Introduction

Before analysing the case studies, it is important to pose some methodological and linguistic clarifications. First, the analysis of the case studies will be based on the application of the Sales model to the Sahelian Jihadi Groups (SJG) and the Haqqani Network. In order to illustrate the evolutionary process of the Islamist Mafias in the clearest way possible an historical approach will be followed. Specifically, I will start to study these organisations from a specific period of time from 2003 until today. This choice is not linked to a specific event but is due to the necessity of being concise and it is also functional in order to demonstrate the evolution from terrorism to organised crime. The choice of the historical approach is also linked to the necessities of this research since the aim of this thesis is not only to create a new paradigm for the study of the crime terror nexus but also to show the evolutionary process of the Islamist Mafias' from terrorism to organised crime. This historical analysis of the SJG will be, conceptually, divided in three main periods: the kidnapping stage (2003-2009), the drug trafficking stage (2009-2012) and the civil war stage (from 2012 until today). Concerning the last historical period, I believe that a separate analysis of this is important for two reasons: a) to challenge that part of the literature which considers the involvement of the SJG in the Malian civil war as symptomatic of a political agenda of the Islamist Mafias; b) to give further demonstrations of the validity of my argument: the existence of the Islamist Mafias as a criminally-oriented organisation and not as a violent political group. This historical subdivision is functional to different analytical needs. There are in fact two challenges that need to be faced in the development of this analysis: a) the considered historical period analysed for this case study has been dramatically complex and full of relevant events for the aim of this thesis (military coups, civil wars, elections to mention a few), consequently it is easy to get confused while analysing it as one unique historical period. The subdivision allows me to be clear from a purely historical and illustrative perspective. b) A mere comparative illustration between the elements of the Sales' model and the history of the SJG would have been inductive from a general perspective and the analysis of the case study would have turned into a mere cut and paste work of the empirical data within the Sales model. On the contrary, the subdivision into historical stages allows us to show the manifestation of the different characteristics of the Islamist Mafias introduced in chapter III and evaluate carefully the evolutionary process undertaken by the SJG and to show how each of the characteristics of the definitional model does not tend to exclude the others but to overlap them. As we will see in the rest of this chapter,

from a criminal perspective, the elements presented in each phase are not mutually exclusive but overlapping and this is useful also to highlight the entrepreneurial attitude of a Mafia illustrated by Arlacchi.¹ In addition, this subdivision is also useful to highlight how the Islamist Mafias, just like the Mafias, have been able to adapt to important historical change in their environments. Finally, the separated analysis of these historical stages allows us to take into account the counterarguments to this thesis in general and to illustrate the evolutionary process more in-depth (for instance the involvement of the SJG in drug trafficking or their participation in the civil war). The subdivision allows me to explain in-depth these potential criticisms and to dismantle them in a tidy and intellectually honest way.

A lexical clarification is due regarding use of the expression ‘Sahelian Jihadi Groups’. By using this phrase I want to indicate mainly six jihadi groups active in the Sahel region since 2003: the GSPC (*Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat*) Al Qa’ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), *Ansar Al Din* (AAD), the Macina Liberation Front (MLF), and of course the new-born group of the *Jamaa’t Nusrat Wal Islam Wal Muslimin* (JNIM). The reasons why I have decided to analyse these groups on a regional level are threefold: a) from a geographical perspective these groups are not static, they are not active in a single country and an analysis focused only on one state (for instance Mali or Burkina-Faso) will be imprecise; b) because the Mafioso method implemented by the SJG during and at the end of the evolutionary process is based on the cooperation with a wide range of actors which are active and based all across the region and this characteristic cannot be ignored for the sake of analytical precision and intellectual honesty; c) because the evolutionary process undertaken by the Islamist Mafias has been possible because of the shift of the SJG to the Sahel where, as I will show below, they have found an hospitable environment to go through this evolution. It must be noted that the province of the Islamic State in the Sahel, (the Islamic State in the Great Sahara, ISGS) will not be considered as an Islamist Mafia. As I have assessed in chapter III the Islamic State is not, according to my theory, an Islamist Mafia and even if there are some elements which denote that the same evolutionary process might have been undertaken by this *wilayat*, to the present day there is not sufficient evidence to assess whether the ISGS has become an Islamist Mafia or not.

The chapter will be structured in the following way: in paragraph one I will contextualise the shift to the Sahel implemented by the local jihadi groups at the end of the Malian civil war. Specifically, I will show how the relationship between terrorist groups in the Sahel is longstanding and why the

¹ See P. Arlacchi “*La mafia imprenditrice*” Il Saggiatore (2010)

Sahel's occupation was strategic for these organisations. In the second section, I will analyse the involvement of the SJG in the drug business and I will take on the divisive issue of the drug-terror nexus in the Sahel. The analysis of this criminal activity undertaken by the SJG is crucial in order to validate my thesis. Because of the clear ideological contradictions between Islamism and Islam on the one hand and drug trafficking on the other the involvement of the SJG in this activity can be seen as the most practical evidence concerning the abandoning of a political ideology and agenda in order to embrace some purely criminal ones. To prove the involvement of the Islamist Mafias it will be also useful, together with providing practical evidence, to challenge that part of the literature that tends to minimise the involvement of the SJG in drug trafficking or to consider it as linked to the implementation of a bigger political project. From section three to seven, I will present each component of the model (social legitimacy, relationships with the official power actors, economic ambivalence, criminal ideology and governmentality) together with some evidence of their use by the SJG. The verification of the compatibility between the Sales model and the empirical evidence on the SJG are useful to demonstrate if and how these organisations fit in the Islamist Mafias paradigm and above all if these organisations can be considered as Mafioso ones. More specifically, the comparison between the Sales model and the evidence collected will allow us to verify whether the SJG have transformed from strictly politically-violent groups into criminal ones characterised by their ability to create and implement an articulate relational network and a parallel legal and cultural systems, as assessed by Sales and according to the paradigm of complexity mentioned in chapter II. Section 8 will analyse the posture of the SJG in the Malian civil war and the consequent regional instability (2012 - ongoing). I will illustrate specifically how the participation in the conflict was not related to the achievement of any political aim but to preserve their privileged position as power brokers among the different actors (the old and the new ones) present in the region. The conclusion will briefly analyse the issue of the ISGS and will bridge to the study of the Haqqani Network in the next chapter



Figure 1 The evolutionary process of the Sahelian Jihadi Groups

1. The Jihadi shift to the Sahel

To understand the reasons behind the emergence of jihadi groups in the Sahel it is important first of all to contextualize the state of the jihadi insurgency at the end of the Algerian civil War of the 1990s. The final stages of conflicts have, historically, represented a sort of ground zero for jihadists morale and aspirations.² The plan of the so-called Afghan Arabs was to replicate the success of the jihad against the USSR in Afghanistan and to overthrow the Algerian regime but this exaltation of the remarkable results obtained in the Afghan battlefields obscured at that time the problems related to waging jihad in North Africa. Osama Bin Laden himself was very dubious about the possibility of winning the confrontation with the Algerian regime³ and his doubts proved right. The leading figures of the Afghan Arabs were killed at the beginning of the war during the so-called Tamesguida blitz⁴ and consequently the key positions of the Islamist movement were occupied by violent and fanatic youths who in a short time alienated any form of sympathy for the mujahidin as political actors, and Islamism as an ideology. As Giles Kepel pointed out:

“At the end of almost ten years of civil war, the Algerian Islamist movement had been defeated by *le pouvoir* [the name Algerians gave to the ruling class of their country *E.n*]. The poor

² G. Kepel “*Jihad*” Carocci (2006) p. 312

³ A.J. Al-Tamimi, “*Osama Bin Laden and the Algerian Jihad*” (2018)

⁴ G. Kepel *Ibidem* p. 298

urban youth which during the October 1988 has rebelled and manifested with the FIS, before becoming GIA's most important recruiting basin, had been annihilated as a political subject"⁵.

Despite the failure of the Algerian jihad, the civil war led the *mujahidin* to learn the strategic importance of the Sahara which was already in those years the centre of many illicit networks and trafficking.⁶ During the civil war the men of the then *Groupe Islamique Armé* (GIA), most notably Mokhtar Belmokhtar, were using the local illicit networks to procure weapons and to finance the war in Algeria thanks to the local smuggling industry.⁷ Other future members of the Islamist Mafia were not yet part of a jihadi group but were involved in these activities and they went on later to teach their comrades how to get involved in these businesses.⁸ Bin Laden himself was aware of the strategic importance of the Sahara⁹ and in 1987 he sent some of his men to verify if Al Qa'ida could establish a base in the region, but his emissaries were robbed by the Tuareg tribes.¹⁰ According to some sources,¹¹ it was through the Sahara and with the help of Mokhtar Belmokhtar that Bin Laden established first contact with the GIA by meeting some of its members in the desert.¹²

At the beginning of 2000s the changing international environment after 9/11 brought a mutation in the jihadist groups' structures which became more decentralized.¹³ This process has been described by Ali Soufan: "In corporate terms, we might say that Al-Qaeda was no longer Starbucks, with multiple branches all managed centrally; instead, it was now McDonald's, with proliferation of independent franchises receiving guidance from headquarters that could be more specific or less so, depending on the situation".¹⁴ This decentralization had an immediate consequence for all the terrorist groups which were part, or aspired to become part, of the Al-Qa'ida network: the necessity to finance their activities by themselves. This issue proved problematic for many branches and especially for AQIM whose leaders publicly complained about the lack of funding.¹⁵

⁵ G. Kepel, *Ibidem* p. 312

⁶ Global Initiative against Transnational Organised Crime "*Illicit traffics and Instability in Mali: past, present, future*" (2014)

⁷ L. Ould M. Salem "*Le Ben Laden du Sahara*" Éditions de la Martinière (2014) p. 42

⁸ A. Tazaghart, "*AQMI: Enquête sur les héritiers de Ben Laden au Maghreb Islamique*", Jean Picollec (2011), p. 37.

⁹ A.J. Al-Tamimi *Ibidem*

¹⁰ A.J. Al-Tamimi *Ibidem*

¹¹ A. J. Al-Tamimi *Ibidem*

¹² A.J. Al-Tamimi *Ibidem*

¹³ T. Hegghammer, "*The ideological hybridization of jihadi groups*" Hudson Institute (2009)

¹⁴ A. Soufan "*Anatomy of Terror*", Norton & Company (2017), p. 183

¹⁵ J. M. Del Cid Gómez, "*A Financial profile of Al Qa'ida and its affiliates*" Perspectives on terrorism Vol.4 No.4, pp. 3-27 (2010)

Despite the opportunities provided by the Sahelian environment, the *mujahidin* were not able to reverse the wars' outcome. Many were killed by the Algerian regime or they accepted the amnesty laws (*lois de réconciliation nationale*) proposed by the then Prime Minister Abdelaziz Bouteflika.¹⁶ Others changed their occupation, becoming security guards for the rich landowners, just like the first Mafioso at the end of the eighteenth century, or bandits.¹⁷ The defeat of the Algerian Islamists pushed the *mujahidin* to develop two of their main characteristics: resilience and adaptability.¹⁸ This changing in the mentality of the Algerian jihadists has been summarized by Abu Amr Abdelkebir, the former president of the Information Commission of the GSPC. Speaking of the adherence of his organization to Al Qa'ida during his trial in Algeria he assessed how it was “a breath of fresh air”¹⁹ and “merely formal”²⁰ and also how: “We have not noted any change on the organizational level with the exception of the adoption of the suicide attacks”.²¹

2. The debate on the drug terror nexus in the Sahel

The involvement in drug trafficking by the SJG it is one of the most important indicators of the evolution undertaken by these groups in their shift from terrorism to organized crime. Such relevance is due to the obvious ideological contradictions between the Islamist ideology and drug trafficking. Moreover, as I will show below, drug trafficking has been a crucial passage for the implementation of governmentality by the organization. For the sake of clarity and correctness, before analysing the Islamist Mafias in the context of the Sales' model, it is important to review critically the different schools of thought regarding the drug-terror nexus in the Sahel in order to prove the validity of my theoretical assumptions and my thesis overall. Concerning the year in which the Islamist Mafias started to be involved in drug trafficking, some authors argued that it was in 2002²² while other assesses how it started in 2005.²³ Apart from this purely chronological issue, there are three main schools of thought within the debate on the drug terror nexus in the Sahel. Some authors tended to downgrade the existence of such links in the region. Wolfram Lacher, for instance, has been very clear about the “myth” of the drug terror nexus in the Sahel in

¹⁶ G. Kepel, *Ibidem* p. 312

¹⁷ G. Kepel, *Ibidem* p. 312

¹⁸ A. Bencherif “From Resilience to Fragmentation Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and Jihadist Group Modularity” *Terrorism and Political Violence* Vol.32 No. 1 pp. 100-118 (2017)

¹⁹ M. Mokaddem “Al-Qaïda au Maghreb Islamique”, L'Harmattan (2013), pp. 166-167,

²⁰ M. Mokaddem *Ibidem* pp. 166-167,

²¹ M. Mokaddem *Ibidem* p. 167

²² Global Initiative against Transnational Organised Crime *Ibidem*

²³ A. Bourgéot “Des Touaregs en rébellion” in P. Gonin, N. Kotlok and M-A. Pérouse de Montclos “La tragédie Malienne” Vendémiaire p.120 (2013)

one of his most famous publications.²⁴ According to the author, the drug terror link is impossible to verify and it is more related to single individuals than to entire terrorist organizations.²⁵ Other authors are keen in recognizing a sort of indirect involvement of the Islamist Mafias in drug trafficking. Daniel for instance, argues how these groups are not smuggling or selling drugs but only escorting drug convoys in transit within the areas under their control.²⁶ Another part of the literature instead refuses to acknowledge the SJG in involvement in drug trafficking because it would be incompatible with their Salafi ideology. This is the case of Lemine Ould M. Salem, who, in his biography of Mokhtar Belmokhtar, assesses how the emir was involved in the smuggling of other goods such as tea and oil but not in drugs for ideological reasons.²⁷

Concerning Lacher's approach, this can be dismissed for two main reasons: first of all, in a context characterized by a deep ideological commitment, such as the one of terrorist groups, there is very little room for individual independent actions which are perceived as opposite to the principles of the organization. When a member of a terrorist group is involved in a forbidden action they are usually disavowed by the organization and the history of jihadi groups offer plenty of examples of this dynamic. The GIA for instance, has been condemned and repudiated by world leading Islamist ideologues for its brutality and for its indiscriminate attacks on civilians.²⁸ In the same vein Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi was heavily criticized by Al Qa'ida's leaders for his attacks on the Shia population in Iraq.²⁹ If the single individuals mentioned by Lacher were effectively involved in a business considered forbidden they would have been disavowed. Moreover, analysis such as the one by Lacher, are symptomatic of a misleading approach to the drug terror nexus issue in general. If we expect, as definitive proof of the involvement of terrorist groups in drug trafficking, to find a jihadi leader personally selling drugs somewhere such a thing will be almost impossible to find. Still, there are other signals that assess the involvement of terrorist groups in drug trafficking. Some reports have highlighted, for example, that drugs were found by the Malian army in the houses of high-ranking figures of the MUJAO in Gao after its retreat in 2013.³⁰ Other authors have collected evidence on how other jihadists are trafficking drugs.³¹

²⁴ W. Lacher "Challenging the Myth of the Drug-Terror Nexus in the Sahel", Kofi Annan Foundation (2013)

²⁵ W. Lacher *Ibidem*

²⁶ S. Daniel "AQMI, L'industrie de l'enlèvement", Fayard (2012) p.182

²⁷ Lemine Ould M. Salem *Ibidem* pp. 43, 44, 45

²⁸ G. Kepel *Ibidem* p.311

²⁹ A. Soufan *Ibidem* pp. 148-149

³⁰ D. Thiénot "Au Mali, les djihadistes se droguent à la kétamine" L'Express (2013)

³¹ S. Laurent "Sahelistan" Seuil (2013) p.172

Concerning the ‘indirect involvement’ argument of Daniel and others it should be acknowledged how this explanation of the drug terror nexus has flaws. Even taking for granted that the Islamist Mafias are “only” escorting the drug convoys in the Sahel would still be a proof of: a) their involvement in drug trafficking; and b) the interest of the Islamist Mafias in the flourishing of such illicit business in the areas under their dominion. This interest is demonstrated by some interviews given by former MUJAO’s fighters. One of those for instance, claimed how during the 2012 Timbuktu occupation, he was arrested and beaten by his bosses because he seized a drug convoy near the city.³² In his words it is clearly perceivable the disenchantment toward the militancy in these supposed jihadi groups: “I have seen that these people haven’t come here for the jihad but to do their businesses. They do drug trafficking. I regret having come to do jihad with them”³³

The ideological rigidity argued by Ould M. Semine is not only contradicted on a factual basis but also by the evolution of the interpretation of the sharia made by Al Qa’ida judges, who have argued that cooperation with drug smugglers is allowed.³⁴ This ideological credibility is also undermined by some testimony during the occupation of Northern Mali. Some witnesses claimed how for example the *mujahidin* used to smoke hashish on a daily basis during the occupation of Timbuktu.³⁵ Finally, as showed in chapter III, the idea of an ideological barrier between terrorism and drug trafficking is weak in comparison to the reality on the ground. To some extent it can be argued that only the jihadists themselves are dismissing their involvement in drug trafficking today.³⁶

3. First element: the social identification/recognition of Islamist Mafias

In the previous chapter we have seen how from a sociological and anthropological perspective the Islamist Mafioso societies and the Mafioso ones share some common elements and how the adoption of their behavioural codes led these societies to the same Hobbesian dilemma. Now it is important to see whether the Islamist Mafias have started to rely on these behavioural codes and social constructs to boost their legitimacy among the local population of the Sahel region. In brief, it is important to see *if* the Islamist Mafias have adopted such behavioural codes, *how* they did it, and, possibly to understand *why* they have decided to do so. According to my research it is at the beginning of the

³² S. Daniel “*Les Mafias du Mali*” Descartes et Cie (2015) p. 89

³³ S. Daniel “*Les Mafias*” *Ibidem* p. 89

³⁴ CTC West Point “*Letters from Abbottabad*” (2012) Letter SOCOM-2012-00000008-HT

³⁵ J. Haméon, “*Au Mali Dans La Maison du Djihadiste Mokhtar Belmokhtar*”, L’Express (2013)

³⁶ Points Chauds, “*Entretien exclusif avec Khaled Abou Abbas*” (2013)

kidnapping stage (2003-2009) that the Islamist Mafias started to merge substantially with the Sahelian social environment. This change was due to two main reasons: 1) because of the increase in infighting within the former Algerian jihadi groups;³⁷ 2) arguably because the merger with the local communities was functional in order to find protection from the Algerian security forces.³⁸ Concerning the first point it is important to recall how, according to a former member of the GSPC, Mokhtar Belmokhtar and Abderrazak El-Para were confronting each other, even before the merger of this group with Al Qa'ida, and for this reason Belmokhtar decided to marry the daughter of a notable Tuareg to protect himself and his business from El-Para.³⁹ To achieve the social recognition by the Tuaregs, the Islamist Mafioso started to heavily use the institute of marriage.⁴⁰ These were not only functional to the structural mixing between the Islamist Mafias and the Sahelian criminal groups but they also represented the starting point of the merging between the Salafi ideology with the local traditions. These characteristics emerged in the case of Belmokhtar's first wedding. The strategic roots of the marriage are demonstrated by the fact that the Islamist mafioso married an important woman of the Oulad Idriss tribe even if he did not have an equal social rank of his bride.⁴¹ The ceremony demonstrated the merger between the Tuareg's tradition and the Salafi one: the wedding is followed by the traditional sumptuous *walima* (banquet) according to the Tuareg's traditions⁴² but also strictly inherent to the Salafi tradition.⁴³ The social recognition enjoyed by the Islamist Mafias among the local population is confirmed by other sources⁴⁴ who assess how the kidnappings business brought some economic development in an area among the poorest in the world and it was so supported by the locals.⁴⁵ Moreover, in comparison with what was perceived as a corrupt élite in Bamako the jihadists enjoyed more sympathy from the people in the north who saw them as their defenders.⁴⁶

This remarkable social legitimacy enjoyed by the Islamist Mafias improved during the drug trafficking stage (2009-2012). In the context of the new Northern Policy of the Malian government after the end of the Tuareg revolts in 2006, the government led by Amadou Toumani Touré adopted a double-faced policy for the region: on the one hand it created some informal agreements with the

³⁷ Points Chauds, "*Exclusif: Un repentí révèle le vrai visage de Mokhtar Belmokhtar*" (2013)

³⁸ M. Mokaddem *Ibidem* p.82

³⁹ Points Chauds, "*Exclusif: Un repentí ...*" *Ibidem*

⁴⁰ L. Pollichieni, "*Mokhtar Belmokhtar, il padrino della Mafia Islamista*" *Limes*, rivista italiana di geopolitica (2015)

⁴¹ L O. M. Salem *Ibidem* p.57

⁴² L O. M. Salem *Ibidem* p.57

⁴³ L O. M. *Ibidem* Salem p.58

⁴⁴ A. Lebovich "*The Local Face of Jihadism in Northern Mali*" CTC Sentinel Vol.6 No. 6, pp. 4-10 (2013)

⁴⁵ E. Baldaro "*A Dangerous Method: How Mali lost control of the North and Learned to Stop Worrying*" *Small Wars and Insurgencies* Vol. 29 No. 3, pp. 579-603 (2018)

⁴⁶ T.A. Benjaminsen and. B.Ba "*Why do pastoralists in Mali join jihadist groups? A political ecological explanation*" *The Journal of Peasant Studies* Vol. 29 No. pp. 1-20 (2018)

Islamist Mafia for profit,⁴⁷ on the other he used the international aid as a power tool to co-opt the Tuareg's leaders.⁴⁸ The Islamist Mafia played its part in acting as the government's proxy to control the Tuareg irredentists but at the same time it boosted its social legitimacy by presenting itself as both: a role model in comparison to the corrupted elite and a movement through which the poorest part of the population can achieve a form of social rise.⁴⁹ The unexpected consequence of the new policy for the north was the explosion of drug trafficking which dismantled the previous social landscape and norms, a tendency augmented by the arrival of the *mujahedin*.⁵⁰ More specifically, the previous tribal hierarchy has been subverted and the small social milieus formed by blood families gained importance for the involvement in illicit activities.⁵¹ It is interesting to note here how by 2011 this use of bloodlines in drug trafficking was proved also by the practice of the use of relatives' lives as a guarantee during the drug transactions.⁵² Moreover, the growing social legitimacy of the Islamist Mafias together with the influx of money related to drug trafficking created a high speed militarization process in the area which provoked a dramatic shift from government to non-state actors in the legitimate exercise of violence.⁵³ The following stage of the civil war did not pose any form of question to the Islamist Mafias' social legitimacy. It is during these historical periods that the social legitimacy has taken new forms such as in the case of the involvement of women in the organization's activities which not only is on the rise but it is replicating the same historical evolution of the Mafias in the same roles.⁵⁴

4. Second element: the relationships with the legal powers

The element of the relationship with power actors as theorized by Sales has been constant in the history of the Sahelian Jihadi Groups in all the historical stages. What is interesting to see here is how, as opposed to this same element in the case of the Haqqani Network, the SJG relationships with the legal power actors started for the same reasons of the ones of the Italian Mafias. More specifically, just like the Mafioso organisations, the Sahelian Groups had been initially co-opted to maintain order in the North of Mali and in the rest of the region. They were hired to prevent other rebellions by the Tuareg and not as proxy elements in the context of a war.⁵⁵ During the kidnapping phase these relationships were facilitated by some specific persons active in the Sahel: the middlemen. In fact, at that time,

⁴⁷ B. Ahmed "Une Complicité en haut lieu avec les trafiquants de drogue et AQIM" Jeune Afrique (2011)

⁴⁸ E. Baldaro *Ibidem*

⁴⁹ E. Baldaro *Ibidem*

⁵⁰ J. Scheele "Tribus, états et fraude: La région frontalière Algéro-Malienne" Études rurales No.184, pp. 79-93 (2009)

⁵¹ J. Scheele *Ibidem*

⁵² B. Ahmed "Mali: Trafic de drogue et tensions communautaires" Jeune Afrique (2011)

⁵³ Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime *Ibidem*

⁵⁴ E. J. Abatan "The role of women in West Africa's violent extremist groups" ISS Africa (2018)

⁵⁵ A. Morgan "The Causes of Uprising in Northern Mali" Think Africa Press (2012)

these figures connected the Islamist Mafias with political authorities, and they were paid for this sort of service.⁵⁶ The middlemen not only acted as a link between kidnapers and authorities but sometimes they helped the Islamist Mafias directly. An example of this is Limam Ould Chafi, a middleman previously known for his role in the Sahelian smuggling industry, who helped the kidnapers of three Spanish aid workers (Alberto Vilalta, Roque Pascal, and Alicia Gomez) to film a video they later sent to their government.⁵⁷ In the subsequent years Chafi, because of his previous occupation as smuggler, has been one of the most used middlemen by the Islamist Mafias and one of the most trusted messengers with the governments of Mali and Burkina-Faso.⁵⁸ The relationship with the middlemen has been functional to forging relations with the local political powers even because sometimes the middlemen were politicians themselves. One of the most remarkable figures in this context is the one of Baba Ould Cheikh, another of the most used brokers during the kidnappings stage, who was also the mayor of Takrint, Mali, and an alleged drug trafficker.⁵⁹ The same can be said for Ibrahim Ag Mohamed Assaleh, a leading figure of the MNLA movement during the civil war and a Malian MP since 2007, who has been another leading intermediary during several kidnappings.⁶⁰ As we can see from these examples the neat distinction between members and supporters of the Islamist Mafias makes little sense as we discussed in the previous chapter. The middlemen in fact, have not been directly involved in terrorist or criminal activities in general. Nevertheless, they have earned influence and money from the Islamist Mafias' activities and it was in their interest to allow the continuation of the above-mentioned illicit acts. Another crucial factor for the development of the relations between the Islamist Mafias and the local political powers has been the one of the money laundering of the kidnappings' ransoms. As noted by Stephen Harmon: "some money derived from ransom payments made to AQIM cells for the release of kidnapped hostages have found their way into the hands of corrupt Malian officials and have been used in election campaign financing".⁶¹ The relationships created thanks to the kidnappings are deep and they go beyond mere corruption or economic opportunism. A senior Malian military commander, for instance, described precisely the nature of the deal between the Malian government and Mokhtar Belmokhtar in 2003: "We promised him [to Belmokhtar *e.n.*] we would leave him alone under the condition that he did not carry out hostile actions on our soil".⁶² The same kind of agreement is assessed by Morgan who speculates how under the presidency of Toumani Touré the Islamist Mafias

