

Mafia Emergence: What Kind of State?

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Introduction

In the mid-1960s, while pursuing anthropological research in western Sicily, Peter Schneider had the extraordinary experience of attending five banquets, or *schiticchie*, organized over several months to celebrate a peace between butchers from several neighboring rural towns, all Mafia associates, and a meat wholesaler with whom they had quarreled. The locales were rustic country dwellings and restaurants, situated in the territories of the respective *cosche* (singular *cosca*), or Mafia groups, whose leaders made the arrangements, cooked the multicourse meals, and supplied abundant wine. Each banquet ended with hilarious, scatological entertainment in which some of the (all-male) participants, in gaudy costumes, parodied women and the church. Evoking patron saint festivals, two banquets culminated in fireworks. Participants numbered about eighty by the last banquet and included a mayor, two priests, four soccer players, and a veterinarian (the latter charged with inspecting livestock before slaughter). The hothouse effect of the fun and games led the assembled company to consider themselves above society, entitled to upend its conventions.

Three decades later, after the anti-Mafia process of the 1980s and 1990s in Sicily had yielded depositions from a number of justice collaborators, ironically known as *pentiti*, it became possible to document what had earlier been suspected—that memories of expansive hospitality and shared good times strengthened the collusive bonds between *mafiosi* and leading figures in business, politics, the clergy, the professions, the police, and the secret services. One *pentito*, Antonino Calderone, famously likened the *mafioso* to a spider, who “builds webs of friends, of acquaintances, of obligations” (Calderone in Arlacchi 1993, 20). His and other depositions showed how the networks ensnared not only local but also regional and national politicians.

In addition to *schiticchie*, hunting parties nurtured relationships between *mafiosi* and notables. So too did crossing paths in luxury hotels. In the postwar decades, years of a colossal construction boom in the regional capital Palermo, the newly built Hotel Zagarella, on the coast outside the city, became the weekend playground for Nino Salvo, one of two *mafioso* cousins who had been granted the tax collection concession for all of Sicily on extremely favorable terms. According to *pentito* testimony, Nino entertained

powerful political leaders, among them a regular poker companion, Salvo Lima, Christian Democratic mayor of Palermo and national parliamentary deputy (eventually also a European Union deputy before being assassinated on March 12, 1992) (Calderone in Arlacchi 1993, 175; Schneider and Schneider 2003, 122). Photographs taken at the Zagarella in June 1979 by photographer Letizia Battaglia became a centerpiece in the 1995 trial of former Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti, accused of having colluded with the Mafia.¹ One of them shows Andreotti with Nino Salvo. Lima and other regional Christian Democratic leaders were present as well. The manager of the hotel at the time testified that Salvo had ordered the “best possible” buffet for Andreotti and personally conducted him on a tour of the finest rooms (Arlacchi 1995, 105; Schneider and Schneider 2003, 122–123).

Impressed by these accounts, scholars of the Sicilian Mafia have adopted the word *intreccio*, by which they mean an “organic interweaving,” an imbrication, to describe the Mafia–state relation in Italy. Umberto Santino, for example, considers the *intreccio* the key to the Mafia’s economy and system of power (2000, 381; see also Catanzaro 1992 [1988]; Chubb 1982, 1996; Schneider and Schneider 2003). This does not mean that all of the state is enmeshed; on the contrary, scholars have also embraced the phrase *pezzi dello stato*—pieces of the state—noting that, since the Mafia’s inception in the nineteenth century, there have always existed anti-Mafia “pieces.” Historian Salvatore Lupo has reconstructed this tension, painstakingly working with police and other archives. An important chapter of Lupo’s *Storia della Mafia* (1993) concerns the 1893 assassination of Emanuele Notarbartolo, mayor of Palermo from 1873 to 1876, then director general of the Bank of Sicily (1876–1890), in which role he exposed a ring of fraudulent traders, their affairs extending to the stock exchanges of Genoa and Milan. The accused murderer, who was simultaneously a deputy in the national parliament, a powerful member of the bank’s council, and a protector of his district’s *mafiosi*, had his conviction overturned in Italy’s highest court, thanks to the intervention of well-placed friends. As Lupo shows, this particular *intreccio* entangled *mafiosi* with the judicial, banking, and financial systems of the entire country.

The nugget of the problem I want to explore is how to construct a theory of Mafia formation that takes account of the *intreccio*. As will become clear, I subscribe to a narrow definition of Mafia. The world is awash in an immense variety of criminal organizations, from gangs of bandits, pirates, and urban youth to the megasyndicates that orchestrate illegal trafficking. Such organizations are also variously structured, from tightly disciplined hierarchies to loose networks and transient coalitions. Within this mix, I reserve the word *Mafia* for translocal, adult male fraternal sodalities whose

respective local “chapters” lay claim to territories in which they “order,” against the exaction of fees and favors and backed by their capacity to threaten violence, certain sectors of the economy. Additional characteristics include transgenerational continuity; an emphasis on respect, discipline, and loyalty; the recruitment of new members not solely (or even predominantly) through kinship but also by tapping talented wannabes; and cultural practices that underscore an exclusive, superior identity—for example, a charter myth, initiation rites, playful nicknames, tattoos or other visible markers, and transgressive conviviality from which women, or at least *their* women, are excluded. Significantly, Calderone refers to Sicilian *mafiosi* not only as “spiders” but also as “the elite of the criminal world . . . vastly superior to common criminals . . . worse than everybody!” (Arlacchi 1993, 2). *Mafiosi* call themselves and each other “men of honor.”

Members of a Mafia also typically invest a lot of time resolving inter-necine conflicts through negotiation and peacemaking, lest their capacity for violence get out of hand. A Mafia prepares for the arrest and imprisonment of some of its members some of the time, mobilizing funds for this purpose. In addition, it promotes, among members and in the wider community, what Italians call *omertà*—the cultural practice of turning a blind eye toward violations of the law, of never betraying anyone to the legal authorities, of minding one’s business and cultivating a stance of studied ignorance. Snitches are correspondingly punished in ways that telegraph the seriousness of this code. Finally, any powerful Mafia is characterized by what I have emphasized above—its *intreccio* with elements of the state.

