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Constructing criminals: the creation of identity within criminal mafias

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PhD

June 2013

Keele University

Abstract

Constructing criminals: the creation of identity within criminal mafias

This thesis seeks to demonstrate that there has been a change in the social and cultural aspects of established organised criminal sub-cultures by observing the changes that have taken place in how identity is constructed. The literature is comparatively lacking in emphasis when compared to information about specific criminal activities and the threat of the organisations. This study finds that the social and cultural dimensions of established organised criminal sub-cultures can be equally important and indicative of changes in those organisations.

This thesis analyses the change in how established organised criminal sub-cultures, or mafias, have perceived and used identity over the last twenty years and asks whether this can be indicative of a change in the social and cultural model of these organisations. The study is comparative and will focus on how identity in four distinct mafias from across the world - the Russian mafiya, Sicilian mafia, the Japanese yakuza and the Chinese triads - is constructed and how this has changed. The Russian mafiya was the first of the established organised criminal sub-cultures to demonstrate this change whereby identity was used in a different way from its criminal underworld roots. The study also analyses the literature available from gang studies to ask whether the recognised focus upon identity can be interpreted with reference to the established organised criminal sub-cultures.

This thesis considers that a criminal identity is constructed through a variety of customs and behaviours including mythology and legend, language and oral traditions and the visual image that a group portrays. A contextual approach is proposed, whereby organisations create and negotiate criminal identities at different scales, by which a street level identity might be more distinctive.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to all those who gave me the possibility to complete this thesis. I want to thank Dr Mark Galeotti for starting me along this path and for his inspiration, enthusiasm and knowledge along the way and Dr Kathleen Cushing and Professor Joe Andrew for their guidance, support and patience.

I would like to especially thank my husband and parents whose encouragement and belief in me have never faltered.

Figure 14: Dorsal tattoo, D Baldayev, D Murrey, S Sorrell, S Vasiliev, Russian Criminal Tattoo Encyclopaedia Volume III (London, 2008)

Figure 15: Russian gravestones, 'Tasteless extravagance of Russian gangsters' tombstones revealed' The Telegraph, 08 November 2009 http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/6530027/Tasteless-extravagance-of-Russian-gangsters-tombstones-revealed.html

<u>Glossary</u>

Artel: a Russian institution similar to a European guild.

Avtoritety: criminal leaders, powerful, wealthy and influential members of the criminal network.

Avvertimento: a symbolic warning used by the Sicilian mafia for example, a cross of pebbles in a field or a small heap of salt.

Azukarinin: guarantors in a yakuza ceremony who oversaw the ceremony and mixed the sake with salt and fish scales which was poured into cups.

Bakuto: traditional Japanese gamblers.

Besprizornye: a Russian term for the homeless, rootless, orphaned children whose numbers rose after the First World War, the Revolution and the Civil War and who turned to crime to survive.

Blatnye: the ordinary rank and file members of the Russian *vorovskoi mir*.

Bushido: the samurai spirit.

Chiao: meaning a sect, a term used for a Chinese secret society.

***Consigli*:** a term that refers to advice from well-meaning friends and is used as a threat by the Sicilian mafia.

GULAG: an acronym, meaning *Glavnoe upravlenie lagerei,* or Main Camp Administration. The word Gulag came to refer to the administration and the whole of the Soviet labour camp system itself.

Giri: a moral obligation, a strong sense of duty felt between members and is described as the 'social cloth' that binds much of Japan together.

***Girikake*:** the collective term for yakuza ceremonies.

Hatamoto yakko: 'servants of the shogun' a gang of *ronin* who lived separately, known as *hatamoto yakko* or *kabuki mono* 'the crazy ones'.

***Hui*:** an association, a term used for a Chinese secret society.

Ikka: a yakuza gang.

***Jiageya*:** land turners or 'land raising specialists' who were used by companies to attain desirable properties, the yakuza carried out this work.

Jingi: honour and humanity, though it came to mean the correct yakuza behaviour specifically with regard to formal greetings.

Machi yakko: servants of the town. These were gangs of clerks, shopkeepers, innkeepers, artisans and labourers who were organised by local construction bosses and arose to enforce order and defend the people. They also operated as mutual aid societies for victims of the Tokugawa era. These included farmers who had found themselves without land due to land taxes, debtors and warriors who were without masters.

Ninjo: is emotion, human compassion and the ability to empathise with people, for example, generosity or sympathy toward the weak and disadvantaged.

Oicho-kabu: traditional Japanese card game.

Omertà: a code of silence with regard to the authorities.

Otokodate: a chivalrous commoner.

Oyabun-kobun: a hierarchical relationships 'father role – child role.' The *oyabun* provides advice, protection and help, and in return is supposed to receive the unanswering loyalty and service of his *kobun* whenever needed.

Pakhany: senior *vory v zakone*, who also controlled gangs.

Ronin: masterless samurai who wandered across the country looking for employment or, failing this, found other means of surviving, through thievery and criminal methods, or by preying on townspeople and peasants.

Rotwelsch: a language used by German vagrants and thieves across Europe including Venice, Germany and Switzerland. The language was based on German but also contained words from Yiddish, Italian, Romany and other languages and was used among travellers and craftsmen from the middle ages onwards, before becoming associated with thieves and false beggars.

Sfregio: a cut across the face which was a form of punishment used for traitors by the Sicilian mafia it can also mean an insult or affront which makes someone lose face.

Sokaiya: a form of Japanese corporate extortion in which members bought a small number of shares in a business so that they were able to attend the shareholder meetings.

Such'ya voina: a violent internal war known as the Scabs' War or Bitches war which took place from the late 1940s to the early 1950s within the *vorovskoi mir.*

Tekiya: street peddlers.

Teuchi: is literally 'hand-striking', a conflict resolution ceremony.

Vorovskoi mir: the Russian criminal underworld, or thieves' world.

Vory v zakone: a fraternity of professional thieves who were figures of authority within the *vorovskoi mir* who may have little direct power but are held in respect often acting as mediators and arbitrators, and the authorities the elite of the underworld.

Yubitsume: the voluntary sacrifice of a finger by a yakuza to demonstrate commitment to resolve an issue.

*Zhigani***:** juvenile criminal groups led by political criminals following the Russian revolution.

Chapter One – Introduction

In a New York courtroom in March 1992 Sammy 'the bull' Gravano was sworn in to testify against his boss, John Gotti.[1] As his testimony began, Joey D'Angelo rose from his seat, stared at Gravano and left the courtroom, later returning in an attempt to unnerve Gravano.[2] This incident mirrored a scene from the film, *Godfather: Part II* and the reference was not lost on Gravano who was angered that someone he had helped to raise was used in such a way.

In the Tōei film studio around 1973, a yakuza gang boss attended a private screening of a film *Battles Without Honour and Humanity: Proxy War* to check his portrayal before it was released.[3] Yakuza bosses not only took an interest in their portrayal in existing films, they also commissioned the production of films in the yakuza genre.[4]

Criminals are constructed in a variety of ways and the influence and relationship between films and criminals reflect this. Films can offer what Gambetta calls a 'common knowledge', a way of establishing agreed, recognisable signals of how a member of a criminal organisation should

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[1] John Gotti was the boss of the New York Gambino crime family until he was convicted in 1992.
[2] A. May 'Sammy Testifies'
http://www.trutv.com/library/crime/gangsters_outlaws/mob_bosses/gravano/testifies_20.html
Whilst this reference may be somewhat dubious, the alleged incident nicely encapsulates the interplay of identity and image to be explored in this dissertation.
[3] C. Desjardins, *Outlaw Masters of Japanese Film* (London, 2005), 23 cited in F. Varese 'The Secret History of Japanese Cinema', *Global Crime* 7/1 (February 2006), 105-124 here 117.
[4] Varese 'The Secret History of Japanese Cinema', 118.

speak, behave and dress which informs the audience.[5] Gravano admitted that *The Godfather* film had influenced his own life whereby he repeated and used lines from the film such as 'I'm going to make you an offer you cannot refuse' and 'If you have an enemy, that enemy becomes my enemy'.[6] In this he was echoing Santino 'Sonny' Corleone from *The Godfather* film.

Identity within a mafia can not only communicate signals and reinforce and create solidarity; it can also indicate any changes in the behaviour and attitudes of the group. In this thesis I explore the cultural and social aspect of the mafia by examining features that have often been neglected, namely that which creates a mafia, as well as the image a mafia creates and projects via visual appearance, lifestyle, language and behaviour. 'Constructing criminals' is about trying to generate an idea of how a member of the mafia is formed, how he is shaped as well as to examine and explain some of the behaviour associated with the mafia, such as why people join these organisations, what is the appeal of the mafia, what drives them and their beliefs. I believe that the image the mafia generates is important; it influences public perception and behaviour as well as relationships with other gangs and criminal groups. By focusing upon the identity of established organised criminal sub-cultures such as the Sicilian Cosa Nostra and the yakuza, it is possible to establish that there has been a move away from such groups constituting for themselves a cultural framework towards an identity that has more in common with

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[5] D. Gambetta, *Codes of the Underworld: How Criminals Communicate* (Princeton and Oxford, 2011), 266.
[6] *New York Times Magazine*, (2 January 2000) cited in Gambetta, *Codes of the Underworld*, 271.

business models. Cultural ideas are shrinking and changing and examining how identity has changed can demonstrate this.

The thesis will be a comparative study in the sense that I will draw upon several international mafias to examine their behaviour and cultural orientations and analyse these areas to assess how important image is to a mafia, as well as how they use it and why. Other key questions include: to what extent are certain characteristics individual to one particular national mafia and what stretches across continents and is reflected in the different mafias from different countries? In other words, are there commonalities between the different mafias or do the specific national and regional circumstances have a stronger influence? I have chosen four distinct mafias: the Sicilian Cosa Nostra, the triads, the yakuza and the Russian mafiya. There are a limited number of established mafias that operate worldwide and I have selected four different mafias that each have strong national identities and histories and all provide cultural markers or aspects that can be studied, for example the established mythology and presented claim to a historically respected lineage of the triads or the rituals of the yakuza. They are diverse in their backgrounds in that they originate from various parts of the world with different environments, different political systems and a different historical context for the emergence of each particular group. These mafias vary in how established they are, in their relationship with wider society, their national history and culture and their interaction internationally. They thus present a broad spectrum of mafias across the world. The Russian mafiya was the first established mafia to move away from a structured identity that influences

different areas of its members' life, by studying it alongside other mafias it is possible to determine if it is a change that is identifiable in other mafias or if it is particular to that organisation.

I will also investigate the messages and codes that the mafia utilise in terms of language, tattoos, images and symbols including those that are intended for use internally or between criminal gangs as well as those that make an external impact and demonstrate to people with whom they are dealing also assessing the extent to which these have changed. Information about the individual and the gang can be extracted from these messages and codes, including the dynamics of a gang, their beliefs, past crimes or a history of the individual, for example, where the person had been incarcerated or when he had joined the criminal organisation.

I will also consider the various masks that the mafia wear; by this I mean the different images or faces that are portrayed to different people at different times in an attempt to control the way the organisation is perceived by others in order to be successful and continue to survive. I will examine the various relationships of the mafia, including those with government agencies and society, along with the issue of why certain mafias appear to be almost accepted by the public. The difficulty in combating the mafia is hindered in some circumstances by the fact that they are not perceived as an external enemy that is easy to identify and whose villainy can be easily established. Rather they encompass something more embedded in the community, with complex and messy networks that can include political ties and the infiltration

of the official agencies and legitimate institutions which are trying to battle against them. The role of an individual mafioso or yakuza, for example, may be considered by the community in which he is based as functional rather than criminal. This is an interesting concept with regard to identity because seemingly the more accessible elements of a criminal identity become, the less structured and informative the identity becomes to that criminal group.