⁵⁶ S. Daniel, "AQMI...." *Ibidem* p.107

⁵⁷ M. Mokaddem, *Ibidem* p. 59

⁵⁸ M. Mokaddem, *Ibidem* p. 61

⁵⁹ Global Initiative against Transnational Organised Crime, *Ibidem*

⁶⁰ E. Wulf and F. Mesko, "Guide to post-conflict Mali", C4ADS (2013)

⁶¹ S. A. Harmon "Terror and Insurgency in the Sahara-Sahel Region" Routledge (2014) p.88

⁶² T. Oberlé "Sur les traces des djihadistes du Sahara" *Le Figaro* (2007)

might have been used to: a) weaken the Tuareg rebels; b) put Mali on the map as a frontline of the War on Terror and consequently facilitating its access to international aid.⁶³ In the same period, the Islamist Mafias signed a similar agreement with the government of Burkina Faso. According to a former Belmokhtar lieutenant, the then Compaoré regime was eager to have a deal similar to the one made by Mali.⁶⁴ The government in Ouagadougou assured the Islamist Mafias that they would not be persecuted by the local authorities and they will be helped to some extent in dealing with the kidnappings on Burkina-Faso's soil but in their turn the *mujahidin* would not conduct any attack against the country.⁶⁵ The alliance between Compaoré and the SJG was already known before the fall of his regime: "Northern Mali is surrounded by mafia militias connected to the central administration of Bamako and the other neighboring countries such as Burkina Faso, are struggling to get their piece of the pie," as said by a Malian soldier in 2013.⁶⁶ Still during the kidnapping stage, the Islamist Mafias were not yet considered as an organic part of a power system. Put succinctly: it seems that the Malian government was not co-opting but rather co-operating the organization at that stage. The jihadists needed a safe haven for the kidnappings and the government was eager to: a) boost its image of a trustworthy partner for the West; b) avoid the spread of violence within its borders. In the same context it is important to recall how according to some sources at the beginning of the kidnapping stage also the Algerian secret services got in touch with the Islamist Mafias in order to recruit some of their leaders.⁶⁷ The relationships with the local religious powers were slightly different, during the kidnappings period instead. If on the one hand the Islamist Mafia and the local imams were sharing a cooperative relationship due to the fact that the ransoms were laundered also through the construction of mosques, on the other the Islamist Mafias have recently started to infiltrate the religious institutions who were paid by the *mujahidin* to legitimate their actions and to spread their ideology.⁶⁸

The drug trafficking stage has proved to be a period of significant transformation for the relationships of the Islamist Mafias with local power players. It is in this period that the SJGs were used by the ruling élite in Bamako as an element of "proxy governmentality". The link between the involvement in drug trafficking by the Islamist Mafias and the new Malian government policies for the north in fact changed the nature of these relationships. As showed above, until the kidnappings stage these links could be understood as something due more to necessity than convenience but when the Malian

⁶³ A. Morgan *Ibidem*

⁶⁴ Le Monde "Les confessions d'« Ibrahim 10 »", djihadiste au Sahel (2019)

⁶⁵ Le Monde "Les confessions..." *Ibidem*

⁶⁶ B. Mesa "Mali Jihadists Mix Religion and Drugs" Al Monitor (2013)

⁶⁷ Points Chauds, "Exclusif" *Ibidem*

⁶⁸ A. Lebovich "The Local Face...." *Ibidem*

authorities started to rely on the *mujahedin* for both, the functioning of the illicit traffics and as an element of a power system to solve the Northern issue, the SJG properly became partners in power of the Bamako élite. This changing is perceivable also in relation to the Islamist Mafias links with religious authorities. In fact, the ideological discrepancy between Islamism and drug trafficking pushed many members of the Islamist Mafias to launder more money through the financing of such institutions and in doing so they enhanced their relations with such authorities.⁶⁹ Moreover, these links were enhanced also because some members of the Islamist Mafias rise to the top roles of the religious institutions at that time.⁷⁰ Moreover, after the 2006 peace deal between the Tuaregs and the Malian government the political relations between the Islamist Mafias and Bamako became more tight,⁷¹ as demonstrated also by the cooperation between the local security forces and the Islamist Mafias.⁷² Through the involvement in drug trafficking, the Islamist Mafias were co-opted by the local government who asked for its services for two reasons: a) to ensure stability in the north in the context of the decentralization process;⁷³ b) to ensure the protection of the drug trafficking in which the local establishment was involved.⁷⁴ Concerning this last point, the infamous case of the Air Cocaine plane crash in 2009 is the most evident example of this evolution.⁷⁵ According to the investigation, Air Cocaine was part of an international drug shipment organized by Spanish traffickers arrested in Mali, which involved the local authorities as brokers and the Islamist Mafias as fixers.⁷⁶ When the airplane crashed in an area under control of the Islamist Mafia according to local witnesses the Islamist Mafioso themselves were the ones who escorted the convoy after having recovered the cocaine from the plane.⁷⁷

Concerning the relationship with the local power players it is important to note how the increase in the money earned with narcotics by the Islamist Mafias gave it the chance to infiltrate local politics. The Islamist Mafias will not elect just local mayors or governors anymore but also MPs.⁷⁸ These relations between the Islamist Mafias and the local power actors will survive also to the French intervention and the 2012 civil war. Many local power players have maintained an ambiguous relationship towards Ag Ghali and the Islamist Mafias starting with France itself. Speaking to the press in 2014 the Minister of Defense Le Drian was asked about whether France considered Ag Ghali

⁶⁹ S. A. Harmon *Ibidem* p.146

⁷⁰ International Crisis Group “*Islamist Terrorism in the Sahel: Fact or Fiction?*” (2005)

⁷¹ Global Initiative against Transnational Organised Crime *Ibidem*

⁷² A. Lebovich “*The Local Face*” *Ibidem*

⁷³ A. Morgan *Ibidem*

⁷⁴ B. Ahmed “*Une Complicité*” *Ibidem*

⁷⁵ S. Daniel “*AQMI....*” *Ibidem* p. 179

⁷⁶ S. Daniel “*AQMI....*” *Ibidem* p. 179

⁷⁷ A. De Georgio “*Altre Afriche*” Egea (2017) p.41

⁷⁸ E. Wulf and F. Mesko *Ibidem*

a terrorist or a revolutionary who potentially could be part of the peace talks. Le Drian left the door open to the second possibility claiming how it was Ag Ghali's choice how he would like to be considered.⁷⁹ The symbol of the endurance of the relationship with local power actors, and if possible of their improvement, is symbolized also by the electoral results in Kidal which became an outpost for the infiltration of the Islamist Mafias within the new elected parliament. Here Hamada Ag Bibi, the right-hand man of Ag Ghali, was elected to Parliament with 96% of votes.⁸⁰ Local voters in Kidal have recalled how: "talking to Ag Bibi is like talking to Iyad [Ag Ghali *e.n.*]"⁸¹ Ag Bibi is today still considered as the emanation of Ag Ghali in the Malian parliament.⁸² Ag Bibi has been elected for a second time in 2018, despite his links with jihadi groups.⁸³ These electoral dynamics recall in full the infiltration protocols shown in relation to the Mafias, as discussed in chapter II, and it is interesting to see how the case of Ag Bibi is also symptomatic of a change in the aims of the Islamist Mafias. It seems in fact that these criminal organisations are keener to create a parasitic relationship with political powers instead of overthrowing them. Former Ag Ghali comrades and Ansar al Din members have been also part of the armed groups who have signed the Algiers agreements, even if a proper cessation of the relationship with their former boss remains dubious.⁸⁴ These kind of ambiguities or benevolent attitudes toward Ag Ghali are not adopted only by Mali and France but also by other power players in the region and more specifically by Algeria.⁸⁵ Algiers in fact has used Ag Ghali's services not only to obtain some advantages, such as the liberation of some of its diplomats kidnapped during the civil war, but also to increment its influence in the Sahel in general and in Mali more specifically.⁸⁶ The opening of communication channels with Ag Ghali gave to Algiers a prominent role in regional security issues especially after the fall of the Gaddafi regime and the general instability brought by the Arab Springs.⁸⁷ Even after the birth of the JNIM the Islamist Mafias have continued to infiltrate the local power fabric. This strategy of influencing the local institutions is demonstrated by the analysis of the attacks of the JNIM during the 2018 elections in Mali.⁸⁸ In fact, during the electoral period the assaults have been focused against the polling stations in the central regions of the country but not in the north where the Islamist Mafias are able to elect their candidates

⁷⁹ R. Carayol, "*Terrorisme-Iyad Ag Ghaly: arrête-moi si tu l'oses!*", Jeune Afrique (2014)

⁸⁰ R. Carayol *Ibidem*

⁸¹ R. Carayol *Ibidem*

⁸² R. Carayol *Ibidem*

⁸³ International Crisis Group "*Narcotraffic, violence....*" *Ibidem*

⁸⁴ B. Roger "*Mali: l'ombre d'Iyad Ag Ghali plane sur les négociations d'Alger*" Jeune Afrique (2015)

⁸⁵ L. Pollichieni "*Il Patto segreto tra Algeri e i Narcojihadisti*" Limes, Rivista italiana di geopolitica (2019)

⁸⁶ L. Pollichieni "*Il Patto segreto....*" *Ibidem*

⁸⁷ L. Pollichieni "*Il Patto segreto....*" *Ibidem*

⁸⁸ A. Thurston "*Mali's elections saw some Islamist militant violence. Here's what these patterns suggest*" Washington Post (2018)

as shown above. In this context the use of violence by the Islamist Mafias closely looks like the one used by the Mafias in Italy: the aim is to influence, not to stop, the political process.⁸⁹

A final mention is needed also for the Islamist Mafias attitude towards the Burkina-Faso's revolts and the defenestration of one of the Sahelian Jihadi Groups oldest allies Blaise Compaoré. According to some sources in fact, the former dictator could be one of the masterminds behind the current insurgency in Burkina Faso and so how he would be using the Islamist Mafia to recreate the status quo.⁹⁰

5. Third element: The money laundering activities or the “economic ambivalence”

The analysis of the economic ambivalence of the Islamist Mafias offers the opportunity not only to prove the adherence of the case study to the Sales' model but first and foremost to challenge the assumption of the political reasons behind their involvement in crime. According to some authors AQIM's kidnappings were a strategic choice in the context of a political project.⁹¹ Still the findings of this research contradict this assessment for many reasons. The beginning of the kidnapping stage started with the abduction of 32 tourists by El-Para and his men and is due more to opportunism rather than strategic choice as was admitted by the kidnappers themselves.⁹² Regarding the El-Para mass kidnapping it is interesting to see how some doubts about the presence of a concrete strategy by the Islamists were also raised by an International Crisis Group report published at that time.⁹³ According to the same report the West African jihadists were showing more interest in economic revenues than politics and the kidnappings were considered a “purely economic issue.”⁹⁴

Let's consider in the context of the kidnapping business the possibility that the money earned from kidnappings could have been employed in financing terrorist attacks. In 2010 an Algerian official claimed how AQIM earned €50 million from kidnappings.⁹⁵ Other sources estimated how between 2008 and 2013 the amount earned from kidnappings \$91.5 million.⁹⁶ Other sources argue how at the

⁸⁹ A. Alesina, S. Piccolo and P. Pinotti “*Organized Crime, Violence and Politics*” Review of Economic Studies Vol. 86 No.2 pp. 457-499 (2018)

⁹⁰ D. Ceccarelli “*C'è l'ex presidente Compaoré dietro l'escalation jihadista in Burkina Faso?*” Eastwest (2018)

⁹¹ A. Lohmann “*Who owns the Sahara?*” Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (2011)

⁹² M. Mokaddem *Ibidem* p.77

⁹³ International Crisis Group “*Islamist Terrorism*” *Ibidem*

⁹⁴ International Crisis Group “*Islamist Terrorism....*” *Ibidem*

⁹⁵ S. Daniel, “*AQIM. L'industrie de l'enlèvement*” Fayard (2011) p. 110

⁹⁶ Y.J Fanunsie and A. Entz “*AQIM Financial Assessment*” Foundation for Defense of Democracies (2017)

end of the kidnapping stage AQIM was considered “Al-Qaeda’s wealthiest branch”.⁹⁷ According to the 9/11 Commission the attacks in Washington and New York cost between \$400,000 and 500,000;⁹⁸ the London attacks of 2005 according to the UK government cost £8,000 maximum;⁹⁹ the Madrid train bombs attack in 2004 cost \$10,000;¹⁰⁰ while the Paris attacks in 2015 cost just \$7,500 according to some estimates.¹⁰¹ This means that at the end of the kidnappings stage AQIM had the economic capability to organize 125 September 11 attacks, 3,571 attacks like the ones in London and Madrid, and almost 7,000 Paris attacks. If the involvement in crime by the Islamist Mafias was related to the necessity to finance terrorist attacks, the organization would have been able to pursue such a strategy already in 2009 and it could have stopped its involvement in crime at that time. Still, despite some low-level skirmishes with the security forces in the Sahel and some sporadic attacks in Algeria none of this ever happened.¹⁰² With no political credibility earned and no political concession achieved there is by exclusion only one thing earned by the Islamist Mafias during the kidnapping stage: money. What happened after the kidnapping stage in fact was that the bulk of this money was reinvested in other criminal activities, more specifically drug trafficking, and in the first money laundering initiatives.¹⁰³

In fact, the remarkable amount of money earned by the Islamist Mafias with the kidnappings, together with their embedding with the local underworld, brought about the creation of the first money laundering initiatives and Islamist Mafioso enterprises. The case of Al-Qaeda’s Thuraya phones for instance came to light during the kidnappings’ stage, while the more complex money laundering initiatives in the real estate sector started during the drug trafficking one, probably because more money was earned by the Islamist Mafias through this criminal enterprise.¹⁰⁴ It is in this context that the Islamist Mafias started to finance local shops and other economic businesses which became dependent on their activities.¹⁰⁵

Together with their investments for money laundering, the Islamist Mafias started already at the end of the kidnapping stage to support the legal economic entrepreneurs in the region. As demonstrated also by Aisha Ahmad’s studies, until today the economic actors of the regions have tended to establish

⁹⁷ Y.J Fanunsie and A. Entz *Ibidem*

⁹⁸ National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, “9/11 Commission Report” (2004) p. 169

⁹⁹ Home Office, “Report of the Official Account of the Bombings in London on 7th July 2005” (2006) p.26

¹⁰⁰ C. Schippa, “How terrorists fund their attacks – and how to stop them” World Economic Forum (2017)

¹⁰¹ Reuters “Militants may have spent as little as \$7,500 on Paris Attacks” (2015)

¹⁰² For an analysis and a detailed report of these attacks see A. Botha, “Terrorism in the Maghreb the transnationalization of domestic terrorism” ISS (2008) p. 52

¹⁰³ M. Mokaddem *Ibidem* p.118

¹⁰⁴ Financial Action Task Force, “Terrorist Financing in West Africa” (2013)

¹⁰⁵ M. Mokaddem, *Ibidem* p.118

good ties with the Islamist Mafia not only because this latter financed their activities through money laundering but also because they helped in avoiding the tax system through smuggling.¹⁰⁶ Among the businessmen helped by the Islamist Mafias there is Belmokhtar's father in law, Lehmyem Ould Hamaha, who, after the marriage of his daughter to an Islamist Mafioso became one of the most trusted money-launderers for his son-in-law, and also one of the richest men in his city.¹⁰⁷

6. Fourth element: The criminal ideology

In order to create their own criminal ideology, the Islamist Mafias tends to use in an instrumental way themes commonly belonging to Islam as religion and Islamism as political ideology. Since the Islamist Mafias are the product of an evolutionary process and they need to hide their commitment to crime behind some ideological rationale. In this sense to find the traces of this criminal ideology of the Islamist Mafias it is important to look for the instrumental use of pre-existing ideologies rather than to new rituals or elements introduced by the organization.

The instrumental use of ideology by the Islamist Mafias was clearly perceivable at the beginning of the kidnapping stage. Specifically, two major factors emerged at that time: 1) the instrumentalization of ideological and religious beliefs; 2) the search for ideological justifications for the commitment of crimes which highlights how these have become crucial for the Islamist Mafias. The way in which the terrorists handled the talks with Western governments during the kidnappings, for example, not only poses many doubts about the political reasons behind these actions but also on their ideological purity. During every kidnapping AQIM started the negotiations requesting the release of other imprisoned mujahidin. Some of those requests were clearly unrealistic and it was evident that their counterparts would have not satisfied them. It seems more appropriate to look at these political requests as specious and to assess how the real aims of the organization were economic. The death of the British hostage Edwin Dyer is typical of this. In that case, Abu Zayd asked for the release of Abu Qatada al-Filistini, one of the most important Islamist ideologues alive, just four years after the London attacks of 2005.¹⁰⁸ After the refusal of the British government to negotiate any deal, the kidnapers did not execute the hostage but asked for a \$10million ransom. After silence from the British government the kidnapers again downgraded their request to \$6million.¹⁰⁹ If the aim of the kidnapping was political Dyer would have probably been killed before any form of trading about the

¹⁰⁶ A. Ahmad, "*Jihad & Co.*" Oxford University Press (2017) p. 175

¹⁰⁷ L.O.M. Salem *Ibidem* p. 59

¹⁰⁸ M. Mokaddem *Ibidem* p. 103

¹⁰⁹ M. Mokaddem *Ibidem* p. 104

ransom. The lack of interest in politics was evident also during the kidnapping of Michel Germaneau. The AQIM's members first bluffed, pretending that the hostage was alive one month after his death. Later on, they falsely claimed to have executed Germaneau who died of heart disease instead.¹¹⁰ A potential counterargument could be that of course the jihadists were more interested in hiding a natural death for political reasons but if so, why did they not do that at the moment of his death? The most logical answer to this question is that the Islamist Mafias were interested in earning money more than credibility. This common tendency to hide the death of the hostages with an ideological/political reason is a symptom of the Islamist Mafias instrumental use of Islamism for their own benefits. Other doubts on the "ideological" nature of the kidnappings arose also from quantitative analysis. Seth Loertscher and Daniel Milton who have analyzed 1,485 kidnapping cases from various databases over 45 years from 1970 to 2015.¹¹¹ According to their research AQIM is the third most prolific jihadist groups for the number of abductions (64) and also one of the groups who hold the hostages for the longest period of time. In looking at these data we find how groups which are less involved in crime and more politically oriented (IS and AQAP for instance) tend to end an abduction in one way or another in less time.¹¹² Furthermore, AQIM and the Taliban (including the Haqqani Network) have a lower execution rate (between 7% and 9%) in comparison to other groups like the IS (45%).¹¹³ Put succinctly, AQIM is among the organizations who kidnap more, holds hostages for longer and releases them more often - all characteristics which are symptomatic of a money-oriented strategy not of a political one. Other sources confirm how the religious justifications for the involvement in this activity were a mere "ideological screen" adopted by the Islamist Mafias.¹¹⁴ This was particularly evident concerning the internal debates of the Sahelian Jihadi Groups on the legality of the kidnappings themselves. The issue of the legitimacy of kidnapping was raised for the first time by Mokhtar Belmokhtar for a purely instrumental reason: he was worried about the rise of Abu Zayd as one of the leading figures in the organization.¹¹⁵ The AQIM leadership dismissed the doubts raised by Belmokhtar and justified the kidnappings because:

"since the democratic system prevailing in the West makes the elected president the supreme commander of the armed forces, any adult Western citizen supports in principle, by his vote,

¹¹⁰ M. Mokaddem *Ibidem* p. 113

¹¹¹ S. Loertscher and D. Milton, "*Held hostage: analysis of kidnappings across time and among jihadists organisations*", CTC Westpoint, (2015)

¹¹² S. Loertscher and D. Milton *Ibidem*

¹¹³ S. Loertscher and D. Milton *Ibidem*

¹¹⁴ M. Mokaddem, *Ibidem* p. 28

¹¹⁵ M. Guidere "*The Timbuktu Letters: New Insights about AQIM*" Res Militaris Vol.4 No.1, pp. 1-16 (2014)

the policy of the government of his country, and he is therefore responsible and accountable for this policy in the Middle-East, whether he likes it or not.”¹¹⁶

Other proof of a criminal ideology implemented by the Islamist Mafias has emerged during the drug trafficking stage. In fact, the ideological discrepancy between Islamism and drug use or trafficking above highlights the development of an alternative creed by these organizations.¹¹⁷ What is interesting to note is how the Islamist Mafias have not yet explicitly justified the drug trafficking preferring to maintain a state of denial.¹¹⁸ But at the same time, the more the hints of the involvement of these groups in drug trafficking have spread the more they have abandoned or dismissed their political rhetoric. For example during an extensive interview with the *New York Times* published during the drug trafficking stage, AQIM’s supreme leader Abdelmalek Droukdel does not mention a single time the word ‘caliphate’ neither as a political objective or as a political project.¹¹⁹ In the same vein, Soriano’s analysis of AQIM’s propaganda shows how during the drug trafficking stage, the less the group was carrying out attacks the more their efforts on propaganda become more profuse, so signalling the little importance of the political objectives which became more a rhetorical argument than a real project.¹²⁰ At the end of the drug trafficking stage, the Islamist Mafias was a perceivable parallel system of power able to bend ideologies to its businesses and to its own subculture. As expressed by the words of a notable from Kidal: “We have become a Mafia culture. Everyone wants to be a part of it. Every youth in our society now wants to be part of the black economy”.¹²¹

This absence of political goals within the Islamist Mafias’ rhetoric will is confirmed also after the Malian civil war and the French intervention. What is interesting to note concerning this factor is how the progression of the rapprochement between Belmokhtar and Droukdel has been characterized by a change in the rhetoric of the latter. After the fall of the Gaddafi regime in Libya and the beginning of the revolution in Burkina Faso it was reasonable to suppose that the jihadists would have tried to exploit these circumstances to install new forms of Islamic State in the region but none of this has been even tried by the Islamist Mafias.¹²² Abdelmalek Droukdel himself dismissed any will to fight

¹¹⁶ M. Guidere *Ibidem*

¹¹⁷ A. Ahmad, *Ibidem* p. 172

¹¹⁸ Point Chauds “*Entretien.....*” *Ibidem*

¹¹⁹ S. Boeke, “*AQIM: Terrorism, insurgency or organized crime?*” *Small Wars and Insurgencies* Vol. 27 No.5 pp. 914-936 (2016)

¹²⁰ M.R. Torres Soriano, “*The road to media jihad: The Propaganda Actions of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb*” *Terrorism and Political Violence* Vol.23 No.1, pp. 72-88 (2010)

¹²¹ GITOC *Ibidem*

¹²² Point Chauds “*Entretien Exclusif.....*” *Ibidem*

in Libya¹²³ while Belmokhtar has talked only of a spiritual support for the revolutionaries.¹²⁴ Concerning Belmokhtar's retreat to Libya after his split from AQIM it must be recalled how according to some authors this was done in order to avoid the confrontation with France, further proof of a lack of interest in politics by the one-eyed emir.¹²⁵ All these elements show that if "a political side" of the Islamist Mafia has ever existed after the French intervention of 2013 this has been completely disavowed or abandoned. The activities of some Islamist Mafias' members such as Amadou Koufa and his Macina Liberation Front militia, after the civil war, gave further proof of the new non-religious and non-political nature of the JNIM's insurgency from an ideological perspective.¹²⁶ In fact, looking at the data on radicalization in Mali¹²⁷, the majority of JNIM members admit to not having any knowledge of the Quran¹²⁸ and to have joined the organization because it offers the opportunity of economic revenue and a form of social respectability.¹²⁹ In sum the reasons why people join the JNIM are similar to the ones why people join Mafias observed in chapter II: through affiliation to the organization, anonymous men attempt a sort of social climbing in combining economic success and social recognition in a context characterized by hate towards the state's legitimacy.¹³⁰ In this context, the instrumental use of Islam and Islamist rhetoric attracted more recruits and they were perceived as more credible by the rest of the population, in creating the prototype of the new Sahelian jihadist: an individual characterized by a lack of ideological formation or knowledge, but proficient in the use of violence.¹³¹

7. Fifth Element: The Islamist Mafias' governmentality

Across the entire evolutionary process, the findings of my research prove how the Islamist Mafias have been able to implement some stable forms of internal and external governmentality in the region.

a) *Internal Governmentality*

To highlight the elements of the internal governmentality of the Islamist Mafias it is important to put under the spotlight two constants in the history of this organization. The first one is the presence of

¹²³ L. Pollichieni "Mokhtar Belmokhtar....." *Ibidem*

¹²⁴ Point Chauds "Entretien Exclusif....." *Ibidem*

¹²⁵ M. Mémier, "AQMI et Al-Mourabitoun, le djihad Sahélien réunifié" IFRIJ (2017)

¹²⁶ International Crisis Group "Speaking with the bad guys: Toward dialogue with Central Mali's jihadists" (2019)

¹²⁷ ISS Africa "Mali's young jihadists" (2016)

¹²⁸ M. Cochi "Perché l'estremismo violento dilaga in Africa" ISPI (2018)

¹²⁹ M. Cochi *Ibidem*

¹³⁰ ISS Africa "Mali's young....." *Ibidem*

¹³¹ A. Ahmad, "Jihad &...." *Ibidem* p. 172

the internal fractures within the groups which are related more to convenience than ideological purity. The second one is how despite these fractures the ideological elements have played an important role in order to maintain a certain degree of cohesion among the ranks of the organization. Just like in the case of Mafias the applied use of ideology has been instrumental to overcome the internal fractures.¹³² Since the beginning of the evolutionary process the Islamist Mafia has been characterized by the presence of evident internal fractures within its ranks but despite those the organization has always been able to maintain the integrity of its ranks, just like the Mafias.¹³³ According to some sources, the first division within the organization was related to the debate between internationalists (those who would be keen in shifting the armed struggle against the ‘far enemy’ following Bin Laden’s ideas) and localists (those who would be keen in restarting the jihad against the ‘near enemy’ within the North African regimes).¹³⁴ With the nomination of Abdelmalek Droukdel as emir of the group the internationalist wing gained the upper hand in this confrontation¹³⁵ but what is interesting to note is that this clash can be seen as the last ideological confrontation within the Islamist Mafias. In fact, after the nomination of Droukdel the successive clashes seem to be characterized more by money or power issues than to ideological ones.¹³⁶ At the beginning of its mandate Droukdel was eager to restart the armed struggle against the Algerian regime¹³⁷ but the relevance acquired by the commanders of the *katibat* in the south, together with a lack of a following among the Algerian population, has paved the way for the progressive dismissal of the political goals.¹³⁸ The brief insurgency of 2007 soon after the merger with Al Qa’ida central can be seen as the last political stage of the Algerian Islamist groups.¹³⁹ From this historical period until today the Islamist Mafias, just like the Mafioso organization, experienced a tension between supporters of a centralized organization and a more decentralized one¹⁴⁰ These tensions characterized the power relationships within AQIM also during the kidnapping stage. In the case of the kidnapping of the French citizen Pierre Camatte for instance, Mokhtar Belmokhtar decided to release him, acting against the will of Abdelmalek Droukdel who instead asked explicitly to kill the hostage.¹⁴¹ The economic and power nature of these internal struggles will become more evident in the case of the contrasts between Abu Zayd and Belmokhtar, as they started during the kidnapping stage. After the arrest of El-Para, Belmokhtar was expecting to