Following Federico Varese (2011, 5–6), I consider such organizations to have consolidated themselves around the turn of the twentieth century in Italy, Japan, and the United States, somewhat later in Hong Kong and Taiwan, and—with qualifications—in 1990s Russia. Searching for a pattern, I first take up Italian sociologist Diego Gambetta and his followers (among them Varese), who have analyzed Mafia formation for just this cluster of cases. Each distinguishes Mafias from other kinds of criminal organization and locates their origins in relation to abrupt and rocky transitions to liberal capitalism—arguments that I find illuminating. Central to their approach, however, is the further proposition that, during the transition, the state, quite possibly in the process of shedding an authoritarian past, was “dysfunctional,” “absent,” or “absorbed with other priorities,” creating vast opportunity fields for *mafiosi*. Once up and running, *mafiosi* then prevented state officials, whom they determinedly corrupted, from constituting normal structures, above all that sine qua non of stateness, monopoly control over the means and use of violence. Is this picture, I

ask, of a Mafia flourishing in the interstices of an ineffectual state and then corrupting (or further corrupting) it robust enough to capture the *intreccio*?

Richard Samuels's 2003 book *Machiavelli's Children: Leaders and Their Legacies in Italy and Japan* suggests an alternative to the "missing state" hypothesis: namely, the mutual accommodation of states and Mafias. Samuels locates post-1860 Italy and Japan in relation to the world system of nation-states, analyzes their respective projects to leap ahead in this system, and implies how their respective Mafias contributed to these projects and were rewarded for their contribution. To the extent that Mafias are *collaborators* in rapid capitalist development, their entanglements with the state are intrinsic to their formation.

The Gambetta School: Narrowing the Definition of Mafia

In his 1993 book *The Sicilian Mafia: The Business of Protection*, Gambetta defined Mafia as "a specific economic enterprise, an industry which produces, promotes, and sells private protection" (1993, 1). Clients can be individuals but mainly they are businesses; on a few occasions, Sicilian *mafiosi* protected groups of laborers from exploitation and abuse (Gambetta 1993, 86–87). According to Gambetta, an abrupt transition to capitalism in the absence of serviceable commercial laws and institutions supportive of a market economy calls such an enterprise into being. In the case of Sicily, Bourbon rulers set off the first stirrings when they began to dismantle feudal institutions in 1812. Following the 1860 unification of Italy, a new liberal state further advanced the privatization of property—for example, by legislating the appropriation of ecclesiastical holdings and their sale at auction.

Such moves provoked outbreaks of banditry and insurrection, above all in the formerly quasi-feudal agrarian south to which Sicily belonged. There, in the latifundist interior and west of the island, such an unarticulated leap into capitalism created immense uncertainty and conflict over the management and disposition of resources (compounded, Gambetta argues, by a deficit of social trust). As these structural conditions made protection by private intimidation a welcome—hence marketable—commodity, demobilized soldiers, estate guards, bandits, and others capable of using physical force stepped into the breach, organizing themselves as Mafia *cosche*. An "autonomous social force," *cosca* members sold protective services to the landlords and merchants of the latifundist interior, to small cultivators and entrepreneurs in the increasingly commercial zone of orchards and vineyards near Palermo, and to businesses in Palermo and other west Sicilian cities.

Many would characterize the sale of private protection as "racketeering," a word of uncertain etymology² that came into vogue during the

Prohibition era in the United States. Implying the use or threat of violence, its meanings straddle the line between provisioning wanted services and extorting money for services that are bogus or rendered necessary by the providers themselves. Gambetta skews toward the benign side of the equation, treating as more or less genuine a preponderance of the protection services that *mafiosi* supply—a position that critics consider too “functionalist” (Humphrey 1999, 211–212; see also Catanzaro 1993, 1994; Schneider 1994). An interesting example to the contrary is offered by anthropologist Caroline Humphrey, who studied Mafia emergence in 1990s Russia. Yes, she proclaims, the sudden opening of markets in the absence of a well-developed legal framework for protecting property and guaranteeing contracts did create a *demand* for protection. And, yes, a *supply* of protectors, skilled in the use of violence, emerged from the chaos—bandits, released prisoners, demobilized soldiers, and, as sociologist Vadim Volkov had already shown for Russia, wrestlers, weightlifters, bodybuilders, and boxers, trained in Soviet sports clubs and known, collectively, as *sportsmeny* (Volkov 2002). But these ingredients, key to a functionalist analysis, are only the beginning. To Humphrey, the protection racket is fundamentally “appropriative,” that is, activated by persons “whose basic income, livelihood and ‘surplus product’ [are] founded on a constant threat of violence to others.” The violence is intrinsic, not accidental; it fuels a dynamic capacity for scaling up that far transcends merely answering a demand for protection (see Humphrey 1999, 211–212; see also Catanzaro 1993, 1994; Schneider 1994).

Notwithstanding Gambetta’s supply–demand functionalism, he acknowledges that the word *racketeer* is at least ambiguous (see Gambetta 1993, 29–33, 187–190). Nor are his descriptions of Sicilian Mafia practice inconsistent with economist Peter Reuter’s pioneering book of 1987, *Racketeering in Legitimate Industries; A Study in the Economics of Intimidation*. Using reports of antiracket task forces in New York City, Reuter explores the commonalities of the most vulnerable enterprises—dry cleaning, trucking, garment making, stevedores, construction, garbage collection, and the wholesale distribution of meat, fish, and poultry. All shared multiple small-business units, a high proportion of costs devoted to labor, low profit margins, minimal product diversification, high failure rates, and what we might summarize as demographic pressure, that is, low barriers to entry and a crush of would-be entrepreneurs competing for market share. In the construction industry, exposure to delays in the delivery of manpower and materials was especially crucial (see Kelly 1999, 76–77). Organized racketeers established revenue streams for themselves by assisting the businesses in question in myriad ways, among them fostering cartels that,

through violence or intimidation, excluded competitors (Reuter 1987, 2–5; see also Landesco 1968, 149; Reynolds 1995, 7).

Gambetta interviewed tradesmen in several Palermo markets that fit Reuter’s criteria: flowers, fish, produce, radio-taxi services, and—although considerably more complicated—construction. *Mafiosi*, he learned, helped advance business strategies of monopoly and exclusion in these sectors; the consolidation of full-blown cartels was, however, an uneven process, easily upended by greed, paranoia, and sabotage. Another Mafia service commonly provided was protection from theft, including the “theft” by borrowers who did not pay their debts. With a touch of irony, we learn that *mafiosi* protected thieves as well. Purse snatchers and pickpockets counted on Mafia muscle to discipline intruders into their respective territories, to find fences, and to restitute purloined objects to their rightful owners for a fee (Gambetta 1993, 228–229; also see 174, 190–191).

