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Chapter 8

A Brief History of the Underworld and Organized Crime, c. 1750–1950

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Introduction

In 1969, the American penologist and criminologist Donald R. Cressey invented an organized crime model for a modern audience (2008 [1969]). Two years before, he had been a consultant on organized crime for the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice convened by Lyndon Johnson to address the threat of organized crime in the United States. Cressey's research, and his subsequent book, *The Theft of the Nation*, would inform U.S. government policies on organized crime for the following decades. In the 1960s Cressey spearheaded the movement of criminologists to attempt to formally define what organized crime was (Maltz, 1976). In doing so they looked back to the recent history of those North American cities in which crime groups were understood to have clawed their way into politics, economics, and society. History, and its impact on the present, was central to many of these attempts to define organized crime. As Attorney General Ramsey Clark remarked in an address to the National Emergency Committee of the National Council on Crime and Delinquency in New York in November 1967, "Many find it difficult to believe there is organized crime, but its existence is confirmed by history, experience and reason. It surfaced in the United States in the last decades of the nineteenth century and during the prohibition era" (U.S. Congress 1967, p. 359). This essay will rewind from that moment in the postwar era when academics and politicians embarked on the "modeling" of organized crime in the United States and other Western nations to consider its long evolution over the previous two centuries. The notion that

the Western world has an organized crime problem, and, indeed, that the "underworld" exists as an entity and a space, has become orthodoxy. Thus, in the late modernity of the twenty-first century, organized crime and the underworld are fully entrenched in our understanding and perception of criminality.

This essay is an attempt to break down this orthodoxy and to try to understand how we came to be in this position by the postwar period. It will focus on the two centuries between 1750 and 1950, and cut a broad swathe across Europe and North America. Coverage is limited to the more well-known texts and histories, and those published in English. As a result, material on North America, Britain, and Italy predominates. The essay is constructed of two sections. Section I will provide an overview of organized crime activity, mapping out the chronology and geography of what historians know about this subject in the past. Section II will explore the founding literature, returning to the American criminologists of the 1960s and 1970s alongside the work of British criminologists. For historians, social science/criminology methodology has been useful in helping us to understand the historical development of organized crime. However, we have to draw on a wider set of cultural and social histories in order to appreciate the key role of print culture and literature in shaping our knowledge of the criminal past. Therefore, this section will consider the problems faced by historians in attempting to understand organized crime in past societies and some of the directions recent research has taken.

Before moving on to the first section, it seems appropriate to consider some problems of language and etymology. The term "organized crime" was rarely used before the mid-twentieth century. Clive Emsley notes that, in England, "'organised crime' was a term not much used in the first two-thirds of the twentieth century. But from the close of the nineteen century policemen and others were beginning to speak and to write of the professional criminal" (2011, p. 87).

Certainly, for much of the late Victorian and Edwardian eras, specific references to organized crime and criminality were used predominately in a political context in the British press, most commonly in relation to events in Ireland, although occasional references to organized crime groups in Naples and Paris can be found (*Times* [London], 22 October 1880; 10 January 1881; 21 May 1920; *Observer*, 10 February 1907; *Manchester Guardian*, 12 July 1911). Starting in the early twentieth century, references to British organized and professional crime would become more common in public and print discourses. In Italy, and particularly in Sicily, from where the organized crime clan known as the Cosa Nostra or Mafiosi emerged in the early nineteenth century, the term "Mafia" was first used in an official document in 1865, in a letter about an arrest from the *delegato di pubblica sicurezza* near Palermo. As Diego Gambetta notes, "in reference to a man, *mafiusu* in nineteenth-century Sicily was ambiguous, signifying a bully, arrogant but also fearless, enterprising and proud" (1996, p. 136). The "underworld" as a term used in Western countries to specifically describe the alternative habitat of the criminal, the deviant, and the dangerous outsider was not common until the turn of the century. The earliest usage of the term was in reference to prostitution in New York, reflected in titles such as *The Women of New York; or, The Under-World of the Great City* (Ellington 1869; Gilfoyle 1992) and *Darkness and Daylight; or, Lights and Shadows of New York Life . . . in the Underworld of the Great Metropolis* (Campbell 1899). In England, Thomas Holmes, secretary of the Howard Association for penal reform, published *London's Underworld* (1912), and by the early twentieth century the use of the term was increasingly invoked in accounts of urban criminality. For example, British writer and former conman Netley Lucas wrote about the women of the underworld "the world over" (1926; Houlbrook 2013), and Alfred Morain, formerly a prefect of police of Paris, wrote about the underworld in his city (1930). Nevertheless, a terminology and

discourse that described the slums, rookeries, dives, sinks, and netherworlds of urban spaces had long roots. Many European countries had a tradition of rogue literature and criminal print cultures that can be traced back at least to the sixteenth century, if not earlier (Kinney 1973; McMullan 1986). However, there are significant problems with the terminology of the "underworld" and "organized crime." Florike Egmond, in her work on the Netherlands in the early modern period, recognized this when she argued: "The term 'organized crime' immediately evokes drug-dealing, mafia-like organization and international connections. Yet, as Mary McIntosh has shown, in spite of these modern connotations, it can be used to cover historical types of crime as well. After all, criminal organization existed before the twentieth century and it would be confusing not to call it thus" (1993, pp. 4–5).

I. Chronology and Geography of the Underworld

This section will provide an overview of those crime groups that have been identified from the eighteenth century. This accounting is necessarily tentative. Unlike histories of criminal law or of penal institutions and reforms, the history of the underworld and of organized crime is much less opaque. Charting the early roots of "modern" organized crime, this section will further encompass the developments of organized crime groups in the United States, Italy, and Britain from the later nineteenth century. It is from this period that it can be argued that more "modern" conceptions of organized crime would emerge.