¹³² M.R. Torres Soriano *Ibidem*

¹³³ A. McGregor “*Leadership disputes plague Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb*” The Jamestown Foundation (2007)

¹³⁴ A. Bencherif *Ibidem*

¹³⁵ A. Bencherif *Ibidem*

¹³⁶ J-P. Filiu “*Al-Qa’ida in the Islamic Maghreb: A case study in the opportunism of Global Jihad*” CTC Sentinel Vol.3 No. 4 pp. 14-15 (2010)

¹³⁷ A. Tazaghart *Ibidem* pp.150-151

¹³⁸ E. Ouellet, J. Lacroix-Leclair and P. Pahlavi “*The Institutionalisation of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb*” Terrorism and Political Violence Vol.26 No.4 pp. 650-665 (2014)

¹³⁹ A.Botha *Ibidem*

¹⁴⁰ See F. Varese, “*Vite di Mafia*” Einaudi (2017)

¹⁴¹ S. Daniel “*AQMI....*” *Ibidem* p.150

be nominated as emir of the South because of his extensive network of relationships and for his experience on the battlefield, but Droukdel decided to nominate Abu Zayd instead.¹⁴² This choice was probably the last attempt by Droukdel to give a political attitude to the groups' activities but the result was the opposite and the clashes between the two emirs became mainly focused on a competition for the kidnappings business and the drug trafficking.¹⁴³

More insights on the confrontations between Belmokhtar on the one hand and Abu Zayd and the central leadership on the other have been proved by the publication of the so-called Timbuktu letters.¹⁴⁴ The general theme of the clashes between Belmokhtar and Abu Zayd was the excessive independence of the former especially from the economic point of view.¹⁴⁵ The central leadership accused Belmokhtar of having badly handled the Fowler and Guay kidnapping, and of having received a poor ransom and of not having contributed to the expenses of the organization.¹⁴⁶ Moreover, Belmokhtar was pushing to create a more decentralized organization following the AQAP model in Yemen but Droukdel refused this idea and complained about a lack of commitment to jihad by Belmokhtar.¹⁴⁷ The successive departure of Belmokhtar from AQIM gives more proof of the evolutionary process undertaken by the Islamist Mafias in this context. His alliance with some members of the MUJAO, an organization mainly relying on illicit traffic, represents another sign of the criminal orientation of his actions.¹⁴⁸ Moreover, as demonstrated by Porter's research, the exercise of violence by the Islamist Mafioso after the split from AQIM in the case of the attack on the In Amenas refinery in Algeria, was due more to Belmokhtar's will to increase his notoriety than the will of restarting the jihad in Algeria.¹⁴⁹

An important consideration on internal governmentality of the Islamist Mafia needs to be done about the Civil War stage. This historical period can be seen as the deepest governmentality crisis in the group's history and at the same time as the definitive defeat of the supporters of a centralized structure of the organization. In fact in this context the proliferation of different armed groups in the region put at risk the survival of the historical core of the Islamist Mafia.¹⁵⁰ The presence of different armed groups involved simultaneously in the completely unregulated exercise of violence resulted in the

¹⁴² Point Chauds "Exclusif...." *Ibidem*

¹⁴³ J-P. Filiu "AQIM and the Dilemmas of Jihadi Loyalty" *Perspectives on Terrorism* Vol.11 No.6, pp. 167-173 (2017)

¹⁴⁴ M. Guidère "The Timbuktu Letters: new insight about AQIM" *Res Militaris* (2014)

¹⁴⁵ M. Guidère *Ibidem*

¹⁴⁶ M. Guidère *Ibidem*

¹⁴⁷ M. Guidère *Ibidem*

¹⁴⁸ S. Daniel "Les Mafias...." *Ibidem* p. 79

¹⁴⁹ G. D. Porter "Terrorist Outbidding: The In Amenas Attack" *CTC Sentinel* Vol.8 No.5 pp. 14-17 (2015)

¹⁵⁰ R. Callimachi "In Timbuktu Al-Qaeda left behind a Manifesto" *Associated Press* (2013)

inability of AQIM to exercise its authority over all of the other SJG groups, and it is for this reason that the low profile strategies suggested by Droukdel will be largely unsuccessful.¹⁵¹ Paradoxically, the Islamist Mafias will start to recompose these internal fractures only during the insurgency period. The death of Abu Zayd, in fact, posed an end to the disputes between him and Belmokhtar but what is interesting to note is how even Abdelmalek Droukdel has become more peaceful in relation to the rogue emir.¹⁵² The closeness between AQIM and Belmokhtar has been so evident that some authors have argued that the split among the groups was merely a formality.¹⁵³

The end of the internal fractures and the reestablishment of complete governmentality among the organization's ranks was sealed by the birth of JNIM. With a video distributed in March 2017 Iyad Ag Ghali announced officially the creation of the *Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin* (JNIM, Group of Support to Islam and Muslims) an organization which involved all the previous existent jihadi groups borne after the fragmentation stage of 2012.¹⁵⁴ The JNIM absorbed the organizations of Ansar Al Din, Al Murabitun, AQIM and the Macina Liberation Front. All the top figures of these groups were present in the video during which Ag Ghali made *bayat* to the Al Qaeda leader Al-Zawahiri.¹⁵⁵ In the same video proof of the importance of propaganda for internal governmentality can be found. In fact, Ag Ghali placed an emphasis on the importance of unity among the ranks of the different groups in the Sahel - a theme which has been proposed many times in the official propaganda of the group¹⁵⁶. Moreover, the JNIM message is focused on the importance of jihad in general but with little attention paid to the creation of a new Islamic state.¹⁵⁷ There are three main consequences related to the birth of JNIM: a) the cessation of hostilities among the different jihadists organizations; b) the restart of drug trafficking in the area;¹⁵⁸ c) the expansion of the geographical range of the activities of the Islamist Mafias.¹⁵⁹ Just like in the case of Mafias the recall to these ideological elements proved useful in order to safeguard the Islamist Mafias' structural integrity from the internal fractures and quarrels that had emerged in the past.

b) External Governmentality

¹⁵¹ J. Cockayne "Hidden Power" Oxford University Press (2016) p.299

¹⁵² El Watan "AQMI veut réunifier ses rangs" (2013)

¹⁵³ M. Mémier *Ibidem*

¹⁵⁴ T. Joscelyn "Analysis: Al-Qaeda groups reorganize in West Africa" Long War Journal (2017)

¹⁵⁵ T. Joscelyn *Ibidem*

¹⁵⁶ S. Altuna Galán "JNIM: A propaganda analysis of Al-Qaeda's project for the Sahel" Real Instituto Elcano (2018)

¹⁵⁷ S. Altuna Galán *Ibidem*

¹⁵⁸ W. Assanvo "Mali's drug problems are its silent enemy" Institute for Security Studies (2018)

¹⁵⁹ R. Maclean "Alarming" Burkina Faso unrest threatens west African stability" The Guardian (2019)

As illustrated by Baldaro, after the 2006 Tuareg revolts the northern area of Mali became an area of limited statehood for structural and strategic reasons¹⁶⁰ while Graham assessed how: “Jihadists have found a social environment where local populations have antagonistic relations with their respective governments”.¹⁶¹ In order to understand the external governmentality projected by the Sahelian Jihadi Group it is important to start from these two concepts expressed by these authors: the absence of statehood and the presence of a form of social legitimacy enjoyed by the Islamist Mafias in comparison to the proper government. These two characteristics together with the paradigm of complexity mentioned in chapter II which argues how the nature of the Mafias is to operate within “a wide and articulate relational context”¹⁶² all together represent the keystone for the origin and the implementation of the SJG external governmentality. In this sense it is important to evaluate if such a widespread relational network exists in relation to the case study. As shown above in the beginning of the 2000s the then GSPC was an organization that was financially poor and which had lost any form of sympathy from both the population in Algeria and the other Islamist groups in the world.¹⁶³ The relation networks of the GSPC in that period were mainly concentrated in the Saharan underworld as demonstrated by the case of the kidnapping of the Canadian diplomats Robert Fawler and Louis Guay who have been sold by common criminals to the Islamist Mafias.¹⁶⁴ The case of the Vilalta, Pascal and Gomez kidnapping confirms these dynamics too. In fact, the kidnapper of the Spanish aid workers was Omar Sid’Ahmed Ould Hamma who was arrested later by the Mauritanian authorities.¹⁶⁵ The figure of Hamma is symptomatic of this new sort of relationship between the Islamist Mafias and other criminals since AQIM negotiated for his release after that of Gomez.¹⁶⁶

The external governmentality exercised by the Islamist Mafias in the region has been already tangible at the end of the kidnapping stage. During the kidnapping stage some forms of governmentality were enforced by the Islamist Mafias, but they were more blurred. It is thanks to the political legitimacy obtained in helping the government with the northern issue that governmentality became more tangible. Some areas of the north become explicitly no-go ones and the Islamist Mafia also started to act as a tribunal for the resolution of the local disputes thus ensuring the harmony among the different ethnic communities in the region.¹⁶⁷ At that time in fact, this increased militarization of the region

¹⁶⁰ E. Baldaro *Ibidem*

¹⁶¹ F. C Graham IV, *Ibidem*

¹⁶² U. Santino “*La mafia interpretata*”. Rubbettino (1995)

¹⁶³ A. McGregor *Ibidem*

¹⁶⁴ A. McGregor *Ibidem*

¹⁶⁵ BBC, “*Spain fears Mauritania kidnap was al-Qaeda*”, (2009)

¹⁶⁶ BBC *Ibidem*

¹⁶⁷ S. Boeke, *Ibidem*

accelerated the development of some forms of governmentality: already in 2009 the Islamist Mafia was involved in extortions to journalists and traders who travelled in the areas under their control¹⁶⁸

The projection of the external governmentality by the Islamist Mafias has not been compromised nor by the civil war or the successive French intervention. The fall of the Compaoré regime in Burkina Faso in 2013, for example, led to another power vacuum in the north east of the country which has been occupied by the Islamist Mafias, which even in this context are fighting for a restoration of the status quo with the local government. In Burkina-Faso, the jihadists have also increasingly started to exploit the illegal gold mining and in doing so they are creating new areas of governmentality, something that has never happened before, not even during the Compaoré regime.¹⁶⁹

To really understand the power and the reach of the Islamist Mafias' external governmentality it is useful to analyse also its relationship with the other armed groups in the region which reflects their powerbroking ability namely the relationship with other armed groups in the region. Walter, Leuprecht and Skillicorn have analysed the structure and spatial patterns among the different armed groups in the Sahel.¹⁷⁰ According to their findings AQIM and its offshoots are the least violent ones in relation to other armed factions and the ones with the best connections with them.¹⁷¹ In sum the Islamist Mafias are keener to adopt a cooperative approach with other armed groups and to build positive relations with them rather than confront them violently.¹⁷² An example of this positive attitude toward other armed groups is the relationship between the Islamist Mafias and Boko Haram. It seems in fact, that the Nigerian group is more violent and enjoys fewer positive ties with other armed factions than the Islamist Mafias.¹⁷³ The SJG are among the few jihadi groups which have positive relations with Boko Haram.¹⁷⁴ These findings are corroborated by evidence which suggests how the two organizations were already in touch after the first crackdown against the Nigerian group in 2009¹⁷⁵ and also by the accounts on the participation of the latter alongside AQIM and its allies in the Malian civil war because of its interests in local drug trafficking.¹⁷⁶ Another interesting fact to note on the Islamist Mafia's network is the one related to the birth of the ANSARU group in 2012-2013. According to some sources the leaflets announcing the birth of this new Nigerian jihadist

¹⁶⁸ R. Masto "Califfato Nero" Laterza (2016) pp.116-117

¹⁶⁹ D. Lewis and R. McNeill "Special Report: How Jihadists struck gold in Africa's Sahel" Reuters (2019)

¹⁷⁰ O. J. Walther, C. Leuprecht and D. Skillicorn, "Political Fragmentation and Alliances among Armed Non-state Actors in North and Western Africa (1997–2014)" *Terrorism and Political Violence* Vol.32 No.1 pp. 167-186 (2020)

¹⁷¹ O. J. Walther, C. Leuprecht and D. Skillicorn *Ibidem*

¹⁷² O. J. Walther, C. Leuprecht and D. Skillicorn *Ibidem*

¹⁷³ O. J. Walther, C. Leuprecht and D. Skillicorn *Ibidem*

¹⁷⁴ O. J. Walther, C. Leuprecht and D. Skillicorn *Ibidem*

¹⁷⁵ S. Daniel "AQMI....." *Ibidem* p. 200

¹⁷⁶ S. A. Harmon *Ibidem* p.144

organization have been found in the house of Mokhtar Belmokhtar in Gao three months before their distribution in the state of Kano in Northern Nigeria.¹⁷⁷ This is a proof of the strong influence of the Islamist Mafias on the Nigerian insurgents at large, an argument which is an object of debate in academia.¹⁷⁸

A conclusive element must be added here in relation to the external governmentality implemented by the JNIM after its birth. It is interesting to note how after the beginning of a new stage in the French counterinsurgency the JNIM and the Mafias look similar also from a tactical perspective, specifically, the use of motorbikes for targeted strikes and killings,¹⁷⁹ but above all the adoption of hit and run tactics aimed at spreading fear rather than conquering territories are the same ones adopted by the Camorra in Naples.¹⁸⁰

8. The Malian civil war

To prove the validity of this thesis it is important to analyse the impact of the Malian civil war on the Islamist Mafias. The analysis of this historical event is important in order to demonstrate the criminal nature of the SJG nowadays. The participation of the Islamist Mafias in this conflict could be, legitimately, seen as the proof of the existence of a political project implemented by these organizations, and consequently that the criminal activities carried out across the decades should be seen as subordinated to this. This is the common narrative about the 2012 Malian civil war as the one of a jihadist offensive aimed at the creation of a state ruled by sharia that was successively stopped by the French intervention in 2013.¹⁸¹ The findings of this research proves that this reconstruction is wrong in some points: a) there is not clear proof that the offensive by the *mujahidin* was aimed at conquering the entirety of Mali; b) involvement in the civil war was the opposite to the interests of the Islamist Mafia and consequently not part of a political agenda; c) the combination of the MNLA's offensive, with the internecine conflicts within the Islamist Mafia gives a better explication of the conflict dynamics rather than the project of the creation of a caliphate in the middle of the Sahel.

¹⁷⁷ J. Zenn “*Cooperation or Competition: Boko Haram and Ansaru after the Mali intervention*” CTC Sentinel Vol.6 No.3 pp. 1-9 (2013)

¹⁷⁸ A. Higazi, B.Kendhammer, K, Mohammed, M-A Pérouse de Montclos, and A.Thurston “*A Response to Jacob Zenn on Boko Haram and al-Qa’ida*” Perspectives on Terrorism Vol.12 No.2 pp. 203-213 (2018)

¹⁷⁹ R. Lyammouri, “*AQIM never really abandoned Timbuktu, Mali*” Sahel blog (2016)

¹⁸⁰ I. Sales “*Napoli, nella Guerra contro la camorra non basta schierare più agenti*” Il Mattino (2019)

¹⁸¹ A. Hernann “*Discourse in crisis: situating slavery, jihad and military intervention in northern Mali*” Dialectical Anthropology Vol.4 No.3 pp. 267-286 (2016)

The relative tranquillity of the Islamist Mafias' business has been shaken by the rapid rise of the Mouvement National pour la Libération de l'Azawad (National Movement for the Liberation of the Azawad) in 2012. This coalition of Gaddafi's former militiamen (some of the Tuareg leaders were part of the Libyan "Arab Legion" in fact), Tuareg irredentists and other fighters with no affiliation, was able in a few months to conquer the entire north of Mali and to claim the independence of the Azawad region, a Tuareg state in the Sahel.¹⁸² The first months of the MNLA rise in the North have perfectly illustrated the weakness of both the Malian army and the political regime in Bamako. It is not a mistake to assess how the *laissez faire* which has characterized the Malian policies towards the north was confirmed in the first months of the rebel offensive.¹⁸³ The army was easily defeated by the rebels who were better armed, thanks to the arsenals taken after the fall of the regime in Libya, and who had a better knowledge of the terrain and deeper connections with the local tribes.¹⁸⁴ Despite the lightning-quick conquering of the North, the MNLA started to show its political weakness a few months after the beginning of the war. From a political point of view, the concept of Azawad was very generic and not important for the other ethnic groups present in the region as a state-building project.¹⁸⁵ Moreover, the men of the MNLA were the protagonists of a series of lootings, arbitrary killings and harassment of the locals which in a very short time alienated any form of sympathy for the rebels.¹⁸⁶

It is in this context that the takeover of the Islamist Mafias started. In the beginning of the insurgency the organization adopted a low profile and at the same time it tried to infiltrate the MNLA in its top positions.¹⁸⁷ This infiltration attempt was possible thanks to the role played by Iyad Ag Ghaly, a veteran of the Tuareg wars and one of the most trusted middlemen during the kidnapping stage.¹⁸⁸ According to McGregor, Iyad Ag Ghaly proposed himself as the leader of the insurgency, a proposal violently rejected by the other members of the MNLA, which led to the creation of the jihadi Tuareg groups of Ansar al Din.¹⁸⁹ The uprising represented a double problem from the Islamist Mafias perspective: on the one hand the emerging of new players in the region was compromising the balance of powers above which the Islamist Mafias have been able to prosper,¹⁹⁰ on the other the conquering of the north by the MNLA and the successive confrontation with the local government was

¹⁸² D. Cristiani and R. Fabiani "From Dysfunctionality to Disaggregation and back?" IAI (2013)

¹⁸³ E. Balduino *Ibidem*

¹⁸⁴ D. Cristiani and R. Fabiani *Ibidem*

¹⁸⁵ D. Cristiani and R. Fabiani *Ibidem*

¹⁸⁶ S. A. Harmon *Ibidem* p. 171

¹⁸⁷ A. McGregor. "Bringing Militant Salafism to the Tuareg: A profile of Veteran Rebel Iyad Ag Ghali". Jamestown Foundation (2012)

¹⁸⁸ A. McGregor. "Bringing Militant Salafism...." *Ibidem*

¹⁸⁹ A. McGregor. "Bringing Militant Salafism...." *Ibidem*

¹⁹⁰ J. Cockayne *Ibidem* p.299

counterproductive for the organizations who were keen to adopt a cooperative approach with the local power players as showed above. The preference of the Islamist Mafias for a low-profile posture is proved also by some of the Timbuktu letters in which Droukdel himself urged his men to adopt this attitude.¹⁹¹

Still at the beginning of the revolt, the redistribution of the key northern cities among the different jihadi groups led to a truce among the members of the Islamist Mafias who received a proper geographical dominion and consequently an equal division of the different illicit traffic in the area (one of the most important issues among the Islamist Mafia's ranks).¹⁹² The subsequent decision to contrast the MNLA and to overthrow it was arguably motivated by both political and economic interests conjunctly. In fact, after the rise of the MNLA the Islamist Mafias were forced to fight in order to not lose their credibility as powerbrokers but above all to not lose their privileged positions within the local illicit networks.¹⁹³ Concerning the first point, the behaviour of the Islamist Mafias in dealing with the local population during the occupation of the cities in the north was completely different in comparison to the one of the MNLA. According to some sources, after having pushed back the MNLA from Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu the *mujahidin* imposed a "fair" rule of law in comparison to the violent one of the MNLA.¹⁹⁴ This attitude is perfectly exemplified by the words used by Belmokhtar while talking to the notables in Gao: "I am here not to impose but to compose."¹⁹⁵

8.1 The French intervention

When the Islamist Mafia was already in control of the northern triangle, the international community was palpably scared by the propaganda of the newborn group of Ansar Al Din led by Ag Ghali.¹⁹⁶ They claimed that the real aim of the group was to conquer the entirety of Mali and to impose its draconian interpretation of sharia law.¹⁹⁷ Still the analysis of the movements of the Islamist Mafia on the ground allows us to dismiss these claims as mere propaganda. Christophe Boisbouvier has retraced in a detailed way the hours that led to the decision of the French president Francois Hollande to intervene in the civil war. The findings of his enquiries reveal some important insights which undermine the narrative of the incoming jihadi offensive towards the capital, Bamako. Boisbouvier reveals for example how Hollande was against the "boots on the ground scenario" and how his

¹⁹¹ R. Callimachi *Ibidem*

¹⁹² L. Pollichieni, "Mokhtar Belmokhtar," *Ibidem*

¹⁹³ L. Pollichieni, "Mokhtar Belmokhtar....." *Ibidem*

¹⁹⁴ S. Harmon *Ibidem* p.171

¹⁹⁵ S. Daniel "Les Mafias...." *Ibidem* p.92

¹⁹⁶ A. McGregor. "Bringing Militant Salafism...." *Ibidem*

¹⁹⁷ A. McGregor. "Bringing Militant Salafism...." *Ibidem*

position on this issue clashed with the one of the army.¹⁹⁸ Moreover, at the end of 2012 the only sources who claimed how a jihadi offensive towards Bamako was incumbent were only the Nigerien and the Malian authorities.¹⁹⁹ In this scenario, Hollande asked the French army and secret services for proof of a “general offensive” against Mali, but in the end French intelligence did not find any of this.²⁰⁰ The idea of a military intervention seems to be more related to the influence and the hypothesis made by the president’s cabinet and his African partners than by hard facts.²⁰¹ This sense of uncertainty in which the decision to intervene in Mali was undertaken is summarized by Boisbouvier:

“At war yes but how? Firstly, using a “shock” strategy. Ignoring jihadists’ final aim (Mopti or Bamako?) the French cabinet decides to dramatize at maximum the situation and they insist on the possible fall of the Malian capital. Hollande knows that communication is one of the main issues in modern warfare and he wants to impress the public opinion. In order to Justify the French intervention, he is preparing to announce how “the existence itself” of Mali is in danger”²⁰²

In a short period of time, French troops were able to stop the supposed offensive and to cast out the jihadists from the North. After the capture of the key cities of Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu the French army started a policy of “targeted killings”²⁰³ which led to the elimination of important figures within the Islamist Mafias, the most important of whom was certainly Abu Zayd, killed during the Tigharghar battle by the Chadian armed forces.²⁰⁴

From the Islamist Mafias perspective France’s intervention arrived in a context characterized by internal fractures and by a dramatic revolution in the illicit networks’ landscape.²⁰⁵ According to some authors the start of the civil war by the MNLA proved to be bad business for the organization, at least in the short term.²⁰⁶ This is evident for instance, because the turmoil in the north reshaped the political panorama in the capital where one of the closest collaborators of the Islamist Mafias, President Amadou Toumani Touré, was deposed by a coup.²⁰⁷ Moreover, an eventual confrontation with France or the West in general, has always been a strategic nightmare for the Islamist Mafia and its leaders.

¹⁹⁸ C. Boisbouvier, “*Hollande l’Africain*”, La Découverte (2015) p.189

¹⁹⁹ C. Boisbouvier, *Ibidem* p. 199

²⁰⁰ C. Boisbouvier, *Ibidem* pp. 201, 203

²⁰¹ C. Boisbouvier, *Ibidem* p. 203

²⁰² C. Boisbouvier, *Ibidem* p. 204

²⁰³ C. Boisbouvier *Ibidem* p.208

²⁰⁴ S. Daniel “Les Mafias...” *Ibidem*

²⁰⁵ J. Cockayne *Ibidem* p.299

²⁰⁶ S. Boeke *Ibidem*

²⁰⁷ S. Daniel “Les Mafias...” *Ibidem* p.314

During the kidnappings stage for instance, Mokhtar Belmokhtar, had heavily criticized the practice of indiscriminate captures for being flashy and Droukdel himself invited his men to pretend to be a local movement to avoid any hard application of the sharia in Mali for the same reason.²⁰⁸ Also, the geographical distribution of the groups has been compromised by the French intervention and the fragmentation among the armed groups has led to a loss in relevance of the region in relation to drug trafficking.²⁰⁹ The drug cartels in fact understood how the Malian route was inefficient because of the presence of too many armed groups each of whom needed to be paid for the drug transit.²¹⁰ Bearing in mind these problems the idea that the civil war in Mali was the zenith of a political project aimed at the foundation of an Islamic State should be cautiously evaluated. It is more appropriate to analyze the civil war from the SJG perspective as a temporary blackout during which the Islamist Mafias had the opportunity to reorganize itself.