What about businesses engaged in smuggling illegal commodities? Like the Mafia, Gambetta points out, such businesses have issues with the law and are secretive and prone to risk; this makes their leaders “fatally attracted” to *mafiosi* and vice-versa. Nevertheless, in contrast to a great deal of U.S. mafiology, which conflates racketeering with pushing the “vices” of sex and drugs (see Woodiwiss 2001), Gambetta insists on disaggregating these phenomena (1993, chapter 9). Businesses that provision forbidden desires are in origin and trajectory autonomous of Mafia formation; their participants organize themselves and embark on commercial expansion without necessarily being, or becoming, initiated members of Mafia groups. Nor do *mafiosi* necessarily approve of them; on the contrary, at times they go out of their way to claim moral superiority. *Pentito* Calderone declared, for example, that “the mafia does not organize prostitution; it’s an unclean activity. Can you imagine a man of honor living on pimping, on the money he makes from women?” (Arlacchi 1993, 3).

Yet Mafia racketeering and illegal trafficking are frequently entangled, and from both directions. On the one hand, illicit businesses are among the biggest consumers of Mafia expertise. Operating outside or on the edges of the law means that they, in particular, cannot depend on “normal institutions,” least of all a normal police force, to solve their problems, including the problem of raising start-up capital. On the other hand, illicit traffics constitute phenomenal investment opportunities for *mafiosi*, however great their expression of moral misgiving. In Sicily in the late 1970s, interactions between trafficking and racketeering turned treacherous as the island became a crossroads for refining and shipping Southeast Asian heroin to the U.S. market. Participation in a commodity chain that encompassed multiple intermediaries and endless chances to skim and adulterate

catapulted *mafiosi* into a level of violent conflict, not to mention “suspicion, paranoia, and resentment,” that the state could not ignore. In Gambetta’s words, “how lethal [this] was for them is indicated by how many died in the internecine conflict of the early 1980s—five hundred is a conservative estimate—how many others turned state’s evidence to save their own skin, and how many more ended up in prison as a result” (Gambetta 1993, 244).

Comparative Case Studies

Gambetta’s model has influenced several students of other Mafias, most notably Peter Hill for Japan (Hill 2006), Federico Varese for post-Soviet Russia (Varese 2001), and Yiu Kong Chu for Hong Kong. Chu (2000), in a book titled *The Triads as Business*, examines the influence of racketeers in several Hong Kong businesses: restaurants, entertainment, construction, minibuses, and wholesale markets for fish (other, newer frontiers are also taken up: outdoor filming for the movie industry, interior decorating, and the sale of new flats). Whatever the context, racketeers walked the line between providing wanted services and extortion. On the positive side, they shielded businesses against attacks from urban gangs, helped them reduce competition, recovered stolen property, collected on unpaid debts, and warned those lacking licenses of pending raids. Still, Chu found many Triad clients who were ambivalent about the role of brute force in sustaining their livelihoods and upset to be periodically hit up by visiting racketeers for free food and drink, not to mention contributions for Triad members in legal trouble (Chu 2000, 55–56). Minibus drivers who were protected benefitted from the work of Triad-recruited youths who slashed the tires or smashed the windows of competing drivers, preventing them from picking up passengers or using the terminals. Nevertheless, some, at least, of the protected drivers joined unions, publicly demonstrated against extortion, and sought to guard the terminals on their own. According to Chu (2000, 57–62), left-wing unions declined in Hong Kong, as in so many places, during the 1980s, after which the minibus industry became more Triad controlled.

Chu devotes several chapters to illegal markets, in each case being careful to separate out the business histories of those who produce, transport, warehouse, and distribute prohibited commodities from the business histories of those who protect them. Hong Kong drug dealers, he shows, are far too numerous for the market they wish to supply. Because of this and other liabilities, they seek Triad protection. Reciprocally, some Triad bosses organize their own drug businesses. These convergences notwithstanding, both drug and human trafficking, two morally condemned

commodity chains commonly blamed on the Triads in public and media discourse, involve sequences that are so vast, from source to destination, that they necessarily evade the control of any single organization. At best, Chu (2000, 110–118) insists, individual Triad members seek out trafficking partners for a piece of the action.

Hill presents a similar picture for Yakuza. In Tokyo and other mega-Japanese cities, the entertainment industry in general—its bars, nightclubs, and restaurants—have long been shaped by Mafia-provided services, among them removing drunk or abusive customers, recruiting suppliers, and making emergency loans (Hill 2006, 23, 95–97). Especially pervasive is the role of protectors in the construction industry. Even under the Tokugawa shogunate (1603–1867), when Tokyo was still Edo, incipient Yakuza “families” assembled unskilled labor for large-scale building projects. When, after the Meiji Restoration of the late nineteenth century, Japan’s great ports of Kobe, Yokohama, and Tokyo underwent massive expansion, these families, now mature, supplied squadrons of laborers to the right place at the right time, collecting and distributing wages and skimming a cut for themselves. Among the most telling services to the construction sector has been, in Hill’s words, that of “facilitating trouble-free labor-relations.” Yakuza are perceived, he writes, as a particularly “useful bulwark against . . . unpredictable and potentially dangerous day-laborers” (Hill 2006, 22–27, 95–97).

Yakuza families indulge in illegal gambling and are leading investors in, and protectors of, this industry. Cards, dice, roulette, and *pachinko* machines, clustered in casino-like parlors, are all part of the picture, as are the illegal bookmaking operations that compete with government-sanctioned lotteries on horses, cycles, and motorboats. Services extend from protecting dice games in laborers’ quarters to orchestrating gambling trips to private resorts and retreats, abroad as well as at home, replete with flights, luxury accommodations, and female companions. Hill also analyzes the demand for protection in two other illicit industries: methamphetamine and the supply of foreign sex workers to “date clubs” and unlicensed street prostitution (as distinct from licensed brothels). “Denizens” of these underworld businesses cannot, in his words, squander the time and run the risk of “tracking down cheats and breaking their legs” on their own; such an effort would make their enterprises far too “costly, violent, and inefficient” (Hill 2006, 11, 97–105).

Perhaps because gambling looms so large in Yakuza history, Hill defines Mafia as “a set of firms that provide extra-state protection to consumers in primarily, but not exclusively, the illegal market sector” (Hill 2006, 10). He goes on, however, to separate the dynamics of Mafia formation from the

dynamics of trafficking—a subtlety evident in his observation that the U.S. Mafia owed its explosive growth, but not its origins, to the prohibition of alcohol in the 1920s (Hill 2006, 14). In Japan, leaders of the most renowned and powerful of the large Yakuza families, the Yamaguchi-gumi, recognize that the wider public considers drugs to be more pernicious than gambling or prostitution; they have even, at times, lent support to drug eradication efforts and expelled members for dealing (Hill 2006, 100). Several of Hill's Yakuza interviewees held drug dealers in contempt, saying they lacked both strength and brains. And, yet, from the 1930s and 1940s, when Japan outlawed drugs at home but allowed their shipment abroad, and especially in the wake of drug control laws and programs from the early 1950s, members of Yakuza groups have found it irresistible to profit—both from protecting and from investing in the drug trade (Hill 2006, 99–105).