The majority of the sources used in this thesis are secondary, as the range of literature required to compare the established organised criminal sub-cultures discussed in this thesis covers the Russian, Chinese, Japanese and Italian languages as well as the nationalities of some of the gangs explored. In order to understand the social and cultural aspect of all of these organisations it has been essential to use a wide range of secondary materials. I have identified key sources and authors for specific criminal organisations, such as Gambetta and his work surrounding the Sicilian mafia[7] and Varese and his work on the Russian mafiya[8] as well as a range of gang literature that has an established body of work on social and cultural aspects of criminal groups from which to draw. These have been used in combination with key sources on identity such as Hobsbawm's *Bandits*[9] and Gambetta's *Codes of the Underworld*[10]*,* alongside works that discuss specific elements of identity in more details such as language and tattoos. The reliance on a range of secondary literature is not without its potential problems, not least of all in terms of particular linguistic resonances that may have been lost in translation. That said, the

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[7] D. Gambetta, *The Sicilian Mafia the Business of Private Protection* (Cambridge, 1993).
[8] F. Varese, *The Russian Mafia* (Oxford, 2001).
[9] E. Hobsbawm, *Bandits* (London, Abacus, 2001).
[10] Gambetta, *Codes of the Underworld.*

extensive comparative and methodological frameworks employed in this dissertation draw from a range of disciplines to build up a compelling analysis of the factors and methods by and through which criminal sub-cultures constructed their identities. This dissertation, thus, is a blended historical study that incorporates perspectives from sociology, criminology and cultural anthropology to understand how criminal identities were constructed.

Despite a comprehensive body of literature surrounding the topic of organised crime, there is a gap in relation to the study of the cultural and social aspects of the mafia. Modern states and governments are focused upon protection and managing risk which has led to studies on the actual crimes in which these mafias play a part and how much of a security risk they present. This focus upon security and protection has shaped theoretical questions about organised crime including how it emerges, its structures and the risk it carries along with details of the actual crimes. The social and culture aspects regarding the history of mafias, the meaning of their symbols and their culture has not been considered to its full potential. Yet by studying how the identity of criminal groups is used and has changed, it is possible to observe how the framework of a criminal sub-culture has changed along with the direction it is travelling in. I am not attempting to argue that mafias are tightly knit and organised units which all have elaborate and proscribed rituals, traditions and customs which must be adhered to or that they run themselves as secret societies that can be neatly explained. Mafias can have a loose structure and complex social networks which are not unified and are influenced by power, violence, competition, rivalry and conflict, all of which change over time.

Organised crime is showing no signs of disappearing, yet the organised criminal models as cultural ideas are diminishing in importance and altering in use. Within an organised crime setting, the cultural framework influences personal elements of an individual's life not just the criminal operations. This traditional model has a cultural context that defines the mindset of the people who operate within it and plays a part in everything they do. Central to the cultural models are the shared experiences and values which guide behaviour and actions. If a group has a shared understanding and symbols which are expressed as cultural norms and practices, it provides a sense of association and a social definition that distinguishes them from other groups.

By considering the models of organised crime it is possible, in part, to map and identify changes in mafias. Jay Albanese proposed a threefold classification of organised crime: a hierarchical model, a patron-client model and an enterprise model.[11] These models referred originally to the American Cosa Nostra. The hierarchical model is a traditional model of the Cosa Nostra as a nationwide bureaucratic organisation, whereas the patron-client model views the Cosa Nostra as embedded in local or ethnic networks. The enterprise model centres on the economic activities and the primacy of market forces over group structures. I believe that there has been increased focus by mafias in the last twenty years on business-based structures and decisions with less regard for the local and cultural networks which were traditionally important.

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[11] J. Albanese, *Organized Crime in America* 2nd Edition (Cincinnati, 1989), 91.

Halstead considers models of organised crime in more detail by observing the specific social conditions that are assumed to be responsible for and encourage the emergence of organised crime at a micro- and macro-level. For example, at a micro-level she considers those who have an interest in an illegal enterprise and the power relationships that connect those interests whilst at a macro-level she highlights illegal markets and the external regulations that influence them.[12] Halstead emphasises two broad categories: group-focused models and economic models and considers different aspects such as the structure, activities and social embeddedness of criminal groups.

William and Godson identify several potentially predictive models that anticipate the evolution of organised crime, for instance, political models that explain an increase in particular types of crime as dependent upon the government, whether a particularly weak or authoritarian government. Economic models attempt to predict organised criminal behaviour with regard to the dynamics of supply and demand and the levels of control of illegal goods and services.[13] Social models emphasise the cultural basis for organised crime, the idea of criminal networks as a social system, and the importance of trust and bonding mechanisms as the basis for criminal organisation.[14]

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[12] B. Halstead, 'The Use of Models in the Analysis of Organized Crime and Development of Policy', *Transnational Organized Crime*, 4/1 (1998), 1-24, here 16.
[13] P. William and R. Godson, 'Anticipating Organized and Transnational Crime', *Crime, Law and Social Change*, 37/4 (2002), 311-355, here 322-328.
[14] *Ibid.*, 335-339.

Established organised criminal sub-cultures, however, do not exist in a vacuum. The models are often created considering specific types of organised crime that emerged under specific historical and cultural conditions.[15] Klaus von Lampe argues that any meaningful model of organised crime has to include six basic elements, three representing organised crime: the people who cooperate in rational activities; the structures that connect these people; and the criminal activities that they are involved in and three environmental factors: the society; the government; and the realm of public discourse such as the media.[16] Organised crime needs organised criminals and these are at least in part a product of the social environment and society they operate within.[17]

The traditional social models of organised crime are decreasing in importance for established organised criminal sub-cultures such as the Sicilian Cosa Nostra, the yakuza and the triads. Instead they are operating increasingly like the Russian mafiya, as flexible criminal networks that do not require an established social system and focus upon supply, demand and control and use of illegal goods and services.

If, as I argue, the cultural model is in decline, then the relationship between how a mafia interacts with and is perceived by wider society is being

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[15] K. V. Lampe, 'The Use of Models in the Study of Organised Crime', cited in G. Antonopoulos, M. Groenhuijsen, J.Harvey, T. Kooijmans, A. Maljevic, K. V. Lampe eds., *Usual and unusual organising criminals in Europe and beyond: Profitable crimes, from underworld to upper world* (Apeldoorn, 2011), 291-306, here 293.

[16] K. V. Lampe, 'The Use of Models in the Study of Organized Crime' Paper presented at the 2003 conference of the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) Marburg, Germany, 19 September 2003 http://www.organized-crime.de/modelsofoc.htm.

[17] *Ibid.*

redefined. By considering the cultural dimension of a mafia which has in recent years often been overlooked it is possible to see how life has changed for established criminal mafias. Social factors can influence the shape of criminal structures, the demand for particular illicit goods and the stance of the government with regard to law enforcement and crime prevention policies or by creating opportunities through policies such as prohibition in America in the 1920s or perestroika in the mid-1980s in the former Soviet Union. The media can also enable attention to be raised or shifted to a certain area or certain criminal groups.[18]

Organised crime operating within a business model does not imply that criminal sub-cultures would rely upon legal methods, turn into legitimate organisations or reduce the threat that they pose. Antonino Calderone describes an element of this distinction in his testimony about the Sicilian mafia published by Arlachhi 'Mafia families are business enterprises, and today's mafiosi are full-fledged entrepreneurs. But the true meaning of being a mafioso, a man of honor, cannot be identified solely with market forces.'[19] If in one way the criminals operate and employ methods similar to a business, in another they will still rely upon traditional methods for example, money-laundering is used to prevent association with criminal activity, hide the origin of illegal money, prevent its seizure and enable it to be used for reinvestment in the future. Lupo in *History of the Mafia* argues that the mafia, a phenomenon that was originally described as traditional and predicted to die

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[18] Lampe, 'The Use of Models in the Study of Organized Crime' http://www.organized-crime.de/modelsofoc.htm.
[19] Testimony of Antonio Calderone published by P. Arlacchi, *Men of Dishonor: Inside the Sicilian Mafia*, (New York, 1993), 8.

out as society progressed has managed to survive the process of modernisation and that modern life does not necessarily disagree with the mafia.[20] Lupo contends that it is first and foremost the mafia that describes itself as a way of life and form of behaviour, an expression of traditional society that creates an ideology which aims to create consensus in wider society and coherence within the organisation. This is an ideology, Lupo believes, that contains self-persuasion, ambition and propaganda rather than actual reality.[21]

It is the transformation of how that ideology of identity that the mafia create may have changed that will be explored throughout this dissertation, how mafias have moved away from a structured identity that influences different areas of its members' life. By assessing how identity has changed it is possible to highlight how mafias as organisations have also changed.

I.   Dissertation Outline

In order to explore the extent to which criminals are 'constructed' Chapter two will firstly consider and explain the definitions that will be integral to the thesis, such as 'mafia' 'organised crime' and 'gangs' and how I will use them, as often these words are used interchangeably.

Chapter three will look at and comment upon the literature that is available on imagined communities, focusing in particular on how organisations and

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[20] S. Lupo, *History of the Mafia*, (New York, 2009), 10.
[21] *Ibid.*, 12.

individuals create and perpetuate groupings and the constraints they face. Throughout this dissertation I refer to a mafia as a sub-culture, in this chapter I will define and consider this term further.

The following three chapters will look at specific examples from the four mafias that have been chosen as case studies: the Sicilian Cosa Nostra, the triads, the yakuza and the Russian mafiya. Chapter four focuses upon mythology, especially ideas and constructions of heritage and ancestry that are an important element of some criminal sub-cultures. For example, the yakuza and the triads use mythology to help condition the perceptions held by gang members and the general public of the place they hold within wider society. Traditions knit generations together and create a link between members from the past and present to produce a more cohesive atmosphere; without it, generational conflict can ensue as arguments develop over the direction of the organisation.

Chapter five addresses the languages which are an important source for internal cohesion and an expression of the common identity of a group. I will explore the verbal indicators which function towards creating an identity, how these are used and what role they fulfil. The languages of criminal underworlds are not static but fluid and because they can be indicative of the group which uses them, as they change so does the language.

Chapter six analyses the visual projection of identity, the clothes, accessories and tattoos that adorn bodies, what these images mean, where they are worn

and why. Visual images help the group to promote a feeling of belonging to a culture and each individual can reinforce this. These visual images and social codes display who an individual is and indicate a social identity and help the group promote a feeling of belonging to a culture. Shared symbols help to maintain internal cohesion in groups. They can facilitate the inclusion of group members and the exclusion of outsiders.

Chapter seven concludes the thesis by considering how identity has changed within established organised criminal sub-cultures and the implication of this change. It highlights the value of considering the cultural aspect of the mafia and demonstrates the importance of understanding identity.

To understand the value of identity to a criminal organisation, it is important to firstly consider in Chapter two the distinctions between those organisations to understand how that specific identity is constructed. By studying a number of international mafias it also possible to plot any trends in identity and use research on gangs which is more comprehensive in the cultural and social aspect of gang life to assist in extrapolating how criminal identity is constructed.

Chapter Two - Mafia versus Organised Crime

The terms mafia, organised crime and even gangs have become interlinked and are often used interchangeably to describe various criminal groups. In this chapter I will look at the terminology and attempt to clarify how I categorise each group. It is important to be aware of the distinctions and differences to fully understand the construction of identity of specific organisations and how that identity may have changed. I will also take this opportunity to take a closer look at some of the criminal groupings I will be analysing throughout this thesis to provide an insight into their structure and world.

I.   Organised Crime

Indiscriminate use has undermined the usefulness of the term 'organised crime'. Von Lampe describes the term as an ever-changing and contradictory construct that does not have one central understanding.[22] Schelling observes that organised crime does not mean simply crime that is organised.[23] Even a fairly straightforward robbery will involve an amount of planning and organisation but such an incident is not an example of organised crime but what could be described as project crime.[24] That is not to say that organised criminals do not carry out project crimes but rather that these types of activities do not define their organisation.