8.2 The Sahelian insurgency after the French intervention

The Islamist Mafias' strategy after the civil war offers further demonstrations of the criminal nature of their activities. In fact, paradoxically, the peace initiatives in the region after the French intervention created some good presumptions for the organizations in order to recreate a new political environment in which they can cooperate with the key power players in the region. The peace deal of Algiers for example paved the way for the institutionalization of the local armed groups thanks to the mixed patrols between Malian and Tuaregs²¹¹ and the creation of the so-called *autorités intérimaires* (interim authorities), an administrative-technical branch of the government responsible for the implementation of the autonomy in the North,²¹² which turned out to be a useful instrument from the Islamist Mafias perspective to legitimize to some extent their political power after the war.²¹³

The French strategy and the Algiers peace talks were not able to resolve a certain lack of foresight from a strategic perspective.²¹⁴ First of all because the French army has refused to combat the criminal activities even if they have acknowledged their importance. General Patrick Bréthous, commander of the Barkhane operation, was clear on this issue in 2016 when he claimed that drug trafficking was surely a factor in Mali and the Sahara but the fight against the smugglers was not the Army's

²⁰⁸ R. Callimachi, *Ibidem*

²⁰⁹ N. Gratteri e A. Nicaso "Oro bianco" Mondadori (2015) p. 173

²¹⁰ N. Gratteri e A. Nicaso *Ibidem* p. 173

²¹¹ *Accord pour la Paix et la Réconciliation au Mali*, Annex 2 (2015)

²¹² *Accord pour la Paix et la Réconciliation au Mali*, Annex 1 (2015)

²¹³ UN Security Council "Letter dated 8 August 2018 from the Panel of Experts established pursuant to resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali addressed to the President of the Security Council" (2018)

²¹⁴ N. K. Powel "A Flawed Strategy in The Sahel" Foreign Affairs (2016)

mission.²¹⁵ From a political perspective, the claim of fighting in Mali to keep France safe from terrorism was dramatically dismissed by the wave of attacks in the country between 2015 and 2016.²¹⁶ Finally, the general idea of separating the ‘good’ insurgents from the ‘bad’ ones which was at the base of the Algiers agreements produced the opposite effect of eliminating the instability. The mixed patrol became a tool to institutionalize the use of violence by armed groups, including former members of the Islamist Mafias who shifted to the pro-government militias after the French intervention.²¹⁷

Soon after the French intervention two characteristics of the Islamist Mafia emerged: a) a “wait and see” approach concerning the peace talks with the Malian government characterized also by the infiltration of the newly elected Parliament; b) an increase in wealth and opportunities from a financial perspective. The first of these two characteristics was demonstrated by the decisions made by Ag Ghali after his escape from Northern Mali. When he was interviewed by Samuel Laurent after his escape from Northern Mali and he was waiting for the peace talks in order to discuss any opportunity related to it.²¹⁸ Concerning the latter there are two main factors that must be taken into account in the aftermath of the French intervention. The first one is the growing instability in the Sahel and in Libya which has represented a significant opportunity to expand the Islamist Mafias’ influence across the region.²¹⁹ This geographical enlargement of the SJG activities is perceivable in the case of Burkina-Faso. It is important to note how this country has been attacked by the Islamist Mafias only after the fall of the Compaoré regime - so when one of the closest political partners of these organizations was ousted. Moreover, after the 2012 civil war, two new illicit markets have exploded in the Sahel and have been exploited by the Islamist Mafias: weapons trafficking and the human smuggling.²²⁰ The fall of the Gaddafi regime let one of the most technologically advanced African arsenals without a guardian. The Islamist Mafias have taken the opportunity to get into this business. As claimed by Mokhtar Belmokhtar the Libyan revolution has been a: “good deal” for the organization.²²¹ This enlargement proves how despite the civil war, the core businesses of the Islamist Mafias remained the purely criminal ones. In this sense, it can be assessed how this criminal organization has declined

²¹⁵ B. Ahmed “*Gal Patrick Bréthous (Barkhane): au Mali, “les terroristes fuient les forces internationales”* Jeune Afrique (2016)

²¹⁶ L. Pollichieni “*La guerre pour la guerre: l’eredità a-strategica di Hollande in Africa*” Limes, rivista italiana di geopolitica (2017)

²¹⁷ P. Kleinfeld “*New violence eclipses Mali’s plans for peace*” The New Humanitarian (2018)

²¹⁸ S. Daniel “*Les Mafias...*” Ibidem p.282

²¹⁹ L. Pollichieni, “*Mokhtar Belmokhtar*” Ibidem

²²⁰ L. Pollichieni “*Mokhtar Belmokhtar*” Ibidem

²²¹ Point Chauds “*Entretien Exclusif*” Ibidem

the regional crisis in order to implement a more dominant position in the local underworld instead of pursuing any political objective.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown the evolutionary process undertaken by the Sahelian Jihadi Groups to become an Islamist Mafia. I have demonstrated how the Sales' 'five elements' model can be applied also to the SJG and how the dynamics of the Malian civil war and regional instability have not changed the main objectives of these organizations which remain purely criminal and power oriented. Across different historical stages the group has abandoned its political goals to adopt a more crime-oriented behaviour and started to cooperate with the local authorities, something which is likely to happen again in the context of an insurgency that has reached a point of "mutually hurting stalemate"²²² in Mali and the rest of the region. In this context a few words should be spent on the birth of the Islamic State in the Great Sahara, an IS province led by a former member of the Islamist Mafias.²²³ According to some sources²²⁴ a rapprochement between the ISGS and the Islamist Mafias in the future might be possible, for others this collaboration could be already ongoing.²²⁵ An eventual alliance with IS in the region would boost the credibility of the Islamist Mafias but it is unlikely to change the ultimate goals of the group: peace with the Malian government.

In adapting to different environments, the Islamist Mafia has occasionally changed forms and names but leaving intact its aim of the achievement of a form of absolute power. The most important lessons that need to be learned from the evolutionary process showed above is how the Islamist Mafias in very little time have been able to implement their own Mafioso method. Moving from terrorism to organized crime they change from a criminal activity aimed at confrontation with local power players to a more servile one towards their communities and the local power players.

In the end of this chapter two key points have emerged from the analysis of this case study:

²²² International Crisis Group: "*Speaking with.....*" *Ibidem*

²²³ E. Miller "*ISIS is expanding in North and West Africa*" The Arab Weekly (2018)

²²⁴ D. Lounnas "*The Transmutation of Jihadi Organizations in the Sahel and the Regional Security Architecture*" IAI (2018)

²²⁵ C. Weiss "*Islamic State claims several ISGS attacks across the Sahel*" The Long War Journal (2019)

- 1) The Islamist Mafias, just like the Mafias, have built a network of resilient power relations which make them, at the moment, an unavoidable power player with whom all the local actors need to talk with. In this sense they have become the Hidden Power theorized by Cockayne.²²⁶
- 2) Just like the Mafias the Islamist Mafias have implemented their own mafioso method. This means that acting in a context where: “the social justice is or has been unable to eradicate the system of the private revenge”²²⁷ they have been able to act as a structural element of a power system in which they are so rooted that they are able to survive even dramatic events such as civil wars.

As assessed at the end of chapter II the Mafioso method can be replicated in other contexts which have the same characteristics and the Islamist Mafioso method is not an exception to this. In the next chapter we will see how even in the case of the Haqqani Network, despite some divergences from a socio-political perspective, the Islamist Mafias have found their own way to achieve stability, increase their power and implement resilience.

²²⁶ J. Cockayne *Ibidem* p.299

²²⁷ G. Mosca “*Che cosa è la Mafia?*” Elison Publishing (2015) ebook

CHAPTER V

Case Study: the Haqqani Network

Introduction

This chapter tests the validity of the Islamist Mafias approach in relation to the second case study of this thesis: the Haqqani Network (that will be also addressed below as the Haqqanis, the HN or the Network). In this chapter, the evolutionary process undertaken by the Network will be analysed, following an historical approach, in order to achieve two main research aims: 1) to prove the transformation of the HN into an Islamist Mafia; 2) to produce a double comparison between the Network, the Sahelian Jihadi Groups observed in the previous chapter and the Sales' model on the definition of Mafia. The core argument of the following analysis will be to prove the substantial implementation of a Mafioso or Islamist Mafioso method by this organization, an implementation which modifies the nature of its final objective: the achievement of an absolute, informal and hidden power rather than some specific political objectives (such as the creation of a government or the implementation of a purely Islamist agenda).

Bearing in mind these aims, it is important even in the analysis of the Haqqani Network to highlight some problems related to research on the Network and on Afghanistan. These issues do not compromise the demonstration of the main arguments of this thesis but still, for the sake of clarity, intellectual honesty and scientific precision they represent some relevant caveats that need to be tackled. Concerning the first of these (the research on the HN as a terror group), it is evident how despite the interest generated in academic research by the Haqqani Network there are still relatively few pieces of literature on the organization in comparison to the ones on Al-Qaeda or the wide Afghan-Arab movement for instance. The only purely academic contribution specifically focused on the Network up till now is the book *Fountainhead of Jihad* by Brown and Rassler which since its publication has become a milestone for all research focused on this organization.¹ Other authors such as Ahmad², Farral and Hamid³ and in more recent times Hegghammer,⁴ have brought some important contributions on the knowledge of the HN's history but always within the wider context of

¹ See V. Brown and D. Rassler "*Fountainhead of Jihad*" Oxford University Press (2013)

² See A. Ahmad "*Jihad & Co.*" Oxford University Press (2017),

³ See L. Farral and M. Hamid "*The Arabs at War in Afghanistan*" Hurst & Co. (2015)

⁴ See T. Hegghammer "*The Caravan*" Cambridge University Press (2020)

the studies on other subjects born from the 1970's Afghan civil war. These caveats push me necessarily to mix the academic literature together with other smaller pieces of information on the Haqqanis, which come from other studies focused on a wide range of subjects (from drug trafficking to Afghanistan's power systems at large) and of course with some elements retrieved from non-academic sources. In this context a first caveat and challenge for this analysis will be not to lose the main aim of this project (which is to verify the application of the Islamist Mafia model to the Haqqanis) during this intellectual and analytical path.

Secondly, the Afghan context in which the Network is active, poses some important challenges for research as well. At a basic level, it is difficult in the context of the on-going war to evidence clearly (as was undertaken in the previous chapter on the Sahelian Jihadi Groups) the different historical periods of the Haqqanis' evolutionary process. Since the war against the Soviet backed regime in the 1970s, the war economy exploited by the local warlords has made Afghanistan the epicentre of the simultaneous development of a wide range of criminal markets and networks.⁵ In a context characterized by the perpetuity of war there are no clear data that allow me to highlight when exactly a specific criminal activity has been undertaken by the Network or whether its involvement in it has changed in intensity in comparison to the past. For this reason, the best solution to develop a clear chronology to analyse each element of the Sales' model is to divide its history according to the emergence of different power players in Afghanistan. Put succinctly: if the evolution of the SJGs can be marked according to the groups' involvement in different criminal activities, in this second case study the evolutionary process can be marked by the changes to the power environment and relations around the Network. For this reason, the development of this analysis will be divided in three main parts: 1) the period of the war against the USSR (1975- 1994); 2) the period of the rise of the Taliban (1994-2001); 3) the period after the US invasion of Afghanistan (2001 until today). This last part can be divided into two further subparts before and after 2009, when the HN gained the upper hand within the Taliban movement and the US occasionally approached the Haqqanis in order to sign a peace deal with them in the context of the "surge" strategy for the Afghan war adopted by the Obama administration. These two facts, which enabled the HN to playoff both sides of the insurgency, were crucial, as will be showed below, to show the transformation of the Network into an informal power entity in Afghanistan characterized by some important links with the US, the Afghan Government and the insurgents. Finally, the analysis of each element of the Sales' model will follow the above-mentioned chronological division in order to highlight also the manifestation of each of these elements in the history of the Haqqanis. What it is important to stress concerning the application of

⁵ J. Mendel "Afghanistan, Networks and Connectivity" *Geopolitics* Vol.15 No.4, pp. 726-751 (2010)

the Sales' model even in this case study is how: a) the elements are not mutually exclusive to each other. One element is always adding to the preceding one and they always act conjunctly; b) some of these elements taken individually are present in other criminal organisations active in Afghanistan, but only their simultaneous presence renders a certain group an Islamist Mafia. If we look for instance at the Taliban in comparison to the Haqqanis, the first have some degree of social recognition and they have implemented some forms of governmentality but their relationships with the legal powers are not always cooperative or functional to a power system as in the case of the HN.⁶ If we take the Hezb-e-Islami-Gulbuddin, the former militia turned political party led by the warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, it denotes some elements of the economic ambivalence and some important relationships with the official power actors in the country but its social recognition and its ideological credentials are very different and less pervasive than the ones of the Haqqanis.⁷ Put succinctly what renders the HN an Islamist Mafia is not the presence of a single element of the definitional model but their simultaneous and continuous presence across the entire history of the organisation.

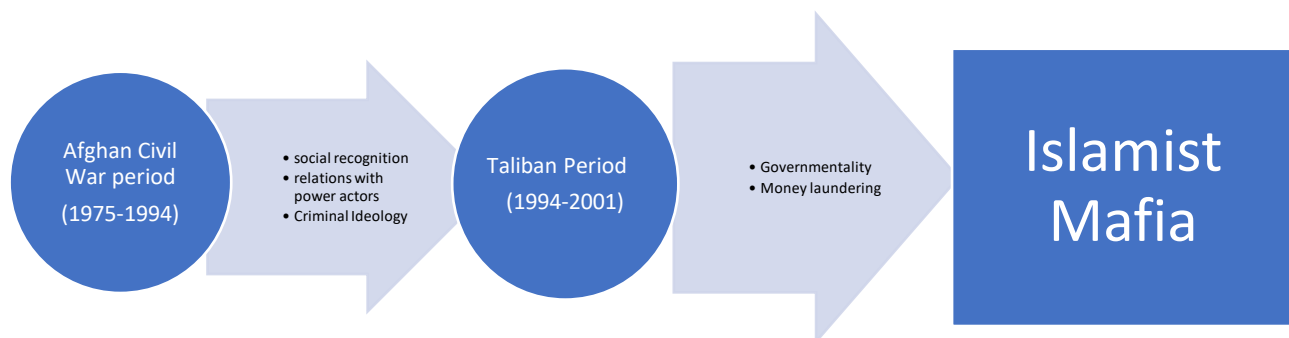


Figure 7 The Evolutionary process of the Haqqani Network

The chapter will be divided as following: In the first section I will address preliminarily some conundrums related to the study of the Haqqanis which must necessarily be addressed for the sake of clarity. From section 2 to 6 I will proceed to the analysis of the case study according to the Islamist Mafias' model. The conclusion will sum up some key concepts emerging from the analysis that could potentially offer some ideas for further potential studies on the crime terror nexus.

⁶ See S. Coll "Directorate S." Penguin Books (2018) ebook

⁷ M. A. Kundi "Afghanistan: Power Struggle among the Rival Groups" Vol.49 No. 3 pp. 23-31 Pakistan Horizon (1996)

1. Who are the Haqqanis and what is the Haqqani Network?

With the formation of the group dating back to 1975 the Haqqani Network is today one of the oldest terrorist organizations in the world (older than Hizbullah and Al-Qaeda). Still, the definition of the Network as a mere terror group is in some ways restrictive, given the wide numbers of actors and interests which it has served or cooperated with across the decades.⁸ The Haqqani Network today is better described as a “platform for the delivery of violence”⁹, built on family lines, which enjoys a double form of legitimation from a social and a political perspective. The first and most relevant core of the group was created by the founder of the HN, the legendary mujahidin commander Jalaluddin Haqqani, around 1975 in the so-called Zadran arch which stretches along the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan, more specifically in the provinces of Loya Paktia, Paktika and Khost on the Afghan side of the border and in North Waziristan on the Pakistani one.¹⁰ The name Haqqani Network was given to the group by Western military officials and analysts around 2006¹¹ and in relation to this label two main issues have emerged in the literature. First, the use of the expression Haqqani Network could have been promoted for strategic reasons by some of the partners of the group in order to separate the Haqqanis from the “common” Taliban and other Afghan insurgent groups.¹² Secondly, the Haqqanis themselves dislike the tag, preferring, especially after the death of Mullah Omar, to be considered as part of the wider Taliban insurgent group and consequently using the label “Taliban” or the more generic word mujahidin to refer to themselves.¹³ From a structural and hierarchical perspective, the Haqqanis are a family which is part of the Zadran tribe, one of the most powerful ones among the so-called Ghilzai Pashtuns, which have inhabited for centuries the lands at the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan on the famous Durand line.¹⁴

⁸ V. Brown and D. Rassler “*Fountainhead....*” *Ibidem* pp. 9-10

⁹ V. Brown and D. Rassler *Ibidem* p.3

¹⁰ T. Ruttig “*Loya Paktia’s insurgency: The Haqqani Network as an autonomous entity*” p. 61; In A. Giustozzi “*Decoding the New Taliban. Insights from the Afghan Field*” Hurst & Co. (2009)

¹¹ V. Brown and D. Rassler *Ibidem* p.1

¹² B Roggio “*Analysis: Reported ban of the Haqqani Network unlikely to end Pakistan’s support of group*” Long War Journal (2015)

¹³ A. Gopal, M.K. Mashud and B. Fishman “*The Taliban in North Waziristan*”, in P. Bergen “*Talibanistan: Negotiating borders between terror, politics and religion*” ebook, Oxford Scholarship Online (2011)

¹⁴ US Army Command and General Staff College, “*The Haqqani Network*”, (2014) p.4

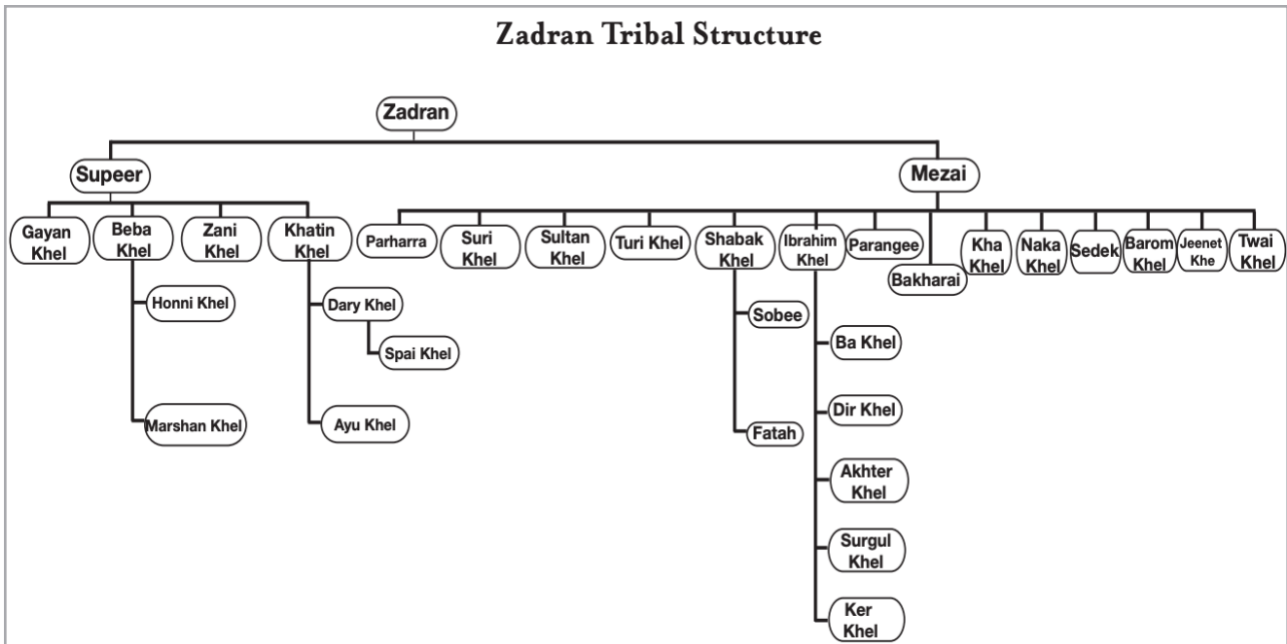


Figure 1: The Zadran Tribal Structure. Retrieved from Jeffrey Dressler "The Haqqani Network. From Pakistan to Afghanistan"

As part of the Zadran tribe, the Haqqanis have built the hierarchies of their criminal organization above the family bloodlines similarly to the Mafia. Up to now, every male of the clan is also a member of the organization and he occupies an apex role in it. The importance of bloodlines within the Haqqanis is so relevant that it is impossible for any other mujahidin who is not part of their family to access the most important positions within this Islamist Mafia.¹⁵ Despite this strongly familial configuration, the group does not exclude entirely from the recruitment in its ranks fighters who came from different ethnic or tribal milieu, or even from other nations outside Afghanistan.¹⁶

¹⁵ A. Gopal, M.K. Mashud and B. Fishman "The Taliban in North..." *Ibidem*

¹⁶ US Army Command and General Staff College, "The Haqqani..." p.31

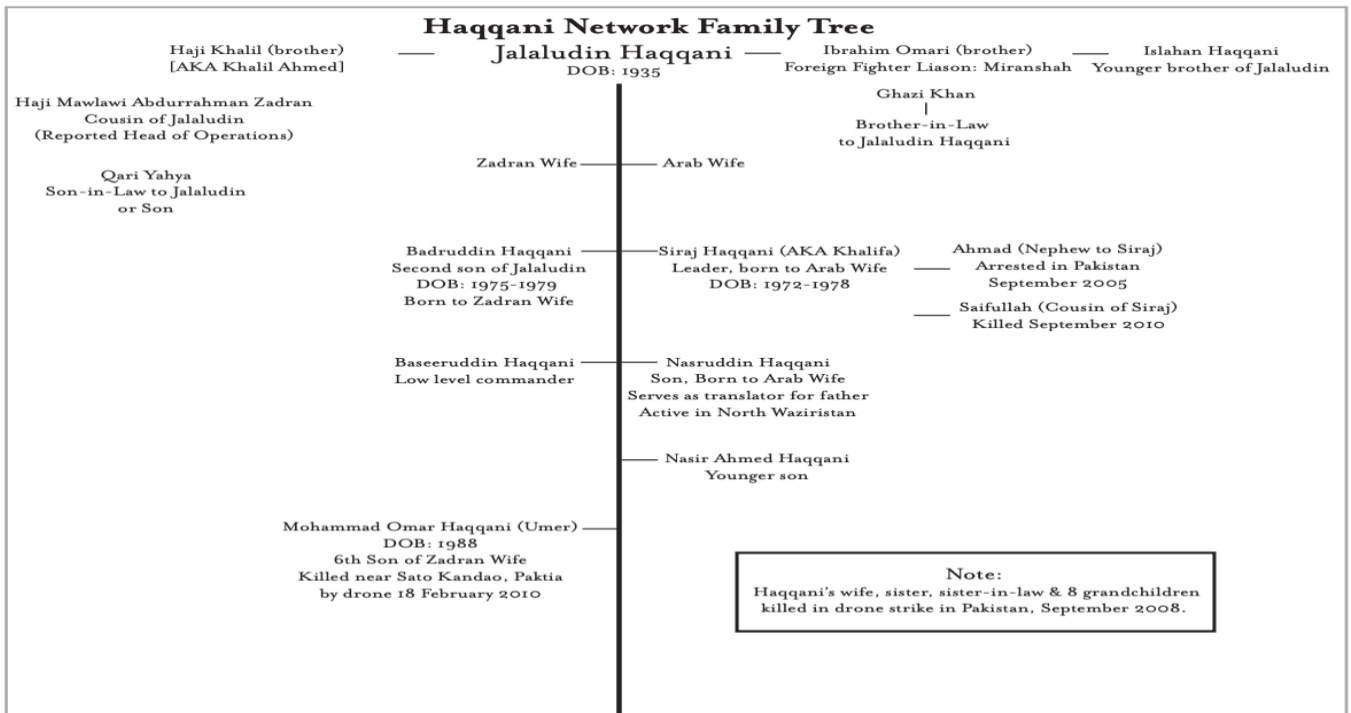


Figure 2: The Haqqani Family Tree, retrieved from Jeffrey Dressler "The Haqqani Network. From Pakistan to Afghanistan"

Studies on the HN and its activities across the decades have divided scholars on two main topics: a) whether the Haqqani Network should be considered as part of the internationalist jihadi movement or as a group focused only on the war in Afghanistan; b) whether the Haqqani Network should be considered as an autonomous group or as a part of the wider Taliban movement. Considering the relevance of these debates it is important to position this research in this context.

1.1 Is the Haqqani Network a nationalist or an internationalist jihadi group?

According to authors such as Joscelyn, the HN should be considered as part of the international jihadi community because of its relationships with groups such as Al-Qaeda.¹⁷ The supporters of this conception justify their assumptions in relying on the propaganda materials published by the Haqqanis, the Taliban and Al- Qaeda in which the group is portrayed as part of the global jihadi movement.¹⁸ For instance, in the 2018 eulogy for Jalaluddin Haqqani published by the Taliban, it is explicitly claimed how the founder of the Network was a “brother” of sheikh Bin Laden and according to some authors this is a sign of the Haqqanis’ internationalist attitude.¹⁹ The US military

¹⁷ T. Joscelyn “*Badness Personified*” The Long War Journal (2018)

¹⁸ T. Joscelyn “*Badness....*” *Ibidem*

¹⁹ T. Joscelyn “*Badness....*” *Ibidem*

establishment seems to agree to some extent with this analysis. In a document published by the US Army Command and General Staff College in 2014 for instance, it is clearly written how: “If the HN had not declared to include foreign fighters in its ranks, then the attacks of 9/11 may have never occurred”.²⁰ On the other hand some authors tend to downgrade the idea of the HN as an internationalist terrorist organization.²¹ Stenersen for instance, assesses how threats to the West made by the Taliban in their propaganda should be considered as merely rhetoric and that while the Haqqani Network has potentially the men and the resources necessary to plan and execute attacks against the far enemy, the organization lacks the interest in doing so.²² This analysis is supported by the words of the actual HN leader himself, Sirajuddin Haqqani, who in 2009 claimed how: “we are concerned with the war here in Afghanistan and prefer to carry out attacks here”.²³

In this debate my research wants to propose a third way to approach this conundrum, showing how even if the HN is not directly involved in terrorist attacks against the far enemy it is indeed supported in other ways by some organizations that were aiming to commit such acts outside Afghanistan. My analysis of some sources reveals in fact how the Haqqani Network has always pursued a local agenda in Afghanistan but at the same time its opportunism and pragmatism have pushed it to collaborate with the international jihadi movement without perpetrating any attacks outside Afghanistan.²⁴ In fact, there is no proof of the Haqqanis’ involvement in military operations outside the country but on the other hand a consistent part of the literature proves how the Network has given logistic and training support to some internationalist groups such as Al-Qaeda or the early jihadist movements inspired by the famous preacher Abdullah Azzam.²⁵ As will be showed in the following section of this chapter, the Haqqanis have used the support of the internationalist jihadi movements in order to expand their network of clients, and in doing so their influence. Moreover, the support to the internationalist movements proved to be useful in order to obtain an ideological legitimation which has been exploited by the Network in order to justify its involvement in criminal activities. In sum, the Haqqanis have supported the international jihadi movement more for the achievement of their own goals rather than for a real desire to strike the far enemy.