Also influenced by Gambetta, Federico Varese was witness to Mafia formation in Perm, an industrial city in the Ural Mountains of Russia, where he lived during the height of the post-Soviet market reforms and rapid privatization of property. Businessmen, whether small shop and kiosk keepers or so-called oligarchs, felt simultaneously liberated and harassed from various quarters. Rapacious public officials such as tax collectors and health inspectors looked to them for bribes; predatory youth gangs threatened robberies, arson, hooliganism, and the wanton destruction of property (Perm's number of recorded crimes rose by over 100 percent between 1989 and 1995); and an excess of competitors wanted in. Some of these businessmen reported being "surrounded by a lot of 'envy.'" Most welcomed, even if they felt manipulated by, experienced protectors, called *krysha*, the Russian word for "roof" (Varese 2001, 80–85). One business owner engaged a *krysha* to beat up the lover of his wife (Varese 2001, 115–118). As would be true of any service industry—financial services, for example—some roofs were ineffectual, others helpful, still others, like vultures, poised to take over the protected business at the slightest provocation—a particular risk in the case of loan-sharking (Varese 2001, 110–114). The best-organized protectors belonged to Perm's Mafia, consisting of an estimated ten, for the most part territorial, families, averaging thirty to forty members each and structured into ranks. Individual members kept their own earnings, but circumstances could oblige them to contribute to a common fund (Varese 2001, 138–144).

In Perm's central market, kiosk owners who failed to pay a monthly fee to this Mafia or concealed their earnings risked being beaten or having their kiosk burned. Small shopkeepers were further constrained in their choice of suppliers and in many cases were required to put clients of the *krysha* on their payroll. Dynamics of this sort pervaded markets for clothing,

meat, and agricultural produce (Varese 2001, 130). Businesses serving illegal markets—drugs or sex, for example—sought *krysha* protection, too, not least to escape police harassment or obtain interest-bearing capital. Regarding such businesses, Varese closely follows Gambetta: Racketeering and trafficking, although mutually supportive, need to be distinguished from each other, almost as “a form of division of labor” (Varese 2001, 4–5).

Varese’s eyewitness account of Mafia formation in 1990s Perm is consistent with the detailed ethnographic descriptions of anthropologists who conducted fieldwork in other Russian cities during that decade’s tumultuous transition to free-market capitalism. In Vladivostok, for example, Thomas Holzlehner initially learned of roofs through the larger-than-life etchings of murdered “godfathers” on the tombstones in the local cemetery. Soon it was evident that such persons, often with backgrounds as wrestlers, boxers, and karate fighters, claimed responsibility for advancing security and order, first in their respective territories and subsequently in relation to wider economic sectors. At times they did this in competition with licensed private security companies or the police. A mix of legal and illegal businesses made up their client list: among them, gambling houses, night clubs, gas stations, car dealerships, microbus transport companies, and fisheries. Networks devoted to smuggling—whether precious metals, poached marine and land resources, ephedrine, heroin, or cars for the Russian market that were stolen in Japan—also subscribed. Demand for protection was all the more intense because of the local presence of unemployed and undisciplined youth, a gratuitous source of disorder. Such juveniles, it was said, were not content to steal your wallet; they would beat you for your fur hat unless you enjoyed the protection of *mafiosi* (Holzlehner 2007).

In the small city of Yaroslavl northeast of Moscow, Nancy Ries encountered person after person who made a distinction between “honest bandits,” *banditi*, their word for Mafia-like “godfathers,” and scoundrels, public drunks and addicts, perpetrators of street crime, and smugglers of national treasures. Local discourse overflowed with tales of lying, cheating, and swindling. Many (especially elderly) citizens were barely scraping by, but an ostentatious minority flaunted sudden wealth. Pyramid schemes, in which a handful of early entrants raked in windfalls at the expense of thousands who lost their life savings, dramatized the unfairness. In such a context, people welcomed the protection of a *krysha*. Businessmen (especially if they engaged in illegal transactions) depended on such roofs to collect debts, recover stolen goods, and enforce contractual arrangements; to ordinary citizens, the *banditi* (whose funerals they attended in droves) promised a social and moral order in which both unscrupulous youth and the avarice and corruption of grown-ups might be reined in. And, yet,

Ries suspected, the “demand” for protection was in part created by the protectors: “Cut me in or it will be worse for you.” Murders, bombings, and assassinations, reported in newspapers with no more fanfare than car accidents, impinged on everyday experience. Not surprisingly, a “bandit” Reis befriended belonged to the *sportsmeny* (Ries 2002).

Russians who spoke with Humphrey in the early 1990s used the term “thawed-outs” to refer to youth, suddenly freed by the restructuring of the Soviet state to engage in a new level of street crime. According to one of her sources, “they operate carelessly, beat their victims, attack with knives and pistols, and threaten with words like, ‘Shit, give me the money or I’ll kill you’ ” (quoted in Humphrey 1999, 214). In the context of this emergency of public order, Mafia-like fraternal groups consolidated themselves and, building on the earlier “culture and techniques” of “honorable thieves,” evolved to become powerful racketeers. That the Mafia *brigada* was appreciated for its professionalism in the use of violence—trained, targeted, and efficient rather than merely rapacious—is illustrated by Humphrey’s (2004) case study of the organization of the *marshrut* system—the system of routes and itineraries of self-organized public transport—in Ulan-Ude, a city of 400,000 in south central Siberia, known for its Soviet-era prison camps.

Upon the collapse of the state-run bus service in Ulan-Ude in 1991, owners of cars and vans, otherwise unemployed or unpaid, rushed to create taxi enterprises, joined by others, also unemployed, who scrambled to borrow money and purchase retired public buses, or new minibuses. Mafia groups, consisting for the most part of former wrestlers (called *bortsy*), tamed the resulting free-for-all, claiming particular routes as “theirs,” demanding tribute from drivers who used them, and punishing drivers who drank or failed to keep proper documents or maintain their vehicles. As the ranks of drivers became saturated, the amount of the tribute grew; excluded drivers, seeking to operate outside of the *marshrut* system, risked being beaten up or finding sand in their gas tanks. The result, secretly supported by the mayor and police, was superior to the state-run buses of Soviet times (Humphrey 2004).

