



Special Issue: Islands of Organised Crime: Spatiality, Mobility and Confinement

Editorial

Rethinking Space, Violence and Control: Criminal Insularities at Europe's Borders and Beyond

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This special issue aims to explore organised crime and counter-crime responses through the lens of spatiality. We focus on islands—i.e., bounded spaces that are territorially discontinuous vis-à-vis mainland—but we reject geographic determinism and adopt John Agnew’s definition of spatiality as “how space is represented as having effects” (1994: 55).

Islands are commonly associated with the idea of laboratory and self-contained experimentation: this happens in very diverse disciplinary fields—ranging from biology to anthropology, and even archaeology. How their peculiar spatial features impact on social and political configurations and practices, however, is a less explored subject.

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The present collection of articles thus seeks to investigate whether there is anything distinctive about organised crime dynamics in islands: what role do islands play in today’s maps of transnational organised crime?

Yet, there is no lack of insightful evidence: islands are historically used to pursue strategies of displacement, containment and seclusion and colonisation (e.g., penal colonies, detention camps, military facilities). Insular spaces are often built as zones of exception and extraterritoriality (Mountz, 2015: 641-642).

Like any other social practice, criminal activities carried out by organised networks are spatially embedded. While nobody questions the salience of the spatial dimension of organised criminal activities, much remains to be studied. Economic geography has long ignored organised crime (Hudson, 2013). At the same time, the main “geographic debate” in organised crime literature regards the tensions that exist between the transnational dimension of organised crime groups and their local origin and embeddedness (Allum *et al.*, 2010; De Boer, 2010). By exploring a rather peculiar type of space, this special issue intends to begin to fill a gap, and contribute to the study of how crime, its construction as a threat and the development of multiple “wars on crime” unfold along a spatial dimension (Hall, 2010).

In spite of the territorial embeddedness of most *dispositifs* of social control and surveillance, attention to the spatial dimension of criminal actors and facts is relatively new: often it has been circumscribed to exercises of crime mapping and/or modelling informed by quantitative methodologies and geolocalisation software tools, relying on statistics and cartography of delinquency and deviance and producing geo-referenced data for the purpose of crime prevention. To be true, crime maps have a rather established tradition: the first ones were produced in the early nineteenth century by André-Michel Guerry and Adolphe Quetelet, who are by now considered the founders of the cartographic school of criminology. The latter aimed at measuring and quantifying criminal behaviours and plotting delinquency and deviance in space. Along similar veins, the Chicago School (1920s-1930s) has endeavoured to combine ecologies of crime and urban sociology for charting the spatial distribution of crime as well as other social conducts. Such interest has further driven the development of the so-called second wave of environmental criminology (1970s-1980s). The introduction of computerized mapping devices and the digitalization of police records have subsequently contributed to the advancement of those approaches (Kindynis, 2014).

In spite of this long-lasting fascination with the relationships between space and crime, threads of research are only recently emerging, interweaving criminological scholarship with different categories and understandings of space and spatiality. Some authors have looked into how the *peripheralisation* of poor suburbs (from the

perspectives of both the social services design and the architectural infrastructures) and the penalization of poverty, socio-economic marginality and even mental illness have fabricated zones of *dangerhood* at the fringes of variously-scaled communities (countries, cities, neighbourhoods) (these points are variously mentioned, see Turner, 2007; Hayward, 2012). Others have conducted criminological research on border and border regimes, focussing on control and surveillance of territory and mobility (Aas and Bosworth, 2013; Zureik and Salter, 2013; Loftus, 2015; van der Waude *et al.*, 2017). A third, pioneering, field of investigation is the research on confined spaces such as spaces of incarceration: such is the twist introduced by spatially informed research on punitiveness (Mountz *et al.*, 2013) and more specifically carceral geography (Moran, 2015; Moran and Schliehe, 2017), which focuses on institutional spaces of interment and encompasses prisons as well as detention centres, secure care units and locked therapeutic wards.

Nevertheless, it is fair to say that the geography-of-crime literature has predominantly focused on crime at the local scale, while reflections stemming from comparative analysis have not yet accompanied the emergence of a spatial turn in the study of crime and crime control, as it seems to have occurred in other realms of social sciences.

If we turn to transnational organized crime the situation is not significantly different. The so-called “glocal nature” of contemporary organised crime points to the need for a multi-scalar approach to the study of illicit flows (Hall, 2012). Complex mobilities and spatialities characterizing organised crime in the age of globalization call for refined epistemological and methodological tools. Whereas organized crime indeed seems to increasingly rely on the frictionless connectivity provided for by the hyper-spatialisation of new information and communication technologies, criminal networks are at the same time deeply embedded into local practices and norms. Does the study of organised crime in peculiar spatial configuration such as islands allow to see new aspects of this tension between rootedness and hypermobility?

