



Mafia-Owned Democracies

Italy and Mexico as patterns of criminal neoliberalism

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ABSTRACT

The paper is based on two preliminary hypothesis: the first is that when Organised Crime (OC) encounters politics, a third type of system emerges and this is called the mafia. The second assumption is that the mafias, particularly following 1989, greatly benefitted from the neoliberal globalisation processes. Nowadays, the mafias tend to replace the State as the privileged partners of capitalism; and, with greater efficiency than the State, are able to combine the local dimension of control (plundering or appropriation) of the territory with the global dimension of the transnational markets (particularly but not exclusively with the illicit trades). We assume that Italy and Mexico, among the consolidated democracies, are the most largely affected by the diffusion of criminal powers, to such a degree that two different patterns of mafia-owned democracy have developed: consociational in Italy, based on cooperative attitudes and behaviour between the leaders of the different groups involved – mafiosi, politicians and entrepreneurs – and therefore, characterised by greater stability; centrifugal for Mexico characterised on the other hand by strongly competitive behaviour between the various leaders involved and associated with a much greater degree of violence compared to the Italian situation.

Subjects: Capitalism, Democracy, Italy, Mafia, Mexico, Neoliberalism, Organised crime.

RESUMEN

El documento se basa en dos hipótesis preliminares: la primera es que cuando la delincuencia organizada enlaza con la política, emerge un tercer tipo de sistema y esto se denomina mafia. El segundo supuesto es que las mafias, en particular después de 1989, se benefi-

ciaron enormemente de los procesos de globalización neoliberal. Hoy en día, las mafias tienden a sustituir al Estado como a los interlocutores privilegiados del capitalismo; y, con mayor eficiencia que el Estado, son capaces de combinar la dimensión local de control (saqueo o apropiación) del territorio con la dimensión global de los mercados transnacionales - en particular, pero no exclusivamente, con los comercios ilícitos. Suponemos que Italia y México, entre las democracias consolidadas, son los más afectados, por la difusión de los poderes criminales a gran escala, a tal punto que se han desarrollado dos patrones diferentes de la democracia de propiedad de la mafia: consociacional en Italia, en base a las actitudes y comportamientos de cooperación entre los líderes de los diferentes grupos involucrados - mafiosos, políticos y empresarios- y que se caracteriza, por lo tanto, por una mayor estabilidad; centrífugo para México singularizado por un comportamiento fuertemente competitivo entre los diversos líderes involucrados y asociados con un grado mucho mayor de violencia en comparación con la variante italiana.

Palabras clave: capitalismo, democracia, Italia, mafia, México, neoliberalismo, crimen organizado

RESUM

El document es basa en dues hipòtesis preliminars: la primera és que quan la delinqüència organitzada enllaça amb la política, emergeix un tercer tipus de sistema i això s'anomena màfia. El segon supòsit és que les màfies, en particular després de 1989, es van beneficiar enormement dels processos de globalització neoliberal. Avui en dia, les màfies tendeixen a substituir l'Estat com als interlocutors privilegiats del capitalisme; i, amb major eficiència que l'Estat, són capaços de combinar la dimensió local de control (saqueig o apropiació) del territori amb la dimensió global dels mercats transnacionals en particular, però no exclusivament, amb els comerços il·lícits. Suposem que Itàlia i Mèxic, entre les democràcies consolidades, són els més afectats, per la difusió dels poders criminals a gran escala, a tal punt que s'han desenvolupat dos patrons diferents de la democràcia de propietat de la màfia: consociacional a Itàlia, en base a les actituds i comportaments de cooperació entre els líders dels diferents grups involucrats - mafiosos, polítics i empresaris- i que es caracteritza, per tant, per una major estabilitat; centrífug per Mèxic singularitzat per un comportament fortament competitiu entre els diversos líders involucrats i associats amb un grau molt més gran de violència en comparació amb la variant italiana.