²⁰ US Army Command and General Staff College, “*The Haqqani....*” *Ibidem* p.31

²¹ T. Gregg “*Talk to the Haqqanis before it’s too late*” *Foreign Policy* (2010)

²² A. Stenersen “*Are Afghan Taliban involved in international terrorism?*” *CTC Sentinel* Vol.2 No.9, pp. 1-5 (2009)

²³ Quoted in A. Stenersen “*Are Afghan Taliban involved....*” *Ibidem*

²⁴ See V. Brown and D. Ressler “*Fountainhead of Jihad*” Oxford University Press (2013)

²⁵ For a report of this cooperation see T. Hegghammer “*The Caravan*” Cambridge University Press (2020)

1.2 Are the Haqqanis part of the Taliban or are they an autonomous group?

Some authors have assessed how the Haqqani Network is a part of the Taliban and that the label Haqqani Network is artificial and has been created for political reasons.²⁶ More specifically, according to some authors, the name Haqqani Network has been created and diffused by the Pakistani authorities in order to separate the so-called “good Taliban” (among them the Haqqanis) from the “bad Taliban” (the Quetta Shura led by Mullah Omar) in order to justify their relationships with the Network and to convince other power actors (for example the US) to start some peace talks with them.²⁷ Thomas Joscelyn assessed how the Haqqani Network is mainly a creation of the Pakistani secret service (the Inter-Services Intelligence, ISI) and is an integral part of the Taliban since Sirajuddin Haqqani became the current deputy emir of the Taliban.²⁸ On a factual base these claims are partially true, but the general approach which derives from them in relation to the analysis of the Haqqani Network is simplistic. As demonstrated by other more in-depth studies on the organisation, the Haqqani-Taliban alliance is, from the Islamist Mafia’s perspective, merely tactical and even in the context of this rapprochement the Haqqanis have always remained semi-independent.²⁹ On this issue it is useful to recall the words of Ruttig who has been clear on this conundrum : “Of course the Haqqani Network is not an invention of the West. It has its distinct roots in Afghanistan’s history, geography and tribal genealogy as part of a former and still existing *mujahidin* organization”.³⁰ Moreover, the Haqqanis existed autonomously for at least 16 years before the rise of the Taliban, and the first relations between the two groups have been characterized by a certain degree of violence as reported by some eyewitnesses.³¹ The separation between the Taliban and the Haqqanis is also demonstrated by some recently declassified cables from the US Department of State which confirm both the separation of the groups and the complementarity of their relationship.³² According to the American diplomats, since the 1990s the Haqqanis have proved to be militarily more efficient than the Taliban and enjoy a stronger credibility in the local tribal environment.³³ The US State Department do not consider the Haqqanis as part of the Taliban and their rise among the ranks of the latter are related mainly to two facts: a) because of the Haqqanis’ military skills which proved to be crucial on different occasions such as during the conquer of Kabul in 1997;³⁴ b) because the Network

²⁶ B Roggio “*Analysis: Reported ban of*” *Ibidem*

²⁷ B Roggio “*Analysis: Reported ban of.....*” *Ibidem*

²⁸ T. Joscelyn “*Pakistan continues to harbor Taliban, including al Qaeda-linked Haqqanis*” Long War Journal (2018)

²⁹ T. Ruttig “*Loya Paktia’s insurgency:....*” *Ibidem* p.88

³⁰ T. Ruttig “*The Haqqani Network blacklisted: From US Asset to special Foe*” Afghanistan Analyst Network (2012)

³¹ L. Farral and M. Hamid “*The Arabs*” *Ibidem* pp.202-203

³² US Embassy in Islamabad “*Afghanistan: Jalaluddin Haqqani’s emergence as a key Taliban Commander*” (1998)

³³ US Embassy in Islamabad “*Afghanistan: Jalaluddin Haqqani’s....*” *Ibidem*

³⁴ L. Farral and M. Hamid *Ibidem* p.222

provided the Taliban with a social and ideological credibility in some Afghan regions (such as Paktia), where the Quetta Shura was lacking.³⁵ Moreover, even after the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, further violent clashes have erupted between the two groups, as a further proof of the separation between the two entities.³⁶

The analysis of the relationship between the Haqqani Network and the Taliban inevitably poses a further conundrum: if the Haqqanis have often clashed with the Taliban, why is their leader currently a recognized member of the Quetta Shura? The answer is complex, and it is related to a wide range of factors. The first one is due to the changes that occurred in the Afghan strategic environment after the US invasion of 2001, which in part facilitated the cooperation between the Taliban and the HN in facing a common enemy.³⁷ The second one is related to the structural mutation of the Taliban themselves who have progressively loosened their hierarchy, becoming what Ruttig calls a “network of networks”, in which the HN is amongst the biggest.³⁸ As will be showed in this chapter it is perfectly normal that these networks occasionally overlap, but this overlapping is not necessarily equal to the absorption of the HN in a broader organization, nor even to a complete subordination of the Haqqanis to the Quetta Shura.³⁹ The Haqqanis themselves, for opportunistic reasons related to political legitimacy and branding, have preferred to spread the misleading image of their group as a part of the Taliban,⁴⁰ sometimes with ironic outcomes, such as when in an interview Sirajuddin Haqqani himself claimed how: “there is no such thing as the Haqqani Network.”⁴¹ In sum, the boss of the organization denied its existence, just like the Mafioso ones in their early days.

After having highlighted and solved these methodological conundrums on the analysis of the Haqqani Network, it is now time to compare the evolutionary process undertaken by the group with the Sales’ model on the definition of Mafia. Consequently, it should be evaluated if and how, the HN just like the Sahelian Jihadi Groups could be considered an Islamist Mafia.

³⁵ T. Ruttig “*The Haqqani Network blacklisted:*” *Ibidem*)

³⁶ International Crisis Group “*The Insurgency in Afghanistan’s Heartland*” (2011)

³⁷ S.Y. Ibrahimi “*Taliban’s Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (1996-2001): “War-Making and State-Making” as an Insurgency Strategy*” *Small Wars and Insurgencies* Vol28 No. 6 pp. 947-972 (2017)

³⁸ T. Ruttig “*The Haqqani Network blacklisted:*” *Ibidem*

³⁹ T. Ruttig “*The Haqqani Network blacklisted:*” *Ibidem*

⁴⁰ A. Gopal, M.K. Mashud and B. Fishman “*The Taliban in North...*” *Ibidem*

⁴¹ A. Gopal, M.K. Mashud and B. Fishman “*The Taliban in North....*” *Ibidem*

2. First element: the social identification/recognition of the Islamist Mafias

The element of social legitimacy enjoyed by the Haqqanis denotes some similarities between this case study and the one of the SJGs. Just like in the case of the Sahelian Islamist Mafia, it can be argued that the social support of the local population to the Haqqani Network in Afghanistan and Pakistan is due mainly to two factors: 1) the tribal legitimacy, linked to their observance of the Pashtunwali customary social norms; 2) the Islamist legitimacy linked to their religious credentials which enable them to instrumentally use religion to mobilize popular support in the Pashtun areas to justify their actions even when they are largely criminal ones. As the Islamists in the Sahel rely on the *Temushaga* and the Islamist ideology; the HN relies on the Pashtunwali and the same politico-religious symbolism.

The necessity to achieve some form of popular support is vital for every power player in Afghanistan, where the exercise of violence has always been a natural tool of political processes.⁴² Moreover, the use of violence has always been linked to the necessity to justify it and it is in this context that the instrumental use of the tribal code of conduct, the Pashtunwali, and of the traditional power structures played a crucial role.⁴³ The history of Afghanistan is full of examples on how the Pashtunwali and the tribal structures have been used to justify violence. In 1925 for instance, the city of Khost (today the main city under the influence of the Haqqanis) choose to rebel against King Amanullah and the revolt was justified because of the new laws on marriage which, according to the Pashtun tribes, were contrary to the Pashtunwali norms.⁴⁴ The Haqqanis are not an exception to this need for social legitimacy, since as noted also by some analysts within the US army the organization in general and its leader: “[were *e.n.*] born into a world in which the Highland Pashtuns were mobilized in defence of their territory and the protection from the state meddling with their tribal or Islamic way of life.”⁴⁵ It is because of these ancestral influences that the Haqqani (and the Pashtun in general) tend to consider themselves as the kingmakers of Afghanistan and, after some initial setbacks, have decided to rely more on tribal norms than on political ideologies to improve their social legitimacy.⁴⁶ Paradoxically, in the first years of the conflict against the Soviets, the Network itself underestimated

⁴² T. Barfield “*Afghanistan*”, p.89 Princeton University Press (2010)

⁴³ J. Mankin “*Gaming the system: How the Afghan. opium underpins the real power*” Journal of International Affairs Vol.63 No.1, pp. 195-209 (2009)

⁴⁴ T. Barfield, “*Afghanistan*” *Ibidem* p 185

⁴⁵ US Army Command and General Staff College, “*The Haqqani...*” *Ibidem* p.5

⁴⁶ J. Dressler, “*The Haqqani Network. From Pakistan to Afghanistan*” Institute for the Study of War (2010)

the importance of tribal credentials and it is for this reason that their first revolt against the Najibullah regime in 1975 was easily repressed because of the lack of popular support.⁴⁷ Three years later, the Haqqanis were able, through a strategic use of corruption and of the tribal norms, to attract the support of the Zadran against the regime.⁴⁸ A sign of this growing tribal consciousness is the participation of the main leaders of the organization in the Pashtun religious ceremonies and *jirgas* (elders meetings) which gave the HN that form of tribal legitimacy that other organizations, such as Hekmatyar's Hezb e-Islami Ghulboddin (HiG), did not have.⁴⁹ This transformation from a purely Islamist to a fighting group which was protecting the Pashtun way of life and the Pashtunwali customary norms became clearly perceivable at the beginning of the 1980s.⁵⁰ In this sense, the parallel drawn by some authors between the Chinese republican bandits and the Taliban was true also for the Haqqanis,⁵¹ who in their early days were very similar to the image of social bandits because of the support they enjoyed among the local populations.⁵² The fragmented tribal environment, where divisions were accentuated by the influx of funds during the proxy war against the Soviets, helped the Haqqanis in boosting their social legitimacy thanks also to their ability in mixing their popular support with a strategically balanced use of violence always exercised according to the customary norms of the Pashtunwali.⁵³

The social legitimation deriving from the respect and the adherence to the Pashtunwali was also perceivable in the aftermath of the Soviet withdrawal when the Afghan warlords started to confront each other. The Haqqanis were generally considered as socially moderate in comparison to the rising Taliban movement⁵⁴ as demonstrated by some declassified cables of the American State Department which depicted the HN's leader Jalaluddin as: "Socially moderate, who is not strongly supportive of the Taliban's position on the treatment of women"⁵⁵. Moreover, to boost their social legitimacy, the Haqqanis have relied extensively on their madrassas (Deobandi religious schools) network across the years which were not only diffusing religious messages but also propaganda linked to the Pashtunwali.⁵⁶ In this context, a key role was played by the *Darul Uloom Haqqania* madrassa, which in the days of the Afghan insurgency against the Soviet-backed regime was called the "University of Jihad".⁵⁷ The tribal propaganda of the Haqqanis can be summarized in a general and continuous recall

⁴⁷ T. Ruttig "*Loya Paktia's insurgency....*" *Ibidem* p.64

⁴⁸ V. Brown and D. Rassler *Ibidem* p.52

⁴⁹ V. Brown and D. Rassler "Fountainhead...." *Ibidem* p.53

⁵⁰ V. Brown and D. Rassler "Fountainhead...." *Ibidem* p.53

⁵¹ See P. Billingsley "*Bandits in Republican China*" Stanford University Press (1988)

⁵² See E. Hobsbawm "*Bandits*" Hachette UK (2012)

⁵³ J. Dressler, "*The Haqqani Network: A Strategic Threat*" Institute for the Study of War (2012)

⁵⁴ A. Gopal "*The most deadly US foe in Afghanistan*" Christian Science Monitor (2009)

⁵⁵ US Embassy in Islamabad "Afghanistan: Jalaluddin Haqqani...." *Ibidem*

⁵⁶ International crisis Group "*Insurgency....*" *Ibidem*

⁵⁷ M.G Weinbaum and M. Babbar "*The Tenacious, Toxic Haqqani Network*", Middle East Institute. (2016)

to avenge the *badal*, the Pashtun's honour, which is tainted by the invaders of their lands whether they are the Soviets or the Americans.⁵⁸ Some authors have argued how after the American intervention in Afghanistan the Network has become the reference point of Pashtun nationalism,⁵⁹ but as we will see below this kind of assessment seems to be exaggerated since until today no political project or agenda has been outlined by the organisation's leaders. Of course, the Haqqanis are using their tribal credentials to gain influence and legitimacy in the Afghan environment, but the idea of them posing as the champions for the cause of a Pashtun state is very far from what reality on the ground shows. As we will see below in fact, empirical data shows how the Pashtunwali and the creation of a Pashtun state are for the Haqqanis more of a sophisticated game of smoke and mirrors than a proper political project. In this sense the relationship of the Network with the project of Pashtun separatism in the tribal areas is very similar to the posture adopted by Cosa Nostra at the end of World War II when the organisation flirted for a while with the Sicilian separatist movement.⁶⁰ Despite this rapprochement, the nature of the interest by these organisation is arguably instrumental in order to preserve or increase their influence.

After the 2001 US invasion, this form of social legitimation was crucial for the Haqqanis' resilience and in securing the support of local to the Network. As summarized by Gregg: "The success of the HN rest with these social/religious/political/ connections that Maulawi Haqqani has carefully nurtured over the past 30-plus years".⁶¹ What is interesting to note in the aftermath of the American intervention in Afghanistan is that the social legitimacy of the Haqqanis is so deep that the population of the Zadran arch tends to identify its enemies with the ones of the Network. This has been clearly perceivable in the case of the public disapproval against the Haqqanis' long-time rival, Padcha Khan Zadran, who decided to ally with the Kabul government in order to defeat the Haqqanis. This decision has eventually backfired against him.⁶² In fact, despite the strictly political legitimation given by the US and their allies to Padcha Khan who was invited to the Bonn conference after the fall of the Taliban's emirate,⁶³ from a social legitimacy perspective the Network was too strong to be defeated.⁶⁴ In the following years, this social support for the Islamist Mafia has remained untouched by the war as demonstrated by the fact that both Jalaluddin and Sirajuddin have never ceased to work closely

⁵⁸ International crisis Group "Insurgency....." *Ibidem*

⁵⁹ H. Mili and J. Townsend "Tribal Dynamics of the Afghanistan and Pakistan Insurgencies" CTC Sentinel Vol.2 No.8, pp. 1-4 (2009)

⁶⁰ J. Cockayne "Hidden Power" Oxford University Press (2016) pp. 180-181

⁶¹ T. Gregg "Talk to the Haqqanis...." *Ibidem*

⁶² H. Mili and J. Townsend "Tribal Dynamics..." *Ibidem*

⁶³ T. Ruttig "Loya Paktia's insurgency...." *Ibidem* pp.66-67

⁶⁴ T. Ruttig "Loya Paktia's insurgency...." *Ibidem* p. 72

with the local tribal elders, who in their turn have continued to rely on the Haqqanis as a judicial authority to settle their disputes.⁶⁵

3. Second element: the relationships with the legal powers

The relationship between the Haqqanis and the legitimate power actors has been a constant in the history of the group and it has changed many times in terms of aims and nature.⁶⁶ The partnership between the HN and the legal powers started, obviously, with the participation of the Network in the civil war against the USSR -backed regime in Afghanistan from 1979 to 1992. The Pakistani secret service was one of the first intelligence agencies to co-opt the Haqqanis during their first, unsuccessful, uprising against the Daoud regime in 1973.⁶⁷ Two years later when the Network conquered Khost⁶⁸ these links became more evident and the 1975 conquest was the prelude for the development of this alliance in the 1980s when the Haqqanis became the principal group that was receiving weapons from the US and their allies as demonstrated by some internal documents of the organization itself.⁶⁹ This trustworthiness, is proved also by other documents which show how during the 1980s the HN was also responsible for the distribution of the financing of the so-called ‘pipelines system’ to other Afghani insurgent groups.⁷⁰ The Pakistan-HN relationship during the civil war was the prelude to a more consistent and stable cooperation between these subjects that is active even today as we will show below. What it is important to highlight for the moment, is how in 1986 the Haqqanis were recognized as so efficient in the use of violence in the Zadran arch region that even the Najibullah regime, on behalf of the USSR, tried unsuccessfully to co-opt them.⁷¹

The war against the USSR was crucial also for the beginning of another historical partnership for the Haqqanis: the one with the US. After the Soviet invasion, the Network became within a few years one of the most efficient and trusted allies of Washington in the above-mentioned proxy war. In this context a crucial factor for the development of this relationship was the personal friendship between congressman Charlie Wilson and Jalaluddin Haqqani himself.⁷² Wilson is known for his definition of Haqqani as “goodness personified”, and to make sense of the depth of his relationship with the

⁶⁵ T. Ruttig “*Loya Paktia’s insurgency....*” *Ibidem* p. 72

⁶⁶ V. Brown and D. Rassler “*Fountainhead....*” *Ibidem* p.130

⁶⁷ A. Ahmad “*Jihad*” *Ibidem*, p.33

⁶⁸ L. Farral and M.Hamid “*The Arabs at War in Afghanistan*”, p. 50 (Hurst & Co., 2015)

⁶⁹ CTC West Point, Harmony project, document AFGP-2002-008585 (2012)

⁷⁰ CTC West Point, Harmony project, document AFGP-2002-008583 (2012)

⁷¹ V. Brown and D. Rassler *Ibidem* p.71

⁷² T. Joscelyn, “*Badness.....*” *Ibidem*

Network's leader it is useful to recall some legends which circulate about it. According to one of these, Jalaluddin once gave the American congressman the chance to shoot personally a missile at a Russian helicopter to "indulge Wilson's wartime fantasies".⁷³ Together with these hardly verifiable tales, there are some recent academic studies which have proved how the HN was among the main beneficiaries of the Stinger missiles program implemented by the US during the Afghan war, a move defined as a "game changer" in the fight against the Soviet Army.⁷⁴ During the Afghan war the triangulation between the HN, the ISI and the CIA was so proficient that these secret services decided to jointly open a military base in Zhawara, in one of the Haqqanis' headquarters, which was run by the organization itself.⁷⁵ To understand the importance of the role of the Network in the anti-Soviet guerrilla it is useful to recall how, according to a former ISI agent charged with the logistical assistance to the Afghan fighters, at that time the Haqqanis used to receive twelve thousands tons of supplies every year.⁷⁶

Even after the withdrawal of the Soviet army, during the rise of the Taliban at the beginning of the 1990s, the co-option of the Haqqani Network by a wide range of legitimate power actors continued.⁷⁷ In this sense, one of the most interesting examples of these relationships is the one of the talks between Jalaluddin Haqqani and some members of the American State Department to discuss the Bin Laden issue after the bombing in Kenya and Tanzania by Al Qa'ida in 1998. As demonstrated by some declassified cables of the American Embassy in Pakistan of that time, some US officials met Haqqani in person to ask him to press the Taliban to expel Bin Laden from the country.⁷⁸ These cables are important for the aim of this research for two reasons: on the one hand they offer some insights on the psychology of Jalaluddin, which is remarkably similar to the Mafioso one observed in chapter II; on the other, they offer some further information on the US-Haqqani relationship. Concerning the first point, from the cables the bravado of the leader of the Network emerges. In meeting the American personnel, Jalaluddin greeted the Americans saying that it is: "good to meet someone from the country which had destroyed my base, my madrassah and killed 25 of my mujahidin".⁷⁹ The HN leader hoped at that time to open some official talks between the US and the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, he also minimized the concerns of the US in dealing with the Taliban because of their draconian interpretation of the Sharia reminding them how Saudi Arabia (an historical ally of the US) was

⁷³ T. Joscelyn, "Badness...." *Ibidem*

⁷⁴ A. Ahmad "Jihad &...." *Ibidem* p. 37

⁷⁵ A. Ahmad "Jihad &...." *Ibidem* pp. 33-34

⁷⁶ S. Coll "Directorate...." *Ibidem*

⁷⁷ T. Ruttig, "Loya Paktia's insurgency...." *Ibidem* p. 73

⁷⁸ US Embassy in Islamabad "Pressing High-Level official Jalaluddin Haqqani on bin Ladin" (1999)

⁷⁹ US Embassy in Islamabad, "Pressing...." *Ibidem*

threatening women in the same way.⁸⁰ Concerning the historical endurance of the relationship between the US and the Haqqanis, according to the cable, Jalaluddin admitted how that was the first meeting with the US after four or five years and he reassured the Americans that Bin Laden was a problem but was under control. From a general perspective, the cable offers the picture of Jalaluddin more as a skilled diplomat than an extremist. In this sense he showed a very Mafioso attitude to the talks, trying to mediate between the Taliban and the Americans on the basis of a mutually proficient relationship. This is clearly perceivable when, according to the cable, Haqqani asked to keep the meeting secret and he also concluded by saying: “Do not turn away from us but deal with us”.⁸¹ In sum the handling by the Network’s leader of the bin Laden issue seems to be animated more by pragmatism than by the ideological motivations.

In the context of the co-optation of the Haqqanis during the Afghan civil war it is important also to mention the relationship between the Network and the Gulf Countries. This cooperation was mainly based on two aspects: the funding of the war effort and the recruitment of the so-called Afghan Arabs. As recalled by Mustafa Hamid, already by the end of the 1970s Jalaluddin Haqqani was a legend for the Arab youth and easily became a catalyst for recruitment from the Gulf.⁸² The importance of Jalaluddin’s role as a pull factor for the young recruits is proved also by the links between the leader of the HN and the main ideologue of the Afghan-Arabs: Abdullah Azzam.⁸³ The interest of the Gulf Monarchies (especially Saudi Arabia) in co-opting the HN was related to two main concerns for the monarchies: 1) the support to the Haqqanis and the Afghan jihad in general was important to consolidate the Saudi leadership on the Muslim world;⁸⁴ 2) the encouraging to join the fight in Afghanistan was also functional to the survival of the Gulf monarchies themselves. After the 1979 siege of Mecca in fact, the acknowledgement of the dangers related to the internal opposition within these countries had facilitated the exploitation of the Afghan jihad as a relief valve for all the potential opponents of the local regimes.⁸⁵

In analysing the cooperation between the Haqqani Network and the legitimate power actors another of the main characteristics of this Islamist Mafia can be noted: its ability in adapting to the changing of local power environments across decades. In fact, it is clearly evident how, as long as the Afghan context went through important transformations, at the same time the relationships between the

⁸⁰ US Embassy in Islamabad, “*Pressing...*” *Ibidem*

⁸¹ US Embassy in Islamabad, “*Pressing...*” *Ibidem*

⁸² L. Farral and M.Hamid “*The Arabs...*” *Ibidem* p.34

⁸³ For an in-depth overview of this relationship see T. Hegghammer “*The Caravan*” Cambridge University Press (2020)

⁸⁴ G. Kepel “*Jihad*” Carocci Editore (2013) p.171

⁸⁵ G. Kepel “*Jihad....*” *Ibidem* p.154

Network and the old and new power players were changing thus illustrating the “transformative approach” of the Haqqanis.⁸⁶ In this sense, just like the Sahelian Jihadi Groups, the Haqqanis shifted from being a proxy actor in the use of violence to a parallel government on the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan’s tribal areas which was supported, or at least tolerated, by regional, national and international powers - another clear example of the concept of the “proxy governmentality” we showed above. The relationship with Pakistan was one of the most evident examples of this adaptability. Soon after the Soviets’ withdrawal from Afghanistan, the rise of the Taliban posed some relevant strategic problems for the Network. In this situation, the nature of the relationship between Pakistan and the Haqqanis changed because their objectives became perfectly aligned regarding the Taliban issue.⁸⁷ The Haqqanis were worried about the growing influence of the Taliban which was threatening their rule over the Zadran arch, while at the same time Pakistan was scared about the eventual difficulties in controlling the Quetta Shura and to use it in the context of its ‘strategic depth’ doctrine against India. It is in this context that according to some authors the HN was pushed by Pakistan to adopt a more cooperative posture toward the Taliban.⁸⁸ The invasion of Afghanistan by the US, following the 9/11 attacks and the overthrow of the Islamic Emirate, brought another dramatic change in the local power environment. In this context, the relationship between Pakistan and the Haqqani Network led to a more in-depth military partnership according to which the Network has received funding and weapons to fight against the US, while Pakistan advanced its strategy aimed at consolidating the strategic depth and counterbalancing the growing influence of India in Afghanistan.⁸⁹ These renewed but different partnerships is proved by the seized documents and cell phones of the captured members of the Network (especially after 2006).⁹⁰ In the context of the Haqqani-Pakistan relationship after 9/11 the interests of the Pakistani border patrol in keeping the local smuggling and criminal activities ongoing after the US intervention also needs mentioning.⁹¹ Another case of this cooperation is the one of the peace deal with the Shia tribe of the Turi in the Kurram region. This tribe inhabit a crucial segment of the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan that both the Haqqanis and Islamabad were eager to reopen after its closure in 2008.⁹² The ISI and the network have successfully worked together in order to achieve a peace deal between the Turi and the local Sunni tribes in order to keep the passages open.⁹³ What it is important to

⁸⁶ V. Brown and D. Ressler “*Fountainhead....*” *Ibidem* p.7

⁸⁷ T. Ruttig, “*Loya Paktia’s insurgency....*” *Ibidem* p. 65

⁸⁸ T. Ruttig, “*Loya Paktia’s....*” *Ibidem* p. 66

⁸⁹ M. Waldman “*The Sun in the Sky: The Relationship between Pakistan’s ISI and the Afghan Insurgents*” Crisis States Research Centre, (2010)

⁹⁰ US House of Representatives “*Combatting the Haqqani Terrorist Network*” (2012) p. 30

⁹¹ J. Dressler “*Dealing with the Haqqani Network*” Foreign Policy (2011)

⁹² J. Dressler and R. Jan “*The Haqqani Network in Kurram*” Institute for the Study of War (2011)

⁹³ J. Dressler and R. Jan “*The Haqqani Network....*” *Ibidem*

highlight in regards the Pakistan-HN cooperation especially after 9/11 is how, even if the Network cooperated closely with Pakistani authorities this does not mean that it should be considered as an organic part of the ISI or of Islamabad's army as the US authorities have done for a long time.⁹⁴ Just like the HN cooperates with the Taliban without being part of it, the organisation cooperates with the ISI without being subordinate or strictly controlled by Islamabad.⁹⁵ As further proof of the nature of this relationship it is important to recall how the Pakistani army has tried to dismantle the Network without success. In March 2006 in fact, an operation which targeted the Haqqanis compounds in Waziristan backlashed and culminated in the seizure of the principal government buildings in the region by the HN and its affiliates. This and many other examples show how the Pakistan-Haqqanis relationship is very complex and difficult to handle for both sides. For this reason any narrative of the Network as a pawn in the hands of the ISI or Pakistan in general is, to say the least, simplistic and should be carefully evaluated.⁹⁶

