**MSc in Sociology**  
**Hilary Term 2015**  
**Sociology of Mafias**

**PROFESSOR FEDERICO VARESE**  
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**NOTE: This Option runs on Friday 14:00-16:00 in the Manor Road Building, starting on the 22nd of January for 8 weeks.**

This document is designed to provide students with basic information on this option. It is subject to minor changes to be communicated at the beginning of the course.

**Objectives**

The course analyzes five criminal organizations that have emerged in different times and contexts: the Sicilian Cosa Nostra, the American Mafia, the Russian Mafia, the Hong Kong Triads and the Japanese Yakuza. We explore the extent to which these cases, notwithstanding their differences, share crucial characteristics and features.

The course begins by defining State, Mafia group, Mafia and organized crime, and distinguishes the Mafia from superficially related phenomena, such as corruption and patronage. The course examines parallels between state behavior in early modern Europe and Mafia behavior, the emergence of Mafias as well as what Mafias do in both legal and illegal markets. The second part of the course focuses on how Mafias perform their roles. We shall study the resources, the organization, the role of women and the norms of these organizations. Finally, the course explores factors that facilitate the expansion and the decline of Mafias and whether Mafias are emerging in non-traditional areas.

The course is multidisciplinary and draws on concepts from political theory, industrial economics, and political economy, as well as on the history and sociology of different countries, such as Hong Kong, Italy, Japan, Russia, and the United States.

**Course Assessment:**

Production of two “Reading Responses” (RRs) during the course of the Term, to be submitted by noon on Friday of Weeks 3 and 6 by email to the course provider. The RRs should not exceed two A4 pages (font 12). The course provider will supply the title of the RRs the week before, during class time. The work will be graded on a pass/fail basis. In case of fail, the candidate is allowed to re-submit once. If the candidate fails twice, or fails to submit none or only one of the RRs, s/he will have failed the course. Late submission will lead to penalization in the final grade.

Production of one assessed essay written unsupervised and unaided. The course provider will publish three Exam Questions on Friday of Week 8 at noon. Candidates will answer ONE of these
questions and submit hard and soft copies of their essay to the Graduate Studies Administrator by noon on Friday of Week 11.

This assignment must be no less than 3,500 words and no more than 5,000 words (inclusive of footnotes but excluding bibliography and appendices). An accurate word count must be declared on the first page of the essay.

Students may not approach the course provider for clarification on essay questions or help with or feedback on the essay. Students are expected to draw on course readings; whilst they may be rewarded for drawing upon additional works, Examiners may reduce the mark of those who fail to cite course readings.

Candidates should take seriously the word limits imposed (both upper and lower). If the word limit is exceeded then the examiners may decide not to mark the work; and if they do proceed then the mark may be reduced. Similarly those who write less than the minimum word limit may be penalized.
Seminars’ Topics

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Pre-course Reading:


Pre-course Viewings: *Mean Streets; The Godfather: Parts One and Two; Goodfellas; Casino; Donnie Brasco; Gangs of New York; Cartel Land.*

Key Texts:


Every week students are expected to study the ‘required readings’ and engage in class discussion.

Key papers are collected in Varese (2010). You could also consult JSTOR (http://www.jstor.org/), Electronic Journals on line at Oxip+ and Oxford scholarship online (http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/oso/public/). Blackwell’s Bookshop in Oxford has created a shelf dedicated to our class. It is located in the ‘Politics’ area, just before the ‘Cold War’ section. You should find there are the key texts for this class.
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Week 1
Definitions (State, Organized Crime, Mafia); The Logic of Protection; Property Rights
Theory and Protection.

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Required Readings:

[available online through SOLO]
Schelling, T.C. 1971. What is the business of organized crime? in Id., Choice and Consequence
2010.
Skocpol (eds.), Bringing the State Back In (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 169-
190. Also in Varese 2010.
401-417. Also in Varese 2010.

[Approx. 140 pages]

- What is the nature of protection? Is protection a commodity? In what ways is protection a natural
  monopoly?
- How does the state differ from the mafia? And how does the mafia differ from OC?
- Why property rights are relevant to the emergence of the modern state?
- Explore the connection between reputation for violence, protection and mafia.
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Week 2
Origins of Mafias (Sicilian Mafia, Russia Mafia and Yakuza)

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Required Readings:

Gambetta, ch. 4. Also in Varese 2010.