The Cultural Assets of Mafias

Gambetta’s followers pay attention to what Varese refers to as “ancestors”—fraternal-like associations among persons criminalized for breaking laws that predated the crucible of Mafia formation. Examples will be familiar: for Russia the sodality of *vory-v-zakone* (thieves with a code of honor) that crystallized among prison camp inmates in the Soviet gulag system in the 1920s and 1930s (Varese 2001, 160–161); for Japan, gangs of gamblers

(*bakuto*) and itinerant peddlers (*tekiya*) possibly dating to medieval times as well as town-based mutual aid societies (*machi yakko*) from the Tokugawa period (Hill 2006, 37). For Sicily, antecedents include nineteenth-century sects among prisoners allied with Freemasonry and another sect called the Beati Paoli, believed to have met in tunnels under Palermo in the eighteenth century. For Hong Kong, Chu (2000, 11–13) cites militarily skilled Shaolin Temple monks of the seventeenth century who, upon failing to overthrow the Qing Dynasty, went underground to found a secret society in Fujian, five lodges of which dispersed to Guangdong, Hong Kong, and overseas.

Brotherhoods such as these, hardly unique to Mafia lands, were much mythologized in the poetry, folklore, literature, and theater of their respective societies. Where Mafias eventually formed, they bequeathed esoteric customs to them—for example (depending on the instance), initiation protocols, elaborate rules of conduct, respect for discipline, a common fund controlled by leaders, secret passwords, special jargon, playful nicknames, and fictive kinship terms. The Yakuza practices of amputating the digit of a finger for disobedience; turning tattoos, once used for punishment, into badges of masculinity; and devoting extraordinary amounts of time to the cultivation of gambling skills had clear antecedents among the *bakuto*. The very word *Yakuza* references the numbers 8, 9, and 3, bad scores in a card game. Tapping into lodge mythology, modern Triads invented several ranks of hierarchy, the third of which was an “incense master,” who presides over lengthy promotion and initiation ceremonies. Until recently, novices mixed the blood, drawn from the finger of each, into a common source before drinking it, “to signify blood-brotherhood” (Chu 2000, 22–25, 31–35).

Clearly, all of the historic Mafias invested in culture building, drawing on ritual and symbolic legacies, at times in the absence of any direct line of continuity with the antecedent fraternal group; in this way they reinforced solidarity among members, enabled mutual support across widely distributed “chapters,” and, perhaps most important, enhanced everyone’s sense of belonging to an honorable elite even as violent acts were being committed. Unfortunately, I think, Gambetta is somewhat dismissive of this process: “These expressions and symbols,” he writes, “are concocted from an almost surrealist stew of bogus and genuine sources, mythical and mundane characters, fiction and reality” (Gambetta 1993, 153–154; but see Gambetta 2009, especially chapter 8 on “nicknames”). Having defined the Mafia in economic terms, he reduces the borrowed elements to “trade-marks,” intended to amplify the reputations of *mafiosi* and therewith the Mafia brand, thus discouraging imposters. Consider, by way of contrast, Humphrey’s thesis that culture plays a critical role in Mafia dynamism. Although *mafiosi* may have no direct connection with their forebears,

they nevertheless channel “the culture and techniques” of past criminal sodalities, transmitted over generations, into the reproduction of certain organizational features: territorial control, a verticalized structure, and discrete boundaries with requirements for entry. In effect, “outlaw” fraternal groups, often born of prison life, generated entire cultural worlds whose attention to rules and ritual, initiations, and displays of belonging and respect bequeathed to later Mafias a source of energy for continued predatory expansion (Humphrey 1999, 211–212).

The Gambetta School and the State

All of Gambetta’s followers acknowledge the showy contributions that *mafiosi* make to their respective communities, investing money and prestige in folk and religious festivals and rounding up votes for favored politicians. All have something to say about the extraordinary amounts of time that *mafiosi* devote to “business meetings”—to encountering one another and outsiders in restaurants, tea houses, bars, clubs, or casinos to eat, drink, play cards, roll dice, make plans, and gossip. The Rock Crystal restaurant in Perm was, according to Varese, the “headquarters of the criminal world” (Varese 2001, 131). Nor was it only local. A police raid on the Rock Crystal birthday party of a Mafia boss in 1994 turned up 215 men suspected of nefarious dealings, among them 4 from former Soviet Republics, 7 from Urals cities near Perm, and 17 from other Russian regions. A councilor of the Regional Legislative Assembly was among those present, along with the deputy director of a mechanized bakery, the founder of another company, the director of Perm’s central market, a former football player, and students from the military academy (Varese 2001).

In a chapter on the Russian Mafia as a whole, Varese describes high-level political officials using certain criminal groups as a wedge against others, thereby creating the impression of gaining control over crime, and using them, as well, in the repression of Chechen “terrorists.” The latter collaboration, he writes, led “some prominent figures close to the mafia” to call for a “truce between the state and criminal structures”—in effect to legalize protection racketeering. Journalists, businessmen, officials, and politicians who supported such a truce depicted *mafiosi* as “civilized and intelligent” and the shadow economy as, in fact, “the real and powerful economy” (Varese 2001, 182). Of course, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, national leader of the Liberal Democratic Party, met and dined with several Mafia bosses and businessmen connected to them. If there was no evidence of a “general pact” between politics and crime, at least one could say, as Varese does, that communication was open enough to avoid misunderstanding.

Evoking the Italian concept “pieces of the state,” Varese points to the many “tacit pacts between fragments of the political elite and segments of the criminal world” (Varese 2001, 181–184).

Yakuza families, Hill shows, protect politicians from electoral competition; grateful politicians open doors to state resources whose distribution enlarges the client base of the Yakuza. Powerful businessmen and politicians alike donate immense floral wreaths bearing their names to Yakuza succession ceremonies, weddings, and funerals and attend these when convenient (Hill 2006, 56, 78–79). Hill further mentions Yakuza members intimidating newspapers to silence scandals on behalf of politicians and politicians intervening with judges on behalf of *mafiosi*. The police, meanwhile, spend time in Yakuza spaces and collaborate with members on behalf of crime control and public safety. Although there have been periodic police crackdowns, there is also appreciation of the Yakuza role in disciplining youth gangs, whether by wielding sticks or distributing carrots. A claim of Yakuza leaders is that they provide a haven for society’s outcasts; that castoffs from dysfunctional families find a home with them (Hill 2006, 58–60; see also Kaplan and Dubro 2003).