Shifting the gaze onto counter-crime, the genealogy of policing resides in the act of patrolling a territory as a representation of state administrative and coercive power, and thus in the spatial demarcation of jurisdiction and authority (Campbell, 2016: 72). Policing practices, law-and-order norms and penitentiary infrastructures often generate specific spatial configurations; not only do they provide for operational topographic instruments but also “function as heterotopias of control, danger and exclusion” creating “spatially-bounded, territorialized sites of protection, investigation, risk-management, and surveillance” (Campbell, 2016: 71-72). In addition to conventional spatial designations such as “no-go areas” and “crime scenes”, the sanitization of

criminal justice (Hayward, 2012) as well as the privatization and proliferation of policing actors and the spatial fragmentation of jurisdiction (Campbell, 2016) have created a specific geography of crime made of “hotspots”, “secure zones”, bubbles and corridors of safety, prohibition and vulnerability.

Against this background, islands represent at first sight a promising universe for case selection and comparative research on the spatiality of organised crime and counter-crime. Having in mind the nexus between (modern) state making and organised crime (Tilly, 1985) this special issue considers the peculiar relation that historically links islands to the emergence and consolidation of different forms of sovereignty, beginning with wars on piracy (Thompson, 1996). In that respect, particularly important and worth further exploration is the role that insularity plays vis-à-vis the trajectory of modern sovereignties: how liminality, peripherality plays a role in negotiating more or less hybrid *sovereignscapes* and the role played by (counter)crime initiatives therein. Recent studies have emphasized how spatiality is key to analysing organised crime: among others (for example, Walter Kemp and Mark Shaw, 2012; Hudson, 2013), Mezzadra and Nielsen (2013) have laid emphasis on how the multiplication of borders and differential customs’ regimes has increased the opportunity for smuggling, while providing protection for criminal networks; Hall (2012) has emphasized the extent to which spaces of illicitness and extra-legality materialize in those physical places where the sovereign gaze of the state is eluded, escaped, resisted, contested as well as regulations are evaded. In this context, borderlands, overseas territories and islands have been “naturally” (e.g., by default) considered conducive to the establishment of a de facto, criminogenic, forms of extraterritoriality. Remoteness and the proximity to international borders seem to be two key conditions for eluding or challenging the state grip on terrains and routes. From early modern times, when piracy challenged vessels carrying national flags, islands have been seen as ideal landscapes for criminal entrepreneurialism to settle. Islands inherited by dismembered colonial empires have emerged as *zona franca* and spaces of exception. Even though “it is wrong to think of this opacity as only the product of the actions of a handful of rogue island microstates” (Hall, 2012: 377), the existence of offshore financial centres that are often connected with geographical insularity is no doubt an important feature in today’s international landscapes.

In the past 50 years many offshore financial centres have been established in small islands; yet, as Hampton and Christensen (2002) argue, the comparative advantage of hosting an offshore financial centre may come from territorial insularity as much as geographic size and remoteness vis-à-vis mainland’s economic hubs. The assumption here is that small islands economies frequently feature “diseconomies of scale,

dysfunctional market structures, high transport costs, high level of openness to international trade, tendencies to be price-takers not price-makers, limited natural resources, small labour markets, and deficiencies in professional and institutional knowledge and experience” (Hampton and Christensen, 2002: 1663); in order to cope with these structural weaknesses, small island states tend to rely on strategies of “opportunistic pragmatism”, proceeding on a well-trodden path of islanders having historically made a fortune on piracy and privateering. Whereas some of the suppositions of Hampton and Christensen (2002) appear to be *exotic-ising* if not orientalisating (most of the small islands states would be allegedly characterized by fragile democratic credentials, including media independence and civil society’s ability to organise dissent and criticize the legitimacy of tax havens’ infrastructures), they interestingly point out that insularity may enhance certain behavioural predispositions at the level of local communities: for example, an inward-looking focus, discretion vis-à-vis secrecy (a trait which is allegedly nourished by “the political economy and culture of smallness”, Hampton and Christensen, 2002: 1664) and a peculiar form of social capital. Further, and perhaps more convincingly, small islands are frequently touristic sites—which means efficient transport links and lodging services as well as attractive climates and leisure facilities: “wealthy tourists would visit the islands, enjoy the lifestyle, and subsequently establish residence and invest. At the same time bankers and tax accountants would be attracted by the climate and lifestyle and would bring with them their knowledge and experience, adding to the virtuous circle” (Hampton and Christensen, 2002: 1664).