A. From "Bandits" to Criminal Gangs: c. 1750 to c. 1850

In 1975, Mary McIntosh was one of the earliest theorists of organized crime to attempt to historicize the underworld, its hierarchies and practices (1975). McIntosh, like many historians and criminologists since, looked back to the role of banditti, brigands, and outlaws in early modern peasant society, an approach shaped by the work of Eric Hobsbawm. His seminal text

Bandits, published in the late 1960s, attempted to explain the role of separate societies or counter-societies that emerged as a means of protecting local interests against the authorities (the gentry, clergy, or state) (Hobsbawm 1969). According to Hobsbawm, the "bandit" was faced with a choice and had to decide whether to become a criminal or a revolutionary. Thus the two could not coexist: "The underworld (as its name implies) is an anti-society, which exists by reversing the values of the 'straight' world—it is, in its own phrase, 'bent'—but is otherwise parasitic on it" (Hobsbawm 1969, p. 84). In an earlier book Hobsbawm had characterized the Mafia as developing from the antipathy to feudalism in rural Italy (1959, pp. 30–56). More recently, accounts of the development of groups such as the Sicilian Mafia have been much more nuanced. In his useful summary Howard Abadinsky describes the evolution of four Italian criminal organizations: the Sicilian Mafia, the Neapolitan *Camorra*, the *'Ndrangheta* ("Brotherhood") of Calabria, and the *Sacra Corona Unita* of the Puglia region (2003, p. 146). The most well-known of these, the Mafia and the Camorra, had very different roots, according to Abadinsky. He argues that the Mafia developed from the emergence of middlemen called *Gabelloti*, who ruled over the estates that had previously been controlled by the aristocracy. This aristocracy had increasingly come under attack during the nineteenth century, and ultimately, the land was "freed" through the campaigns of Giuseppe Garibaldi (Abadinsky 2003, p. 147). As Alan Wright notes, "the collapse of the feudal system after the rise and fall of Napoleon in the early nineteenth century marked the emergence of the Mafia into a *società* (society) of families that mediated between the landowners and the masses" (2006, p. 104). The Camorra, according to Abadinsky, was deliberately structured as a secret society (2003, p. 158) and was more organized and disciplined than the Mafia, although other research suggests that this is far from clear-cut. Tom Behan has stressed the mythology that surrounds the development of the Camorra

in Naples, referring instead to the group's emergence in the early nineteenth century as what was effectively a criminal organization, with its roots in popular resistance and anti-authoritarianism: "The official news of the Camorra as an organization dates from 1820, when police records detail a disciplinary meeting of the Camorra. Such an event indicates a qualitative change: the Camorra and *camorristi* were no longer simply local gangs living off theft and extortion; they now had a fixed structure and some sort of hierarchy" (1995, p. 12).

In other European countries, organizations or groups with similar profiles to the Italian societies are likely to have existed. In Germany there was increasing reference to societies or gangs of crooks from the eighteenth century on. Katrin Lange has stressed that the contemporary debates about such gangs were vague and often arbitrary, allowing the authorities to target offenders variously labeled as beggars, tramps, gypsies, cheats, robbers, and bandits, or using the term *Gauner* (crooks) (2004, p. 109). While a number of publications referred to such "gangs," the term was used loosely. Lange refers to Johann Zedler's *Universal Lexikon*, published in 1741, which described gangs of robbers but provided no information on their organization or structure. A further set of writings known as the *Official Stories* (*Aktenmäßige Geschichten*), which were published in the early nineteenth century by the law enforcement and judges in charge of gang trials, also emphasized the loose structures of such gangs (Lange 2004, p. 110). Nevertheless, other German historians have been less critical of the concept of an underworld in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Germany. Carsten Küther (1976) argues that the problem of gangs and bandits was one of poor control. The eighteenth-century judicial system was not well equipped to deal with the subcultural nature of such groups, and, he argues, the state failed to deal effectively with them. To some extent this may have been due to the lack of unification in German territories that left borders permeable and law enforcement structures far from

centralized. Arguably, it was only after the Napoleonic wars, and the adoption of the Napoleonic Code in some parts of Germany (such as the regions of the west bank of the Rhine and the Grand Duchy of Baden), that the judicial system was to become more effective (Lindström 2004, p. 142).

Florike Egmond has researched organized crime in the Netherlands, focusing on various marginal groups in the early modern Dutch republic. She particularly notes the role of ethnic groups such as Jews and gypsies, as well as their links with organized crime by the late eighteenth century and the rise of vagrancy and dearth from the 1740s (Egmond 1993, pp. 184–85). Similarly, Uwe Danker's studies of gangs of robbers in eighteenth-century Coburg found that the gangs there included a significant number of Jewish vagrants (2001, pp. 96–97). On the other hand, Danker also found groups that were made up of farmers and artisans from the local area. While the eighteenth century seems to have been crucial in the Dutch and German examples, Egmond suggests that it would be unwise to impose any neat chronology onto the development of organized crime in the Netherlands: "To put it briefly: Organized rural crime did not become more (or less) professional in the period 1650–1800" (1993, p. 180). Richard Evans's discussion of the underworld in nineteenth-century Germany demonstrates how "criminal careers" unraveled and the ways in which German commentators increasingly portrayed such individuals as members of an organized criminal underworld (1998, p. 6). Here Evans draws attention to the important role of the social commentators and reformers of the nineteenth century, who would use the burgeoning print culture of newspapers, periodicals, pamphlets, and books to "discover" the underworld. Moreover, while many of the accounts of gangs in continental Europe stress the disorganized, marginal, and fluid nature of the groups, it

may be that in nineteenth-century Europe, the "underworld" become more anchored to growing urban spaces.