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[22] K. von Lampe, 'Organised Crime in Europe: Conceptions and Realities', *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*, 2/1 (2008), 7-17, here 7.
[23] T. Schelling, *Choice and Consequence* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1984), 180.
[24] P. Hill, *The Japanese Mafia: Yakuza, Law and the State* (Oxford, 2003), 7.

Von Lampe highlights three different notions about the nature of organised crime. The first is a focus on the crime, a specific type of criminal activity that is distinguished by a degree of sophistication and rationality in contrast to impulsive or infrequent criminal behaviour. The second concentrates on the collective organisation, how individuals are linked to one another. The third notion is the concentration of power either within the underworld or through an alliance with the political and economic elite.[25] Hill attributes the existence of organised crime to its functions as a business that satisfies a demand for goods and services such as illegal drugs, gambling and sexual services among the members of the 'legitimate' world.[26] Schelling highlighted that organised criminal group's aim is to achieve monopolistic control over the illegal markets in which they are active.[27] This view, however, was criticised by Reuter who suggested that a stress on monopolistic control was not supported by evidence and that organisations had involvement in a range of criminal activities.[28] Organised criminal groups have resilience, a hierarchical structure and an involvement in various criminal activities. Hill also believes that these attributes of organised crime are accompanied by a desire to control criminal activity and a central involvement in illegal markets; otherwise the description could include business corporations that are involved in bribery, fraud and environmental crimes.[29]

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[25] K. von Lampe, 'Organised Crime in Europe: Conceptions and Realities', 7.
[26] Hill, *The Japanese Mafia*, 8.
[27] Schelling, *Choice and Consequence,* 180.
[28] P. Reuter, *The Organization of Illegal Markets – An Economic Analysis* (Washington, 1985), 185.
[29] Hill, *The Japanese Mafia*, 8.

Schelling contends that organised criminals are not only concerned with the monopolisation of illegal markets but also the extortion and protection of those markets. In this sense organised crime is not just criminal business: it is criminal government.[30] In this description Schelling's organised crime sounds like a mafia.

Von Lampe argues that a lot of the confusion in the debate on organised crime can be explained by the failure to realise that there are different ways to conceptualise organised crime and different approaches lead to different assessments of the same situation. The overall picture of organised crime is not a static one; the organisations are diverse and variable.[31]

Albanese considers the authors who have attempted to define organised crime and, based on a consensus of writers over the last 35 years, defined organised crime in the following way:

> Organised crime is a continuing criminal enterprise that rationally works to profit from illicit activities that are often in great public demand. Its continuing existence is maintained through the use of force, threats, monopoly control, and/or the corruption of public officials.[32]

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[30] Hill, *The Japanese Mafia*, 10.
[31] K. von Lampe, 'Organised Crime in Europe: Conceptions and Realities', 7.
[32] J. S. Albanese, 'North American Organised Crime', *Global Crime,* 6/1 (February 2004), 8-18 here 10.

This definition considers why the organisation works and how it is maintained and is useful to compare with the definitions of a mafia to illustrate what distinguishes a mafia further.

II.   Mafia

A mafia is a specific form of organised crime. Von Lampe distinguishes criminal structures that serve social functions such as the Sicilian mafia, Russian *vory v zakone* and Chinese triads from the entrepreneurial criminal structures by the indirect support that non-economic structures offer, such as providing status, reinforcing deviant values, and providing a forum for the exchange of information.[33] He also distinguishes another type of criminal structure that can serve quasi-governmental functions by establishing and enforcing rules to live by and resolving arguments in an identified market or area, an example of the Sicilian mafia.[34] This demonstrates the difference between a traditional hierarchically-structured mafia such as the Sicilian mafia in what von Lampe describes as territorially-based associations compared to the fraternal association of the Russian mafiya. Von Lampe describes a fraternal association as one that transcend territorially-based groups rather than exerting controls themselves.[35]

Gambetta identifies the essential characteristic of the mafia as 'a specific economic enterprise, an industry which produces, promotes, and sells private

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[33] K. von Lampe, 'Organised Crime in Europe: Conceptions and Realities', 8.
[34] *Ibid.*, 8.
[35] *Ibid.*, 11.

protection.'[36] He thus distinguishes between mafia and organised crime as the mafia supplying the 'organising force' compared to organised crime as a collection of criminal entrepreneurs who operate as independent economic agents that in certain circumstances are licensed and protected by mafia.[37]

Mafia is used as a general term for established criminal cultures not just Sicilian or Italian, in *Mafias on the Move*, Varese considers the world of international crime and the relationship between globalisation and organised crime in general and mafias specifically.[38] He identifies those organisations that can be referred to collectively as mafia as: the 'Ndrangheta, the Sicilian Cosa Nostra, the Italian American mafia, the Hong Kong Taiwanese triads, the Solntsevskaya and other Russian *gruppirovki* and the Japanese yakuza.[39] Hill describes a mafia as a form of organised crime that seeks to monopolise the production and distribution of certain products in the underworld.[40] He recognises the central characteristics shared by mafias as the provision of protection to consumers who, whether due to the inadequacies of the state or the illegality of the situation, could not find protection elsewhere.[41] Varese explains this further by distinguishing a mafia as a specific type of criminal organisation that supplies protection in the territory of origin and identifies that these groups aspire to govern others in both the underworld and 'upper world' by providing criminal protection.[42] Examples of criminal protection include

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[36] Gambetta, *The Sicilian Mafia*, 1.
[37] *Ibid.*, 227.
[38] F. Varese, *Mafias on the Move: How Organized Crime Conquers New Territories* (Princeton/Oxford, 2011), 17.
[39] *Ibid.*, 18.
[40] Hill, *The Japanese Mafia*, 9.
[41] *Ibid.*, 35.
[42] Varese, *Mafias on the Move*, 18.

protection against extortion, protection against theft and police harassment, the settlement of disputes and the intimidation of others for the benefit of the employer.[43]

Throughout this thesis I consider criminal groups that have a sub-culture, a term I study in more detail in Chapter three. Criminal groups that are distinctive and separate from mainstream society and have a way of life that makes the world understandable to the members of that group such as a form of language, a code of tattoos or a set of rituals or behaviour.

III.   Specific Mafias

The Sicilian Mafia

The Sicilian mafia was embedded in Mediterranean culture, arising from a need to take control of security due to the weakness of the ruling Italian state. The weakness of the Italian state in the nineteenth century led the people of Sicily to seek arrangements for the security of their lives, property and business. This enabled informal groups such as the mafia to achieve powerful positions and made it difficult for the state to win the loyalty of the public.

The Sicilian mafia is not a single centralised organisation, information that came from a number of mafiosi who provided evidence in exchange for state protection such as that from Tommaso Buscetta's confession to Judge

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[43] Varese, *Mafias on the Move*, 18.

Falcone and Vincenzo Marsala, Salvatore Contorno and Antonino Calderone provided an insight into its structure. The collective structure of the mafia family did not become more organised until after the 1950s, previously families were connected through a system of independent groups by tradition and protected markets or casual bargaining. Since the end of the 1950s organisation has become more systematic including at least one cartel per province to incorporate all Sicilian families.[44] The families formed part of a *commissione*, also known as *cupola* or *provincla* each with a boss of a group or mafia family.[45] Each family according to Antonino Calderone's testimony is made up of men of honour or 'soldiers', *decina* , bosses who head up groups of soldiers maybe 5, 10, 20 or even 30 men depending upon the size of the family, the vice representative and the head of the family, the representative.[46] There is also a council, *consiglieri* made up of ordinary men of honour who have been chosen for this important role which involves close proximity to the representative, influencing, informing and presenting information to him.[47] The nomination of a family boss or representative took place through elections with every member receiving the right to vote either by public declaration through the raising of hands or within large families by poll, although Gambetta explains that in some cases the vote was a legitimisation of a choice.[48]

Lupo contests the historical role of the mafia as being used by feudal landowners to uphold their power but rather sees them as the organisers of

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[44] Gambetta, *The Sicilian Mafia*, 110.
[45] *Ibid.*,112.
[46] Testimony of Antonio Calderone published by Arlacchi, *Men of Dishonor,* 33.
[47] *Ibid.*, 34.
[48] Gambetta, *The Sicilian Mafia*, 111.

cooperatives who secured power by acting as intermediaries in the transfer of land from large landowners to peasants in the post-war years.[49] The mafia groups set out a system of control over territory from the networks of *guardianie* (custodianships) and seized control of both legitimate and illegitimate new businesses including smuggling, cattle rustling and interceding into long distance trade such as citrus fruit.[50]

The Camorra

The Camorra developed in Naples and has a less linear history than that of the Sicilian mafia but a similar array of possible originating histories. In *See Naples and Die,* Behan states that it is likely that the Camorra emerged as a result of the failure of the Neapolitan Republic which was proclaimed in 1799. Following this, a number of secret societies were created by the middle class and the Camorra became the voice for ordinary people.[51] A lack of a clear hierarchy and division of interests differentiates the Camorra from the mafia which has also made the organisation difficult to combat and eradicate.

The North American Mafia

North American organised crime began with an influx of immigration that coincided with the first serious phase of industrialisation and urbanisation. Gangs in New York emerged as early as 1830 in the once prosperous but crumbling Five Points area which was built on a swamp that had become so

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[49] Lupo *History of the Mafia*, 8.
[50] *Ibid.*, 9.
[51] T. Behan, *See Naples and Die: The Camorra and Organized Crime* (London/New York, 2009), 21.

unhealthy that the only people living there were the poor Irish immigrants and freed slaves. By the 1860s the area was rife with vice and crime, an abundance of saloons, speakeasies and brothels through which unsurprisingly many gangs emerged, each with their own territory: the Forty Thieves, Kerryonians, Chicesters, Roach Guards, Plug Uglies and the Dead Rabbits.[52] By the end of the nineteenth century the biggest gangs in New York were the Five Points Gang originally known as the Whyos, full time criminals who sold violence on a sliding scale led by Paolo Vaccarelli who was known as Paul Kelly and the Eastman Gang led by Monk Eastman which was a mainly Jewish gang. The Black Hand extortion rackets followed the immigration of Italian males to the United States and Italian hit men and mafiosi began to establish themselves.

Critchley argues that although current theory emphasises 'American' factors in determining United States mafia structure and activities, Sicilian features were influential in shaping certain elements such as the internal practices in families in New York City. For example, the structure of the Morello organisation which Critchley describes as the first family in New York strongly resembled a Sicilian family or *cosche* and there were cases of dual membership of American and Sicilian Mafia with a 'letter of consent' written and sent by the boss of the Sicilian family to be accepted as 'proof' by the American boss.[53] However over time the influence that was evident in structure and ceremonies began to erode and the distinctions made between Sicilian members and others began to disappear. There were several

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[52] M. Short, *Murder Inc.: The Story of Organized Crime* (London, 2003), 33.
[53] D. Critchley, *The Origins of Organised Crime in America*, (London and New York, 2009), 61.

methods of joining the New York mafia system, through kinship, apprenticeship or from the disaffected youths in the neighbourhood.[54] In fact dual membership was forbidden after the Castellammare War of 1930 and 1931 and the first generation mafiosi were considered insular in their outlook and ill-suited to the conditions in America, criticised for being too narrow in their circles and not adopting a 'business like' approach, nicknamed 'Moustache Petes', 'Greasers', 'Greaseballs' or 'Greenhands'.[55] The Castellammare War involved mafiosi around Salvatore Maranzano, from Sicily and those from Italian sources aligned with the 1930 *capo di capi* Joseph 'Joe the Boss' Masseria. The War was a watershed in mafia history and prompted changes to admission criteria, the abolition of *capo di capi* (boss of bosses) and a ban on the Sicilian mafia joining American groups.[56]

The government was ineffective for the immigrant population, who were often too scared to go to the authorities or felt isolated due to their poor economic or cultural standing. This was an opportunity for organised crime to offer a form of protection, repression and mediation with people they appeared to relate to. The 'Tammany Hall' political system that played a major role in controlling politics in New York by regulating the nominations and patronage of the Democratic Party, often provided support and immunity for gangs if they could guarantee support. Seemingly blind to the threat organised crime posed, the government used these criminals as a tool to control employment

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[54] Critchley, *The Origins of Organised Crime in America*, 104.
[55] *Ibid.*, 200.
[56] D. Critchley, 'Buster, Maranzano and the Castellammare War', Global Crime Vol.7 No.1 (2006)

issues through trade unions, to manage voters, and in World War II to help with the invasion of Italy which resulted in immunity for some criminal bosses.