This is not a distinctive feature of late modernity entering a post-fordist phase. Long before the institution of tax havens and the *financiarisation* of global economy islands were already functioning as spaces of exception, hosting penitentiary establishments whose discontinuity from the non-deviant society was then doubled. Prisons’ “classic” heterotopia is indeed enhanced in the case of far-off overseas penal colonies, which ultimately operate according to their extra-territorial status as well as their insularity (*outré-mer*, *outré-murs*, Redon and Grancher, 2014). The latter in fact may affect different aspects of detention (from monitoring technologies for probationers and parolees to probation witnesses, whistle-blowers and informers, to the reinsertion and reintegration of former detainees into society) in light of the very insular configuration which affect the conditions of living undercover and anonymity. The impossibility of evasion as well as disguising identities in islands and how it impacts of crime (and social) control is epitomized in a recent crime novel by the Martinican writer Raphaël Confiant:

une île par définition, c'est petit (...). On y vit donc à portée de vue et à portée de voix. Tout le monde sait qui est qui et qui fait quoi, si bien que la maréchaussée ne met guère de temps à résoudre les larcins ou les crimes, d'autant, qu'en général, les coupables préfèrent se rendre au bout de deux-trois jours pour ne pas risquer d'être mis au ban de la communauté (quoted in Redon and Grancher, 2014).

All this corroborates the hypothesis that insularity and organised crime have multiple points of contact that go well beyond the seminal (and still influential) interpretive paradigm of Sicily's Cosa Nostra. Other well known cases whose organised crime stories are often in the media would probably include mafia-like clans in Corse; the Dutch Antilles, the Canary Islands or Cap Vert as key hubs of the transatlantic cocaine highway; British Overseas Territories and crown dependencies, such as the Cayman, the Virgin Islands, the Isle of Man and the Island of Jersey as well-known tax havens and centres for global money laundering; human trafficking in Lampedusa and Zanzibar. In recent years, islands have become critical locations in the geopolitics of irregular migration routes.

These examples have (perhaps surprisingly) remained in the shape of scattered empirics and have not flown into a systematized analysis of how the condition of insularity relate to the development and control of organized criminal phenomena. Comparative literature on organized crime in islands is simply non-existent. Scholars working on the rise of the Sicilian mafia have made seminal contributions, that have sedimented paradigmatically in the form of ideal-typical mechanics related to insularity, generating distinctive analytical frameworks that are then used for comparative purposes. Crucial insights come from history and genealogy (Lupo, 2004), rationalist sociology of violence (Gambetta, 1996), political economy (Arlacchi, 2007) and criminology/sociology of criminal migrations (Varese, 2011). Against this background, this special issue engages research on organised crime carried out on islands (see for example Blickman 1997 on Aruba, Mullen et al. 2014 on Cyprus, Kolbe 2013 on Haiti, Dominguez-Mujica *et al.*, 2016 on the Canary Islands), with the aims to further expand this body of research by including perspectives such as relational geography and post-colonialism. In these fields, recent contributions have laid emphasis on the salience of islands in the practice and imagination of criminal policing and confinement, from Alcatraz to Robben Island and Lampedusa (e.g., Perera, 2009; Mountz, 2011, 2015; Cuttitta 2014). Building on the analysis of border cases such as Mexico (Snyder and Duran-Martinez, 2009), the Sahara-Sahel (Lacher, 2012) and the Moroccan Rif region (Strazzari and Zanoletti, 2019), recent scholarly work has developed analogies between islands and the “ocean of sand” of the Sahara (McDougall and Scheele, 2012). These

contributions crucially challenge the so-called state-capture hypothesis (Miraglia *et al.*, 2012) and can therefore have significant research and policy implications.

Building on these premises, this special issue was originally conceived of as a collective endeavour for rethinking space, violence and control, by studying “criminal insularities”. In other words, our attempt was to reflect upon conditions of peripherality and insularity affecting the development of extra-legal economies as well the design of governance instruments to contain and/or counter them; and further, to see whether and how criminal enterprises and policing/law enforcement practices are (re-)organised in insular spaces. Our theoretical expectation was that criminal activities and actors may change according to/are moulded by the specific spatial assemblage of islands, and therefore that local “wars on crime” (including border management, prosecutions and the organisation of penitentiary systems) would work distinctively in islands when compared to other geographical landscapes.

We believe that this variation should prompt more exploration. Our analytical interest formed partially as a reaction to the disclosure and publication of the investigative activities carried out by a number of journalist networks. Articles by Luca Raineri on Malta, and Luca Baldaro, Silvia D’Amato and Tommaso Giuriati’s on Corsica flow from this line of inquiry. Consequently, while the authors’ contributions build on the literature devoted to the study of the spatiality of organised crime and crime control, they are also well anchored to recent events. On the other hand, Anna Sergi’s article on the Calabrian *‘ndrangheta* in Australia relies on less unconventional sources, data and methodological instruments. The juxtaposition of Australia to the couple of Mediterranean small-sized islands paves the way to think about the spatiality of crime irrespective of geographical magnitude and implicitly restates the extent to which Insularity, peripherality and remoteness do not belong only to a Newtonian definition of space. We are very much aware of the limitations that stem from focusing on such a small number of cases. Nonetheless, our hope is to encourage further exploration along these trajectories: an exploration that can only benefit from interdisciplinary engagements beyond the orthodoxy of narrowly conceived criminal law and law enforcement approaches.

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