In Britain the relationship between print culture and representations of organized crime flourished in the early to mid-eighteenth century. By 1750 the legacy of the thief-taker Jonathan Wild was still marked (Howson 1970). Wild's activities in controlling crime in early eighteenth-century London, and his collusion with the authorities, have been well documented. Perhaps in common with some of the later European incarnations of organized crime, Wild was notable for seizing opportunities created by the authorities. In this case, the rise of a statutory award system from the 1690s facilitated the creation of a significant crime culture in the early eighteenth century (Beattie 2001, pp. 376–422). Other historians of the eighteenth-century metropolis have drawn attention to criminal gangs and networks that seem to have come into being at least in part as a result of "moral panics" (Ward 2014). The extent to which any pervasive organized crime networks actually existed in eighteenth-century Britain is debatable. Once illegal markets are accessed for the disposal of stolen goods, such criminal activity becomes inherently organized. However, it would take the modernizing aspects of society for more recognizable models of organized crime to evolve: the creation and circulation of financial instruments; new technologies in firearms, safes, and transport infrastructures; the development of a strong surveillance culture that legislated the "habitual criminal" into being; the growth of global networks via colonialism; and the creation of the "underworld" in texts and literatures that could be accessed by a wide range of readers (Shore 2015).

B. Urbanization, Immigration, and Organized Crime, c. 1850 to c. 1900

As was suggested earlier, there is a crucial relationship between organized crime and print culture and the publicity it affords. Leitizia Paoli has drawn attention to the important role of

historical discourses in the Italian example: "To a larger extent than in any other European country, organized crime has been a relevant topic of the public and scientific discourse in Italy since the mid-nineteenth century" (2004, p. 263). After the unification in 1861 the government focused its crime policies around the idea of the existence of stable organized crime groups, in Sicily in particular. In other words, because the government tended to associate organized crime specifically with the southern Italy region, this view was reinforced by the media and public opinion. As Paoli notes, the image of the Sicilian Mafia as a secret and powerful organization was elaborated beginning in the later nineteenth century by "'moral entrepreneurs' who published newspaper articles and romanticised reports on the mafia" (2004, p. 264). While other European countries undoubtedly had social and political groups similar to those in Italy, it is the movement of the Italian groups outside their own territory—during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—that arguably escalated their activities and made them more visible and threatening to the authorities. Thus, although criminal groups may well have existed in other countries, they were not necessarily known about on the global stage, while there was international reporting of the Mafia and Camorra as early as the later nineteenth century. This may have been a reflection of political events in Italy: the right-wing government was under threat during the 1870s, and it had accused the left of corruption involving the Mafiosi. Legislation was passed that, according to John Dickie, "proposed that suspected members of criminal associations and their political patrons could be imprisoned without trial for as much as five years" (2004, p. 70). In 1874, the *Times*, for example, reported on "the Mafia in Sicily" and on "Neapolitan Brigandage" (*Times* [London], 15 October 1874; 18 November 1874). The paper first referred to the Mafia in the United States in 1890, when it reported the assassination of David Hennessey, the chief of police of New Orleans. According to its report, Hennessey had

been investigating Italian and Sicilian societies: "The vendetta, of which the murder of Mr. Hennessey is the latest outcome, originated in Sicily, and was transferred to New Orleans nearly 30 years ago. The opposing societies are the Mafia and the Stoppaghera" (18 October 1890).

The nineteenth century witnessed the making of the underworld across Western Europe. Thus, in many metropolises, the underworld was "discovered" as a literary, cultural, and political issue. Paris, London, and Berlin became nighttime cities, according to Joachim Schlor (1998), a phenomenon that can be seen in the parade of texts that dealt with the problems of crime and poverty. While deviance was not confined to the night, darkness came to symbolize the journey into the spaces of the underworld in Victorian cities, reflected in titles about London such as *The Night Side of London* (Ewing Ritchie 1858), *London at Midnight* (Vigar Harris 1885), and *The Hooligan Nights* (Rook 1899). Similar titles dealing with crime, poverty, and vice abounded for New York, including *The Nether Side of New York* (Crapsey 1872), *Lights and Shadows of New York Life* (McCabe 1872), and *The Night Scenes of City Life* (De Witt Talmage 1891). In London, the development of the underworld as a distinct space with its own dwellers had been cultivated through the social journalism of individuals like Henry Mayhew, John Greenwood, and Andrew Mearns and by authors of fiction like Charles Dickens and G. W. Reynolds. In such texts, the line between fiction and reality was increasingly blurred, and by the turn of the century the underworld had fully emerged as a marginal and "other" landscape, not only in the metropolis of London, but in many other cities and regions of Europe and North America. For example, Dominique Kalifa has explored how representations of the underworld developed in Paris during the nineteenth century, commenting that "it is often in the urban topography—streets, *places*, or *impasses*—that fear or obsession with crime crystallizes" (2004, p. 175). Novelists and journalists such as Eugène Sue shaped the reputation of the Left Bank as a

"sinister and dangerous" place in the first half of the century. Indeed, Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* (1842) would directly influence Reynolds's *The Mysteries of London*, which was published two years later (Kalifa 2004, p. 177; Reynolds 1844).