As Hill shows, the “eastern” Yakuza families, coalescing around the Inagawa-kai in Tokyo, Yokoyama, and the surrounding Kanto region, cultivated a more mellow relationship with the state than did the famed Yamaguchi-gumi coalition, whose territory embraced the cities of Kobe and Hiroshima. (The Sumiyoshi-kai of Osaka also had unique characteristics, as did many of the lesser coalitions.) Notwithstanding variations in space and time, however, Yakuza groups entwined themselves more consistently with rightist political forces than with other elements. In the early twentieth century, one found them helping to engineer “incidents” that simultaneously advanced nationalist militarism and protected opium networks in China and Manchuria (Hill 2006, 42). Following World War I, they helped rightist elements of the government, rattled by the threat of socialism, to repress trade union militancy. Amid the confusion and chaos of post-World War II defeat and occupation, Yakuza bosses not only consolidated black markets and, in Tokyo, collected taxes but also got on board with the occupiers’ Cold War agenda. As documented by Kaplan and Dubro (2003), authorities on this history cited by Hill, they helped derail student demonstrations in the 1950s and, most famously, took what amounted to a government contract to secure the visit of Dwight Eisenhower in 1960 (although he never arrived) (Hill 2006, 34–55).

Italy, the source of the word *intreccio*, is widely understood to have nurtured mutually beneficial relations among its various Mafias and most, if not all, of its political parties, resulting in dense entanglements

with many parts of the state. The center-right Christian Democratic Party, which dominated coalition governments throughout the Cold War, notoriously benefitted from Mafia-mobilized electoral majorities in Southern Italy and Sicily. In his attempt to construct an elegant and abstract model of Mafia formation, however, Gambetta was so heavily guided by the market dynamics of supply and demand that he ended up marginalizing political considerations. In the words of Judith Chubb, his disinterest in politics led him to “disregard the broader structural context within which the Mafia has flourished and which until very recently guaranteed its immunity” (Chubb 1996, 280; see also Catanzaro 1993, 1994; Schneider 1994). Perhaps hearing the criticism, Gambetta added a postscript to the English translation of his book. “As of this writing (May 1993),” it says, “ex-Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti and former President of the *Corte di Cassazione* (Italy’s highest court) Corrado Carnevale are both under investigation on charges of mafia conspiracy” (Gambetta 1993, 257). He continues, “The degree of collusion between public authorities and the mafia [has] shocked the country” (Gambetta 1993).

What, then, is Gambetta’s theory of the state’s role in the formation of the Sicilian Mafia? He argues that by the time Italy was unified in 1860 there already existed the “foundations” of a protection industry. As noted above, these date to the initial dismantling of feudalism in 1812. Not only did the new liberal state have, therefore, to “establish itself and its law . . . in a region where no such (legitimate) authority had previously existed. It also had to compete with a rival, an entrenched, if nebulous entity which had by then shaped the economic transactions as well as the skills, expectations, and norms of the native people” (Gambetta 1993, 97). Liberal policies pertaining to the continued privatization of property contributed to the disorder. So too did the expansion of the suffrage, minimal as it was. In so fledgling a democracy, this only led local factions or “parties” of elites (mainly landowners and professionals) to ally with *mafiosi*, whose private use or threat of violence could be deployed against rival factions or “parties,” competing for the state’s largesse (Gambetta 1993). Compounding the challenge, the new state was “confused, at odds with an eccentric reality, badly organized, and too busy elsewhere to devote much of its energy to the South.” Although “neither significantly weaker nor demonstrably more repressive than any other liberal state of the period,” its lacunae created an immense opportunity for the protection industry (Gambetta 1993, 98).

This depiction of the Mafia-state interaction—in which the state is unable to function and cedes ground to the Mafia—does not, in my view, do justice to the *entangled* relations between Mafia and state referred to in Gambetta’s postscript and richly described by his followers. Yet they

too have accepted his theory of a state missing in action at the time of Mafia formation. Hill, for example, theorizes that the demand for extra-legal protection is predictable “where the state is unwilling or unable to provide protection to its citizens operating in legitimate markets.” The conditions most likely to generate Mafias were evident in Japan during the Meiji Restoration and again, in spades, following World War II when, in Hill’s words, there was both “a supply of tough and desperate men” and “a lack of official mechanisms for regulating (market) transactions” (Hill 2006, 44). The Yakuza’s “market niche” came about as a result of the failure of the Japanese state to consolidate a system through which citizens could protect their interests, redress grievances, and feel secure in their commercial transactions (Hill 2006, 264–265).

Varese’s book on the 1990s Russian Mafia begins with a summary of Gambetta’s supply-and-demand history of Sicilian Mafia formation. In the midst of the abrupt “shock therapy” transition from a planned to a market economy that accompanied the fall of the Soviet Union, Russian society not only devolved into chaos but also faced the problem of “missing institutions” (Varese 2001, 80). At the same time, an abundance of violent men—the already noted *sportsmeny*—were ready to fill the vacuum. In a second book, *Mafias on the Move* (2011), Varese asks how Mafias do and do not succeed in conquering new territories. Migration, he writes, “is clearly not a cause of mafia transplantation,” although it can be a precondition. “Only when migration is coupled with illegal employment and the *absence of state protection* does a demand for criminal protection emerge that can be met by a mafia.” And again, “the presence of a supply of mafiosi and the *inability* of the state to govern markets are the key factors that link cases of successful transplantation” (Varese 2011, 8–11, italics added).

These and related texts point to the consistently negative vocabulary with which the Gambetta school characterizes the kind of state that produces a Mafia. Words such as *missing*, *absent*, *void* or *vacuum*, *inability*, and *failure* leap off the page. Weakness is implied, although, as Gambetta says, weakness is not the issue so much as is neglect; the states in question are otherwise preoccupied (Gambetta 1993, 97–98) and hopelessly corrupt. To Varese, corruption is the primary reason why the Russian state of the 1990s was so ineffectual in protecting its citizens. As many others have also argued (e.g., Wedel 1998, 2003; Rawlinson 1997, 2010, 2013), former *nomenklatura* and other self-serving officials bribed and strategized to acquire public resources; helped their relatives and friends acquire them; cozied up to the cliques surrounding Anatoly Chubais and the Harvard Institute of International Development, both funnels for the distribution of foreign moneys; and evaded all forms of taxation. Varese further compares

the proliferation of *state-licensed* private security companies to the proliferation of Mafia gangs and quotes the widespread perception of ordinary people that the “real mafia” is the state. Boris Yeltsin effectively said as much when he declared, in 1993, “Russia is a mafia country on a world scale” (quoted in Rawlinson 2013, 216–217).