The relationship between the US and the Haqqanis after 9/11 has fluctuated between cooperation and confrontation proving to be less consistent if compared to the one with Pakistan. Soon after the 2001 invasion, there were some attempts at cooperation with a part of the US military command which have tried to co-opt the Haqqanis in the new American-backed government.⁹⁷ In 2001, Jalaluddin himself held meetings with American and Pakistani officials in Islamabad on this issue and at the same time his brother Ibrahim moved to Kabul after the fall of the Taliban regime as a sign of the Network's willingness to talk with the US.⁹⁸ After the failure of these initiatives, due to the beating and the temporary imprisonment of Ibrahim Haqqani himself,⁹⁹ the US adopted a mixed approach toward the HN, based on a principle of non-interference¹⁰⁰ on the one hand (summed up by the words of an Afghan governor: "the bear does not climb down the mountain; the hunter doesn't climb up the mountain"¹⁰¹) and an occasional recurrence to force in the context of the "surge" strategy adopted by the Obama administration in order to achieve a peace deal with the Haqqanis and to negotiate from a position of strength.¹⁰² What it is important to highlight here is how this approach does not appear to change the US cooperative attitude to the HN. For instance, the HN was not on the Foreign Terrorist Organizations List of the American Treasury Department until 2011¹⁰³ and talks between the

⁹⁴ S. Coll "Directorate..." *Ibidem*

⁹⁵ S. Coll "Directorate..." *Ibidem*

⁹⁶ S. Coll "Directorate..." *Ibidem*

⁹⁷ T. Ruttig, "Loya Paktia's insurgency" *Ibidem* p. 66

⁹⁸ S. Coll "Directorate..." *Ibidem*

⁹⁹ T. Ruttig, "Loya Paktia's insurgency" *Ibidem* p. 66

¹⁰⁰ T. Ruttig, "Loya Paktia's insurgency" *Ibidem* p. 67

¹⁰¹ T. Ruttig, "Loya Paktia's insurgency" *Ibidem* p. 67

¹⁰² S. Coll "Directorate..." *Ibidem*

¹⁰³ A.K. Cronin, "Why the Haqqani Network is not on the Foreign Terrorist Organizations List" Foreign Affairs (2011)

Americans and the Haqqanis have been held in the context of the kidnapping of an Afghan diplomat during which the Network acted as a mediator.¹⁰⁴

The early Haqqani-Taliban relationship can be seen as another example of cooperation. During the rise of the Taliban movement its relationship with the Haqqanis was tense. As reported by Mustafa Hamid, the first meeting between the HN and the Taliban was held in 1995 when Ibrahim Haqqani (Jalaluddin's brother) met some of the groups' leaders and he was robbed of his weapons by the supporters of Mullah Omar.¹⁰⁵ Later on, the confrontation between the Network and the Taliban ended thanks to mediation from the elders of both groups in Khost, after which the Haqqanis allowed the Taliban to pass through their territory.¹⁰⁶ When the Northern Alliance led by the Tajik warlord Ahmed Shah Massoud put at risk the Taliban offensive on Kabul in 1997, the Haqqanis decided to cooperate militarily with the men of Mullah Omar. There are different theories about whether this was a genuine decision of the Network, who was worried about losing its autonomy in case of a general offensive led by Massoud, or if they were pushed by other actors, such as Pakistan, to join the Taliban.¹⁰⁷ Many sources agree in saying that without the Haqqani's presence in Kabul the city would have not have been conquered nor held by the Taliban in the war against the Northern Alliance.¹⁰⁸ Hamid himself claimed in 1997 that the Taliban would have lost Kabul without the Haqqanis' intervention.¹⁰⁹ The cooperation between the Haqqanis and the Taliban was confirmed by the nomination of Jalaluddin Haqqani as the Minister for Tribal Affairs in the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan but this seems to be more a formal recognition of the autonomy and relevance of the Network rather than proof of the actual involvement of the Haqqanis in the day to day governance of the Emirate.¹¹⁰ In the aftermath of the US invasion the relationship with the Taliban ceased for some time and there was other proof of the cooperation between these two organizations. In 2001 for instance, after the Taliban's withdrawal from Kabul, they asked Sirajuddin Haqqani' to mediate some disputes among their ranks,¹¹¹ while in 2003 the importance of the cooperation with the Network was confirmed by the Taliban's decision to nominate Jalaluddin as supreme commander of the resistance against the invading forces.¹¹²

¹⁰⁴ T. Joscelyn "Badness...." *Ibidem*

¹⁰⁵ L. Farral and M. Hamid *Ibidem* pp. 202-203

¹⁰⁶ L. Farral and M. Hamid *Ibidem* p. 202

¹⁰⁷ US Army Command and General Staff College, *Ibidem* p.39

¹⁰⁸ US Army Command and General Staff College, *Ibidem* p.39

¹⁰⁹ L. Farral and M. Hamid *Ibidem* p.222

¹¹⁰ T. Ruttig, "Loya Paktia's insurgency....." *Ibidem* p. 65

¹¹¹ A. Gopal, M.K. Mashud and B. Fishman "The Taliban in North Waziristan" *Ibidem*

¹¹² US Army Command and General Staff College, *Ibidem* p. 18

Another example of cooperation between the Haqqanis and the legitimate power actors is the one of the so-called madrassas network. This expression is used to indicate the ensemble of the religious schools situated at the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan which have supported the mujahidin during the Soviet invasion, and the insurgents after 2001.¹¹³ The Haqqani Network has been supported by the local religious institutions with funding and men across the years¹¹⁴ and even if the nature of the relationship between the Haqqanis and the Madrassas network is ideological the importance of money laundering activities which can be done through this network by the local mullahs should not be underestimated.¹¹⁵ An example of these opportunities is the one illustrated by a declassified report of the US Defence Intelligence Agency, which assesses how in 2009 the leader of the *Hadika ta Uloom* madrassa in Pakistan, Maulawi din Mohammad, helped the Haqqanis in establishing a link with some local businessmen who donated \$17,000 to the Haqqanis to continue their jihad against the US and their allies.¹¹⁶

In comparison to the case of the Sahelian Jihadi Groups the phenomenon of the infiltration in relation to the Haqqani Network denotes some differences. Specifically, the impossibility of the Network in participating in local elections, a decision which eventually would cost them a considerable part of their ideological and social credibility, has pushed the Haqqanis towards a more corruption-oriented strategy which has helped the group in cultivating relationships with the Afghan authorities and with that specific power group of politicians, warlords and traffickers that Giustozzi calls “the strongmen”.¹¹⁷ Consequently, the Network does not let its men participate in elections but by exploiting its tribal credentials and its status it is able to cultivate some ‘ambiguous’ relationships with elected MPs¹¹⁸ or local governors.¹¹⁹ A first example of the infiltrations conducted by the Network is the one aimed at influencing the Afghan institutions. As other organized crime groups in fact demonstrate, the Haqqanis have proceeded to the infiltration of political officials, bribing and offering their services to them. As reported by a captured Haqqani soldier: “Fighters [belonging to the HN *e.n.*] have been approaching Afghan government and military officials persuading them to sign a five-page document secretly pledging their loyalty to the Taliban leadership”.¹²⁰ Another example of infiltration is the one toward the guards near the Pakistan-Afghan border thanks to which

¹¹³ US Army Command and General Staff College, *Ibidem* pp. 20-21

¹¹⁴ International Crisis Group “*The insurgency.....*” *Ibidem*

¹¹⁵ International Crisis Group “*The insurgency.....*” *Ibidem*

¹¹⁶ US Defense Intelligence Agency, “*Hadika ta Uloom madrassa in Dera Ismail Khan, PK was facilitating financial support for the Haqqani Network*” (2009)

¹¹⁷ A. Giustozzi “*War and Peace economies of Afghanistan’s strongmen*” *International Peacekeeping* Vol.14 No.1, pp. 75-89 (2007)

¹¹⁸ N. Coburn and A. Larson “*Derailing Democracy in Afghanistan*” Columbia University press (2014) pp.163-184

¹¹⁹ J. Dressler “*The Haqqani Network. From Pakistan....*” *Ibidem*

¹²⁰ J. Dressler “*The Haqqani Network. A Strategic....*” *Ibidem*

the group has maintained the possibility of continuing to use the passes in the area. A proof of this deal is given by some declassified documents, in which American officials assess how the Haqqanis' attack on the US FOB [Forward Operating Base] Chapman was made possible through the corruption of a border guard who was paid \$100,000.¹²¹ The infiltration of the Afghan authorities is not only related to low or middle ranking officials. In fact, the HN has reportedly bribed the provincial and district governors of Ghazni thanks to the money earned through drug trafficking and smuggling of minerals and in doing so they have created a parallel form of governmentality which enables the Network to rule over some regions of Afghanistan without participating in the legitimate political processes.¹²² Finally, on a tribal level, the income from illicit activities has been used by the Islamist Mafias in order to infiltrate the local *jirgas*.¹²³

4. Third element: The money laundering activities or the “economic ambivalence”

The economic ambivalence of the Haqqani Network is one of the most sophisticated characteristics of the organization.¹²⁴ Before analysing in-depth the different activities in which the HN is involved it is important to clarify two theoretical points: 1) the Haqqanis strategy, as one of the key power players in Afghanistan, aims to allow the group to remain active on both sides of the local markets, the legal and the illegal ones. This concept of ambivalence has been expressed in relation to the Afghan context by Giustozzi: “The partial conversion of the Afghan strongmen into businessmen *resembles in many ways the establishment of “Mafia”* [italic mine e.n.] which are both in the legal and the illegal economy and are able to use force to protect their interests and possibly to expand”;¹²⁵ 2) as in the case of the Sahelian Jihadi Groups, and in the entire debate on the crime-terror nexus, the involvement in illicit activities by the Haqqanis could be potentially explained as related to the accomplishment of a political project aimed at creating a state ruled by *sharia* but a close observation of the development of their illicit activities proves how these assumptions are not correct. An example of this purely criminal attitude can be retrieved in applying to the Haqqani Network the dataset on kidnappings by Loertscher and Milton introduced in chapter IV. In doing so, it can be observed how

¹²¹ US Defense Intelligence Agency “*Foreign Intelligence Service and Haqqani Network involvement In The 30 December 2009 suicide attack on FOB Chapman*” (2010)

¹²² V. Brown and D. Rassler *Ibidem* p. 144

¹²³ T. Ruttig, “*Loya Paktia’s insurgency.....*” *Ibidem* p. 75

¹²⁴ G. Peters “*The Haqqani Network financing: the evolution of an industry*” CTC West Point (2012)

¹²⁵ A. Giustozzi *Ibidem*

the Haqqani Network, just like the SJGs, is one of the groups which holds hostages for longer and it shares the same death rate percentage in kidnappings with the SJGs with a 9% score.¹²⁶ At the same time, it is remarkable to see how the Haqqanis tend to release the hostages in the majority of cases (64%).¹²⁷ Put succinctly, as in the case of the SJGs, the analysis of kidnappings highlights a profit-oriented attitude towards jihad.

a) Islamist Mafioso Enterprise

The first form of Islamist Mafioso enterprise implemented by the Haqqanis during the civil war period is the one of the madrassas which today are open more for financial than ideological reasons.¹²⁸ The foundation and maintaining of madrassas in fact should not only be evaluated as useful for the propaganda efforts or the implementation of governmentality by the Haqqanis but also as centres which facilitate both the money laundering activities and the fundraising.¹²⁹ Through the use of the *hawala* donations in fact, the Haqqanis are able to collect money which are then invested in the legal and illegal markets.¹³⁰ Moreover, the entrepreneurial aspect of the Madrassas is confirmed by their catalyst role in maintaining the relations between the HN and its Gulf donors. In this context the involvement of religious preachers in money laundering and financing is more evident in the case of the HN than in the one of the Sahelian Islamist Mafia . Mawlawi Aziz Khan for instance, one of the early preachers who started to finance the HN through donations and who has been living and teaching at *Manba Uloom* Madrassa, the first Haqqani religious school, is emblematic in this context.¹³¹ The instauration of the madrassas network, as I will show below, is a crucial element for the control of the strategic area on the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan but this has also been used for the implementation of illegal economic activities such as weapons smuggling which is one of the most flourishing enterprises implemented by the Haqqanis since their creation.¹³²

The control exercised by the Haqqanis on the city of Khost, historically famous for its role in the regional trade networks,¹³³ has been useful especially for the implementation of their legal enterprises

¹²⁶ S. Loertscher and D. Milton “*Held Hostage: Analyses of Kidnapping Across Time and Among Jihadi Groups*” CTC West Point

¹²⁷ S. Loertscher and D. Milton *Ibidem*

¹²⁸ T. Ruttig “*Loya Paktia.....*” *Ibidem* p.73

¹²⁹ International Crisis Group “*The insurgency.....*” *Ibidem*

¹³⁰ G. Peters “*The Haqqani Network financing....*” *Ibidem*

¹³¹ G. Peters “*The Haqqani Network financing....*” *Ibidem*

¹³² G. Peters “*Seeds of Terror*”, St. Martin’s Press (2009) p. 128

¹³³ J. Dressler, “*The Haqqani Network. A strategic.....*” *Ibidem*

given also the relevant tribal connections which the Haqqanis enjoy in the area.¹³⁴ One of the most important economic initiatives undertaken by the HN, especially in the Taliban period, is related to the illegal minerals mining and smuggling which has one of its most important epicentres just in Khost.¹³⁵ This business can actually produce a remarkable amount of earnings (only chromite is estimated to provide to the HN \$400,000 per year)¹³⁶ without posing the same ideological contradictions as drug trafficking. The involvement in drug trafficking is confirmed among the others, by the US National Security Agency which has found elements which link Nasiruddin Haqqani, son of Jalaluddin, to the regional networks of traffickers.¹³⁷

The control of Khost and the southeast in general has allowed the Haqqanis to build their own economic enterprises as well as to capture the legal ones,¹³⁸ as demonstrated by the penetration of the Network in the real estate sector.¹³⁹ In this context it is interesting to see how the Haqqanis have been able to exploit their tribal links to enter this market. Haji Khalil Zadran for instance, a businessman from Kabul belonging to the same tribe as the Haqqanis, has acted as a figurehead for some real estate firms owned by the Islamist Mafia.¹⁴⁰ The company owned by Khalil Zadran have also won some contracts with the US and the Kabul government for the infrastructural development in the southeast of the country.¹⁴¹ The strategic importance and the relevance of the infiltration of the Haqqanis in the real estate sector has been recognized by the International Crisis Group in one of their reports in 2011: “By capturing portions of the growing national construction and logistics sector and using these licit enterprises to launder profits generated from drug and weapons trafficking, the Haqqani network has penetrated the formal economy.”¹⁴² The same scheme based on the extensive use of figureheads has been adopted by the Haqqanis to open a wide network of small shops and import export businesses.¹⁴³ In this sense it is interesting to see how the exploitation of the transport-related economic activities has been used by the Network to extort or blackmail indirectly the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) forces in Afghanistan. In this context a key role has been played by the Afghan-Khost Transportation Company who won some contracts in this sector from ISAF itself and which is owned by Haji Hakimullah, another frontman of the Haqqanis.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁴ Wikileaks, “Khost: Bombings In Khost target civilians; new tactic aimed at "Anti-Islamic" Activities (2006)

¹³⁵ M. Dupée “*Afghanistan’s conflict mineral: The Crime-State-Insurgent Nexus*” CTC Sentinel Vol.5 No.2, pp. 11-14 (2012)

¹³⁶ M. Dupée, *Ibidem*

¹³⁷ US National Security Agency Cable “2007 – 07- 06”

¹³⁸ International Crisis Group “*The insurgency.....*” *Ibidem*

¹³⁹ J. Mankin “Gaming the system.....” *Ibidem*

¹⁴⁰ G. Peters “The Haqqani Network financing....” *Ibidem*

¹⁴¹ G. Peters “The Haqqani Network financing....” *Ibidem*

¹⁴² International Crisis Group *Ibidem*

¹⁴³ G. Peters “*The Haqqani Network financing....*” *Ibidem*

¹⁴⁴ G. Peters “*The Haqqani Network financing....*” *Ibidem*

b) Support to legal economic actors

The relationship between legal economic actors and this Islamist Mafia is more structured and to some extent more complex than the ones between the SJGs and the Sahelian entrepreneurs. Since its early days, the ability of the Network in keeping the border passes open thanks to a mix of violence and corruption has attracted the support of economic organizations such as the Pakistan-Afghanistan Transit Trade Association (PATTA) which has decided to support a wide range of armed groups during the war against the USSR and successively during the Afghan civil war before the rise of the Taliban. Among those groups there were the Haqqanis, who have allowed the continuation of commerce previously damaged by the installation of checkpoints on the borders by the local militias which made trading more expensive.¹⁴⁵ This sort of understanding with the Haqqanis has continued even after the US intervention and the fall of the Islamic Emirate. The Haqqanis attract the benevolence of local businessmen because in comparison to other armed groups and sometimes to the Afghan government itself they are considered reliable and able in keeping the border passes open.¹⁴⁶ Moreover because of their earnings from illicit activities, analogous to what has been showed concerning the SJGs, some Pakistani banks are eager to collect and hide the money of the Network in order to gain liquidity in their coffers¹⁴⁷

The relationship between the Haqqanis and some American economic institutions, more specifically USAID, it is another example of the Islamist Mafia support for economic actors. In 2011, USAID paid millions of dollar to the HN to ensure the security of its workers engaged in the building of the Khost-Gardez road.¹⁴⁸ This kind of deal is symptomatic of the governmentality exercised by the Haqqani Network which has been summed up by the words of a Taliban leader: “If they give money to Sirajuddin then they don’t get attacked; if not, then they are attacked”.¹⁴⁹ Moreover, the relationship between the local enterprises and the Islamist Mafias should not be understood as a purely predatory one. The Haqqanis are chosen as business partners by the local entrepreneurs since they are able to ensure the safety of their businesses in a turbulent environment.¹⁵⁰ The proficiency of this relationship

¹⁴⁵ A. Ahmad “*Jihad...*” *Ibidem* p.78

¹⁴⁶ G. Peters “*The Taliban and the Opium trade*” p.10 In A. Giustozzi “*Decoding the New Taliban. Insights from the Afghan Field*” Oxford University Press (2009)

¹⁴⁷ G. Peters “*The Haqqani Network Financing.....*” *Ibidem*

¹⁴⁸ A. K. Cronin “*Why branding the Haqqani terrorists was a mistake*” Foreign Affairs (2012)

¹⁴⁹ M. Waldman *Ibidem*

¹⁵⁰ G. Peters “*The Haqqani Network Financing.....*” *Ibidem*

is proved also by the fact that some Haqqani members are hired by the local enterprises as security guards.¹⁵¹ In 2012, the HN's ability in obtaining the trust of the local economic actors was so evident that during a hearing held by the US House of Representatives, analysts explicitly suggested that Congress stop all USAID contracts in Afghanistan in order to avoid indirectly financing the group.¹⁵²

5. Fourth element: The criminal ideology

The Haqqanis have been able to create their own criminal ideology since their birth.¹⁵³ From a comparative perspective the Haqqanis have relied not only on purely political and religious symbolism but also on some elements of the tribal ones. In the case of the Haqqani Network, from an historical perspective, this shift from tribal to religious elements according to the circumstances and the organisation's necessities has been evident in many cases. For instance, in the aftermath of the fall of the Taliban regime, the Haqqanis have used their tribal credentials in two ways: to safeguard their predominance in Paktia and the Zadran arch and to present themselves as an invaluable asset for the US and the Afghan government.¹⁵⁴ In 2006, after the failure of the talks with American authorities in Kabul, the Network has started to use its Islamist credentials to enlarge its activities beyond the traditional Zadran ruled areas such as in Wardak, Logar and Kabul provinces.¹⁵⁵ Those ideological sources (the tribal and the politico-religious one) are used as complementary and with two different aims within different social contexts. The legitimacy deriving from the Pashtunwali is used to strengthen the organization's ranks in its top positions which even today are occupied by members of the Haqqani family or, more generically, by members of the Zadran tribe.¹⁵⁶ The Islamist credentials instead are used by the organization when dealing with other jihadists organization such as Al-Qaeda or the Taliban or other organizations involved in the Afghan insurgency. Lastly, both these ideological sources are used to justify the group's involvement in criminal acts.

A first sign of this instrumental use of religious and tribal creed is perceivable in the use of weddings of the HN members, which are used to forge new alliances and to create new fundraising opportunities. Jalaluddin Haqqani for instance, married an Arab woman during the 1970s in order to

¹⁵¹ G. Peters "The Haqqani Network Financing....." *Ibidem*

¹⁵² US House of Representative *Ibidem* p.40

¹⁵³ T. Ruttig "Loya Paktia....." *Ibidem* p. 72

¹⁵⁴ S. Coll "Directorate..." *Ibidem*

¹⁵⁵ T. Ruttig "How tribal are the Taliban?" in S. Bashir R.D. Crews "Under the Drones" Harvard University Press (2012) p. 116

¹⁵⁶ US Army Command and General Staff College *Ibidem* p. 4

improve his ties with Gulf donors.¹⁵⁷ The tribal elements of the criminal ideology of the Haqqanis can be found in the group's recruitment propaganda where the local preachers affiliated to the Haqqanis tend to rely on the concept of avenging the honour of the Pashtuns against the invaders.¹⁵⁸ Moreover, the exploitation of the Pashtunwali allows the Islamist Mafia to implement a hierarchical structure which is deeply adherent to the family and tribes bloodlines.¹⁵⁹ As reported by Khan and Constable, the hierarchical order built on kinships should be evaluated as one of the main qualities which has helped the HN in becoming arguably the most resilient group in the Afghan environment: "these [qualities *e.n.*] include kinship, bonds and unwavering religious ideology, strong discipline and careful planning and an enduring ability to attract supports whether young suicide-bomb trainees or generous Middle-Eastern backers."¹⁶⁰ This ability of the HN to adopt the tribal credentials in order to gain stability has been demonstrated by two further factors: a) a relative homogeneity in the composition of the HN in comparison to other Taliban networks in Afghanistan; b) few cases of internal feuds among the group members in comparison to other insurgent groups. On this second point Dressler specifically assessed how: "Today the Family makes up the most respected, cohesive and capable insurgent-terrorist organization in the region."¹⁶¹

After the fall of the Taliban regime Jalauddin Haqqani became, according to some authors, the main reference point for Pashtun nationalism and his clan has intensively exploited this sentiment to ensure a form of legitimation for the activities of the Network.¹⁶² An example of this manipulation of the sentiment of Pashtun nationalism is the one of the conquering of Kabul in 1995 when spreading a message on the duty to avenge the honour of the Pashtun through their madrassas, the Network was able to mobilise in little time 2,000 well trained fighters to support the Taliban.¹⁶³ The growth of drug trafficking, and the subsequent change in the traditional social structures in Afghanistan,¹⁶⁴ has threatened the survival of many armed groups but the HN's ability to use its tribal credentials has been useful in order to survive such dramatic changes¹⁶⁵ and to expand its involvement in a wide range of illicit traffic even when these were evidently contradicting the ideological creed of the organization.¹⁶⁶ These potential contradictions are the reasons why the HN prefers to be considered as part of a national Taliban insurgency instead of an autonomous entity: in order to avoid attracting

¹⁵⁷ US Army Command and General Staff College *Ibidem* p. 13

¹⁵⁸ International. Crisis Group *Ibidem*

¹⁵⁹ A. Gopal, M.K. Mashud and B. Fishman "Inside...."