Prohibition provided the mafia and many other criminals with an excellent opportunity. The 18th Amendment to the Constitution and the Volstead Act ran from 1920 to 1933 and enabled the mafia to provide a product that the majority of ordinary American people still required, alcohol. The first contact many of the wider population of the United States had with a mafioso was as a provider of alcohol and this usually involved public admiration for finding a way around a law that very few respected or recognised. The view of 'mobster chic' rather than seeing organised crime as a violent, dangerous, grubby life had been born and also had a face, Al Capone, who was later to be on the cover of *Time* magazine.

Following gang wars from the mid-1920s until the 1940s, a new structure was created to recognise territory and minimise tension within gangs. In America there was usually one mafia syndicate or family in each city apart from New York which had five mafia crime families who retained the names of the bosses from the 1960s: the Genovese Family (named after Vito Genovese, but began with Lucky Luciano in 1931), the Gambino Family (Carlo Gambino), Colombo Family (Joe Colombo), Bonanno Family (founder Joe Bonanno) and the Lucchese Family (named after Tommy Lucchese but founded by Jack Gagliano).[57] In 1963 according to an informer, Joseph Valachi, each criminal family had a boss, under boss and a 'consigliere' who was an advisor to the

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[57] Short, *Murder Inc*, xii.

boss. Below the under boss were 'caporegimes', captains or lieutenants who each commanded a crew of 'soldiers', the lowest level of the organisation. At the top was the National Commission, a supervising body for the families that made policy, settled disputes and allocated business and territory between the families.[58]

Vory v zakone

The *vory v zakone* were fraternities of professional thieves that held respect and authority as an elite stratum within the *vorovskoi mir* (the criminal underworld, or thieves' world) which originally existed as an anti-establishment sub-culture. *Vory v zakone* means 'thieves professing the code'.[59] These thieves emerged in the 1920s and 1930s in the former Soviet Union, encouraged by the catalyst of the prison camp system throughout the Stalin era. The origins of the *vorovskoi mir* can be seen further back in the outlaw bands that existed in the Tsarist era and during the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917[60] and in the structure and organisation of the Russian beggar and thieves *artels*.[61] The *vory v zakone* demonstrated distinctive features that distinguished them as a community separate from the rest of Russian society. These professional thieves had an unwritten code or 'law' which governed many aspects of their life, including who they were, how they lived and how they interacted with others. The organisation also possessed a

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[58] Short, *Murder Inc,* 37.
[59] J. Serio and V. Razinkin, 'Thieves professing the code: The traditional role of the Vory v Zakone in Russia's Criminal World and Adaptations to a New Social Reality', *Low Intensity Conflict & Law Enforcement*, 4/1 (Summer 1995), 72-88, here 72.
[60] S. Handelman, 'The Russian 'Mafiya'' in M. Galeotti ed. *Russian and Post-Soviet Organised Crime* (Aldershot, 2002), 109.
[61] V. Chalidze, *Criminal Russia* (New York, 1977), 37. Artel is an institution similar to the European guilds.

whole hierarchy of illegal trades, a communal fund, their own language, an ideology, initiation and exclusion rituals and a code of tattoos.

A key element to the thieves' life was that a thief must sever all links with society. The *vory* were a closed fraternity, who were at war with the establishment and as such they were required to act as social outcasts. Any activities that suggested the state had control over a member were forbidden including service in any war. A thief was not allowed to have any paternalistic feelings towards his family as the *vorovskoi mir* became the new family. Ordinary criminals committed illegal activities occasionally or even systematically but still remained a member of wider society and shared, to an extent, the same culture with the rest of that society. These thieves rejected the state ideology root and branch.[62] In contrast to other organised criminal sub-cultures such as the Sicilian mafia, the Russian thieves held no interest in the socio-political affairs of the country at large.[63] The traditional view of the *vory v zakone* was that they scorned everything that was considered to be 'normal' or involved 'normal society'. This was an integral aspect of the *vorovskoi mir* which was later challenged and resulted in a dramatic transformation.

The specific purpose of the thieves' law was to determine the exact limits of the isolation from and rejection of society.[64] Their 'code' did not consist of laws that could have been recognised by the citizens of the Soviet Union, or

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[62] Y. Glazov, '"Thieves" in the USSR – A Social Phenomenon', *Survey* 22, (1976), 141-156, here 155.
[63] M. Dyomin, *The Day is Born of Darkness* (New York, 1976), 205.
[64] Chalidze, *Criminal Russia*, 48.

the official legal system. They were a set of unwritten rules that structured and governed almost all aspects of a thief's life. This code by which the thieves lived was perceived by their society as honest and uncorrupted, unlike the politics that governed the lives of the rest of society.

Despite the origins of the *vorovskoi mir* that stretched back and developed over time, the conditions under which they flourished and gained in strength are clear. The *vorovskoi mir* was a product of a prison culture which provided the proximity and opportunities that enabled the organisation to thrive and then to transform. The Gulag prison camp system was filled with millions of political prisoners and criminals were in effect co-opted as auxiliaries of the State, to keep the political prisoners in line. This was in opposition to the traditional code of the *vorovskoi mir* and led to a bloody internal war fought in the camps and known as the Scabs War. The final victors were the scabs, who learned that power, profit and protection could all be obtained through working with the State.[65] Following Stalin's death and the opening of the camps the scabs colonised the rest of the Soviet underworld and reshaped the *vorovskoi mir* in their image.

From the 1960s onwards organised crime flourished thanks to the growing corruption of the Communist Party elite and the growth of the underground economy.[66] After the Communist Party collapsed in the 1980s the criminals were able to capitalise on the situation providing alcohol to ordinary citizens during the anti-alcohol campaign and protection racketeering for the

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[65] M. Galeotti, 'The Russian Mafiya', *Global Crime*, 6/1 (February 2004), 54 – 69, here 55-56.
[66] *Ibid.*, 56.

thousands of small businesses created by Gorbachev's economic liberalisation campaign.[67] The structure and culture of the *vorovskoi mir* also changed to reflect its new environment.

The Russian mafiya does not follow a formal rigid structure; it is characterised by loose and flexible networks of semi-autonomous criminal entrepreneurs and gangs with a keen awareness of the environment in which they operate.[68] Rather than a chain of command, there are key figures within the organisation.[69] *Vory v zakone* are figures of authority within the *vorovskoi mir* who may have little direct power but are held in respect often acting as mediators and arbitrators, and the authorities (*avtoritety)* are the more conventional criminal leaders. However, even an *avtoritet* is unlikely to have a personal gang of his own that is of a significant size; normally he remains a powerful, wealthy and influential member of the criminal network.[70]

Yakuza

The Japanese yakuza or the *boryokudan* have immediate and striking features that intrigue and shock the observer, not least of which was up until 1992 their seemingly easy acceptance within Japanese society. The yakuza once held a proud and prominent place within Japanese society: gang offices were publicly advertised and the crest and name of the gang was on display.[71]

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[67] Galeotti 'The Russian Mafiya', 56.
[68] *Ibid.*, 55.
[69] *Ibid.*, 57.
[70] *Ibid.*, 57.
[71] Hill, *The Japanese Mafia*, 6.

There were even items that would be associated with businesses and corporations in other countries such as business cards and tie pins.

This seeming acceptance of the yakuza by society was reinforced by the 'history of the yakuza' or perhaps more accurately their account of the history as Hill contends: '… the yakuza mythology is important in conditioning the perceptions, held by both the gang members themselves and the wider society, of the place the yakuza/*boryokudan* hold in Japanese society.'[72] The yakuza appealed to the history of ancient Japan and cast themselves as the moral descendants of noble warriors whose aim was to uphold Japan's traditional values.[73] This image of the yakuza as a chivalrous, brave and noble group who stood as loyal, honourable members of the criminal class with roots that stemmed back to samurai warriors of feudal Japan[74] enabled an image of patriotic Robin Hood type figures to emerge and be more readily accepted by the Japanese public.[75] In *Confessions of a Yakuza*, Saga discusses the qualities required for a yakuza boss, more than just muscle or force but the kind of qualities that make members of a gang willing to die for them and an awareness of the importance of respectfulness, reputation and appearance in the local area.[76]

The yakuza stand by their mythology and adorn their office walls with pictures of great godfathers and family trees that link the groups in any way to the

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[72] Hill, *The Japanese Mafia*, 36.
[73] D. E. Kaplan and A. Dubro , *Yakuza: Japan's Criminal Underworld* (Berkley and Los Angeles, 2003), xviii.
[74] *Ibid.*, 3.
[75] *Ibid.*, xviii.
[76] J. Saga, *Confessions of a Yakuza: A Life in Japan's Underworld* (Japan, 1995), 77.

noble outlaws of old.[77] They even used this connection as a defence against the implementation of the aggressive laws to combat organised crime in Japan in 1992. In April 1992 at a public hearing in Tokyo, Tanka Keizo who was representing the yakuza gang known as Inagawa-kai declared that: 'We are yakuza, not crime organisations. Ours is a chivalrous group that dates back through history.'[78]

The yakuza had an identifiable image that included, tattoos, *yubitsume* - the voluntary sacrifice of a finger to demonstrate commitment to resolve an issue[79] – (shown in figure 1 image by Photographer Anton Kusters, found at BBC News Today In Pictures: The Yakuza http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid_9572000/9572646.stm) and the style of clothing and hair. If the image was carried off successfully then there was no need for an individual to state that he was affiliated to a yakuza gang; in fact he would not even need to speak at all. All the above factors would scream his membership and all the implications that carried: 'The member would hand over his name card, with his organisational affiliation prominently displayed in the top right-hand corner, or ensure that his tattoo and amputated fingers were visible.'[80]

The National Police Agency in Japan identified that there were twenty-five major yakuza syndicates in 2001; the three largest and most powerful were the Inagawa-kai, the Sumiyoshi-kai and the Yamaguchi-gumi, of which the

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[77] Kaplan and Dubro, *Yakuza*, 8.
[78] Hill, *The Japanese Mafia*, 201.
[79] *Ibid.*, 75.
[80] *Ibid.*, 139.