Paraules clau: capitalisme, democràcia, Itàlia, màfia, Mèxic, neoliberalisme, crim organitzat

Introduction. When Organised Crime Meets Politics (and Capitalism)

The impact the diffusion of Organised Crime groups (OC) has on politics and on civil society has been dramatically underestimated, both by the social scientists and by the governments – who seem rather more committed to redimensioning the severity of the phenomenon and safeguard what remains of their credibility. To date throughout the academic world and in the mass media, the greatly predominant mantra has been that of “the State failure”, what’s more described as a zero-sum game: the greater the pervasiveness of the OC within a State, the lower

the State presence and consequently the greater the degree of its failure. However, in this way, the most important aspect is ignored. Namely the capacity the criminal systems have for developing symbiotic relations with the political system, generating new and original methods of managing political and economic resources.

This paper is based on two preliminary hypothesis. The first is that when OC – a structured and permanent group of individuals who use violence to obtain profit through criminal activities – meets politics, it gives rise to a third type of system called the mafia. The mafia is an organisation structured to a greater or lesser degree depending on the period and the demands; it aims to pursue economic profit for the elite through:

1. the control and/or the conquering of positions of political power,
2. the direct and widespread management of the illegal markets, in addition to the exploitation of growing segments of the legal counterparts,
3. the obliteration of the relationships of civil solidarity,
4. the use of violence as a non-exclusive yet specific means for its dominance.

The mafia is not an anti-state, but a state within a state. It develops on the inside and drives a process of fragmentation into sovereignty clusters that on occasion compete, clash or collude; each has a specific life cycle and a different degree of structure (Armao 2014).

The second premise is that the mafia, more than any other actor, has benefitted greatly, particularly since 1989, from the global consolidation of a neoliberal model which emerged by convergence and summation of two phenomena: on the one hand, the process of widespread deindustrialisation and simultaneous deregulation of the financial markets; and on the other, the crisis of the welfare state, driven by structural adjustments imposed by the international financial organisations. Nowadays, the mafias tend to replace the state as the privileged partners of capitalism; more efficiently than the state, they are able to combine the local dimension of territorial control (plundering or appropriation) with the global dimension of the transnational markets – the commercial factors (for example, the illicit trafficking of drugs, arms and people), and financial factors (money laundering and investments of the enormous profits generated by the illicit trafficking).

Consequently, in specific territorial contexts and in specific historical conditions, the mafias have been able to generate a completely new model for a political-economic system, that we define as a mafia-owned democracy, with the reference ideology summarised in the unconditional adhesion to a form of criminal

neoliberalism.

The decision to use Italy and Mexico as case-studies was certainly not a casual one. These are two countries that are more greatly affected by the diffusion of criminal power, and their relevance is improved by the fact that they are formally consolidated democracies, and by their respective geopolitical position and the level of development achieved. In other words, we are not dealing with peripheral and economically marginal countries, and OC cannot be depicted as resulting from underdevelopment. The mafia in both of these countries is a comprehensive and efficient manifestation of modernity, and one possible way for interpreting politics in times of globalisation.

In both Italy and Mexico, the flaws in the state-making process and the survival of powerful local potentates have nurtured the emergence of particularly structured forms of OC. As we will observe in the next two paragraphs, the collusion between OC and significant segments of the political system, and their ability to infiltrate the legal economy and intimidate the healthy parts of civil society are the foundations of two different patterns of mafia-owned democracy that appeared from the 1990s onwards. Both Italian and Mexican political systems are highly-fragmented. Nevertheless, Italy has produced a consociational mafia-owned democracy, based on cooperative attitudes and behaviour between the leaders of the various groups involved – mafiosi, politicians and entrepreneurs. In Mexico, on the other hand, a centrifugal mafia-owned democracy prevailed and is characterised by highly competitive behaviour between the various leaders involved, and this corresponds to a much higher level of violence with respect to the Italian reality¹ The reasons behind this different model of political-mafia development can be identified internally and internationally, and in the political and economic universes. To facilitate the reading, the presentation of the two case-studies will follow the same narrative scheme: Background, In the Making, Consolidation.