¹⁶⁰ H. N. Khan and P. Constable *Ibidem*

¹⁶¹ J. Dressler "The Haqqani Network and the Threat...." *Ibidem*

¹⁶² H. Mili and J. Townsend *Ibidem*

¹⁶³ V. Brown and D. Rassler *Ibidem* p.105

¹⁶⁴ J. Mankin *Ibidem*

¹⁶⁵ H. Mili and J. Townsend *Ibidem*

¹⁶⁶ J. Mankin *Ibidem*

attention to its illicit activities and especially on drug trafficking. The group has not publicly disavowed and not even recognised its involvement in drug trafficking despite evidence of this, such as the import of chemical precursors in the areas under their control,¹⁶⁷ the use of poppy by its foot soldiers,¹⁶⁸ the wide drug consumption in the areas under their control such as Khost¹⁶⁹ and above all the massive involvement of the organisation in the heroin traffic business.¹⁷⁰

For what concerns the instrumental use of Islamism by the Haqqanis it is interesting to note how in this case, just like in the one of the SJG, the abandoning of the political ideology appears to be directly proportional to the groups' involvement in criminal activities. In fact, despite the fierce recollection of the ideals of the Islamic resistance in all of its history the Network has never proposed or outlined any form of political project about Afghanistan or Pashtun minorities.¹⁷¹ For all of his life Jalaluddin has only generically talked about "sharia rule", while his son has not, until today, ever outlined any form of political program nor even for what concerns the Pashtun nationalist sentiment.¹⁷² The attitude in manipulating the Islamist ideology for their aims was showed by the Haqqanis already during the early stages of the war against the Soviet Army. An interesting anecdote on this attitude has been reported by Mustafa Hamid who remembered how Jalaluddin Haqqani explicitly asked him to modify one of his publications in order to hide the corruption among the mujahideen ranks to the Gulf donors.¹⁷³ The importance and the effects of the use of Islamist beliefs by the Network is evident in the words of people from the Zadran arch which define Jalaluddin Haqqani as: "a virtuous and noble man with unwavering belief in Islam".¹⁷⁴ In sum, as pointed out by Ahmad, in a context such as the one of Afghanistan, religious credentials are crucial to distract the attention from the criminal businesses of jihadi groups and the Haqqanis are adopting this strategy.¹⁷⁵ This picture of the Haqqanis as religiously observant has been applied even to Sirajuddin Haqqani who, even if he is lacking his fathers' religious credentials (he is not a *mawlawi*), he is still considered a devout man and it is also because of this public image that the Taliban have relied on his services to mediate disputes among their ranks.¹⁷⁶ The Haqqanis not only have used their religious credentials and Islamism to picture themselves as pious but recently they have relied on a wide range of religious

¹⁶⁷ G. Peters, "Haqqani Network financing....." *Ibidem*

¹⁶⁸ P. D. Thruelsen "The Taliban in Southern Afghanistan: A local insurgency with a local objective" Small Wars and Insurgencies (2010)

¹⁶⁹ D. Macdonald "Drugs in Afghanistan" Pluto Press (2007) p. 199

¹⁷⁰ UNODC "The Global Afghan Opium trade" (2011)

¹⁷¹ T. Ruttig, "The Battle for Afghanistan: Negotiations with the Taliban: History and Prospects for the Future" New America Foundation (2011)

¹⁷² T. Ruttig, "The Battle for....." *Ibidem*

¹⁷³ L. Farral and M. Hamid *Ibidem* pp.68-69

¹⁷⁴ A. Gopal "Most deadly US foe...." *Ibidem*

¹⁷⁵ A. Ahmad *Ibidem* p. 58

¹⁷⁶ A. Gopal, M.K. Mashud and B. Fishman "The Taliban in North....." *Ibidem*

charities to absorb the reputational costs of the involvement in illicit businesses following the same propaganda strategy of other groups.¹⁷⁷ The exploitation of religious symbols and titles has been also functional to improve the group's cohesion. It is for this reason that the Haqqanis' men are used to addressing Sirajuddin with the title of "khalifa" (caliph),¹⁷⁸ something which not only contradicts the general theories of political Islam concerning the role of the caliph but also further underlines the existence of a certain degree of separation between the HN and the Taliban as criminal organizations, since the latter have recognised the deceased Mullah Omar as their caliph.¹⁷⁹

Finally, it is important to highlight how just like in the case of Mafias and of the Sahelian Jihadi Groups, the criminal ideology of the Haqqani Network has become a remarkable tool for recruiting among the poorest part of the population who are seduced by the potential social advance which can be achieved through the militancy in the Network. The HN is seen as fierce defender against a corrupted government and, above all, as careful movement toward the weak and the poor.¹⁸⁰ As demonstrated by some studies in fact, the majority of the Taliban's recruits (including the Haqqanis' ones) are poppy farmers¹⁸¹ who represent one of the lowest social and economic classes in the Afghan drug trade.¹⁸² The attraction among the poorest parts of the population on both sides of the Durand line is also due the prestige and high consideration of the Haqqanis' religious instruction which is also able to fill the social and economic voids left by both the Pakistani and Afghani governments.¹⁸³ The criminal ideology of the Network proved efficient also in depicting the organization as socially moderate and consequently in convincing more people to migrate in the areas under their control where the population enjoys more freedom in comparison to the ones subjected to Taliban rule.¹⁸⁴

6. Fifth Element: The Islamist Mafias' governmentality

a) Internal Governmentality

¹⁷⁷ A. Ahmad *Ibidem* p. 58

¹⁷⁸ H. N. Khan and P. Constable "A much feared Taliban offshoot returns from the dead" Washington Post (2017)

¹⁷⁹ C. Bunzel, "Al-Qaeda's Quasi-Caliph: the recasting of Mullah Omar" Jihadica (2014)

¹⁸⁰ V. Brown and D. Rassler p.131

¹⁸¹ G. Peters, "The Taliban and the opium...." *Ibidem* p.11

¹⁸² See M. Shaw "Drug trafficking and the development of organized crime in post-Taliban Afghanistan" in D. Buddenberg and W. A. Byrd, "Afghanistan's Drug Industry: Structure, Functioning, Dynamics and Implications for Counter-Narcotics Policy" World Bank (2007)

¹⁸³ V. Brown and D. Rassler *Ibidem* p.131

¹⁸⁴ A. Gopal and Alex Van Linschoten "Ideology in the Afghan Taliban" Afghan Analyst Network (2017)

As highlighted in the previous paragraph the HN, thanks also to the implementation of its criminal ideology, is arguably today one of the most disciplined and cohesive organizations in the fragmented Afghan Network. In doing so, the Haqqanis have developed a form of resilience which is similar to the one of the SJGs. In a context characterized by the frequent fragmentation of the local armed groups the Haqqanis have remained relatively intact from a hierarchical point of view. From a structural perspective, the Network is composed by four main groups of fighters: 1) the Veterans from the Afghan jihad; 2) the Fighters from the Zadran arch especially from Loya Paktia; 3) the Fighters from North Waziristan; 4) and the foreign non-Pashtun militants.¹⁸⁵ Despite the homogeneity of the Network's leadership some internal conflicts have broken out within its ranks and the observation of these internal feuds can be seen as a first example of the internal governmentality of this Islamist Mafia. Jalaluddin Haqqani's decision to pass the leadership of the HN to his son Sirajuddin for instance, was not unequivocally accepted by all the members of the organization, especially by one of Jalaluddin's brothers, Ibrahim, who was violently opposed to his nephew's nomination.¹⁸⁶ According to some sources, the root causes of this clash were both ideological and political, with the wing led by Ibrahim more keen to start peace talks with the US forces while the part of the Network led by Sirajuddin was more inclined towards continuing the war in order to take a seat for talks from a stronger position.¹⁸⁷ Put in the bigger context of the definitional model adopted for this thesis the internal feuds within the Network denotes a strong level of convergence with the historical examples within the Mafioso ones (let's think for instance at the internal feud within Cosa Nostra during the 1970s when the families from the province of Palermo defeat the ones from the city). Sirajuddin's wing reacted in a manner akin to a mafioso organization, with the exercise of violence which was combined with a carefully constructed image of it as legitimate according to the Pashtunwali norms, a combination which proved to be useful in order to secure the undisputed leadership of the HN for Sirajuddin and his supporters.¹⁸⁸ Another analogy with the mafioso internal feuds is related to how, through the exercise of violence, the group assisted a generational change in its leadership after 2009, which on the one hand saw the rise of previously marginal figures such as Khalil Haqqani¹⁸⁹ but on the other it led to the rise to the group's leadership of a new generation of the family led by Sirajuddin and his brothers Abdul Aziz¹⁹⁰ and Nasiruddin.¹⁹¹ In sum, the internal feuds of the Haqqanis are

¹⁸⁵ A. Gopal, M.K. Mashud and B. Fishman "Inside the Haqqani Network" Foreign Policy (2010)

¹⁸⁶ T. Gregg *Ibidem*

¹⁸⁷ T. Gregg *Ibidem*

¹⁸⁸ J. Dressler "The Haqqani Network. From Pakistan...." *Ibidem*

¹⁸⁹ US National Security Agency cable "2011-01-10" *Ibidem*

¹⁹⁰ B. Roggio "US adds Haqqani commander to the list of global terrorists" Long War Journal (2015)

¹⁹¹ B. Roggio "US adds Haqqani Network, Taliban leaders to list of designated terrorists" Long War Journal (2010)

solved through the same means used by Mafias and they bring about the same generation-shifting outcomes.¹⁹²

The ability of the Network in implementing its internal governmentality has been proved also in the aftermath of the collapse of the Islamic Emirate, when the Taliban factions started to fight each other especially over money issues.¹⁹³ Part of these internecine conflicts has involved the Haqqani Network which has been attacked in its territory but which has been able to defend its key positions in the Zadran arch through a targeted assassination campaign which eventually led to the killing of some Taliban governors.¹⁹⁴ The survival of the Haqqanis as a unified organization in the face of these two important changes not only proved the efficiency of the organization in managing its cohesion but it has also represented the starting point for a progressive improvement of its importance within the wide Taliban movement.¹⁹⁵ At the end of 2009, and especially after the announcement of Mullah Omar's death, the Haqqanis became the guardians of the Taliban's internal stability. In fact they successfully managed the transition periods of the leadership from Omar to Mansour and lately from Mansour to Akhundzada.¹⁹⁶ This growing importance of the HN was proved by the nomination of Sirajuddin as deputy *amir* of the Taliban, a decision which was due to the will of the Taliban leadership in keeping the Haqqanis within the organization as a key player to stabilize their troubled internal power dynamics.¹⁹⁷

b) External Governmentality

From a preliminary perspective, there is evident similarity between the HN's and the Mafias' and SJGs external governmentality: the necessity of the Network's leaders to ensure their presence in their territories as a tangible sign of power.¹⁹⁸ This factor has been made clear by the Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid who claimed how some Taliban commanders accepted to live in Pakistan but the Haqqanis would never do the same.¹⁹⁹ Another evident element of the external governmentality of the Haqqanis, as in the case of Mafias, is the one of the taxation system which is implemented by the group.²⁰⁰ The HN governmentality across the Pakistan and Afghanistan border

¹⁹² For examples of the impact of these feuds on the internal dynamics of Mafias see F. Varese "*Vite di Mafia*", Einaudi (2017)

¹⁹³ International Crisis Group *Ibidem*

¹⁹⁴ International Crisis Group *Ibidem*

¹⁹⁵ J. Dressler "*The Haqqani Network and the threat to Afghanistan*" Foreign Affairs (2011)

¹⁹⁶ B. Osman "*Toward fragmentation? Mapping the post-Omar Taliban*" Afghanistan Analyst Network (2015)

¹⁹⁷ P.D. Thruelsen *Ibidem*

¹⁹⁸ H. N. Khan and P. Constable *Ibidem*

¹⁹⁹ H. N. Khan and P. Constable *Ibidem*

²⁰⁰ G. Peters "*The Haqqani Network financing....*" *Ibidem*

areas is implemented by the presence of local training structures in Kurram and Miran Shah²⁰¹ - a structural presence that the HN does not forget to publicize in its propaganda.²⁰² Due to their ability and legitimation in the use of violence, the Network is a recognised authority on which the local populations rely to judge and resolve their disputes.²⁰³ This parallel form of government manifests itself through the providing of social services in the regions subjected to the Haqqanis' rule. An example of these is the indirect implementation of a parallel healthcare system thanks to the exploitation by the Network of the work of the NGOs in the Loya Paktia region since the early days of the Afghan insurgency.²⁰⁴ As long as the war is ravaging Afghanistan the HN's ability in distributing these forms of welfare has been crucial for the implementation of an unofficial social contract between the population and the Islamist Mafias aimed at obtaining legitimacy rather than controlling the locals²⁰⁵ - a factor which is in part confirmed by a 2017 audio message by Sirajuddin Haqqani who asked his men to always avoid killing civilians.²⁰⁶ This kind of claim needs to be evaluated carefully. In fact on the one hand it is true that empirical data show how the HN tend to avoid to kill civilians during its operations in the Paktia region and the Zadran arch where the majority of the violent actions led by the groups appearance to be more targeted and restricted in terms of victims.²⁰⁷ On the other, it is true that the HN's men have been at least involved as fixers in indiscriminate killings especially in Kabul.²⁰⁸ The HN arguably justify these killings as part of the war against the infidels but it is important to stress here how in some cases the link between the Network and these bombing campaigns are purely speculative and not corroborated²⁰⁹ as happened for instance in the 2017 bombings in Kabul²¹⁰ or in the killing of the peace envoy of the Afghan government, Burhanuddin Rabbani in 2011.²¹¹ Put succinctly, in a complex and rapidly evolving context like the Afghan conflict the extent and the nature of the involvement of the HN in car-bombings campaign it is very difficult to outline and there are not definitive proofs to assess whether claims such as the one mentioned above are merely propagandistic or not.

Analogous to what was observed in relation to the Sahelian Jihadi Groups, the HN across the decades has been able to create a wide and ramified network of relationships with other armed groups.²¹² The

²⁰¹ M. Waldman *Ibidem*

²⁰² B. Roggio and C. Weiss "*Haqqani Network publicizes training camp in Afghanistan*" Long War Journal (2015)

²⁰³ V. Brown and D. Rassler *Ibidem* pp. 142-143

²⁰⁴ V. Brown and D. Rassler *Ibidem* pp. 108-109

²⁰⁵ A. Jackson, "*Life under the Taliban Shadow Government*" Overseas Development Institute (2018)

²⁰⁶ H. N. Khan and P. Constable *Ibidem*

²⁰⁷ J. Dressler "*The Haqqani Network and the Threat....*" *Ibidem*

²⁰⁸ S. Coll "*Directorate...*" *Ibidem*

²⁰⁹ S. Coll "*Directorate...*" *Ibidem*

²¹⁰ Tolo News "*Haqqani Network denies any role in Kabul bombings*" (2017)

²¹¹ BBC "*Haqqani Network denies killing Afghan envoy Rabbani*" (2011)

²¹² A. Gopal, M.K. Mashud and B. Fishman "*The Taliban in North Waziristan....*" *Ibidem*

links between Al Qai'da and the HN for instance, started in the early days of the Afghan war against the USSR and the Haqqanis have proved to be a valuable ally for Bin Laden and his men at some important historical moments for the group. In this context, it is important to remember how the famous 1998 Bin Laden's *fatwa* against the Jews and the Crusaders was issued at the Haqqani headquarters in Khost, a decision taken by Bin Laden himself who decided to use the HN's camp instead of the Taliban structures.²¹³ During the Afghan civil war the Haqqanis forged important partnerships with the leaders of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, with whom the Network would later share some criminal partnerships.²¹⁴ In the same vein, the HN has shared relevant links with the Tehrik Taliban Pakistan group (TTP, also known as the Pakistani Taliban) whose first leader Bahitullah Meshud was close to Jalaluddin Haqqani.²¹⁵

The HN have also been able to act as a peacemaker among tribal groups in the FATA area such as in the case of the peace deal with the Turi tribe in 2011.²¹⁶ The Turis, are one of the longstanding tribes at the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan and they control some strategic areas which are crucial for interconnectivity of the licit and illicit networks between the two countries.²¹⁷ After the American invasion some clashes between the Turis and other local tribes (such as the Moqbils) broke out and these produced the block of the strategic passes by the Turis.²¹⁸ The Haqqanis have initially decided to provide weapons to the Turis' opponents in order to use them as their proxies,²¹⁹ but when the conflict turned in a stalemate the HN decided to act as a peacemaker ensuring a truce between the Turis and their rivals.²²⁰ The role of the Network in the Kurram tribal wars highlights two of the main characteristics of the Haqqanis: on the one hand their governmentality based on their credibility, on the other it gives further proof of the organization's pragmatism which clashes with the misconception of the Haqqanis as a hardcore politically-oriented jihadi group. Since the Turis are Shias it would have been unsurprising if the Haqqanis had undertaken a military solution or even to implement a sort of ethnic cleansing. The HN instead gave another proof of its nature as power broker and acted as a mediating force in order to end the feud within a strategically sensitive area.²²¹

²¹³ V. Brown and D. Rassler *Ibidem* pp. 196-197

²¹⁴ L. Farral and M. Hamid *Ibidem* pp. 197-198

²¹⁵ T. Ruttig, "Loya Paktia's....." *Ibidem* p.76

²¹⁶ J. Dressler and R. Jan *Ibidem*

²¹⁷ J. Dressler and R. Jan *Ibidem*

²¹⁸ J. Dressler and R. Jan *Ibidem*

²¹⁹ J. Dressler "The Haqqani Network influence in Kurram and its implications for Afghanistan" CTC Sentinel Vol.4 No.3, pp. 11-15 (2011)

²²⁰ J. Dressler and R. Jan *Ibidem*

²²¹ J. Dressler and R. Jan *Ibidem*

Conclusion

In this chapter I have showed how the Haqqani Network can be considered an Islamist Mafia according to the theoretical framework used in this thesis. Moreover, just as the Sahelian Jihad Group did, the Network has built its own Islamist Mafioso method. A first characteristic of this method can be primarily observed in the non-predatory relationship that the HN has developed toward the local population, something which makes the Haqqanis different if compared to other armed groups active in Afghanistan.

In this context it is important to underline how the HN, even more evidently than the SJGs, is a practical example of the theories by Cockayne on the Hidden Power. Borne as an insurgent group it has undertaken some important changes in its structures and strategies in becoming firstly a criminal industry and lately a power broker. This transformation is highlighted by the continuing relationships that the Network has built with a wide range of actors, some of which are supposed to be its opponents. Just like the Italian Mafias, the Haqqanis have successively proposed themselves as a partner in power rather than a concrete form of political opposition. In this context, as showed also in the previous chapter in relation to the Sahelian Islamist Mafia, even the brutal use of violence should be understood as a tool for the development of this relationship rather than an instrument adopted in order to implement a political agenda. Just like the SJGs the Haqqani have always aimed towards a form of recognition by official power actors - an aim which can be considered achieved because of the success of the group in: a) preserving its independence in relation to other armed groups in the country; b) securing a place for itself at the table of peace during the talks between the US and the Afghan government on one side and the insurgents on the other. On this second point, further proof of the success of the Haqqanis is given by the recent publication by the *New York Times* of an opinion article written by Sirajuddin Haqqani himself, something which has arguably no precedent in the history of Afghan terrorist groups.²²² This fact gives further proof of the non-predatory nature of the relationship that the Network has tried to build with the official power actors already under the leadership of the founder Jalaluddin. In putting into perspective this event to the theoretical framework developed in this thesis and to the theory of the Islamist Mafias, it gives another practical demonstration of how the Network has become a non-negligible, even if unofficial, power actor able to break politico-ideological lines within Afghanistan as demonstrated by the rumours of

²²² S. Haqqani “*What we, the Taliban, want*” *New York Times* (2020)

the nomination of one of its affiliates as the new leader of the local Islamic State faction, the so-called Khorasan group.²²³

²²³ Telangana today “*ISIS Khorasan branch new leader is Pak-based Haqqani Network terrorist: Afghan Minister*” (2020)

Conclusion

Introduction

In this conclusion, I will summarise the most important findings of this research. The chapter will be divided into three sections. In the first one, I will reinforce the ways in which the evidences from the case studies, when applied to my theoretical framework, reveals answers to the research questions outlined in Chapter I. In the second section, I will compare the definition of mafias given by Sales with the one of the Islamist Mafias that I have proposed for this work, underlining the original conceptual contribution of this thesis. In the third section, I will compare the two case studies analysed in this thesis with the Sales' model in order to highlight the principal similarities and divergences between these and the theoretical model. Such analysis bridges the conceptual and empirical divide that has been present in previous studies on this topic and that this thesis wants to resolve. Specifically, the Islamist Mafias' theory will help to overcome the profit vs. ideology dichotomy, and it will clarify which kind of shape a terrorist organization might take in the context of the convergence process on the crime terror continuum. In the final section I will highlight potential future directions for studies of the crime terror nexus and in the field of political violence which might be conducted using the theory of the Islamist Mafia.

1. The Islamist Mafias in the debate on the crime terror nexus

To make sense of the contribution that this thesis has brought to the debate on the crime terror nexus it is important firstly to reconsider the research questions introduced in chapter I. From a preliminary perspective, it can be assessed how each one of the three research questions is linked to a specific level of problematization. The first question (*is it possible for some terrorist groups to evolve into organized criminal groups?*) is deeply related to the debate on the convergence phenomenon within the studies on the crime terror nexus. The second one (*if so, how do their main objectives change?*) can be understood as another sublevel of problematization related to the crime terror nexus, which is linked to the evolutionary process that terrorist groups might undertake in the process of convergence. Consequently, this thesis aims to fill the gap in the literature in relation to this topic by giving a description of how this evolutionary process takes place. The third research question (*in what ways*

does an Islamist Mafia exist?) poses two further level of problematization, specifically: a) it is necessary to understand what kind of shape a “converged” terrorist group might take within the wider concept of “organised crime”, used until now to describe the phenomenon of convergence; b) the proposition of the theory of the Islamist Mafia. Concerning this last assumption, it is important also to clarify what a Mafia and an Islamist Mafia are and above all to demonstrate the existence of an Islamist Mafia, from an empirical perspective.

1.1 Research question 1: is it possible for some terrorist groups to evolve into organized criminal groups?

As showed in the first chapter, until the theorisation of the crime terror continuum by Tamara Makarenko¹ the analysis of the relationship between terrorism and organised crime was mainly composed by a series of theoretical speculations linked to the presence of small pieces of evidence of the involvement of terrorist groups in criminal acts, especially after the end of the Cold War.² When Makarenko gave a systematic description of these relationships (see figure 1) the debate on the crime terror nexus was enriched by two main factors: 1) a new theorisation of the phenomenon of convergence, according to which terrorist groups can become criminal and vice versa; 2) the revival, in a new theoretical framework, of the so-called “profit vs. ideology dichotomy” which deem the process of convergence as impossible by virtue of the different aims which criminal and terrorist organizations want to achieve.

¹ T. Makarenko “*The Crime –Terror Continuum: Tracing the interplay between Transnational Organised Crime and Terrorism*”. *Global Crime*, Vol. 6 No.1 pp. 129-145 (2004)

² See W. Laqueur “*The New Terrorism: Fanaticism and Weapons of Mass Destruction*” Oxford University Press (1999)

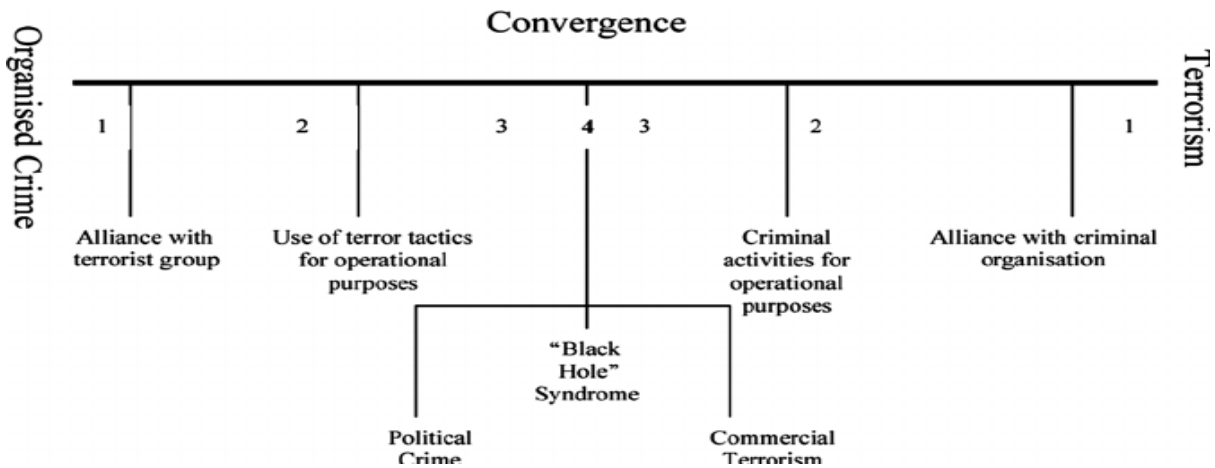


Figure 8 The Crime Terror Continuum theorised by Tamara Makarenko in 2004

The first research question has situated this thesis within the debate on the phenomenon of convergence in the crime terror continuum with the aim of giving a positive answer to this question. To prove the validity of the convergence theories, it has been necessary to overcome the profit vs. ideology problem thanks to the creation of the theory of the Islamist Mafias and to do so some further level of analysis needed to be added to the first theorisation of the crime terror continuum. In this context the formulation of the Islamist Mafias is closer to Ballina’s reinterpretation of the crime terror continuum (figure 2) than to the original theory by Makarenko.³

³ S. Ballina *The Crime-Terror continuum revisited: A model for the study of hybrid criminal organization*” Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism Vol.6 No.2 pp. 121-136 (2011)

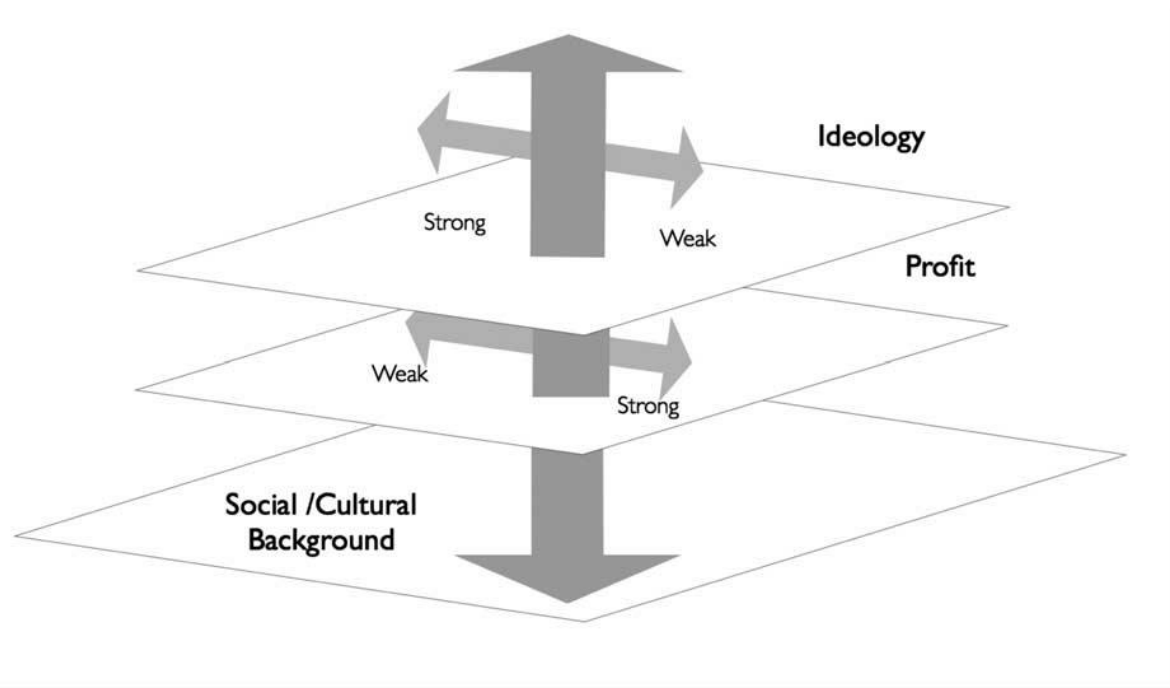


Figure 2 The crime terror continuum revisited by Santiago Ballina (2011)

In the Islamist Mafias theory, the profit and ideological components of the observed criminal organization are not mutually exclusive. As showed in the analysis of the case studies, the Sahelian Jihadi Groups and the Haqqani Network at times seem to be more profit than politically oriented but at the same time they continue to cultivate the ideological components of their creed in order to maintain and to increase their legitimacy in relation to the surrounding social environment. The observation of the case studies gives additional proof of the simplistic nature of the profit vs. ideology dichotomy in the study of the crime terror nexus, an aspect of terrorism studies which is instead very complex. As we have seen above the Islamist Mafias have not outlined a clear political project, at least not yet, nor even a proper political agenda as other terrorist groups such as the Islamic State have done and they prefer to generally call for a “sharia-based rule” for their countries. Nevertheless, they have cultivated beneficial relations with their respective infidel counterparts even if political ideology does not completely disappear from their discourses or propaganda. This shows how profit and ideology can coexist and that these two elements are not mutually exclusive. Put succinctly, these terrorist groups do not abandon their behavioural codes and symbolism in order to undertake a process of convergence, but they use those for other aims *within* the process of convergence. In this context, the answer to the first research question given by this thesis not only proves the possibility of convergence but it gives another possible interpretation to overcome the conundrum of the profit versus ideology dichotomy. It is not only in the convergence process that ideology can be used for profit, but it also facilitates the above-mentioned convergence and the consequent transformation of terrorist groups into more criminally oriented ones.

1.2 Research question 2: If so, how do their main objectives change?

As highlighted in the first chapter, one of the main gaps present in the current literature on the crime terror nexus is related to the lack of analysis on how, why and when some terror groups decide to be involved in politics. More specifically, the current literature, analysed in Chapter I, so far has not given an explanation of why some terrorist groups decide to cultivate their relationships with official power actors without receiving any form of official recognition in return. The decision by terrorist groups to cooperate with official governments or even to let their members run for political office might be symptomatic of a change in the groups' political aims. The abandonment of these "extreme" political aims, such as the overthrowing of the government or the instauration of a new state form, is consequently the first evident changing in the objectives of these groups. Consequently, another question arises: if the overthrowing of a regime and the installation of another is not the aim of these terrorist groups anymore, then is political change still their main objective? It is important to highlight how there is not an unequivocal answer to this question given the fact that this could change according to every group's history. Nevertheless, the observation of the case studies in this thesis gives some information about the changing of the political objectives of the terrorist groups.