Texts such as these fundamentally shaped contemporary and later portrayals of the cultures of crime. In Western Europe, particularly from the later nineteenth century on, often-well-meaning concerns about poverty and slum life merged with new ways of thinking about criminality, physiology, and human behavior. Influential thinkers such as Francis Galton in England, Bénédict Morel in France, and Cesare Lombroso in Italy shaped and contributed to a new language that aimed to describe what were seen as inherited characteristics of populations and adopted medical and pathological rhetoric to explain criminality (Pick 1989). While these theories did not completely reject environmental explanations for crime, the increasingly deterministic way of explaining criminal behavior within certain parts of the population was attractive to many commentators. Arguably, these explanations were paralleled with the emergence of legislation that would make "the criminal" a more visible social problem. In Britain, the Habitual Criminals Act was passed in 1869, and the passage of new police legislation, and particularly the establishment of the Detective Department in 1842 and its reorganization as the Criminal Investigation Department in 1878, drew attention to the "criminal class" (McGowen 1990; Petrow 1993). In France, the Relegation Law of 1885 exemplified a harsh approach toward recidivists, deporting those who were found guilty of habitual criminality (Toth 2006, p. 21). Godfrey, Cox, & Farrall have suggested that habitual offender legislation in the nineteenth century was also influenced by colonial practices such as the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871, which was passed by the British in India to deal with the problem of habitual crime (2010, p. 197). The colonial context is key, Simon Cole notes, in understanding attitudes toward

crime in colonial India: “Put in terms of caste, the habitual criminal became a ‘hereditary criminal,’ a member of a genetically determined criminal group. Criminality became ethnic” (2001, p. 67). In the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this overly deterministic understanding of habitual criminality would arguably find its expression in the connections made between immigration and crime.

From the later nineteenth century on, the interest in the “professional” and the “habitual” criminal grew, along with the belief that such criminals inhabited a separate underworld, one that would be associated spatially with the growing urban spaces of Western Europe and North America. Unsurprisingly, it would be the new arrivals in these areas who would be accused of importing criminality into the metropolises of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Outside Western Europe, other secret societies and criminal groups had long pedigrees. It is worth mentioning the major Chinese and Japanese crime groups briefly here, as they were eventually to be imported to Western countries. The Triads had roots in the British colonies of Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Singapore, and were involved in criminal activities such as gambling, extortion, and opium trafficking (Abadinsky 2003, pp. 212–13; Booth 1990). The Chinese Tong, in contrast, were first established in San Francisco as immigrant benevolent societies in the 1850s but became increasingly associated with prostitution and gambling from the late nineteenth century on (Abadinsky 2003, p. 216; Huston 1995). The Yakuza date from at least the seventeenth century, when they were linked to a group of samurai warriors called the *hatamoto-yakko*, itinerant peddlers known as the *tekiya*, and illegal gambling gangs called the *bakuto* (Kaplan & Dubro 2003, pp. 5–6; Hill 2005). However, the Yakuza did not make any impact in the United States until the 1950s, outside the bounds of this survey (Mallory 2012, p. 145). Perhaps the most distinct immigrant groups to be considered in the context of emerging

discourses of organized crime were those that had migrated from Italy. The United States was home to many groups of immigrants that would be linked to racketeering, protection, and other illegal activities in its major cities. These groups were overwhelmingly from migrant communities, including those of Irish, Jewish, and Italian origin (Wright 2006, p. 118). The most well-known of these were the Mafia and Cosa Nostra "families" that came to prominence in the late nineteenth century and had become a global reported issue by the interwar period. Many criminologists have drawn on the "alien conspiracy thesis" to explain the rise of organized crime in American society. This thesis is particularly associated with the work of criminologist Dwight Smith, who argues that American society has been historically preoccupied with placing the blame for crime on immigrant groups:

> It remains painfully obvious that Americans are susceptible to the lures of conspiracy advocates when their accusations touch the right cultural anxieties. In four instances since 1798, charges of a secret alien conspiracy have captured sufficient public attention to affect public opinion and public policy well beyond the scope of events triggering the original cry. (1976, p. 76)

For Smith, the reporting on the Mafia in the early 1890s was a clear illustration of the alien conspiracy theory. He argues that in this case evidence was used to suggest a criminal "bent" in the southern European immigrant population as a means of restricting immigration (p. 81).

Other writers have linked the growth of organized crime to the relationship between immigrant groups and urban politics in American cities. Thus, with the migration of about a quarter of a million Irish people at the mid-century, and continued migration after that, Irish immigrants found that their entry into society and ability to chase the American dream was blocked by the existing Protestant community. In order to gain power and social mobility, Irish

immigrants colonized local politics. This process was exemplified by the rise of Tammany Hall, a political organization that was founded in 1786 but gained the loyalty of the Irish immigrant population in the nineteenth century. Its name became a byword for corruption, particularly under the leadership of "Boss" Tweed (Golway 2014), and it became particularly noted for its association with gangs, which were used by politicians on election days but would also work in the gambling houses and brothels that were under the control of the machine (Abadinsky 2003, p. 76). These gangs, described by Herbert Asbury in *The Gangs of New York* (1928), included the Five Points, the Plug Uglies, and the Bowery Boys among their number. IHowever, the extent to which these gangs were involved in systematic organized crime activity remains debatable according to the historian Tyler Anbinder. In his study of the Five Points, he argues that the area's reputation has taken on "mythic proportions" (Anbinder 2001, p. 68). Nevertheless, the Five Points gang included in its ranks a young Al Capone before he left for Chicago and the Sicilian-born Lucky Luciano (Kobler 1971 p. 31). The other historical "gang" that has been connected to the origins of the Mafia in America was the Black Hand, small groups of extortionists who preyed on Italian immigrants and committed "outrages," according to the international press (*Times* [London], 10 February 1908). While Black Hand activity apparently had Italian origins, it is often problematically lumped together with Mafia activity, argues historian David Critchley, who has stressed the difficulty of untangling the history of early organized crime groups (Critchley 2009, pp. 20–23). Nevertheless, during the interwar period, Asbury (1928; 1936; 1940) made some attempt to reveal these early histories of the underbelly of American cities. What is clear is that organized crime groups became an undeniable feature of New York and other American cities between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