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Italy: The Consociational Pattern

As regards Italy, we should not consider the mafia from a bottom-up perspective, but from top-down. It did not spread over the grass roots and gradually climb the social and political ladders; it was actually aided and abetted by the political system. From the very beginnings of its institutionalisation process, the mafia understood how relevant it was to play a pivotal role in politics. Hence, it specialised as a political power broker, selling parcels of votes to the highest bidders with

¹ For this dicotomy we freely draw on A. Lijphart (1977)

some of its members holding political office when possible or necessary. A particularly solid patronage system developed where the mafia member was placed at the top of a triadic relationship, as opposed to the traditional dyadic patron-client relationship.

Background: The Foundational Co-optation

In Italy, the mafia is the result of a peculiar compromise between central government and some local potentates. From 1860s onwards, the newborn Italian state favoured co-optation strategies rather than coercion strategies to gain control of the outlying areas of Southern Italy (Tilly 1975). In other words, it abdicated its main function of monopolising State resources because unable to do so and because it wanted to minimise the costs of unification. Mainly in Western Sicily, the mafia developed as an instrument of the local elites, who wanted to maintain their powers of coercion, tax levying and even the administration of justice. The mafia emulated the state, taking advantage of collusion or at least the tacit permission of the State. In the period following the unification of Italy, territorially-localised clans in Sicily involved themselves in extremely dynamic economic activity: livestock rustling, control of the wholesale market, and the organisation of the trafficking of migration. The national political parties spurred the formation of rival clans in the same village as well as alliances among clans from different villages (Schneider, Schneider 1976). The well-known phenomenon of mafia involvement in local-level political competition was somehow legitimised by government's liberal elite (Pezzino 1990). In Naples, meanwhile, the Camorra served as the mercenary army for the terminating monarchy of King Ferdinand II. Later, it served as the liberal opposition to the Bourbon government. Lastly, it served as a police force after the unification (Behan 1996). In Calabria, at the turn of the century, the 'Ndrangheta was beginning to develop systemic relationships with the local political elites (Ciconte 1992).

The advent of Fascism changed the situation much less than was believed for too long. The widely advertised war against the mafia skilfully conducted by Prefect Mori centred some representatives of the local banditry, but not the powerful mafia bosses. These bosses actually chose a low-profile approach: they neither opposed the political regime, nor did they hide. They simply protected their own power and accepted the leadership of the Fascist party (Duggan 1989; Raffaele 1993). When the Allied troops invaded Sicily in 1943, many of these bosses assumed the administrative tasks which representatives of the British and American secret services were prepared to give them, despite being well aware of their affiliation (Casarrubea 2005). The legitimisation of the mafia's power by the victors of the war – more importantly by the USA, the incumbent hegemonic super-

power of the Western Bloc – was a fundamental historical shift, decisive in the development of the mafia in Italy.² In fact, by starting in the local administration, and then entering the pro-American separatist movement, many top representatives of the mafia later joined the governing party, the Christian Democrats. This link with the national politics has never disappeared. Sicily, in particular, became a useful and occasionally indispensable reservoir of votes, where the mafia directed voters towards one candidate as opposed to another, determining the electoral fate of many politicians (Lupo 2009).

In the Making: The Political Mafia

Immediately after the end of World War II, Cosa Nostra was the most structured organisation, with the strongest links in the world of illegal international trafficking. It wielded a sort of hegemonic role over the Neapolitan Camorra, initially controlling its access to the circuits of cigarette smuggling, to then progress to drug trafficking (Behan 1996). Similarly, the input from Cosa Nostra and the Camorra was indispensable for the expansion of interests and spheres of action by mafia organisations already present in Calabria (the 'Ndrangheta) and in Apulia (the Sacra Corona Unita). This does not mean that the 'Ndrangheta and the Sacra Corona Unita were generated by Cosa Nostra and/or the Camorra. Each of these groups has its own origins and traditions; they pursued the conquest of their own territories and strengthened their own patronage network. In addition, they exploited their interactions with other OC groups and marked-out areas of their own specific competences. For example, 'Ndrangheta made a great leap forward in the 1970s through its closer relationships with the Sicilian Cosa Nostra and the Neapolitan Camorra. Initially, the Calabrian clans played supporting roles only, but increasingly assumed leading roles (Ciconte 1992). Similarly, the Sacra Corona Unita agreed to operate in Apulia under the control of the Neapolitan Camorra for many years and only later emerged as a completely autonomous organisation (Massari 1998). In time, Cosa Nostra renounced its leadership of illegal trafficking without a fight. Consequently, today 'Ndrangheta is by far the most feared and most powerful organisation, the most widespread in northern Italy and across Europe, with the best global network of drug trafficking, with contacts as far as Colombia and Mexico (Forgione 2009).