For Gambetta and his followers, the kind of state that nurtures a Mafia becomes increasingly corrupt as time goes on. Having fostered an explosive growth of commercial transactions in the absence of usable institutions; having simultaneously uprooted waves of people from their livelihoods, churning some of them into careers of gratuitously violent crime; having allowed illegal markets to burgeon; and having yielded to *mafiosi* the prerogative of possessing and wielding weapons in the name of restoring order, the states in question found it more and more difficult to institutionalize the rule of law. Marshaling the theory of path dependency, Varese puts it this way: Privatization in the absence of appropriate regulation creates new vested interests, which in turn “block subsequent attempts at regulating markets” (Varese 2001, 29). Having substituted for proper state functions, *mafiosi* actively corrupt state officials who would challenge their power.

Alas, corruption is a slippery concept. The oldest, most generic meaning is predominantly moral, evoking notions of decay, depravity, and deviation from purity. The historically more recent and predominantly legal meaning concerns the abuse of public office for private gain or the pursuit of private gain at public expense. Implied in the modern, legal definition is a clear separation, nowhere evident in the real world, between public and private, state and society, politics and economics—a separation that is bridged through quid pro quo transactions like bribery and votes for favors. Implied, as well, is a separation between those who corrupt—the private citizens—and those who, ostensibly committed to uphold the public trust, are corrupted—corruption being the contamination, or adulteration, of the public by the private (see Bratsis 2006).

Whether in the moral or the legal sense, corruption differs according to context. High-level malfeasance involving public officials and business elites is not the same as ordinary people bribing the local police or tapping into electric lines. Public opinion often rails against the former in moral disgust while exonerating the latter, understood to be “making arrangements” as best they can. Indeed, to the extent that low-level corruption satisfies the norms of reciprocity that govern family and community life, its practitioners are often admired (Smart 1999). Whatever the level, corruption seems far too pervasive, and too widely blamed for a variety of ills, to be diagnostic of Mafia states, as distinct from states that have not fostered

Mafias. Nor are morally outraged discourses attacking corruption or the formal if episodic censure of certain practices as corrupt, absent from states with thriving Mafias. As the Notarbartolo tragedy reminds us, in these states, too, attempts at reform help constitute a standard of integrity—the promise and hopefully the *appearance* of a state that is committed to public service. In short, it is hard to conclude that the Mafia–state relation is best characterized by the Mafia filling in for and then “blocking” the state, preventing it from functioning as it should.

Mafias as Collaborators in the Chase

I now refer back to *Machiavelli's Children*, Richard Samuels's comparison of Italy and Japan—two countries that, after 1860, sought to join the league of the already established capitalist and industrial powers by exerting global influence through colonial and imperial expansion. Emergent leaders of the Meiji Restoration in Japan and the Risorgimento in Italy would, in their words, “catch up with and surpass” the hegemony of North Atlantic Europe, becoming “first-class nations.” They resented the “sting of foreign condescension and scorn,” of being treated as adolescents in diplomatic circles. Japan was above all humiliated by the “unequal treaties,” favorable to Europe and the United States, that followed the arrival of Commodore Perry in Japanese waters in 1854; the leaders of the newly unified Italy declared that the centuries-old experience with manufacturing, shipping, and commerce of Italian cities, along with their contributions to science and art, should be internationally recognized (Samuels 2003, 12).

In hot pursuit of parity, both Italy and Japan embarked on a compressed and ambitious project that encompassed, at a minimum, capitalist industrialization; steps toward parliamentary democracy; imperial adventures; and substantial investment in armaments, shipbuilding, steel, roads, railroads, canals, improved communication, electrification, and schools. Much of this was state led and depended on the state's ability to tax economic productivity; productive enterprises in turn benefitted from the state's support, for example, in the form of tariff policies and subsidies. The presumably differentiated spheres of polity and economy, state and market, and parliamentarians and entrepreneurs in reality constituted an interwoven whole, perhaps best characterized in Gramscian terms as a “ruling bloc.” In both Japan and Italy, the blocs that coalesced after 1860 bent their energies toward the rapid accumulation of national wealth and assertion of autonomous national power, binding both state and economy to the task.

Remarkably, a great deal was achieved, despite a series of interruptions and setbacks. Already before World War I, both countries could boast

of massive growth in heavy industry, steam-powered textile manufacture, infrastructure improvements, a rapidly growing population (reflecting health and nutritional improvements), and a healthy balance of exports. Italy's first industrial growth spurt, in the 1880s, saw steel production increase from 3,600 tons to 158,000 tons, an "astonishing achievement"; the ministries of the navy and war supported the continued growth of steelworks, whose development exploded after 1896. World War I further stimulated advances in engineering, metallurgy, new manufacturing technologies, and chemicals (see Clark 1984, 24–25, 119–127). Japan's industrial capacity doubled between 1890 and 1914; the number of factories went up by a factor of 3 (see Kaplan and Dubro 2003, 21). Italy, although defeated in its effort to occupy Ethiopia (the occupation would not be realized until the mid-1930s), had annexed Eritrea, Libya, and Somalia by World War I; Japan, outperforming the navies of China and Russia (defeating Russia in 1905), had annexed Korea, Formosa, and Shandong and occupied Manchuria and the Russian Far East. If we fast-forward to 1975, the time of the oil shock, we find Italy and Japan (notwithstanding their defeat in World War II) immediately included in the Group of Six, which met to strategize and plan for future challenges. Other partners were Britain, France, Germany, the United States, and one year later Canada. Almost by definition, members of this now Group of Seven (G7) ranked among the wealthiest and most developed countries on Earth—highest in gross domestic product, standard of living, exports, gold and foreign exchange reserves, and donors to the UN budget. What does it mean, one wonders, that three of the seven—the United States is the third (four if we include Canada)—nurtured the world's most potent Mafias? Or that racketeering took off in American cities just as the country, having fought its Civil War and closed its frontier, bulked up to become a great power, making an immense leap into industrialized farming, transport, and manufacture; massively recruiting labor from abroad; and staking a claim to empire through colonial and policing adventures in the Philippines, the Caribbean, and Latin America? In short, the United States shares with Italy and Japan not only a Mafia but also a phase of rapid capitalist industrialization and "catch-up" imperial ambition in which this Mafia crystallized.