Yamaguchi-gumi was the largest.[81] The yakuza syndicates are well financed and organised indeed as Hill described it, they are: '...the criminal counterpart to the country's efficient, finely tuned corporations'[82] and are composed of groups tiered in a pyramidal structure. In the case of the Yamaguchi-gumi, the head family is comprised of men who are themselves bosses of third level groups. The hierarchical relationships within these groups are cemented by the creation of father-son (*oyabun-kobun*) and brother (*kyōdaibun*) relationships at ceremonies centred on the ritual exchange of sake. These are not usually based on actual family ties. The boss of the group will have an *oyabun-kobun* relationship with all but the most senior executives of his group who will be his 'younger brothers'. If the gang is a syndicate subgroup then the boss will, in turn, be the *kobun* of the superior group's boss. In addition gang members are subject to a code of discipline imposed both by the senior leadership of the head family and their immediate boss, backed up by punishments ranging from fines and confinement to the office to beatings, finger amputation, expulsion and, in extreme cases, death.[83]

Like most organised criminal groups, the range of illegal and legal activities that the yakuza are involved in is vast, including gambling, loan sharking, narcotics, money laundering, pornography, and entertainment. A criminal activity that is specific to Japan was a form of corporate extortion that involved *sokaiya,* members who bought a small number of shares in a business so that they were able to attend the shareholder meetings. The threat of the *sokaiya*

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[81] Kaplan and Dubro, *Yakuza*, 128-129.
[82] *Ibid.*, xviii.
[83] P. Hill, 'The changing face of the Yakuza', *Global Crime*, 6/1 (February 2004), 97-116 here 107.

disclosing information which may be embarrassing or displaying a presence usually resulted in 'compensation'. The threat of embarrassment is a very real threat within Japanese society and could present problems for the company in question. The directors of companies in Japan do not like to lose face particularly in such an undignified manner, and thus were normally prepared to pay the extortion.[84]

IV.   Gangs

Studies on gangs have long involved a stronger emphasis upon the identity of a group and the cultural and social aspect of gang life; as such they provide useful comparisons that can help illuminate criminal identities in mafias. The recognised focus upon identity within literature available from gang studies can be interpreted with reference to the established organised criminal sub-cultures to assist in deducing how criminal identity is constructed in mafias. The use of gang studies enriches the approach to understanding the construction of criminal identity and is a useful methodological instrument. There is an established range of literature surrounding cultural elements and identity across gang studies that assist in showing how criminal identity is constructed. The focus of mafia literature is comparatively lacking in emphasis when compared to information about specific criminal activities and the threat that organisation may pose and gang studies present a useful comparison to help illuminate identity in mafias.

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[84] Hill, *The Japanese Mafia*, 127.

In 1928 Frederic Thrasher defined the gang as: '… life, often rough and untamed, yet rich in elemental social processes significant to the student of society and human nature.'[85] Thrasher's description, if somewhat romanticised, remains a useful starting point. The term 'gang' has historically been used to describe certain social groups who were considered to be a major social, economic or moral problem at a given time, for example, the gangs of the nineteenth century who robbed stage coaches and banks in America such as the Doolin, Dalton and James gangs.[86] These outlaws were difficult to study due to their secretive lifestyle and fear of capture and the majority of the reports of their activities were based on second-hand accounts that could be sensationalised. Both of these factors reinforced and helped to create the mythology surrounding them, even today.

This form of economic or moral problem was not reserved to America, either now or in the nineteenth century. For instance, on 3 August 1874 a gang killing in Liverpool hit the headlines. Richard Morgan, his brother and wife were attacked by four or five members of the notorious High Rip gang following a refusal to give them money. Richard Morgan was knocked to the floor, choked and kicked all the way down the street. Trying to help her husband Alice Morgan had suffered a blow which left her deaf. This attack was carried out by Liverpool's most notorious gang at the time but other gangs such as the Logwood gang, the Lemon Street gang and the Housebreakers also terrorised the streets.[87]

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[85] F. Thrasher, *The Gang* (Chicago, 1928) cited in M. S. Jankowski, *Islands in the Street: Gangs and American Urban Society* (London, 1991), 1.
[86] Jankowski, *Islands in the Street*, 1.
[87] R. Kemp, *Gangs II* (London, 2008), 210.

During the 1920s and 1930s in America, the term gang became associated with organised crime, with a distinction between organised adult groups and adolescents. Herbert Ashbury and Thrasher identified that youth gangs were often the organisations that would feed young delinquents into organised crime.[88] The Mob became the term used for organised criminal groups and the term gang came to be used for adolescents. The two social groupings were distinct but connected by social conditions, environment and the migration of members from the gangs. This connection continued as many of the New York gangs aspired to be in the mafia and as such tried to use a hierarchical structure to imitate how they thought the mafia may look, even using terms such as 'godfather'.[89]

Thrasher placed gangs in a cultural and geographical context. The gang was isolated from mainstream society both by geography and lack of access to legitimate institutional roles. This isolation contributed to the group solidarity critical to Thrasher's account of gangs and is what prevented gangs from giving up their affiliations.[90] For most, gang life has an obsessive, even deadly attraction which constricts and diminishes the life of a member to the friendship group of the gang. The gang becomes the life and community for the individual.

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[88] Jankowski, *Islands in the Street*, 3.
[89] *Ibid.*, 70.
[90] As cited in S.H. Decker and B.V. Winkle, *Life in the Gang: Family, Friends and Violence* (Cambridge, 1996), 7.

In many of the current gang studies, a gang is defined as a group whose members meet together with some regularity over time, has a group-determined organisational structure and criteria for membership and usually involves territoriality. A gang thus is beyond the individuals who make it up at any one time.[91] For example, two of the most famous gangs thanks to music lyrics, films and certain rap artists originated in Los Angeles and are known as the Bloods and the Crips. The Crips were formed in 1969 by two black teenagers, Raymond Washington and Stanley Tookie Williams, and were originally named the Baby Avenues and later the Avenue Cribs; the term cribs stemmed from the age of the members. The reasons for the change to the Crips are unknown and suggestions include a misspelling. The gang developed into a network of sets that were loosely connected rather than being one single gang, and one of these sets, known as the Pina Street Boys, broke away following tensions between other Crip sets. In the mid-1970s the Pina Street Boys joined forces with other anti-Crip gangs and formed what became known as the Bloods. The world-wide notorious hatred between the Bloods and the Crips had begun.[92]

Gang colours are important for these two gangs. The Crips are affiliated to blue and the Bloods to red, and the gangs have even created distinctive ways of speaking to set themselves apart from each other as they fight over territory. These two major American gangs use the American grid system of town planning to create distinct boundaries. For example, in Compton, a part

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[91] C.R. Huff, ed *Gangs in America* 2nd edition (California, 1996), xviii.
[92] Kemp, *Gangs II*, 130-131.

of Los Angeles that is synonymous with gang culture, there are sixty-eight active gangs, which translates to seven gangs per square mile.[93]

The outlaw motorcycle gangs such as the Hell's Angels, the Outlaws, the Bandidos and the Pagans have each organised themselves on a national level in America and even in some cases international levels around 'charters', 'chapters' or 'mother clubs'. Within each chapter there are titles such as president, vice president, treasurer and sergeant of arms. These four gangs along with a number of smaller groups actually form the largest criminal sub-culture in America with over 7000 members plus individuals on the periphery including front-men and lawyers who look after business interests.[94]

A gang often has a leadership structure with loosely defined roles, as well as social codes that regulate certain behaviour and plans for not only the members but for the maintenance of the organisation.[95] This definition does highlight some key elements to consider when looking at a gang, for it suggests a gang with a formal infrastructure, even if that is just a recognised leader or a group of people who demand more respect and prevent the group being just a collective of people with similar interests. This, coupled with individual characteristics that demonstrate defiance and a willingness to mark their neighbourhood as their 'territory' and operate in illegal areas, clearly distinguishes it further. For example, La eMe known as the Mexican mafia is one of the oldest prison gangs in America and is able to influence street gangs outside the prison system. Mexican street gangs carry out its orders

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[93] Kemp, *Gangs II*, 133.
[94] Short, *Murder Inc*, 337.
[95] Jankowski, *Islands in the Street*, 28-29.

usually from fear of reprisal, especially if they or any of their family are or will be incarcerated. The structure of La eMe is hierarchical, comprised of a head of the organisation, four generals each with four lieutenants and each lieutenant with four sergeants. On the street every neighbourhood had a soldier, who carried out orders in an attempt to become a full member of this gang, known as a 'brother'.[96]

The neighbourhood is a very important element of a gang. Few gangs operate on a national level and a territory can be as little as a restricted number of streets. For survival a gang must integrate to a certain extent within their local community to ensure that the local residents consider them their own. A successful gang tries not to antagonise their local neighbourhood to ensure their support with regard to rival gangs and the police. The Black Disciples, for instance, sponsored community events in the housing project areas where they were based.[97]

Thrasher and most subsequent studies on gangs conclude that individuals matured out of a gang as they got older and Jankowski provided seven possible outcomes: one, the individual stays in the gang into his 30s; two, they drop out and pursue various illegal activities on their own; three, they move on to another type of organisation or association criminal or otherwise; four, they become involved in smaller groups like 'crews' where they can recreate a larger stake of the resources and respect; five, prison; six, death;

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[96] Kemp, *Gangs II*, 63.
[97] S.D. Levitt and S.J. Dubner, *Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Explores the Hidden Side of Everything* (London, 2005), 101.

or seven, a legal job.[98] However, Devitt and Dubner highlight that since high profit drugs such as crack cocaine have become readily available, the opportunity for longevity has increased. This was echoed further by Venkatesh in his observations of the Black Disciples, that the crack cocaine economy had fundamentally altered the nature of the urban street gang. [99]

There appear to be two schools of thought regarding gang organisation: either that gangs are a loose association of individuals that lack cohesion and a defined leadership, as described by Yablonsky in *The Violent Gang*,[100] or the opposite, that they have relatively well defined leadership with differentiated roles. Jankowski analysed organisational structure, with regard to the differentiated roles by hypothesising vertical/hierarchical structures. In this model, leadership was divided hierarchically and the authority and power related to the place in the line of command. Each leadership position entailed a number of official roles such as the president, the vice president and the warlord who commanded the gang when force was believed to be required. The horizontal/commission structure had roles but they were not ranked in a hierarchical structure but rather divided in responsibilities. The 'influential model' had a formal leadership that operated under the guise of informality surrounding an understanding that a leadership needed to exist, but it had no formal duties or titles; here two to four members of the group would make

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[98] Jankowski, *Islands in the Street*, 61-62.
[99] S. Venkatesh, *Gang Leader for the Day: A Rogue Sociologist Crosses the Line* (London, 2008), 35.
[100] Yablonsky, *The Violent Gang*.

important decisions with direction and goals to be considered by the collective.[101]

In many parts of the world, a gang is able to give a group that may feel alienated or disenfranchised a voice. In the study that Ross Kemp did for the television programme on Sky 1[102] and later for his books, he discussed the gangs he studied in East Timor, an island located between Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and the north coast of Australia. This island had been colonised, invaded and fought over for centuries and as such the population took pride in its warlike nature. The gangs on the island manipulated this heritage and provided their members with an identity, albeit a violent one. Ross Kemp interviewed a youth worker from the island, José Santos, who had experience of the gangs that operated in East Timor. Santos explained that the people on the island were very proud that they came from a warrior culture and thought that the gangs were corrupting that pride, honour and history.[103]

This can also be seen in the Mara Salvatrucha gangs, commonly referred to as Maras, MS or MS-13 that first emerged within Los Angeles's Salvadoran community in the 1980s. They have since spread back into Central America (primarily El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala but also Mexico) and outwards into Europe, but they are still associated with the United States. In January 2008, the FBI estimated that MS-13 operated in at least 42 states

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[101] Jankowski, *Islands in the Street*, 65-66.
[102] Ross Kemp on Gangs a documentary shown on Sky 1.
[103] Kemp, *Gangs II*, 85.

and the District of Columbia and has 6,000-10,000 members nationwide.[104]

The MS-13 are involved in a wide range of serious organised crimes, including drug and people trafficking and contract killing; the MS-13 maintain their street gang roots more than many other established groups. They are largely formed in autonomous local cliques that dominate particular territories, although, according to the FBI, this is beginning to change.[105]

In his study of young gangs, Fagan explains that the basic form of the street gang has endured for decades. The things that are important: ethnicity, fighting, status, drugs and community are themes that are as relevant today as almost half a century ago. The difference he did highlight was the use of drugs which has become more common, and the violence which has become more lethal.[106] Within a gang a killer was respected, feared and talked about, it was an opportunity to make a name, an impact. But for those gangs with a more strategic organisation such as the Black Disciples this had to be balanced with keeping members in check:

> It ain't all about killing. They see these movies and shit, they think it's all about running around tearing shit up. But it's not. You've got to learn to be part of an organisation, you can't be fighting all the time. It's bad for business.[107]

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[104] M. Galeotti and K.Barksby, 'Bodies of Evidence: decoding tattoos used by criminal gangs', *Jane's Intelligence Review* (July 2008), 8-13 here 10.
[105] *Ibid.*, 10.
[106] J. Fagan 'Gangs, Drugs and Neighbourhood Change', in Huff, *Gangs in America*, 39-74, here 68.
[107] Quoted in Levitt and Dubner, *Freakonomics*, 108.

