Reviews

Global Organized Crime and International Security

edited by Emilio C. Viano

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Reviewed by Adam Edwards

This edited volume reflects the increasing political and academic interest in organized crime and its purported threat to international security. Viano's introduction justifies the text in terms of offering a 'new perspective' on organized crime which acknowledges it as: (a) 'a worldwide phenomenon ... probably the first true 'virtual' corporation in the world'; (b) 'a threat to national and international security stemming, in part, from the collapse of the Soviet empire'; and (c) 'a system of transnational alliances with the potential to destabilize democratic values and institutions' (pp xii–xiii).

What is immediately striking about this collection is how diverse and eclectic the various contributions are. Rather than substantiating Viano's new perspective, they provoke a series of questions about the nature of the purported 'globalization' of organized crime and how this is to be measured, interpreted and responded to. At one pole, Viano's own thoughts exemplify a perspective on the threat of organized crime that is increasingly dominant in official discourse. This view seeks to remove or reorganize crime from its conventional treatment by criminology and the sociology of deviance and to place it within the analytical framework of post-Cold War international relations. Starting from the *assertion* that organized crime *is* becoming more transnational in its reach, it is argued that a 'drastic revolution' in criminal law and criminal justice is needed. Policy responses need to be 'introduced, adopted and implemented at the international level' (p xxi) and they should entail 'collective rather than individual responsibility, accountability and punishment ... prevention and prophylaxis more than the current 'after-the-fact' punishment and rehabilitation ... elimination of a criminal organization's economic base and on the identification and confiscation of its assets more than on the traditional individual deterrence, incapacitation and reform' (p xx).

At the other pole, however, Rodriguez's chapter on 'Alienation and Female Criminality' in Puerto Rico provides a 'social ecology' of the connections between women's poverty, prostitution and social alienation and their drift into drug addiction and organized trafficking operations. Here the implications for the study of organized crime are a return to a (gender-sensitive) criminology and a sociological analysis of the locally-specific circumstances which generate both the opportunities for, and the pressures to get involved in, organized crime. Rodriguez's contribution is also notable for its attempt to view organized crime from the perspective of the perpetrators when, in much of this volume as with so much of the recent commentary on transnational or organized crime, the issue is construed entirely from the standpoint of policy-makers, law enforcement and security agencies. Nonetheless, Rodriguez's argument has important implications for policy responses to organized crime. Rather than a preoccupation with grandiose international security operations, it

may be that 'prevention and prophylaxis' are better secured through a battery of policies for the social and economic renewal of the particular ecological environments inhabited by those individuals and groups 'at risk' of being recruited into organized crime (pp 133–4).

A detailed comparison of the different contributions reveals other themes and competing interpretations. The chapters by Taylor and Jamieson explore the interdependencies between nominally 'licit' and 'illicit' entrepreneurs, and how these are being accentuated through the development of transnational trading blocks such as the North American Free Trade Association (NAFTA) and the European Union. In so doing they challenge conventional depictions of organized criminals inhabiting an 'underworld' that shadows legitimate political economies and threatens them from without, as in the more apocalyptic observations of Albin et al and Martin (chapters 1 and 3 respectively).

The notion of 'external threat' is also present in the contributions from Balloni et al and Resa-Nastares (chapters 4 and 5 respectively), which exemplify a particularly disturbing trend in the contemporary analysis of organized crime, that is the conflation of criminality and ethnicity. Cesoni (chapter 14) provides an important counter-balance by emphasizing the unresolved problems of defining terms such as 'globalization', 'mafia', 'organized crime', etc, and the threat to the 'fundamental rights and liberties' of certain ethnic groups which the slovenly and essentially political use of these terms presents. Cesoni argues that 'to be really effective, a preventive policy must take account not only of the diverse forms assumed by organized crime, but also the environments which foster their development' (p 157). When these diverse forms and particular environments are examined it becomes clear that much organized crime is endogenously generated by the actions of domestic criminal networks exploiting local and regional markets for illicit goods and services.

Conspicuous by its absence in this volume, however, is the role of consumer demand in Western societies for illicit goods and services. Part of the danger of reducing organized crime to ethnic struggles is the obfuscation of how major opportunities are generated by this avaricious culture of demand for illicit highs, in particular those of a sexual and narcotic nature. The burgeoning literature on the sponsoring of organized crime by Western intelligence and security agencies is also absent, as is any consideration of the dependence of nominally licit Western corporations on criminal organizations, for services ranging from the disposal of toxic waste to doorman duties in night-clubs and other entertainment venues.

This blindness towards the culpability of Western governments and citizens is part of a general problem with Viano's attempt to 'shoe-horn' a very embryonic, equivocal and under-developed—but broad—field of research and policy into a rather narrow post-Cold War international relations perspective. This perspective, together with the brevity of the individual contributions, also precludes a more reflexive consideration of exactly how the authors reach their conclusions on the identification, measurement and interpretation of the purported 'global organized crime' problem. A more elaborate introduction to the volume, and perhaps a conclusion, that placed the individual parts and chapters in context and also discussed the connections and themes cutting across these contributions, would have enhanced the coherence and usefulness of this volume. As it stands the book demands a lot from readers in extracting these themes for themselves. Nonetheless, the effort is worth it—the individual contributions introduce a broad range of literature and source material for current students, scholars and policy-makers with an interest in organized crime.

Adam Edwards
Nottingham Trent University