Even more intriguing is Russia, invited to join the G7 in 1998, after having embraced a "shock therapy" approach to market reforms and having experienced, at the same time, a notorious round of Mafia formation. Although the Group of Eight has again become Seven with Russia's expulsion over Ukraine, and although the Russian Mafia's *intreccio* with the state has not matured under Putin, 1990s Russia nevertheless encourages the following hypothesis: For the leaders of governments and industries embarked

on closing the gap with the declared “great powers” of the nation-state system, Mafias are a significant ally, intertwined from the beginning with the project to join existing world hegemony. In these, my final remarks, I suggest three respects in which this might be so.

The first is already well covered by the Gambetta school. The project was extraordinarily disruptive. Churning rural populations off the land and/or dispossessing them of use rights, it generated banditry, animal rustling, kidnapping, theft, and related mayhem. Abruptly bringing immense, often uprooted and demographically distorted populations (many of them growing rapidly) into cities, it incubated gangsterism and urban crime. In deploying performative violence and a reputation for violence, Mafias tamed these eruptions, bringing a modicum of order to beleaguered landowners, uncertain markets, and small businesses getting off the ground. The selective initiation of unemployed street youth into Mafia families further dented the growing incidence of everyday criminality.

A second contribution that Mafias made to power blocs intent on rapid, transformative development was to lend a hand in keeping at bay anti-capitalist social forces. As Samuels shows, the ruling blocs of both Italy and Japan were already deeply concerned about the specter of socialist organizing before World War I (one need only recall the repressive measures taken by the government of Francesco Crispi against the Sicilian *Fasci*, the insurgent peasant and artisan movement, in the early 1890s) and welcomed the existence of their respective Mafias as counterweights (see Samuels 2003, 105–109, 114–120, 189). This transpired not so much because Mafia leaders were ideological about capitalism and its enemies but rather because their everyday practical activities included recruiting, allocating, and disciplining labor on behalf of selected businesses and industries. The already noted role of Yakuza and the Italian Mafias in tethering their respective countries to the capitalist West during the Cold War is continuous with this trend.

Besides creating order in arenas of sudden mayhem and obstructing anticapitalist activism, there is a third respect in which a Mafia could help a ruling bloc chase great power status. *Mafiosi* hosted, and elevated, businessmen in contexts where other, more traditional fields of endeavor (like landowning, the professions, bureaucratic officialdom, religion) had a lock on prestige and where entrepreneurship lacked legitimacy. All of the Mafias discussed above historically invested in and promoted new arenas of relaxation and entertainment where men of all kinds, but businessmen in particular, could collectively enjoy taking pokes at established social norms, as happened during the banquets with which this article began. Although moralists in their respective societies looked askance at some

of the arenas—casinos, for example, which American critics labeled dens of vice and a dangerous threat to society’s health and integrity—the ice breaking that went on in them normalized the marketplace, valorized profit taking, and advanced a captivating, capitalist-friendly milieu. If we disabuse ourselves of the tradition of wedding capitalist culture to a work ethic—if we imagine a play ethic to be relevant, as well—we can, perhaps, better appreciate this particular contribution that Mafias made to capitalist development, one that is widely celebrated in popular culture.

Strategic allies to power blocs in hot pursuit of industrial capitalist and imperial parity, *mafiosi* did not have to corrupt, or further corrupt, the state. Already an integral part of it, they could claim respectability and, using the “culture and techniques” of racketeering, invest in new frontiers. As industrial capitalist development unfolded, they participated in its momentous growth, achieving, in particular, a significant presence in state-led initiatives involving public works and construction. (These, by the way, were considerable in Italy’s south as well as north.) And yet there is one caveat. The nation-states that hosted Mafias had to appear to be serious; their leaders, after all, measured themselves against the great powers of the nation-state system. And a serious state, by this time in history, had the power to control the means of violence within its borders. Therefore, although Mafias used or threatened violence in all of their order-making activities and in turf wars for territory among themselves, it was crucial that they accept certain limits: Occasional arrest, prosecution, and incarceration would have to be a normal part of doing Mafia business. In addition, *mafiosi* had to prevent the exercise of violence from getting out of hand or targeting state officials (as happened in Sicily with disastrous consequences when members of Mafia *cosche* began to traffic heavily in heroin). Within these parameters, however, Mafia formations could flourish. As Samuels puts it for Japan and Italy, governance was “abetted” by organized crime; *mafiosi* were “welcomed as ‘in-laws’ as often as they were reviled as ‘outlaws’ ” (Samuels 2003, 189).

In conclusion, I credit Gambetta and his followers for their insistence that the word *Mafia* not be thrown around, that it be restricted to criminal organizations that are more or less territorially organized and whose main activities concern racketeering. I appreciate, as well, their analysis of abrupt and tortuous capitalist development as a context for Mafia formation. They tend, however, to frame the Mafia–state relation in terms of an initial time of the state being missing in action, followed by Mafias corrupting, or further corrupting, the state. I suggest that a model that insists on the mutual accommodation of Mafias and states, in which the former contribute to the latter’s most ambitious developmental projects, better illuminates the Mafia–state *intreccio* and its effects.

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Notes

1. Andreotti was eventually acquitted of some charges and absolved of others that were covered by a statute of limitations.
2. Sociologist Marylee Reynolds has traced the word’s “murky” origins. Some associated it with the loud noises of hoodlum hangouts, parties, or the Vaudeville stage; others with the rack used to inflict torturous pain but not kill the victim. Contemporary newspapers weighed in, for example, the *New York Times* of 1931, which declared that a racket “maintains itself by the industry of others,” adding, a year later, that “Troy was a racket; it levied tribute on the traders of the time. The feudal system was a racket; it made the peasant pay for protection. The Mafia was a racket; it exploited the landowner and the business man. . . . Stripped of frills, the racket is nothing but extortion of a regular, fixed payment by threat of injury.” According to the head of the Chicago Association of Commerce, a racket is “a conspiracy to commit extortion by intimidation, force, violence, blackmail, arson, murder” (quoted in Reynolds 1995, 103–105). Reynolds also refers to Hostetter and Beesley’s 1929 book *It’s a Racket*, which defined the phenomenon as a defect of capitalism that depended on political protection—a “parasitic activity in which the racketeer lives from the industry of the victim, the latter being kept in control by the use of terror, force, intimidation,” and to Landesco (1929), who defined racketeering as “the exploitation for personal profit, by means of violence, of a business association or employees’ organization.” Racketeers rationalized their gains as due compensation for services provided (quoted in Reynolds 1995, 90, 103).

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