The extended consideration of gangs helps to problematise the study of identity within criminal mafias by looking at criminal identity in more detail, analysing how identity is used, who it benefits, what is used for and why it is used. The definitions of organised crime, mafia and gang help to understand the range of participants in the world of organised crime. The definitions of mafia establish how they differ from wider organised crime and an identity helps to reinforce this. The literature that surrounds this aspect of criminal mafias is drawn from a combination of studies about specific groups as well as literature that focus on elements of identity such as language.

Chapter Three – Historiography and Methodology

I.   The Historiographical Context

Organised crime is neither an unpopular topic nor lacking in research. There is a vast body of knowledge and literature about organised criminal groups, differing in its quality. There is, however, surprisingly little in terms of comparative studies of different mafias and what is in existence looks at how organised crime fits into the bigger debate such as the transnational phenomena, global networks and the actual crimes, for instance, drug-smuggling, arms-trading and people-smuggling. Beyond that most of the existing literature focuses on themes other than those relevant to my topic, such as organised criminal groups operating as private protection.

A new comprehensive work that does look at how criminals are constructed is *Codes of the Underworld.*[108] Gambetta considers how criminals communicate with their victims and each other studying the actions and signals that are created, and identifies the theoretical models that can best explain why these practices are used. For example, how compromising information can be volunteered in order to generate trust in a situation or relationship in which otherwise it may not have been created.[109] This acts not only as a binding function but also a signalling function, in which Gambetta describes the compromising situation as a 'handicap signal' whereby the signaller makes

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[108] Gambetta, *Codes of the Underworld.*
[109] *Ibid.*, 88.

himself more exposed as a signal of trustworthiness.[110] The use of violence also has a number of communication functions that Gambetta considers, the stronger the reputation for violence the less an individual has to commit to prove that status, that nonviolent displays of strength or threats aim to influence the beliefs and actions of others and that the goal of much violence is to communicate the violent potential of that individual to others.[111] He categorises communicative actions as 'costly signals' which are designed to inform and give credibility to that information such as violence, fighting, self-harming or disclosing compromising personal information and 'conventional signals' which communicate information by an understanding rather than a fundamental connection with the message such as nicknames or clothing.[112] Conventional signals require an understanding of their association which can be created for example, by using established connections such as the images and language used in films such as *The Godfather*.[113]

Notwithstanding Gambetta's work, a combination of literature from different areas and disciplines is required. In addition to studies that focus on specific mafia: the Sicilian Cosa Nostra, the yakuza, the triads and the Russian mafiya, it has been essential to use literature that reference sub-cultural markers, for example, language, tattoos, alongside work that explores how the concept of an identity is created.

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[110] Gambetta, *Codes of the Underworld,* 89*.*
[111] *Ibid.*, 91.
[112] *Ibid.*, 13.
[113] *Ibid.*, 157.

The Sicilian Cosa Nostra

Perhaps the organisation traditionally most recognisable in wider society is the Sicilian mafia or Cosa Nostra, a criminal organisation that originated in Sicily whose cultural framework has been intertwined with the wider community. Hess has shown this connection in his research on the origin of the term 'mafioso' and what it describes, the independent families and their relationship with the government.[114] Blok studies the phenomenon of the Sicilian mafia across a century focusing upon its emergence and structure and the need that arose in Sicily for security due to the weakness of the ruling Italian state.[115] In his earlier work *The Sicilian Mafia*, Gambetta considers the implications of security and how the Cosa Nostra sells protection and their role in an economic and political environment.[116] Arlacchi looks at the traditional mafia and the transformation into business, banking activity and the increasing cultural value attached to material wealth.[117] Catanzaro highlights that one of the strengths of the Sicilian mafia is its ability to adjust to new situations, that new groups and emerging individuals are able to push aside those who are perceived to no longer understand the times.[118] The continual evolution of the mafia thus is a condition of survival, adapting its behaviour to the changing historical conditions.[119]

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[114] H. Hess, *Mafia and Mafiosi Origin, Power and Myth,* trans Ewald Osers (London, 1998).
[115] A. Blok, *The Mafia of A Sicilian Village* (Prospect Heights, 1974)*.*
[116] Gambetta, *The Sicilian Mafia.*
[117] P. Arlacchi, *Mafia Business: The Mafia Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism,* trans Martin Ryle (Oxford, 1988).
[118] Catanzaro, *Men of Respect,* 102*.*
[119] *Ibid.*, 102.

I will argue, however, that identity does not necessarily disappear and traditional values do not have to vanish but rather that their function and meanings can change. Mafiosi have had to adjust to the rules of economic market competition. In his testimony Antonino Calderone, boss of the Catania family commented upon this change 'The mafioso is like a spider – he builds webs of friends, of acquaintances, of obligations. Today money has taken over and everything has degenerated, no one spends the time to cultivate friendships.'[120]

Yakuza

Despite distinctive identifying markers such as tattoos, the yakuza, the traditional Japanese criminal association, have been able to create a place for themselves in the community along with a degree of social legitimacy at least until the Botaiho countermeasure laws of 1992. A comprehensive work on the yakuza as mafia is Kaplan and Dubro's exploration of the origin, mythology and the involvement in society of Japan's criminal syndicates.[121] Hill considers the yakuza as providers of protection, a parallel to Gambetta's discussion of the Sicilian mafia, and maps the changing relationship between the yakuza and the state and the image of the yakuza.[122] Hill also points to the influence of generational issues on identity; a diminishing proportion of young males in the twenty-first century are attracted to the organisation; the lean and hungry youths of the 1950s were replaced by a softer, more pampered Japanese youth. The image of the yakuza appears to have lost its glamorous edge and

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[120] Testimony of Antonio Calderone published by Arlacchi, *Men of Dishonor,* 38.
[121] Kaplan and Dubro, *Yakuza.*
[122] Hill, *The Japanese Mafia.*

is perceived as *kitsui, kitanai* and *kiken,* in other word, arduous, dirty and dangerous.[123] The increasingly hostile relationship between the authorities and the yakuza has also further reduced the attractiveness of yakuza membership to potential recruits. Therefore the demographic is increasingly aging. Identity for the yakuza has been an important and obvious part of its existence which has resulted in distinctive cultural markers. I will show how there have been changes in that identity that reflect the changes in the yakuza as an organisation.

Triads

Perhaps historically the most secretive of the established organised criminal sub-cultures are the triads, a term used to refer to the different elements of Chinese criminal associations. Booth traced the triads from their origin to their evolution into an international criminal organisation which has become involved in a wide range of activities and explores the common ritual, sense of brotherhood and mythologies that are associated with this organisation.[124] Mythology and history reinforced by rituals have held an important place for the triads. Haar, for instance, has shown the meaning and function of mythology for the triads and how it forms part of their identity.[125] The triads often exist amongst Chinese communities settled in other countries and target immigrants. Arsovska and Craig observed the role of the triads who provided aid but also carried out extortion within the lower classes of China who moved

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[123] Hill, *The Japanese Mafia*, 52.
[124] M. Booth, *The Dragon Syndicates: The Global Phenomenon of the Triads* (London,1999).
[125] B. J. ter Haar, *The Ritual and Mythology of the Chinese triads: Creating an Identity* (Honolulu, 2000).

to foreign shores.[126] Dubro considered the yakuza and the triads within the Asian underworld and although the focus was upon their organised criminal activity in North America he also discussed the nature, structure and history of these groups. [127]

Russian Mafiya

The Russian mafiya is one of the most recent of the established organised criminal sub-cultures to operate at an international level. The identity of this organisation is focused less upon history and mythology than the yakuza or triads and the structure is more flexible. The prison camp system really defined the precursors to the Russian mafiya, the *vory v zakone.* Chalidze looks at various elements of the criminal sub-culture, the *vory v zakone,* including the code or law they lived by and the role of prison camps, which were integral to the development and growth of the Russian mafiya.[128] Varese takes a comprehensive view of the Russian mafiya including its origin, its role within private protection drawing comparison to some of the themes in Gambetta's *The Sicilian Mafia* and its relationship with official agencies.[129] In *Mafias on the Move*, Varese also examines mafias and their role within international crime, he challenges some of the assumptions of the structure of international organised crime and describes the flexible network of Russian organised crime, the alliances of independent 'brigades'.[130] Whilst Shvarts

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[126] J. Arsovska and M. Craig, '"Honourable" Behaviour and the Conceptualisation of Violence in Ethnic-Based Organised Crime Groups: An Examination of the Albanian Kanun and the Code of the Chinese Triads' *Global Crime,* 7/2 (May 2006), 214-256.
[127] J. Dubro, *Dragons of Crime: Inside the Asian Underworld* (Toronto, 1992).
[128] V. Chalidze, *Criminal Russia* (New York, 1977).
[129] F. Varese, *The Russian Mafia.*
[130] Varese, *Mafias on the Move.*

looks specifically at the Sicilian mafia, he considers the rational choice model of the Sicilian mafia to see if it can be used to explain the emergence of the Russian mafiya.[131] Friedman and Handelman look at the Russian mafiya and its relationship with America. Friedman writes an account of the Russian mafiya and its involvement in America in the post-Communist era.[132] Handelman looks at the origins of the criminal underworld in Russia and those groups on the outskirts of society and their growth and development via the black market and reform which led to a move into America.[133] Volkov considers the influence of the political situation in Russia and how groups involved in organised violence appeared in the emerging economic market of post-Soviet Russia.[134] I believe that the Russian mafiya has demonstrated that identity for an established organised criminal sub-culture can be used in a flexible manner, a concept that is being adopted by other criminal mafias.

Culture of Gangs

As noted previously I draw upon the studies on gangs in which analyses of culture and identity is more prevalent. Insights derived from gang studies I believe are vital in explicating the construction of criminal identities in mafias. In comparison to the change in the role of cultural identity amongst established serious organised criminal sub-cultures, however, the sense of belonging and identity is held in higher esteem amongst gangs. Gang studies

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[131] A. Shvarts, 'Russian Mafia: The Explanatory Power of Rational Choice Theory', *International Review of Modern Sociology,* 30/1 (2002), 66-106.
[132] I. R. Friedman, *Red Mafiya: How the Russian Mob has Invaded America* (New York and London, 2000).
[133] S. Handelman, *Comrade Criminal: Russia's New Mafiya* (New Haven/London, 1995).
[134] V. Volkov, *Violent Entrepreneurs: The Use of Force in the Making of Russian Capitalism* (Ithaca, New York, 2002).

incorporate and consider image and identity and as such the literature is more useful to the aim of the dissertation.

Traditional gang studies such as that by Yablonsky which observed groups in the West Side of Manhattan[135], Thrasher who studied 1,313 gangs in Chicago,[136] and Cohen[137], all considered how a delinquent sub-culture emerged and demonstrate how identity is created and enforced with gangs. More modern studies, such as Klein in *The American Street Gang* focus upon structure, crime patterns and characteristics across street gangs[138] whilst Skolnick in *Gangs and Crime Old as Time* analysed identity and how it is changing for gangs with an evolution into entrepreneurial groups.[139]

The identity that is associated with a particular gang is also influenced by the wider street culture within which they exist. The MS-13 (Mara Salvatrucha), noted above, a criminal gang that originated in Los Angeles is influenced by Latino street gangs and prison gangs, demonstrated by an emphasis and value upon 'nerve', 'retaliation' and an opposition to the mainstream social institutions that surround them.

Decker and Van Winkle attribute understanding a gang to having an awareness of its culture such as the symbols, values and traditions of the

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[135] Yablonsky, *The Violent Gang*.