The analysis of the Sahelian Jihadi Groups and the Haqqani Network highlights two main findings concerning the changing of the aims of the organizations: 1) the political rhetoric or aim remains but it seems rather a symbolic instrument that is used to justify the use of violence. Occasionally, these concepts are used by the Islamist Mafias also to justify their involvement in criminal activities, especially when those contradict the ideological constructs of their political ideology (for instance in the case of drug trafficking); 2) despite this use of a political ideology or rhetoric, the observation of the case studies denotes an increase in the involvement in criminal activities by these organizations, rather than in confrontation with other political subjects. The observation of the kidnappings business is the most evident case of this change. In this thesis I have showed how some scholars tend to make sense of the involvement in kidnappings as functional to the political fight against a regime, in part as a way to finance the jihad.⁴ Nevertheless, this thesis has showed how the involvement of terrorist groups in such a criminal acts does not necessarily translate into an increase of political violence with more deadly and decisive attacks conducted against the local regimes, as demonstrated also from an empirical perspective in observing the dataset on kidnappings published by Loertscher and Milton⁵.

⁴ A. Lohmann "Who owns the Sahara?" Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (2011)

⁵ S. Loertscher and D. Milton, "Held hostage: analysis of kidnappings across time and among jihadists organizations", CTC Westpoint (2015)

In the case of the SJGs for instance, it has been clearly showed how, despite the remarkable amount of money earned by the organizations, the SJGs have not conducted deadlier attacks against the ‘far enemy’, nor have they have increased their political activism in general.

This preference for involvement in criminal activities does not have to result in a simplistic evaluation of the changing of the objectives of the Islamist Mafias (from politics to profit). In some ways, they continue to work to achieve a form of political power, but it is a different one. The enrichment of these criminal organizations, their increase in influence and the development of a form of governmentality, are all necessary to reach the aim of becoming a “hidden power” using the same expression adopted by James Cockayne.⁶ The internecine conflicts within the ranks of these organizations and the use of private violence are both tools and symptoms of the will to achieve this political objective as showed in the analysis of the case studies. What is important to highlight in this context is how the efforts made in the achievement of hidden power, in the case of the Islamist Mafias, are linked to their ability to cultivate a form of cooperation with the official power actors, most notably political institutions. In this context the Islamist Mafias, whether they are the Sahelian groups or the Haqqani Network, are perfectly amenable to the process of indirect administration highlighted by Vanda Felbab-Brown: “States delegate authority to criminal groups over areas on which the government and elites do not want to expend resources or in which they do not have the capacity to govern.”⁷ In such a context the governmentality (or the hidden power) of the Islamist Mafias become functional to impose a form of control in these areas, and in doing so they cooperate with the local institutions for convenience rather than corruption. Finally, as showed in both the case studies, the final outcome of this process is the start of negotiations or peace talks with the local governments in order to achieve a form of recognition by them and to continue to prosper not only as efficient entrepreneurs in the underworld but also as an unofficial but crucial part of a power system.

1.3 Research question number three: In what ways does an Islamist Mafia exist?

As assessed above, the last research question of this thesis is related simultaneously to a further level of problematization on the one hand, and a more creative aspect of this work on the other. Concerning the first one, the analysis of the literature on the crime terror nexus has showed an important gap regarding the use of the expression or concept of “organised crime” in the convergence processes. In this regard, a first problem related to the use of this expression is due to its imprecision. Intuitively,

⁶ See J. Cockayne “*Hidden Power*” Oxford University Press (2016)

⁷ V. Felbab-Brown. “*Crime and state-making*” in J.P. Sullivan and. R. J. Bunker “*The rise of the Narco-state (Mafia States)*” Small Wars Journal, El Centro (2018) ebook

it is known how with the expression “organised crime” scholars tend to identify an enormous spectrum of criminal phenomena which are different from one to another. Social bandits, insurgents, street gangs, cartels, drug dealing rings are all example of organised crime, but they are not identical. When this conundrum is translated within the crime terror nexus debate it tends to hide or ignore a wide set of problems especially for what concerns the phenomenon of convergence. Put succinctly, if terrorist groups evolve into criminal ones, what kind of criminal organization they will become after this evolution? Bearing in mind such a conundrum this thesis fills this gap with a new proposition to analyse the convergence in the crime terror nexus: the theory of the Islamist Mafias. The Islamist Mafias are a cluster of criminal organizations that instrumentally use a political and religious ideology in order to commit criminal actions that are opposite to the states’ and religious laws. The main aim of these organizations is to ensure the enrichment of their members in economic, political and social terms through the activities of the organization. The members of the Islamist Mafias are not all Muslims, but they are nevertheless united by the common will to increment their power. The Islamist Mafia is a criminal phenomenon characterized by a high level of pervasiveness which enables it to forge power relationships in a way and with subjects that the majority of common terrorist groups are not able to reach usually.

In this context it is useful to briefly revisit the lexical clarifications related to this definition that were mentioned in chapter III. Specifically:

- a) The word “Islamist” here is used to refer to a specific political ideology (which aims at the instauration of a political system based on sharia) not to Islam as a religion, nor even to Muslims as followers of this faith.
- b) The members (which must be intended as both the individuals who are part of the enabling network related to the Islamist Mafias and the “jihadists” on the ground) of the Islamist Mafias are not all Muslims. These organizations are supported by a wide range of different subjects who are not Muslims and that consequently have a little or no interest in shaping a political regime based on the Quran or the *sharia*.
- c) The value of Islam and Islamism for the Islamist Mafioso is instrumental. Of course, they use the main ideological themes of the Islamic epic in their propaganda but their use of those is aimed only at the achievement of a form legitimacy or recognition.

With the theory of the Islamist Mafias I want to make sense also of the multidimensional nature and presence of some terrorist groups in a wide range of different fields simultaneously from a criminal perspective. In fact, some of those are active within the social, economic, and political field as parallel authorities and the concept of Islamist Mafia is more appropriate to describe these criminal organizations than the use of some more reductive ones such as the one of narcoterrorism for instance. It is true that the observed terrorist groups are involved in drug trafficking as the Latin American cartels, but at the same time they tend to justify through political ideology their activities, so they are not just seen as drug cartels. It is true that these organizations are involved in robbing as gangs are, but they are also involved in the resolution of conflicts within their societies. It is true that these criminal organizations are calling for the application of an extremist religious law which has no support among the local populations, but at the same time they enjoy some forms of popular legitimacy. The theory of the Islamist Mafias, given the multidisciplinary approach which characterises it, aims to offer an interpretative framework of these apparent contradictions and at the same time to fill the gaps in the current literature. In sum, some terrorist groups are a specific new form of criminal organization (not organised crime generically) and these new criminal entities tend to manifest themselves on a wide range of different fields at the same time. Their main objective is to increase their power and all their different manifestations (from a social, political and economic perspective) are functional to this objective.

2. The theory of the Islamist Mafias

2.1 The Sales' Model

The theorisation of the Islamist Mafias as an explanation for the convergence processes within the crime terror nexus brings yet another level of problematization: the necessity of defining the mafias conceptually. In the literature review in the first chapter, I have analysed the first approaches on the studies on mafias which have denoted some perceptible weaknesses. Excluding the positivist definitions which are biased by some evident form of ethnic determinism (even explicitly racist in some cases such as the one of the Italian positivist school⁸) I have critically analysed the different formulations of what I call the structural approach in the studies on mafias. This approach, borne

⁸ C. Lombroso "*L'uomo delinquente*". Hoepli (1876)

mainly in the field of criminology, is characterized by the observation of the internal hierarchies of these organizations which are considered as an element useful to explain a wide range of issues in relation to the Mafias, from their resilience to their remarkable economic success. Despite the wide diffusion of the structural approach the works related to it these perspectives on Mafias present two main weaknesses: 1) the almost exclusive observation of the hierarchies in the Mafias brings about some form of inductive reasoning and they also appear to be outdated in many ways, given the dramatic hierarchal change within mafias themselves in the last few decades and the increasing similarity among the hierarchies of different criminal organizations;⁹ 2) the inductivity of the structural approach is demonstrated by the fact that its supporters tend to label certain groups as a mafias only by virtue of a certain hierarchical configuration but such explications were in many ways insufficient in order to make sense of their political relations, their social legitimation and above all of the governmentality that these groups have been able to implement since their early days. Consequently, another weakness has emerged from the observation of the structural approach: its unidimensional perspective in the definition of mafias. More specifically, the attempt to describe the mafias according to one disciplinary background (such as economy, criminology, etc.) is used to extend the same theoretical background to every single aspect of this criminal phenomenon.

The analysis of this approach led to the necessity to adopt a multidimensional one to define mafias. Moreover, the need to successively apply such an approach to the study of some jihadist terror groups obviously imposed the need to verify if such an approach exists and whether it can be applied also to the case studies of this thesis. The use of the Sales' definitional model appeared to be the most suitable one for the aims of this research, for three main reasons: 1) because of its openness which renders it applicable even to criminal organizations which are not part of a strictly "Mediterranean" or Italian socio-political context; 2) because of the historical approach on which this model is built, the case of the Islamist Mafias gives also the opportunity not only to demonstrate the final outcome of the convergence process but also to make sense of the different stages of this evolutionary process; 3) because the historical method in the studies on mafias, as argued by the author himself, represents the best approach to adopt in order to avoid the deterministic trap characterising the previous definitions of mafias as mentioned above.

2.2 The Sales' Model application to the Islamist Mafias

⁹ H.B. Milward and J. Raab "*Dark Networks as Organizational problems*". International Public Management Journal Vol.9 No.3 pp. 333-360 (2007)

The introduction of the Sales model helped to find an appropriate, multidisciplinary definition of Mafia. Nevertheless, before proceeding to the analysis of the case studies it was important to test whether the model could be applied in a theoretical way to the Islamist Mafias. According to empirical findings, and the comparative evaluation between the Sales model and other research on the cases studies from different disciplines, this thesis has proved how the chosen model can be applied to the Islamist Mafias even if some differences have emerged from the comparison.

From a discursive perspective this definition already highlights the interethnic, criminal and hidden nature of these organizations. In this context, the theoretical necessities related to the analysis of Mafias' (such as the multidisciplinary approach, an indeterministic attitude and a theoretical openness) are perfectly applicable also to the Islamist Mafias. This reality is the first proof of the validity of the Sales' model in this thesis.

Concerning the application of each of the elements of the Sales' model on the theory of the Islamist Mafias the results further prove the validity of this model.

Sales Model	Islamist Mafias
Social legitimacy	Strong correlation
Power relationships	Strong correlation
Economic Ambivalence	Weak correlation
Criminal Ideology	Weak correlation
Governmentality	Strong correlation

Table 1 The Sales and the Islamist Mafias model in comparison

As showed in the table above the majority of the elements considered in the Sales' model have a strong degree of correlation when compared with the theory of the Islamist Mafias. The

anthropological and sociological research on the Tuaregs¹ and the Pashtun societies² proved how both these social environments are built on the same code of conducts as the mafioso societies (based on the concept of honour and the transgenerational obligation to revenge for instance) and above all how both these social environments face the same dilemmas. Specifically, both mafioso and Islamist Mafioso societies, are characterized by the presence of potentially infinite and unregulated social conflicts in which the use of private violence is perceived as positive if not even desirable. The combination of these characteristics does not allow the social environments to create any form of stable authority, consequently only the exercise of a form of patronage by some external actors allows these socio-political systems to achieve some form of stability.

This patronage system, together with the Mafias and Islamist Mafias' ability to exercise violence, leads to the development of the relationship with official power actors. Sales' theories on these ones are perfectly adaptable to the relationship which the Islamist Mafias have cultivated with a wide range of states, social groups, and institutions across the decades. This appropriateness is demonstrated also by the application of my theory on the mafia-power continuum which has been applied not only in relation to the Islamist Mafias theory but also to the empirical analysis of the case studies.

A more problematic application of the Sales' model is related to the phenomenon of economic ambivalence. In part, this is due to what I call the *innovation curse*, since for the first time these terrorist organizations are analysed as mafioso ones it is impossible to have the same amount of details and insights which are present in the literature on mafias which is obviously older and more in-depth. Secondly, the comparison is further complicated by the environment in which these organizations are active. Mali and Afghanistan are nowadays war zones and the local governments are not capable, or willing, to produce official and reliable data on money laundering in the so-called "grey area" of the local economic systems. These data are also difficult to find in relation to the local illegal markets which are obviously analysed according to some raw estimates than to some concrete and precise data. Nevertheless, the literature has provided some empirical evidence of the involvement of the Islamist Mafias in money laundering activities and of some connections between the Islamist Mafias and the legal economic actors. Consequently, the element theorized by Sales can be considered present within the Islamist Mafias even if it is not possible at the moment to assess a perfect coincidence between the two models.

¹ See B. Lecoq "*Disputed Desert*" Brill (2010)

² B. Glatzer, "*The Pashtun Tribal system*", in G. Pfeffer and D.K. Behera "*Concepts of Tribal Society*" Concept Publishers (2002) p.271

The comparison of the criminal ideology between the two models has proved to be problematic too. The correlation exists in relation to the instrumental use of the ideological constructs in order to achieve certain objectives such as the coherence of the internal hierarchy, or the justification for the use of violence. Nevertheless, from a theoretical perspective two main differences have emerged. Firstly, in comparison to the mafias the Islamist Mafias do not create their own proper rituals, such as the affiliation ceremonies in the case of the first, but they tend to hijack Islamic symbolism and Islamist ideology and adopt them in order to preserve their credibility and, possibly, to hide their involvement in crime. Secondly, the findings proved how some elements which were present in the Mafioso criminal ideology, namely the mafioso biopower and the idea of a Mafioso ‘superman’, are not present for what concerns the Islamist Mafias. A possible explanation for this absence is that the exercise of these ideological powers is already implemented by the social norms according to the behavioural codes of the Islamist Mafioso societies. For instance, the social codes of Pashtun and Tuaregs are inspired in part by the sharia norms which tend to have by themselves some biopower norms (for instance how to eat, how to dress, etc.), consequently, the Islamist Mafias do not have the necessity to think and create such norms as the Mafias. A second reason is related to the fact that these ideological characteristics are already present in the ideal of the mujahidin or of the social bandits, both constructs on which the Islamist Mafias have relied on in order to gain their social legitimacy. Consequently, the Islamist Mafias do not need to create their form of ‘supermanhood’ because that psychological and social construct is already present and it already has a role: the improvement of the local hierarchies’ solidity and of recruiting, especially among the poorest and most desperate part of the local population.

The element of governmentality instead offers a further example of the strong correlation between the two models: Mafias and Islamist Mafia have been able to impose a parallel set of norms over certain communities and certain territories because of their use of violence and above all because of their social legitimacy. They are the law, the police and the tribunal on which the local population rely in order to obtain justice - or more simply a form of protection from the unregulated and illegitimate use of violence which characterizes the local social environment.

3. The analysis of the case studies

After having tested the notion of the Islamist Mafias from a theoretical perspective this thesis provided proof of their existence from an empirical point of view. The analysis of the Sahelian Jihadi

Groups and of the Haqqani Network in chapters IV and V provide a positive answer to the third research question of this thesis (In what ways does an Islamist Mafia exist?).

Before comparatively analysing the case studies it is important first and foremost to explain again why these groups have been chosen as examples of Islamist Mafias. The first reason for this choice is related to the remarkable involvement of these organizations in criminal activities. Consequently, they are a perfect example of the crime terror nexus. Moreover, from a general perspective these groups denote some similarities with the Mafias, for instance their use of bloodlines and kinship as instruments to regulate the activities of the organizations. Most importantly, just like the “classic” mafias, these groups have implemented some relationships with official power actors across the decades and in some peculiar forms which are in many ways different from the ones adopted by other terrorist groups, such as Hezbollah³ or the PIRA⁴ which, for instance, in order to take part in the “official” political game have created their own official political parties.

In chapters IV and V, the adaptation of the Sales model and of the Islamist Mafias theory has been subject to empirical verification with the analysis of the case studies (see table 2 below). From a general perspective, the empirical findings have confirmed the adherence of the model to the case studies with all the elements’ presence confirmed by empirical observation. The social legitimacy and the power relations cultivated by both the Haqqanis and the Sahelian groups have been developed in the same way as the ones of the mafias and, via two behavioural codes, built on the same ideal types as the mafioso societies. More specifically, the cultivation of social legitimacy in both cases has been used as an element on which the relationship with official power actors have been built on and latterly cultivated. Concerning the relationship with official power actors it is important to highlight how, even in these cases, the application of the mafia-power continuum has demonstrated a strong fit in demonstrating the relationships between the Islamist Mafias and their political and religious partners.

³ See M. Calulli “*Come uno Stato*” Vita e Pensiero (2018)

⁴ See R. English “*Armed Struggle: the history of the IRA*” Pan Books (2008)

Sales' model	SJG	HN
Social legitimacy	Strong	Strong
Power Relationships	Strong	Strong
Economic Ambivalence	Weak	Strong
Criminal Ideology	Weak	Weak
Governmentality	Strong	Strong

Table 2 The Sales' model in comparison to the case studies

Despite these positive outcomes concerning the first two elements of the Sales' model, a partial, weak correlation has emerged in the observation of the element of the economic ambivalence in the case of the Sahelian Jihadi Groups. In regards the activity of the SJGs in both legal and illegal markets, this has been confirmed by the empirical findings. Nevertheless, these tend to not fully demonstrate the presence of remarkable Islamist Mafioso enterprises. This weak correlation is arguably due to the lack of data in relation to money laundering activities in the Sahel which make it very difficult to prove the presence of Islamist Mafioso enterprises. Another possible explanation of this weak correlation might be related to the fact that the evolutionary process from terrorism to organised crime in the case of the SJGs started fairly recently (at the beginning of the 2000s) and by consequence the bulk of the groups' activities could have been focused mainly in the illegal markets rather than the legal ones. On the contrary, the economic ambivalence in relation to the Haqqani Network not only is present and tangible but in many aspects is similar to the ones of the mafias. For example, as showed in chapter V, the Haqqanis have opened a wide range of enterprises in the real estate, construction and transport sectors combining their financial availabilities together with a ruthless but strategic use of violence which has allowed them to penetrate deeply the legal markets with their enterprises. Despite this difference, the observation of empirical data has showed how both the case studies are active in the legal markets and the illegal ones and even how they have both supported the activities of the legal economic enterprises which for a wide range of reasons have used the services of the Islamist Mafias in order to obtain funding, competitive advantages and other benefits.

The weak correlation, from a theoretical perspective, between the Sales' model and my theory has been in some ways confirmed also by the empirical observation of such cases. In looking at the criminal ideology of the SJGs and the HN the comparison with the Sales' model proved be different from the one depicted by the Italian historian. The Islamist Mafias, as with mafioso organizations, tend to instrumentally use some pre-existent ideological constructs with the same aims, such as the

justification of the exercise of violence or to boost their recruiting opportunities especially in the poorest parts of the local populations in Afghanistan and in the Sahel. Nevertheless, even the empirical observation has not showed the invention of new rituals or practices by the Islamist Mafias which instead are just using some pre-existing codes and symbols related to Islam as a religion or Islamism as a political ideology. This weak correlation is particularly remarkable especially in the case of the involvement of the HN and SJGs in drug trafficking which is a criminal activity that represents a flagrant ideological contradiction with Islam in general and Islamism more specifically. Despite these evident contradictions, none of the observed criminal organizations has ever introduced a new ideological element to justify its involvement in this business, rather they have just ignored this issue.

The analysis of governmentality in the case studies confirms a strong correlation between the Sales model and the case studies. As empirical data show the Islamist Mafias and the Mafias are able to implement a parallel system of laws and institutions in the areas under their dominion as demonstrated by the imposition of a parallel taxation system and the presence of tribunals to solve local disputes.

Conclusion

The theory of the Islamist Mafias proposes a new interpretation for the study of the crime terror nexus and more specifically for what concerns the convergence phenomenon. In concluding this work, I would like to propose some new possible avenues of research that the Islamist Mafias could open in the future.

Firstly, the work on the Islamist Mafias offers a new interpretative framework for what can be called “proxy governmentality”. More specifically, the analysis of the relationships between the Sahelian Jihadi Groups and the Haqqani Network on the one hand, and the official power actors on the other (be them the economic, political or religious ones) are open to further speculations and problematizations in the field of terrorism and political violence. In this sense, the Islamist Mafias offer a more in-depth analysis of these relations in comparison to existing theories such as the one of “Dirty Entanglements” proposed by Louise I. Shelley.⁵ In fact, the author analyses such relations as the consequence of a random process of corruption, while the Islamist Mafias theory places the accent on the convenience of these relationships from the perspective of official power actors. In

⁵ See L.I. Shelley “*Dirty Entanglements: Corruption, Crime and Terrorism*” Cambridge University Press (2014)

acknowledging the existence of these relationships, academic research could start to investigate some important topics, for instance: why do legitimate power actors decide to rely on unofficial ones in order to rule a specific territory or community? How could peace talks between the states and terrorist groups be changed or affect these relationships?

The analysis of the forms of governmentality implemented by the Islamist Mafias has highlighted another remarkable characteristic of these organizations: their links with the territory which they occupy from a geographical perspective. The geographic factor in the analysis of the crime terror nexus is not a new element in this research field. Some of the works by Shelley and Picarelli have highlighted how geography can influence the development of the crime terror nexus in some specific spaces.⁶ The first theorisation of the crime terror continuum by Tamara Makarenko was characterized by the presence of what the author calls the “black hole syndrome”, according to which the context of failed states and turbulent regions in general enhances the opportunity for cooperation between terrorist and organized criminal groups.⁷ This same interaction between geography and the crime terror nexus has been reiterated by Makarenko also in other successive writings.⁸ In sum, the debate on the crime terror nexus has been often characterized by the geographical observation of the spaces where criminals and terrorists interact and the theory of the Islamist Mafias aims to represent another starting point in this context. In this thesis, the geographic movements of the Haqqanis and of the SJGs have been shown and how these geographical changes have affected the groups in the context of the evolutionary process from terrorism to crime. Let’s take for instance the case of the Sahelian Jihadi Groups, when they started to move from Algeria to Mali. They already have shown some embryonic aspects of their convergence towards small scale criminal activities, nevertheless their shift to the Sahel has in some ways accelerated and concretised such changes. Giving these interactions between geography and the Islamist Mafias some questions can be posed, for instance: if such geographical changes would have never happened, would these criminal organizations have evolved from terrorism to crime? Moreover, the relationship between geography and the case studies in this thesis demonstrates how the Islamist Mafias are geopolitical subjects according to the definition of geopolitics given by the French scholar Yves Lacoste.⁹ For Lacoste, geopolitics is a discipline which analyses the confrontations between powers in a specific geographical territory. The Islamist Mafias have proved to be power actors in some specific territories because of their

⁶ L.I. Shelley and J. Picarelli “*Methods and Motives: exploring links between transnational Organized Crime and International Terrorism*”, Trends in Organized Crime Vol.9 No.2 pp. 52-67 (2005)

⁷ T. Makarenko “*The Crime –Terror Continuum: ...*” *Ibidem*

⁸ T. Makarenko. “*Europe’s Crime Terror Nexus: links between terrorism and Organised Crime in EU*” European Parliament (2012).

⁹ Y. Lacoste “La géographie, ça sert d’abord, à faire la guerre” La Découverte 2013 ebook

governmentality - consequently, according to Lacoste's definition, they are a geopolitical subject.¹⁰ Given this premise, the Islamist Mafias theory aims to give further proof of this geopolitical relationship and to propose new fields of problematization in relation to the crime terror nexus. For instance, which kind of specific geographical environment enhances the phenomenon of convergence between terrorism and organised crime? Which kind of geographical territory allows non-state actors to develop a form of governmentality? How do terrorists analyse geographical spaces? These are examples of the big area of problematisation that this thesis opens with its illustration of the interaction between the Islamist Mafias and the surrounding environment and in these fields academia could focus part of its future research efforts.

The Islamist Mafias also offer some new perspectives concerning the studies on radicalization in relation to the crime terror nexus. As showed in chapter I, academia has recently started to question the link between radicalization and criminal militancy¹¹. There is one aspect in such studies which is often underestimated: the social and ideological background which criminals bring with them when turning into jihadi fighters. In some ways, the current status of the debate on the link between radicalisation and crime seems to be characterized by the same problems seen in the early studies on the crime terror nexus. Scholars tend to look at the jihadi militancy as a fracture in relation with a criminal past. More precisely, it seems that when an individual radicalises, he or she necessarily shifts himself or herself from a for-profit use of violence to a purely political one, a fact which is not necessarily true. The evolutionary process observed in this work has showed how terrorist organizations do not lose their ideological rhetoric and symbolism when they became criminally oriented, rather they continue to use these elements but for different purposes. In this context, it would be important to enquire whether this same dynamic can be applied also to the studies on radicalisation. Put succinctly, do radicalised former criminals abandon the symbols and ideological constructs of their criminal past when they radicalise? Do radicalised criminals tend to exploit their former criminal credibility when they radicalise? If so, how? These are some of the potential research questions that the Islamist Mafias theory opens in this field.

In today's context, characterized by the increasingly blurred lines between terrorism and organised crime, the theory of the Islamist Mafias gives shape to the hybridity which characterises the activities of non-state politically violent actors. Taking into account the forthcoming peace deals that the HN and the SJGs are about to discuss with their respective counterparts it is arguable that these new types

¹⁰ Y. Lacoste *Ibidem*

¹¹ P. Neumann, R. Basra and C. Brunner. "Criminal Pasts, Terrorist Futures: European Jihadists and the New Crime-Terror Nexus" ICSR (2015)

of criminal organizations are here to stay for a prolonged period of time. Given this assumption, my theory proposes a way to make sense of these groups and of their apparently contradictory behaviour. For some, the idea of the existence of an Islamist Mafia might sound bizarre or unrealistic, just like the idea of the existence of Mafias themselves in their early days. Nevertheless, it is my strong conviction that the theory proposed in this work is an appropriate one to give a complete and encompassing explanation of the multidimensional nature of these organizations and of the empirical data collected and showed in this thesis. On this basis, this contribution will fill the gaps present in the literature and pave a way for a more in-depth understanding of the crime terror nexus and its implications in academia and beyond.

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