In this phase, that we can define as “constituent” for the political-mafioso power, OC and the Sicilian Cosa Nostra, in particular, used intensive and selective violence. The anomaly of the Italian situation in the context of Europe deserves a

² It is worth remembering that the USA adopted the same strategy in occupied Japan, delegating the control of the territory and the black market to Yakuza clans.

short mention: violence has accompanied the development of Italy from the Post-War economic miracle to the severe institutional crisis of the present day. If we compile a chronological list of mafia-linked and terrorist-based violence, what emerges is a picture of endemic war between these different non-state actors of violence and the institutions that plagued Italy's civil society for more than 30 years.

It is worth noting, however, that between 1970 and 1993, the mafia murdered 612 representatives of the Institutions and civilians; Left- and Right-Wing terrorism were responsible for 181 deaths, explosions caused 129 fatalities.³ In detail, the mafia killed 70 members of the Law and Enforcement agencies (the terrorists 96); 17 judges (terrorists 11), 14 politicians (terrorists just 1). Two other features should be pointed out. The first is that Cosa Nostra kills more people than all of the other criminal organisations and terrorism put together. And if we take a closer look at the victims, it is clear that the violence of the mafia, when compared to the terrorists' targets, is directed much more evidently towards members of the political and judicial castes.

In those same years, the mafia clans started colonising new areas, far from their native territories; they had to reduce the amount of force used to deflect the attention of media and public opinion away from their presence, at the same time investing most of their resources in the economy. They diversified their illegal market activities to include drug trafficking, counterfeiting, toxic waste disposal, financial fraud, and so on. They penetrated deep into the lawful economies, initially taking over small businesses to launder money. They then entered partnerships with some of the best known companies in the huge legal market of public contracts (Sciarrone 2009). This evolution was abetted by the proliferation in Italy of Masonic Lodges where the mafia members could freely meet entrepreneurs, politicians, and professionals. It was also abetted by the marked propensity of all government coalitions to turn a blind eye, reacting only (opportunistically, one could say) to public opinion's periodic waves of indignation, in most cases related to the brutal killings of state representatives.

This growing collusion between mafia and the state was further nurtured by the peculiar state-assisted model of Italian capitalism. Since the post-World War II period, in fact, the state played a leading role in the so-called "Italian economic miracle". Firstly, the state developed public industry in crucial sectors such energy and engineering at unprecedented rates of growth. Secondly, the state acted

³ We collected these data by comparing the lists of names compiled by some of the anti-mafia associations and the Italian Association for the Victims of Terrorism, because no official government lists are still available

as the guarantor for large private companies, providing legislative and financial support when threatened by crises. These private companies were prevalently family-owned, another Italian anomaly (Ginsborg 2003). The Christian Democratic Party, which ruled the country for more than 40 years, was the main creator of this state-assisted model, as well as the principle silent partner of the mafia clans. It is worth repeating that from the outset the mafia developed an incredibly solid patronage system where the mafia bosses positioned themselves between the candidate and the voters, offering the candidate easy votes and offering the voters the chance to advocate their cause to the candidate, even if this turned out to be an illusion. This specific capability ultimately made these same bosses protagonists in the “corrupt exchanges” between the political and entrepreneurial systems (Della Porta, Vannucci 1999).