[Approx. 140 pp.]²

- Is there a single framework that can explain the rise of all Mafias under study?
- Were the vory-v-zakone a mafia?
- Compare and contrast Fentress’ and Gambetta’s account of the rise of the Sicilian Mafia.
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Week 3
Origin of the Mafias continued (Italian American Mafia, Triads); Resources Mafias use
(Information gathering and Intelligence; Violence; Reputation; Advertising)

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Required Readings:

Chu, pp. 11-21, 31-35. Also in Varese 2010.

Gambetta, ch. 2.

[Approx. 120]³

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- How different is the emergence of the Italian American mafia from the rest?
- How can we account through a property-right based model for the emergence of the Triads in Hong?
Required Readings:

Gambetta, ch. 6. Also in Varese 2010.

[Approx. 120]†

- What role does information play in the day-to-day operation of a Mafia? And violence?
- How does a mafia go about collecting reliable information?
- What is the role of reputation in the underworld?
- Since Mafias cannot advertise themselves publicly, which devices do they use?
- Are mafias organized in a hierarchical fashion or as loose networks? And why?
- Why there are no women in the mafia?
- Why do Mafias have rituals?
- Do Strict Roles Obtain or Each Member Can Be Asked to Perform any Task? Are Delicate Jobs Assigned to Outsiders? i.e. murders are carried out by professional killers or mafia members?
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Week 5
Organization (cnt): Bosses [e.g. age, profession, death]; Role of women; Internal norms [e.g. introduction; inheritance; expulsion; punishment]; External norms.
What Mafias do in the Overworld.

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Required Readings:


Gambetta, ch. 8. Also in Varese 2010.
Chu, 53-76 and 83-106. Also in Varese 2010.
Varese, 2001. ch. 5.

[Approx. 160 pp.]

- Why are Bosses older in the Sicilian and Italian American Mafias than in the Camorra and 'Ndrangheta?
- Which norms are common across mafias and which ones are specific? Any idea why?
- What is the role of the Mafia in the legal economy?
- Which sectors of the economy are more vulnerable to mafia penetration?
- In what sense is the Mafia enforcing cartel agreements? And what are the economic consequences of mafia-controlled cartels? And the conditions for disappearance of mafia-controlled cartels?
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Week 6

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Required Readings:

Gambetta, ch. 9. Also in Varese 2010.


[Approx. 160 pp.]6

- What are the features of illegal markets?
- The mafia-enforced cartel over tobacco smuggling in Southern Italy lasted from 1973 to 1979. Why did it collapse?
- Why is the drug trade extremely destabilizing for criminal organizations? Under what condition can an insurgent group turn into a Mafia?
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Week 7
The Transplantation of Mafias

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Required Readings:

Calderoni, F et al. 2015. The Italian mafias in the world: A systematic assessment of the mobility of criminal groups. European Journal of Criminology.

[Approx. 160 pp.]7

• “Al Qaeda is to terror what the Mafia is to crime. But its goal is not making money; its goal is remaking the world and imposing its radical beliefs on people everywhere.” George W. Bush. Given this week’s readings, do you agree?
• How easy can Mafias migrate out of their original territory?
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Week 8
Mafia and Terrorism; The Decline of Mafias; Revision

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[Approx. 35 pp.]

- Under which conditions do Mafias decline?
1. The Study of Mafias: Network Analysis; Content Analysis; Historical Comparative Sociology; Principal-Agent Models


2. Co-operation between Mafias and States


3. Anti-Mafia Policies


4. Mafia and Popular Culture

Gambetta, ch. 6.
ADDITIONAL (OPTIONAL) READINGS for term’s topics:

1 Additional Readings:


2 Additional Readings:

Hill, P.,*The Japanese Mafia* (Oxford University Press, 2003), Chapter 2 (‘Yakuza Evolution’), pp. 36-64.


3 Additional Readings:


4 Additional Readings:

Additional Readings:


Additional Readings:


Additional Readings:

pp.148-166.