[136] F.M. Thrasher, *The Gang: A Study of 1,313 Gangs in Chicago* (Chicago, Illinois, 1947).

[137] A. K. Cohen, *Delinquent Boys – The Culture of the Gang* (Glencoe, Illinois, 1955).

[138] M. W. Klein, *The American Street Gang: Its Nature, Prevalence, and Control* (Oxford, 1995).

[139] J.H. Skolnick, 'Gangs and Crime Old as Time; But Drugs Change Gang Culture' in M. W. Klein, C.L. Maxson, and J. Mille eds., *The Modern Gang Reader* (Cary, North Carolina, 1995), 222-227.

gang.[140] The gang values are important because the institutional structure of the gang is so weak. As a gang is unable to rely upon formal rules, sanctions or lines of authority to guide the behaviour of members, values play the primary role in identifying the goals and shaping behaviour. These elements provide an important symbolic link between gang members, evident in language, dress, and apparel. By identifying himself as belonging to a specific gang set, a member communicates a set of behaviours and expectations about what constitutes an appropriate response from someone he meets.[141] However, it is important to remember, when considering some of the larger and more established gangs such as the Bloods, Crips and the outlaw motorcycle club Hells Angels, that there are two levels or layers. The first is the street-level presence which values identity as a useful tool to reinforce its presence, for example, the openly displayed gang signs and motorcycle insignia clans. The second is the transnational organised criminal level which is focused upon the structure, organisation, relationships and business of the group. As Robinson pointed out, the image of a member on the street is not reflective of the organisation as a whole:

> An organized criminal gang known for manipulating shares on the stock market, running all sorts of lottery scams, prostitutes and drugs, they are anything but a bunch of hairy guys who steal Harleys and drink beer for free because they can intimidate the bartender.[142]

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[140] Decker and Winkle, *Life in the Gang.*
[141] *Ibid.*, 272.
[142] J. Robinson, *The Merger: How Organised Crime Is Taking Over the World* (London, 1999), 360.

Robinson demonstrates this further with the example of one Hells Angels chapter that agreed a deal with another external gang to deliver drugs to a certain country. Within a few hours of the deal being made, every chapter had been informed and told to stay away; the communication channels were linked and organised.[143]

This distinction between the street-level membership of a gang and a more strategic level has also been drawn by Levitt and Dubner in *Freakonomics.*[144] They compared the workings of some gangs to American business, specifically McDonalds. In fact, they claim that a McDonald structure chart compared to the organisation of a Chicago gang called the Black Disciples studied by Sudhir Venkatesh had very little difference. The leader J.T. (who was college educated) reported to a central leadership of about twenty men, called the board of directors. Levitt and Dubner believe that whilst white 'suburbanites' were studiously mimicking black rappers' ghetto culture, black ghetto criminals were imitating corporate thinking. J.T. paid the board of directors nearly twenty percent of his revenues for the right to sell the drug crack in a designated twelve-square block area. The rest of the money was his to distribute as he saw fit.[145]

This distinction between street level and more strategic levels of a gang was also noted by Venkatesh by observing how members behaved with other gangs. J.T. explained that higher-ranking leaders tended to interact peacefully because they often carried out business together. In comparison to the

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[143] Robinson, *The Merger,* 17.
[144] Levitt and Dubner, *Freakonomics.*
[145] *Ibid.*, 99.

behaviour of higher-ranking members, he described the behaviour of the street-level membership, the teenagers or 'shorties': '...they mostly just beat the shit out of each other in high school or at parties.'[146]

The age group of membership of the different levels within a gang could also differ. Considering the longevity of gang membership, it is improbable that a gang member aged mid-twenties would still be in a street level gang. It is more likely that the person would have moved on, either to jail, higher up the gang structure, moved away from gang life, or even died. The unstable and temporary nature of street membership thus helps to explain why it has the most overt cultural identity and stronger loyalty.

Culture and Identity

Although there are excellent studies available on specific mafias and gangs, the number of studies which consider how a criminal identity is constructed other than Gambetta in *Codes of the Underworld* is slim. Often the focus is on the group in general with only a small amount of information about the cultural framework. In order to compensate for this gap, it is vital to consider works that focus on elements that make up an identity. For example, Hobsbawm's *Bandits* discusses social banditry and how some of the mafias adopted the same principles as a gang to encourage relations with the wider society, by aligning themselves to historical figures considered to be 'good bandits' or

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[146] Venkatesh, *Gang Leader for the Day*, 42.

'social bandits'.[147] Gambetta, in his recent work *Codes of the Underworld,* as discussed earlier in this chapter considers how criminals communicate through signalling.[148] Primary sources and studies that address communication through language and visual image, specifically tattoos, criminal tattoos, prison tattoos, criminal argot (a variety of language used by a socially marginalised community) and semiotics all add to the picture. It is also important to understand more about the countries in which these mafias operate and how their national cultures and histories may have influenced, and aid interpretation of, certain behaviours.

Caplan's *Written on the Body*, for instance, discusses how tattooing can be culturally integral and looks at the history of tattoos in Europe and North America.[149] Within Western culture tattoos have an uneasy and ambiguous status within a society that traditionally considered body-marking as a punishment which carried a stigma rather than something honourable or decorative. In *Bodies of Inspiration*, DeMello highlights the importance of the communication function of tattoos and how they can reinforce an individual or collective identity.[150] The work of Bronnikov,[151] Baldayev[152] and Lambert[153] on Russian prison tattoos show just how much information can be conveyed through the choice of tattoo, and, by examining individual testimonies, Lambert discovers some of the reasons and implications of those choices.

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[147] Hobsbawm, *Bandits.*
[148] Gambetta, *Codes of the Underworld*, 11.
[149] J. Caplan, *Written on the Body, The Tattoos in European and American History* (London, 2000).
[150] M. DeMello, *Bodies of Inscription: A cultural history of the modern tattoo community* (Durham, North Carolina, 2000).
[151] A. Bronnikov, 'Telltale Tattoos in Russian Prison', *Natural History*, XI (1993), 50-59.
[152] D. Baldayev, *Russian Criminal Tattoo Encyclopaedia* (London, 2009).
[153] A. Lambert, *Russian Prison Tattoos: Codes of Authority, Domination and Struggle* (Atglen, Pennsylvania, 2003).

Valentine illustrates some identifying tattoos of a number of gangs and groups including the Russian mafiya and uses illustrations from a prison officer to replicate some of the images.[154]

Tattooing as a cultural practice has a long history that demonstrates changes in practice and perception. Hambly, for one, studied the history of body-marking through painting, tattoo puncture and scarification across world cultures and history including the different levels of constructed meanings.[155] Gilbert has mapped these changes in a source book that holds a collection of tattoos drawn from diverse cultures and ages.[156] Rather than the images, Sanders focused on the act of tattooing as a social act which changes the way an individual views and is viewed by him/herself and others.[157] Rubin discusses the cultural and social meaning of tattoos, how tattooing can act as a cultural signifier, a form of resistance to or a symptom of the culture that surrounds the individual.[158] Fellman and Thomas[159] and Poysden and Bratt[160] look specifically at tattoos from the Japanese underworld and the history of Japanese tattooing, including the specific body suit tattooing (a traditional full body tattoo that covers all of the torso, the upper arms and legs often with a space down the centre of the body that is not tattooed) and the development of the yakuza. Takahiro considers traditional Japanese tattooing and how

[154] B. Valentine, *Gangs and their Tattoos: Identifying Gangbangers on the Street and in prison* (Boulder, Colorado, 2001).

[155] W.D Hambly, *The History of Tattooing and its significance: With Some Account of Other Forms of Corporal Marking* (London, 1925).

[156] S. Gilbert, *Tattoo History: A Source Book an anthology of historical records of tattooing throughout the world* (Berkeley, 2000).

[157] C.R.Sanders, *Customizing the Body The Art and Culture of Tattooing* (Philadelphia, 1989).

[158] A. Rubin, *Marks of Civilization Artistic Transformations of the Human Body* (Los Angeles, 1988).

[159] S. Fellman and D.M. Thomas, *The Japanese Tattoo* (1988).

[160] M. Poysden and M. Bratt, *A History of Japanese Body-suit Tattooing* (Leiden, Netherlands, 2005).

bushido, the samurai spirit, has influenced and is reflected in its imagery.[161] In contrast in 'Mobster gravestones in 1990s Russia', Matich considers the visual imagery and messages that gravestones can convey for Russian criminals.[162]

There are a number of studies that focus upon oral traditions, semiotics, and the uses of language, argot, *fenya* (a form of criminal argot used by the *vorovskoi mir*) and slang. Some of these works analyse criminal argot or prison slang specifically such as Encinas,[163] Monteleone and Garner,[164] and Barrere.[165] Coltharp's book is a linguistic study of a Mexican-American area of Texas[166] and von Timroth considers taboo elements of the Russian language such as argot, jargon, slang and mat (a distinctively Russian sub-cultural slang).[167] Bushnell goes further to argue that graffiti functions as a language, and studies it in relation to popular youth culture and counter-culture in Russia.[168] Other texts such as those by Finnegan,[169] Singleton,[170] Maurer[171] and Chandler[172] are more general and look at language and semiotics and its underground uses. In connection to both the visual images and language is

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[161] K. Takahiro, *Bushido: Legacies of the Japanese Tattoo* (Atglen, Pennsylvania 2001).

[162] O. Matich 'Mobster gravestones in 1990s Russia', *Global Crime* 7/1 (February 2006), 79-104.

[163] G.L.Encinas, *Prison Argot: A Sociolinguistic and Lexicographic Study* (Lanham, Maryland, 2001).

[164] V. J. Monteleone and B. Garner, *Criminal Slang: The Vernacular of the Underground Lingo* (Clark, New Jersey, 2004).

[165] A. Barrere, *Argot and Slang: A New French and English Dictionary of the Cant Words, Quaint Expressions, Slang Terms and Flash Phrases* (Whitefish, Montana 2007).

[166] L. Coltharp, *The Tongue of the Tirilones: A Linguistic Study of a Criminal Argot* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama, 1965).

[167] W. von Timroth, 'Russian and Soviet sociolinguistics and taboo varieties of the Russian language: Argot, jargon, slang and mat', *Slavistische Beiträge*, 205 (1986).

[168] J. Bushnell, *Moscow Graffiti: Language and Subculture* (London, 1990).

[169] R. Finnegan, *Oral Traditions and the Verbal Arts: A Guide to Research Practices (As a Research Methods in Social Anthropology)* (London/New York, 1991).

[170] D. M. Singleton, *Language and the Lexicon: An Introduction* (London, 2000).

[171] D. W. Maurer, *Language of the Underworld* (Lexington, Kentucky, 1982).

[172] D. Chandler, *Semiotics: The Basics 2* (London, 2006).

Barthes' *Mythologies* and Gambetta's *Codes of the Underworld.* Barthes considers the masks, signs, signals, gestures and messages western society uses. For example, the way in which an image can persuade an observer into making a particular interpretation.[173] Gambetta analyses how signals such as language, vocabulary and nicknames and style of dress are used and protected.[174] Such work supports the argument that to properly understand criminal sub-cultures a more comparative approach is required, one that considers aspects of cultural identity such as that taken by Gambetta in *Codes of the Underworld*.[175]

II.   Methodological Issues and Conceptual Approaches

Due to the comparative nature of this dissertation, which involves the analysis of different groups across the world, as well as the cultural and language barriers, this thesis utilises a range of textual, iconographic and other visual, conceptual and statistical studies and sources. All of these have their methodological problems.