The Consolidation: Berlusconi and Beyond

On the international scene, the early 1990s were marked by the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe, the end of the Cold War and the undisputed triumph of neoliberal capitalism. In Italy, these years were marked by two simultaneous series of events. Cosa Nostra killed in 1992 two of its most resolute enemies, prosecuting attorneys Falcone and Borsellino (Dino 2011). Also, most of Italy’s long-time political leaders were indicted or arrested during Tangentopoli (Bribesville) (Guzzini 1995). At the time, this was interpreted as a “democratic revolution” driven but not caused by the judiciary. However, these events proved to be a decisive step in the consolidation of the Italian mafia-owned democracy.

Although the so-called “Second Republic” was marked by an unprecedented turnover of the political elites, it repeated the “First Republic’s” exploitation of economic and social resources, and did so on an even larger scale. Over the last 20 years, the distribution of income has become increasingly uneven. The mafia (‘Ndrangheta, in particular) has infiltrated Central and Northern Italy, as daily findings of the ongoing investigations demonstrate – from Lazio and Rome, the Italian capital, to Emilia, Tuscany, Lombardy, Piedmont, Veneto – exploiting the systemic corruption of political elites, also extending into the self-defined “anti-casta” movements, such as Lega Nord (Sciarrone 2014). Admittedly, the Cosa Nostra terror strategy drove its own military defeat, consisting in the arrest of most of its old leaders. However, Cosa Nostra also won an outstanding victory in terms of legitimisation. Cosa Nostra and all other main mafia brands were afforded unprecedented opportunities to conquer new and more relevant positions, both locally and nationally, following the dramatic turnover of the political elites.

The mafia found an opening in the privatisation of politics theorised and practiced by center-right governments and its undisputed leader, Silvio Berlusconi. As a self-esteeming and successful entrepreneur who lent himself to politics, Berlusconi embodied a new kind of leadership that is increasingly evident even in other advanced democracies. He is a merchant king, a postmodern version of the medieval thaumaturge-king (Bloch 1973). The medieval kings of patrimonial states owned their states' revenues, but they also owned their debts. On the other hand, the merchant kings act as though they owned states, using them to their own advantage, increasing their own revenues while locking out market competitors. Leaders of totalitarian regimes need to have absolute control of coercive machines. On the other hand, merchant kings do not need reigns of terror because they can consolidate consent through networks of patronage relationships. In the case of Italy, Berlusconi is the merchant king of discontent, unsatisfied with ruling his country by its rules. He claims that he has a sacred duty to draw new borders, to decide what is right and what is wrong, and to ignore the legal foundations of his power. His various efforts are devoted to stretching beyond the terms of his mandate and the limits of his majority in Parliament. As king, he leads through charisma. The media he owns or controls creates a sounding box to second his emotions and his motions, echoed by a cohort of spokespeople recruited from among his subordinates, both parliamentarians and journalists. As a merchant, he pursues his own interests and those of his legion of financial supporters, ignoring potential scruples relative to any conflicts of interest (Ginsborg and Asquer 2011).

In short, we agree that “the mix of populism and anti-politics on which Berlusconi's ‘Personal Party’ was constructed has proved incapable of creating a new ruling class or maintaining stable political alliances, while it remains deeply flawed by the original vices of conflicting interests, corruption and the circumvention of law which were transferred from business to politics”; while “until very recently the centre-left has also proved incapable of presenting itself as a viable political alternative or to represent ‘decent politics’ as an alternative to the disarray of the ‘First Republic’ or to formulate radically new programmes and objectives for those who genuinely want reform” (Crainz 2015: 182). Nevertheless, on the other hand, the two main flaws of Berlusconiism – charismatic personalism and the anti-political rhetoric – have been perfectly reproduced in the new leaders who have appeared over the last two years: from Beppe Grillo, founder of the Movimento Cinque Stelle (Five Stars Movement), to Matteo Salvini of the Lega Nord (Northern League), and the head of the government himself, Matteo Renzi. In parallel, the daily reports of inquests that reveal the consociational plot between mafia, politics and economics still does not appear to have produced the awareness that forms the indispensable condition for processing an efficacious anti-

mafia strategy.