C. Organized Crime c. 1918 to c. 1950: Italy, North America, and Britain

Reports of organized crime activity escalated from the interwar period, particularly in North America, Italy, and Britain. In the case of American organized crime, this was linked in part to the fluctuating fortunes of Italian society during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Italian organized crime in North America would come to be most strongly associated with New York. Starting in the later nineteenth century there was a flood of emigration from southern Italy to America. By the 1930 census, New York had around 440,000 Italian immigrants. The largest proportion of these (around 237,000) had arrived by 1910. However, in the period up to 1930 that number almost doubled (Rosenwaike 1972, p. 94). It was the demands of this largely peasant-origin community that shaped the development of the Italian Mafia in New York during the twentieth century. Thus, according to sociologist Randall Collins, it was a combination of factors that led to the prominence of Italian organized crime in American cities, including "the arrival of large numbers of European immigrants from peasant backgrounds who demanded cultural services that the dominant Anglo-Protestant society made illegal; the availability of a patrimonial form of military organization that could be applied to protecting such services; and the relatively late arrival of the Italians in comparison with other ethnic groups" (1975, p. 463; cited in Abadinsky 2003, pp. 86–87). The resulting rivalry between the Italian, Irish, and Jewish groups for the control of resources meant that the Sicilians often resorted to the forms of illegal organization that they had adopted in their own country.

By the mid-1920s these organizations were on the wane in Italy, and particularly in Sicily. With the rise to power of Mussolini, the southern regions would increasingly turn to Fascism. Once the regime gained power, it was quick to move to repress the Mafia, however. As Judith Chubb has noted, "individual Mafiosi became easy targets for the fierce campaign of repression unleashed by Mussolini under the direction of the Prefect Cesare Mori, for, once its

dominance was secured, Fascism tolerated no rival power structures" (1982, p. 26). Prefect Mori, Mussolini's local man in Sicily, had originally led police operations against brigands after the First World War, when a number of war veterans were believed to have joined bandit gangs. He was called out of his retirement in the mid-twenties, when Mussolini appointed him prefect of Palermo, and it was this appointment that marked the beginning of the sustained campaign to repress the mafia (Finkelstein 1998, p. 19). Mori set out to purge the island of Mafiosi, arresting 11,000 people who were believed to be either members or associates of the Mafia (Dickie 2004; Abadinsky 2003, p. 112). Moreover, the more influential Mafia leaders were essentially absorbed into the Fascist political organization. The authoritarian hand of the totalitarian state impacted Sicily far more effectively than any previous interventions had managed. As Gaia Servadio notes, Sicily had historically resisted any external interference, and the Mafia had flourished as a result of weak central government (1978, p. 3). As a result of Mori's campaign, the Italian and Sicilian Mafia would be driven underground for much of the interwar period, only resurging during the Second World War (Wright 2006, pp. 104–05). Many of the Mafiosi who were not imprisoned, absorbed into the regime, or killed would emigrate to America.

In interwar America the Mafia flourished through the enabling prism of Prohibition. While the temperance movement in America had thrived in the later nineteenth century, it would not be until 1919 that the National Prohibition Act (the Volstead Act) was passed as the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution, providing for federal enforcement of the law and establishing a Prohibition Bureau. Thus, the evolution of organized crime in American cities during this era was closely connected to the enforcement of Prohibition, and to the opportunities presented by the illegal liquor trade. While organized crime groups certainly existed before Prohibition, their main enterprises were concerned with prostitution, gambling, and theft.

Moreover, in terms of local and civic power structures, the gangsters rested somewhere near the bottom of a "highly stratified social milieu" (Abadinsky 2003, p. 67). Alan Block has pointed to the role of the racketeer in working with local unions and industry bosses, utilizing violent skills in order to control workers and keep down labor costs for employers (1994, p. 52). However, it would be the reforming impulse of Prohibition that would really enable the proliferation of organized crime in American cities through the enterprise of bootlegging, which, "with an enormous consumer base in place, with little opprobrium attached to drinking outside of fundamentalist religious groups, . . . did provide a vital new enterprise for those inclined to organized criminality" (pp. 53–54). The bootlegging of liquor required large-scale organization. Nevertheless, it was not predominately the old-style racketeers who made the most of these new business opportunities, but rather the rising generation of immigrants from Jewish and Italian backgrounds (Haller 1976, cited in Block 1994, p. 54).

With Prohibition, the character and activities of criminal gangs shifted. It has been argued by historians that in this period gangs became much more organized, and their impact was much wider than it had been prior to Prohibition (Abadinsky 2003, p. 67). Mark Haller, writing about Chicago, has noted, "Organized crime was important because of the relatively great wealth of the most successful criminals, because of the large numbers of persons directly employed by organized crime, and because of the still larger numbers who supplemented their income through various part time activities" (1971–1972, pp. 222–23). Indeed, not only did criminals reap the benefits of the restrictions on alcohol, but so did those public officials, police, and politicians who developed venal relationships with the gangsters. Michael Woodiwiss has argued that federal enforcement agents in the Federal Prohibition Unit, renamed the Prohibition Bureau in 1927, were known to support the activities of liquor smugglers by granting them permits,