Mexico: The Centrifugal Pattern

As has been observed in Italy, the consolidation of a consociational mafia-owned democracy started in the early 1990s. To understand this fully, on the one hand appropriate attention must be given to the origins of the mafia as a political power broker, able to develop a particularly solid patronage system; on the other, to the mafia's ability to exploit this position of mediation to benefit from a state assisted capitalism which, together with the implementation of the neoliberal policies, favoured the spreading of systemic corruption throughout the country since the 1990s.

In Mexico, on the contrary, the birth and development of OC should be interpreted in a bottom-up perspective, as a grass roots phenomenon, gradually ascending the social and political ladders, eventually evolving into a centrifugal mafia-owned democracy. This may appear to be a contradiction in this country that has long been governed by an authoritarian regime; however, the situation can be explained looking back at some peculiar features of the Mexican history, that date as far back as the 1910 Revolution.

Background: The Revolutionary Drift to Impunity

The first and fundamental element to be considered is the role of protagonist played by the institutions delegated with the monopoly of the violence. With the ongoing revolution, both the police forces and the army were initially involved in the dynamics between revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries and, successively, in the repression of the counter-revolutionaries. After 1918, when the new regime was consolidating, the reformed police institutions were also responsible for contrasting the judicial powers, still considered to be under the control of the conservative political and counter-revolutionary forces. From the outset, the poor training and the even worse salaries exposed the police forces to the risk of corruption. In the 1940s and 1950s, President Cárdenas in particular expected the military to resolve the ever-increasing problem of corruption, and this nurtured the authoritarianism of the state thanks to growing militarisation of the police forces and their direct subordination to the command of the armed forces. If this is joined by the proliferation of new national and local security agencies – with some secret agents appointed to keep an eye on their colleagues – we can understand how the situation quickly became ungovernable: the increasing fragmentation of the Law and Enforcement agencies (and consequently of the lines of

command], favoured competition (and open hostility) between the groups, resulting in an even greater shift to the corruption that the forces were fighting and, above all, leading to an increased feeling of insecurity among citizens (Davis 2010b).

The second factor is based on a tradition that had already consolidated back in the days of the Revolution; this focused on the cultivation and trafficking of drugs (opium poppies and marijuana), facilitated by the predominantly rural character of the Mexican economy. Particularly in the Northern regions, along the endless border with the USA, efficient networks of smugglers developed and were able to flood the North American territories with illegal merchandise (drugs and even alcohol in the years of Prohibition). In other words it differed to what was happening in Italy, in that from the outset the Mexican criminal economy was characterising as a “commercial capitalism”, capable of producing growing profits and, as a consequence, generating an institutionalised protection racket: the enormous amount of money circulating was attractive for anyone, within the state apparatuses, who found themselves living in poverty; and appetising for people in positions of authority (military or politicians) who considered collusion with OC to be an indispensable factor in the advancement of their own career (Watt, Zepeda 2012).

The third peculiar element of the Mexican pattern is its geopolitical position, namely its proximity to the USA. From the outset, the USA play a dual role: primarily as a client and the main purchaser of the drugs originating in Mexico and Central and South America; and secondly, as an hegemonic (and sufficiently unscrupulous) power, prepared to collaborate with the OC if viable entities in the fight against other and (in its perception) more dangerous enemies – such as the communist regimes in Latin America.⁴

In the Making: The Ciudad Juárez Paradigm

Starting from the peculiarities listed above, the development of OC in Mexico during the twentieth century should be interpreted as the consolidation of a model of criminal neoliberalism in which, different to what was happening in Italy, the economic dimension prevailed over the political, attributing a prominent role (and responsibilities) to an external actor such as the USA (Mercille 2011). In summarising the characteristics of this development, it may be useful to concen-

⁴ The most famous and documented case dates back to the early 1980s when the CIA organised the *Contragate* operation using the Mexican drug barons to deliver arms to the paramilitary groups in Nicaragua, guaranteeing immunity for narco-trafficking to the USA (Kenny, Serrano 2012)

trate the analysis on a city, Ciudad Juárez, where a rather complex set of circumstances – geographical, political and economic – converge to define it as the OC paradigm of Mexico:

1. the border: Juárez is a city of almost 1.5 million inhabitants in a metropolitan area that extends uninterrupted to include El Paso in Texas, resulting in a total of more than 2 million. It is located in the middle of a large region that is home to 16 million people, but it is also in the middle of a border 1,900 miles long touching ten states (4 in the US and 6 in Mexico), with a total in excess of 80 million inhabitants. It is surrounded by rocky mountains and a desert, and linked to El Paso by four bridges across the Rio Grande, a dense train network, numerous tunnels and drain canals. It has been calculated that annually more than 8 million pedestrians and 14 million vehicles (with more than one person inside) pass this way towards the North (Staudt 2008; Campbell 2009);
2. the criminal tradition: the geographical position of the city helps to explain the presence of drug gangs; for example, from the 1920s, the ban on production and trafficking of opium for non-medical use, first in the USA and then in Mexico, gave rise to the birth of the black market. It was then that Juárez became a transit point for opium and morphine that originated in Europe, India or Burma, passing through the port of Shanghai in China, to then reach Los Angeles. Some bosses also thrived on profits from gambling and prostitution, and they used their power to corrupt politicians, policemen and journalists. Through their philanthropic activities they even won the consensus of the local population (Mottier 2009);
3. the dynamics of interaction with the states: in essence, from the beginning of the twentieth century, OC was clearly a player which could draw maximum advantage from its dual role, at the domestic level – vis-à-vis the state of Chihuahua and the Mexican federal government – and at the international level – vis-à-vis the USA. New casino licenses for the city and the profits generated by them, provided the local administration and state coffers with the resources sufficient to finance public works and the salaries of their employees, at least until in 1934, when gambling was outlawed (Mottier 2009). However, what is most important is that this essential fiscal autonomy strengthened the power of local oligarchies which, even after the revolution, succeeded in thwarting the federal government's efforts to impose its law on them (Wasserman 1993). Even the long authoritarian period which ended with the defeat of the PRI in the elections of 2000, did not manage to completely erase this kind of extra-territorial condition enjoyed by Ciudad Juárez;
4. the maquiladoras: starting in 1965, the Mexican government established the "Border Industrialisation Program", to solve the serious crisis of male unem-

ployment (up to 50% at that time). As part of this program, the maquiladoras – mostly textile manufacturing plant or mechanical and electronic assembly factories – were opened to facilitate the employment of a low-cost workforce.⁵ However, contrary to expectations, for a long time the workforce was mostly female (80-90% in the 1970s, declining gradually until it plateaued at 60% in 2000). The USA, on the other hand, transformed the border zone into a central testing ground for new free trade policies, obtaining from Mexico detaxation of the profits for the North American corporations which subcontracted their production to the local maquiladoras (Lugo 2008; Staudt 2008).⁶

Over recent decades, these circumstances transformed Ciudad Juárez into an extraordinary magnet for the masses, especially women and girls, coming from the poor states in the south. At the same time, however, the city has also become an extraordinary hotbed of violence. Since 1993, more than 500 women have been raped and murdered in Ciudad Juárez. Their bodies have been found in the desert, and most have been horribly mutilated (Fregoso and Bejerano 2010; Domínguez-Ruvalcaba, Corona 2010). From 2008 through 2011, Ciudad Juárez was the Mexican municipality with the highest rate of OC homicides: 1,620 in 2008; 2,660 in 2009; 2,101 in 2010; 1,460 in 2011 – since then violence in that city has declined significantly; and in 2013 Ciudad Juárez dropped from second to fourth place among the most violent municipalities in Mexico (Heinle, Rodríguez Ferreira, Shirk 2014).