escorting liquor trucks, or giving them advance warning about raids (2001, p. 190). Consequently this period, up to the repeal of Prohibition in 1933, became the classic era of organized crime development, associated in the minds of many with the activities of figures such as Al Capone, Johnny Torrio, and Bugs Moran in Chicago, and Charles "Lucky" Luciano and Meyer Lansky in New York. Moreover, while the impact of the Wall Street crash and the subsequent Great Depression starting in 1929 may have narrowed the financial gains to be made from Prohibition, those who were not dead or in prison managed to diversify by the 1930s and 1940s into other spheres of business, including restaurants, night clubs, and gambling (Haller 1974, 5–6, cited in Abadinsky 2003, p. 68). As Nancy Lubin has noted, "although the Prohibition in 1933 marked the close of an era, it did not end organized crime. Instead, it merely forced the entities to diversify and use their new sophistication and capabilities in a variety of new schemes" (1994, p. 702). Finally, it is important to remember that the Prohibition era may have skewed discussions about the historical development of organized crime. Philip Bean (2010) believes that the impact of Prohibition on organized crime has been overstated, and that violent crime did not significantly increase during this period, but rather became more visible (p. 70). He suggests that the view that Prohibition was the major fuel for organized crime is a myth that has been promoted by Hollywood: "Its guns and gangster depiction is wildly inaccurate" (p. 69). Arguably, a similar increased visibility occurred in relation to concerns about gang crime in interwar Britain.

The British experience of organized crime in the first half of the twentieth century has been subject to little rigorous investigation. While a "narrative" of some of the best-known crime groups exists, it is highly problematic (McDonald 2010; Morton 1992). The criminologists Dick Hobbs and Alan Wright have both been cautious about accepting the descriptions of family

groups like the Sabinis, who were active in London in the 1920s, as systematically organized. Hobbs sees the groups that can be identified in Britain starting in the late nineteenth century as "precursors" to the "creation of the organized crime menace and its subsequent institutionalization" (2013, p. 41). Wright notes, "In relation to the interwar criminal groups, it is not possible to claim with any legitimacy that the gangs described were formal-rational organizations" (2006, p. 167). Nevertheless, the gang activity in this period does have some shared features with that of Europe and North America. References to criminal gangs were made throughout the nineteenth century, but references to gangs that combined physical violence with illegal activities only became common in the interwar period (Shore 2014). These groups were distinct in that their involvement in forms of gambling, betting, and the associated protection business was clearly organized to some extent. Moreover, territory was not only linked to residence and/or leisure, but to the racecourses and their environs, where business took place.

The "racecourse-gangs" of this period were widely reported in the press (Shore 2014). Their activities revolved around the gambling and protection business, centered on horseracing tracks during the 1920s and moving into greyhound-racing tracks by the later 1920s and the 1930s. After the First World War, there was a significant surge in attendance at the races, leading to concerns about racecourse crime. However, there was also significant anxiety about violence and criminality in the postwar metropolis (Emsley 2008; Lawrence 2003). When territorial conflicts between the gangs involved in betting and protection activities spilled over onto metropolitan streets, reporting on such crime became more intense. Reports of the "racecourse wars," as they had become known, escalated in the mid-twenties, when a series of newspapers took interest in such gang violence on the streets of London and at various stations that were carrying passengers to the races (Shore 2014, pp. 359–60). At this point the controversial Home

Secretary William Joynson Hicks became more vocally and visibly involved and "made a declaration of war on the race-gangs" (Shore 2011, pp. 21–22). To a large extent, race-gang activity seemed to recede from the public view after the mid-decade. While clearly some of these groups' activities continued, they were no longer reported with the same vigor by the press. During the 1930s, there was a brief revival of racing-related violence after a violent fracas involving men from the East London race-gangs took place at the Lewes races in Sussex (Shore 2014, pp. 361–62). It was this event that, according to film historian Steven Chibnall, was the influence for Graham Greene's 1938 novel *Brighton Rock* (2005, p. 17). A number of other individuals gained prominence in this period and have been the subject of both criminal biography and autobiography, and academic study. John "Ruby" Sparks's career as a "smash-and-grab" gangster, for example, has been examined by Alyson Brown (2011; Sparks 1961). As her work demonstrates, Sparks's criminal career as a "motor-bandit" reflected contemporary fears about new forms of organized criminality that were associated with the rise of gangsterism in North American cities in this period. Other individual criminals also gained some sort of distinction in the 1930s and during the Second World War. Two of the most well-known British criminals in this period were Billy Hill—the self-styled "Boss of Britain's Underworld"—and Jack "Spot" Comer. Both men, who were associates, exploited the black market opportunities of wartime Britain (Roodhouse 2013, pp. 15, 95; Murphy 1993).

During the early twentieth century, discussion of "professional" or organized criminality was frequently shaped by fears of external threats. Thus distinct discourses about alien criminality were common in the interwar period, and the foreign criminal was seen as an invasive force, with "foreign Jews" and Italians singled out not only by the press but also by some law enforcers who relied on easily perpetuated stereotypes when dealing with such groups

of criminals. For example, in early 1923, at the Old Bailey trial of the Cortesi brothers, who had been charged with the attempted murder of Charles and Harry Sabini at the Fratellanza Club in Clerkenwell, Justice Darling remarked in his summing up that "the case reminded him of the old Italian feuds of the Montagues and Capulets and the 'Whites' and 'Blacks.' Although these parties could combine against people who they held to be a common enemy, they were always quarrelling among themselves" (*Times* [London], 18 January 1923). The connections between other forms of illegality and immorality and those perceived as foreigners was also apparent in the moral panics about drugs that have been examined by Marek Kohn (1992) and Lucy Bland (2013). In particular, the descriptions and treatment of the Anglo-Chinese Billy "Brilliant" Chang, who was prosecuted in 1924 for drug dealing and later deported, reflect the problematic connections made by contemporaries between drugs, illicit sexuality, and alien criminality (Bland 2013, pp. 65–69). The latter two factors were again linked in the vice empire of the Messina brothers, who were of Sicilian and Maltese descent. The brothers were involved with the London vice trade from the 1930s until the conviction of two of their number, Eugenio and Carmelo, for procuring in 1956 (*Times* [London], 7 July 1956; Slater 2007). Criminal groups like the Sabinis and the Messinas were easy to fit into the stereotypes of "hot-blooded" foreigners in interwar Britain. As Dick Hobbs has noted of the Messinas and their exposé by the *Sunday People* journalist Duncan Webb, "they were exotic and photogenic, prospering during the career of a publicity-hungry crusading journalist at a period in British history when, in a repeat of the racism that singled out the degenerate threat of alien sexuality in the aftermath of the First World War, traditional forces were trying to reassert themselves" (2013, p. 55).

II. Foundational Texts and Historical Approaches

As the preceding section might suggest, the study of organized crime is a wide and varied field, intersecting not only with the history of crime, policing, and the law, but also with histories of local government, politics, and immigration. A reader seeking historical perspectives on organized crime is faced with this somewhat amorphous field in terms of texts dealing directly with the issues of the historical underworld, organized banditry, and the development of "modern" incarnations of organized crime. Thus, in this section I will focus on two approaches. The first will survey the definitional texts on organized crime, many of which belong to the field of criminology rather than history. The second part will focus on more specifically historical approaches to the development of organized crime.

A. Foundational Texts

For the reader coming to the concept of historical organized crime for the first time, the North American texts remain the key canon. While definitions of organized crime continue to evolve, the writers of the 1960s and 1970s who first grappled theoretically with the "problem" of organized crime in the United States still shape our understanding today. The British criminologist Dick Hobbs has noted the problems in the study of organized crime, in this case in reference to Britain, as follows:

> In the face of a dearth of indigenous data, material from the USA is used extensively. Cross cultural applications are problematic in that much of this literature, from a range of sources, refers to phenomena that are culturally specific; this is particularly true of American studies of organized crime, which in their classic form tend to refer to large-scale organized criminality of the syndicated variety. (1994, p. 444)

Nevertheless, these texts remain the foundation for many studies of organized crime in the Western world. As we saw at the start of this chapter, Donald Cressey's work from the late 1960s and 1970s remains influential, despite its many detractors. Cressey (2008 [1969]) established the syndicate model of organized crime, claiming that organized crime in North America was composed of an alliance of twenty-four Mafia families, and was highly structured, tight-knit, and hierarchical. This view has been popularized in popular culture, particularly through Mario Puzo's novel *The Godfather* (1969) and the films of the 1970s. According to Cressey, the highest Mafia authority was the "Commission," which was made up of the rulers of the most powerful "families" (p. 111). Cressey's detailed reconstruction of the structures and management of the "Commission," "families," and geographically based "councils" depicts nothing less than a bureaucracy. This, then, is the business model of the Mafia, seductively echoed in early paradigms of criminal organization, such as that of Jonathan Wild, who was accused by contemporaries of having "form'd a Kind of Corporation of Thieves, of which he was the Head or Director" (Howson 1970, p. 238). While most criminologists and historians of American organized crime recognize the significance of Cressey's work, many have found problems with his model, not least in its limited application. Contemporaries such as Joseph Albini disagreed that organized crime was hierarchical. Instead, he understood it to consist of networks of clients and patrons in a system of "loosely structured relationship" (Albini 1971, p. 288; Wright 2006, pp. 4–5). Albini was part of a group of revisionists who would challenge Cressey's model and the dominant governmental definitions of organized crime over the following decades. This group included Francis and Elizabeth Ianni (1972), who argued that kinship groups formed the basis of organized crime rather than Cressey's corporations; Peter Reuter (1983), who put forward the theory of disorganized crime in response to a study of illegal

markets in New York that demonstrated the diverse and fragmented nature of organized crime; and Alan Block (1982), whose historical analysis of organized crime in New York again found fragmentation and chaos rather than hierarchy and structure.

Other authors have looked more closely at the specialization and function of underworld roles. Most notable in this regard is the work of the American criminologist Carl B. Klockars, whose study *The Professional Fence*, published in 1974, has been profoundly influential. What distinguished Klockars from many of his contemporaries was his willingness to engage with historical precursors to modern organized crime, the approach adopted in his study of the eighteenth-century thief-taker Jonathan Wild. This sense of the longer historical trajectory can also be found in an early British writer of organized crime definitions, Mary McIntosh. Her book *The Organisation of Crime* (1975) was a pioneering text in which she identified four types of professional and organized crime: picaresque, craft, project, and business. The picaresque she described as a fairly permanent gang under the leadership of one man, corresponding approximately to the brigand or bandit gang. The craft organization included people committing skilled but small-scale thefts and cons. The project crime was typical of burglars, robbers, smugglers, or fraudsters, and involved more complex techniques and planning by a team of "specialists." The business organization was typical of those criminals who practised extortion and supplied illegal goods but had some degree of protection from the law (pp. 28–29). Like Klockars, McIntosh had a keen sense of historical precedents and included in her study references to banditry, a consideration of the "cant" language, and a short discussion of the career of the notable burglar of the 1870s Charlie Peace (pp. 18–27). Both McIntosh and Klockars were undoubtedly influenced by the work of Edwin Sutherland, who wrote his seminal study of the "professional thief" in 1937. This work, which followed the career of a professional

thief named Chic Conwell, was a "monograph which tells how groups of men made a living by stealing, primarily by picking pockets, shoplifting and operating confidence games" (Snodgrass 1973, p. 3). Sutherland's work is regarded as a foundational text of the Chicago school of sociology and also of the development of theoretical writing about organized crime ever since.