Ultimately, in Ciudad Juárez everything seems to revolve around the organisation of violence, and everything would appear oriented to reproducing it. Violence is the direct source of revenue for a large group of extras: from independent hitmen to members of OC, from local and federal police to employees of private security agencies. In Ciudad Juárez violence no longer follows any political strategy: it is a currency that regulates transactions in the free-trade zone. It is one of the aggregate costs of labor in two main types of business in the area: OC, of course, but also the maquiladoras. Victims of femicide are almost always young workers, kidnapped as they leave their place of work at the end of their shifts. The sexual abuse they suffered, their bodies completely ravaged, is nothing more than an arrogant statement by men who wish to apply to the sexual relations the same logic that governs the work relations in an economy which is

⁵ in the 1990s there were almost 300 of these factories in Ciudad Juárez. The salary was the equivalent of \$4 to \$8 per day, less than \$50 per week. In the last ten years this value has further been reduced by the devaluation of the Mexican peso and by the salaries not keeping up with the inflation

⁶ In 1984, Mexico entered the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), and in 1994 it joined the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)

increasingly reproducing, on an urban level, a model of exploitation (slave work-force) typical of totalitarianism.

Consolidation: The War on Drugs

There were over 50,000 OC murders in Mexico from 2006 through 2011; approximately 14,000 in 2012; and 11,000 in 2013. And these accounted for roughly 50% of the total annual number of intentional homicides in Mexico (Heinle, Rodríguez Ferreira, Shirk 2014). As has been observed, “the long-term history of economic downturns and the onset of neoliberal reforms since the 1980s created the conditions for a surge in urban crime and violence (armed robberies, car theft, assaults, kidnappings, lynchings) in the mid-1990s” (Pansters 2012: 11). In Mexico, the democratisation process that started in the 1990s with the introduction of a multi-party system, seemed to exasperate, and not resolve the problems of impunity and widespread violence. In only three years, between 1995 and 1998, the crime rates in Mexico City nearly tripled (Davis 2010b).

This apparent paradox can easily be explained by the fact that the disappearance of the monopoly of PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) unleashed a turf war between the players, old and new, operating in this territory. In this contest, those who tried to reverse the course of history by introducing virtuous practices were doomed to fail before those who follow this route. In an atmosphere traditionally dominated by police corruption and by a high degree of conflict between the police and the armed forces, as observed, it is unquestionably more difficult to radically reform these institutions than to comply with their character. In this context, particularly in these last two decades, it proved easier for OC to further aggravate social disintegration: it fed into the corruption and the rivalry of state organisms, with the goal to prove to its citizens that these organisms were unreliable, finally stepping forward as a new guarantor of safety. In the same way, in a society dominated by an economy increasingly based on forms of informal employment, somewhere between the legal and the illegal, every attempt to impose new rules, unless supported by an adequate supply of alternative occupations, clashed with the workers who were determined to defend their profits, no matter how small, or how dubious the provenance. OC, on the other hand, invented the underground economy and proved itself capable of continuously proposing its new variants, and designing extraordinarily well-integrated models of exploitation. All these factors contributed to the birth of a centrifugal mafia-owned democracy.

Conclusion. The Remains of Democracy

It has been observed that “in light of these developments, it is hard to be optimistic about a way forward toward peace and security in the region [...]. Democratic institutions and global market practices that seem to bring civic engagement and rising standards of living in the advanced capitalist world have not proven powerful or resilient enough to catapult Mexico and its Latin American neighbors out of the treacherous stranglehold of their developmental past. To do so would require a complete break with the global economic connections and local social or spatial practices that sustain violence” (Davis 2010b: 58). We have to agree with this opinion; however, there is no doubt that the Italian experience – of a country that wishes to position itself at the summit of the “advanced capitalist world” – only serves to further accentuate the feeling of pessimism.

To all effects, Italy and Mexico represent two different involutive patterns of democracy, the success of which is measured in terms of an unstoppable increase in the profits of criminal neoliberalism and an equal reduction in the safety of the individuals who live in these countries, and in the “environmental sustainability” of a development model based on destruction and death. Italy and Mexico represent two ideal types; possibly the extremes of a criminal continuum that recognises many intermediate stages. Undoubtedly, the Italian consociational mafia-owned democracy would appear to be able to guarantee greater stability and a more moderate use of violence; but that does not mean that this is a more successful model. Italy, viewed from the coast of Mexico may seem to be the Holy Grail, a model to be copied; however, the intrinsic and growing weakness of its democratic institutions risks the escalation of the Italian consociational mafia-owned democracy into the Mexican centrifugal mafia-owned democracy .

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