B. Historical Approaches

Beyond these important foundational texts, a valuable survey can be found in the work of the criminologist Alan Wright, who covers British, American, and some European organized crime groups in his aptly titled survey *Organized Crime* (2006). Wright has a strong sense of historical context that makes this book useful for the student of organized crime in past societies. Similarly, the extensive work of Dick Hobbs on organized crime (1994; 1995) has much to offer. His *Lush Life: Constructing Organized Crime in the UK* (2013) blends ethnographic study with a detailed historical survey of organized crime groups in London from the later nineteenth century. A starting point for those seeking some understanding of continuity and change in British organized crime is the article by Jenkins and Potter (1988) that deals with the precursors to the "family firms" of the era following the Second World War. British historians other than those already mentioned in section I have not embraced the critical study of organized crime. Perhaps because clear definitions are elusive, few historians have attempted to come to grips with the underworld in anything but a cursory manner. Part of the problem, in British as well as more global crime-writing cultures, is the predominance of "true crime" texts and popular histories that have tended to perpetuate a highly problematic and uncritical approach to the sources (Thomas 1998; Thomas 2005; Chesney 1970). However, historians of crime have started to problematize historical ideas about and attitudes toward criminal organization and to think about the role of local institutions—such as the police and other law enforcers—and the media in

constructing the underworld "myth" (Slater 2009; Shore 2015). Recent work on criminal individuals and crime groups associated with organized crime is rooted in careful scholarly research (Brown 2011; Davies 2013; Roodhouse 2011; Shore 2015). For example, Andrew Davies's (2013) work on Glasgow and the rise of the gangster during the 1920s and 1930s combines the ethnographic approach of scholars such as Sutherland with a strong sense of historical context and sensitivity to the source material.

While other countries, as we have seen in section I, do have a range of texts dealing with organized crime history, many have not been published in English. Diego Gambetta (1996) and Judith Chubb (1982) have written with great authority on the development of Italian organized crime from its peasant roots in the south. At least a cursory understanding of Italian, and particularly Sicilian, crime groups would seem important to those who want to understand the evolution of organized crime in North America. Other authors have sought to develop a more global understanding of organized crime history. For example, the useful collection edited by Mark Galeotti (2008) ranges across a broad spectrum of time and space, including studies on organized crime in tsarist Russia as well as in occupied France. A useful study that includes some historical overview of European and North American organized crime is that of Howard Abadinsky (2003), whose broad survey includes chapters on Italy, Russia, Latin America, and Asian gangs alongside studies of organized crime in New York and Chicago. There is also a well-established literature dealing with iterations of organized gangs of bandits and brigands in early modern Europe, but the later eighteenth century onward is less well served. Individual country studies suggest that this is a thriving field; however, an accessible survey or monograph text that would provide those new to the field with some overview of historical developments has yet to be written. There are some useful accounts that consider European perspectives. For

example, Alan A. Block's (1994) work on American organized crime is very strongly rooted in the broader European experience. And, while it does not specifically deal with historical analyses, the collection edited by Cyrille Fijnaut and Letizia Paoli entitled *Organized Crime in Europe: Concepts, Patterns and Control Policies in the European Union and Beyond* (2004) includes an excellent set of papers on the history of organized crime in different European countries, although the earlier period dominates here. Finally, Paul Knepper's (2009) work on white slave trading, alien criminality, and the evolution of international crime networks is particularly useful in helping to understand how changes in rhetoric and concepts of organized crime had shifted from local and regional disputes to a transnational theater by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Moreover, Knepper has also investigated the League of Nations in the interwar period, particularly in relation to its crime remit and the establishment of the Advisory Committee on the Traffic in Women and Children in 1921 (2011; 2014, pp. 405–06).

Conclusion

Knepper's work shows us how the paradigm of organized crime has shifted, for law enforcers as well as for historians and criminologists, to a more global stage in recent decades (2009; 2011). Talking about the development of organized crime in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Mark Galeotti has identified the key activities of organized crime as narcotics, people trafficking, and cyberspace (2005, pp. 2–4). Moreover, the "underworld" has become increasingly transnational, particularly with the rise of Russian and other Eastern European crime groups since the 1980s. Hence future historians may well move away from the more rural and urban studies that have dominated the histories of organized crime and the underworld for our period. While early twentieth-century studies of the Mafia, and particularly of the cross-fertilization of

such organizations between Europe and the United States, arguably mark the beginning of the identification of these groups as a more global threat, for much of our period, criminal organization remained regional and local. Indeed, Dick Hobbs has stated that the role of transnationalism has been overstated, and that much organized crime remains a local phenomenon characterized by alliances with global (or, as he coins it, "glocal") markets (2013, p. 223). The nineteenth-century "underworld" as a serious area of study still remains problematic. While, as this chapter has demonstrated, there has been significant exploration of the cultural and social constructions of the underworld, there are few detailed studies of extensive criminal networks. Of course, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century criminal networks, even if we accept that such networks existed in any sort of organized form, are fundamentally elusive. Even in the arguably better-documented twentieth century, the "myth" of organized crime and the influence impact of its networks have troubled some commentators (Smith 1975; Bean 2010, pp. 69–70). Thus the "underworld" remains hidden. Moreover, in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the reach of the underworld is aided by the ever-stretching tentacles of the Internet, and our understanding of what it really constitutes remains flawed.

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