One important source are camp memoirs from prisoners who had encountered the *vorovskoi mir,* whilst they were imprisoned in the Gulag Archipelago, the system of forced labour camps that grew across the USSR. GULAG is an acronym, meaning *Glavnoe upravlenie lagerei,*[176] or Main Camp Administration. The word Gulag came to refer to the administration and the

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[173] R. Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York,1957).
[174] Gambetta, *Codes of the Underworld*.
[175] *Ibid.,*
[176] A. Applebaum, *GULAG: A History of the Soviet Camps* (London, 2003), 3.

whole of the Soviet labour camp system itself, including labour camps, punishment camps and transit camps. Forced labour was in existence in Tsarist Russia from the seventeenth century, but after the Russian revolution it became an important component of the Soviet system and in the 1930s underwent a rapid expansion up until its height in the early 1950s.[177] The prisoners worked across most industries including mining, logging, munitions and construction and lived as a distinct community with its own laws, customs, morality and slang and created its own characters and literature.

However, camp memoirs by their nature have problems that must be considered. They concentrate upon individual experiences at a given time in a given camp, and cannot be objective about the historical circumstances in which they were involved.[178] 'Political' prisoners, who were often from a variety of nationalities and a minority in the camps, wrote the bulk of camp memoirs. The majority of Gulag inmates were in fact workers and peasants; only 7% of the camp population had higher education in 1934.[179]

Camp memoirs, moreover, present an individual observer's view, rather than the experiences of those being referenced or an objective description. Within some of these individual memoirs, useful reflections and observations can be found about other members of the prison camp experience and the system itself. They do present an informative view on how the *vorovskoi mir,* which originally existed as an anti-establishment sub-culture, appeared to those

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[177] Applebaum, *GULAG*, 4.
[178] E. Bacon, *The Gulag at War, Stalin's Forced Labour System in the Light of the Archives* (Hampshire and London, 1994), 8.
[179] Applebaum, *GULAG,* 270.

spectators and how the thieves treated these observers. Prison testimonies observe and report on the details of camp life and death from an ideal position. Memoirs such as Edward Buca's *Vorkuta* contain discussions with members of the thieves' fraternity who provided a rare glimpse into the workings of the brotherhood to which they belonged. For example, in *Vorkuta*, Ivan, a member of the *vorovskoi mir,* explained to Buca the process the *vory* had of refusing to work.[180] Some camp memoirs such as Gustav Herling's *A World Apart* have detailed, useful observations about the *vorovskoi mir*. Other memoirs have very little information about the criminals either due to little personal contact or a choice not to document that interaction.

However, some of the information that is assumed about the *vorovskoi mir* from camp memoirs is not always accurate. For example, the hierarchy of the fraternity can appear more structured and rigid than it actually was. The *vory v zakone* were equal, but in camps where there existed *vory* (the elite of the underworld) and *blatnye* (the ordinary rank and file members); the *vory* would be superior, a distinction that could have been missed by an observer. The treatment of women is also contradictory. The esteem in which thieves appear to hold their mother, the respect and reverence that were apparent in their songs, tattoos and stories in fact masked the actual attitude of violence and disrespect to the majority of women in their lives.

There is a danger of biased perspectives in memoirs from the Gulag Archipelago, due to the often terrible situations experienced by individuals. As

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[180] E. Buca, *Vorkuta* (London, 1976), 59-60.

Applebaum noted: 'Most of the Gulag's classical chroniclers – witness to the terror, the robbery and the rape that the thieves' inflicted on the other inhabitants of the camps – hated them with a passion.'[181] This is not to deny these acts happened, but the close proximity the observers had to the thieves within the prison camps may have blurred their perspective. If they were victims of the thieves' violence or close to someone who was, then this could cloud future and further observations. Accuracy, of course, can also be tainted depending upon when the memoirs were written and the length of time between the events and the recording of the information. The need to be a member of a group may also have shaped what was remembered, through the collective experience of a social memory.[182]

At the same time, post-camp experience can have some bearing on what is recalled in memoirs. This is especially the case in places where freedom of speech had been restricted. Galina Skopyak, a Gulag survivor who remained in Norilsk in Siberia after being released in 1954, did not discuss her camp experiences until 1985. Even a decade later, in 1995 she was still reluctant to disclose the detail of the terror she had seen and endured.[183] In the interviews and research carried out with survivors of the Gulag system and their families, by Orlando Figes, he highlights an unbridgeable gap between the survivors and those left behind.[184] Survivors often found it hard to talk; some closed themselves off from the experience as a mechanism of survival.[185] On their release some prisoners had been instructed not to discuss their experiences

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[181] Applebaum, *GULAG*, 265.

[182] N. Adler, *Beyond the Soviet System, The Gulag Survivor* (Princeton, 2002).

[183] Adler, *Beyond the Soviet System*, 39.

[184] O. Figes, *The Whisperers: Private Life in Stalin's Russia* (London, 2007).

[185] *Ibid.*, 557.

in public, and many clearly feared the consequences for themselves or their families if they even discussed them in private.[186] The remnants of the fear that the Soviet system had instilled still existed and some previous prison camp inmates were careful not to say anything that could make them vulnerable to accusations or arrest in the future. For others, however, such as Solzhenitsyn, it was necessary to write about their experiences. As Solzhenitsyn wrote:

> As soon as I began the book, I thought of abandoning it. I could not make up my mind: should I or should I not be writing such a book by myself? And would I have the stamina for it? But when, in addition to what I had collected, prisoners' letters converged on me from all over the country, I realized that since all this had been given to me, I had a duty.[187]

The stories that did emerge about the Gulags were greeted with detachment and mistrust by many in Russia. In fact, Solzhenitsyn's chronicles were claimed to be dishonourable, and were met with bitterness and there were even suggestions in 1974 that they should be withdrawn and handed over to the 'organs of the KGB'.[188]

There is always the danger that due to the horrific nature of the labour camps in Russia, there are some experiences the authors may not be able to disclose or disclose fully, therefore blocking out events that could be

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[186] Figes, *The Whisperers*, 560.
[187] A. I. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago 1918-1956 V-VIII* (New York, 1978), 526.
[188] *Ibid.*, 474.

important. The opposite, however, is also a possibility, that the writers of the camp memoirs focus upon the most traumatic events and those experiences have the most influence. Memoirs were often published outside the Soviet Union. When they were produced for a commercial market in the West, it is possible that events were made more violent, dramatic or exciting in order to boost sales and demonise the Soviet Union at that time. When assessing information from camp memoirs it is thus important to consider who would benefit from the documentation: was there any involvement from a particular organisation? Were they approved of or censored by the government of Soviet Union at that time? Indeed this form of source could serve a political purpose. Many of the Gulag survivors who published memoirs said that they did whatever they could to prevent a circumstance in which the experiences could be repeated, by telling their personal stories of Soviet repression.[189] The perspective of such sources would have had a political objective that would have had the ambition and focus of damning the Party, rather than presenting a detailed or objective portrayal of camp life in all its forms. An alternative was that they were written to damn the Party 'at that time', therefore enabling the present-day government to detach themselves from the horrors of the 'Stalinist era'.

The audience and purpose of memoirs must be considered to question the content. For example, the best-selling *Siberian Education,* published in 2009, was originally sold as an autobiography of life amongst Russian criminal underworlds. It was later revealed to be for the most part a fraud. Nicolai Lilin

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[189] Adler, *Beyond the Soviet System*, 40.

was a former resident of the Transdnistrian Moldovan Republic (PMR) whom Bobick describes in 'Profits of Disorder: images of the Transdnistrian Moldovan Republic', as selling the outsized reputation of the region for crime in order to appeal to a literary public.[190] Bobick argues that the majority of the work is fiction, written by someone who appeared to be a trusted insider for a Western audience. The response from online forums that addressed the content of the book and local reactions to it reinforced this opinion in their varied responses of outrage, disbelief, anger, and even laughter.[191]

Despite the problems with camp memoirs as historical sources, they have been indispensable in understanding part of Soviet social history. They provide an informative insight into the experiences of the Gulag camps and of Soviet repression at that time and offer reasonable portrayals of the nature of the forced labour camp experience. Although they do not provide an historian with information on the economic significance, organisational methods, political control or ideological foundations of the camps,[192] they do provide an insight into camp life and importantly for this thesis, how the *vorovskoi mir* of Soviet Russia both may have projected themselves and also how they were perceived.

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[190] M. Bobick, 'Profits of Disorder: images of the Transdnistrian Moldovan Republic', *Global Crime,* 12/4 (September 2001), *239-265,* here 249.
[191] Bobick, 'Profits of Disorder', 251.
[192] Bacon, *The Gulag at War*, 8.

Language and Visual Indicators

One of the most important conceptual approaches for this dissertation, relying as it does on visual, oral and other non-written sources, is the way in which language can help to create a greater understanding of a group's cultural activity and identity. It is important to ask whether language, terminology and oral traditions such as songs and stories can tell us about a group and whether they reflect a broader national identity much more than the actual group. Social groups and communities use language as a means of identifying their members, establishing their boundaries and even as a means of exercising social control.[193]

It is important to consider the significance of the story or folklore for the group's identity and how it is related to modern society. Having a distinctive language or folklore can heighten group solidarity and encourage a sense of belonging and loyalty amongst members. It is also important to consider how these traditions and stories are circulated and by whom. These are not cultures that lack access to written sources but rather they choose to use oral traditions in various situations. Is this due to a secretive nature, or is it the best way to disseminate the information to greater effect? Oral traditions can create secrecy for a group from the rest of society and those outside the group through a communication system that can hide true meanings by creating a linguistic system which is virtually incomprehensible to outsiders. Messages can be corrupted by transmission and communication but is this

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[193] L. Thomas and S. Wareing, *Language, Society and Power* (London, 2004), 158.

really seen as a negative, or do 'Chinese whispers' help create and perpetuate myths and legend? For example, argot lives principally in the minds and on the tongues of individual speakers; it is a language that is created by participants.[194] This can provide an identity for the group, something which they have created for themselves to use themselves.

The classic model of semiotics from Saussure considers that language is made up of signs and every sign has two elements, the order and composition of letters, known as the signifier and the object that appears in our minds when we come across that word, known as the signified. For example, the signifier of dog is D-O-G and the signified is a domesticated carnivorous mammal. This is a form of code and may involve an array of meanings and communications including words, images, scents, tastes and sounds when we consider the signified. Certain mafias take words which have set ideas linked to them and change the code. For example, the Russian mafiya take the German phrase 'Guten Morgen' (Good Morning) to mean morning burglary therefore changing the signified, changing the code and changing the message, but only for those in the know. This is also the case for images of tattoos. For example, the word for beetle in Russian, *zhuk* spelt out means good luck with your robbery, but a picture of a beetle would have illustrated a pickpocket,[195] therefore again changing the signified.

There are many visual aspects through which mafia can be scrutinized, such as dress, self-image, accessories, physical presence, and, one of the most

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[194] Maurer, *Language of the Underworld* cited in K. Gelder, *Subcultures: cultural histories and social practice* (London, 2007), 16.
[195] Bronnikov, 'Telltale Tattoos in Russian Prison', 55.

intriguing and telling, tattoos. In *Eyewitnessing History,* Peter Burke discusses the uses of images as historical evidence; however, he does not consider tattoos.[196] Tattoos are a changing and dynamic visual language that is able to demonstrate influential events and changes in tastes through imagery. The control that a mafia may have over their image is an important consideration, in the sense of the conscious messages they are trying to portray. Jane Caplan, for instance, has shown how tattoos can be culturally integral to some societies, differing across countries and therefore across mafias. She explores

> …how cultural meaning is derived from or attached to the tattoo's visible and indelible physical status on the body. The tattoo occupies a kind of boundary status on the skin, and this is paralleled by its cultural use as a marker of difference, an index of inclusion and exclusion. Thus the tattoo has been taken to mark off entire 'civilizations' from their 'barbarian' or 'savage' neighbours; to declare a convict's criminality, whether by branding him as a punishment or because he has inverted this penal practice by acquiring voluntary tattoos (thereby, ironically, marking himself); and more generally to inscribe various kinds of group membership, often in opposition to a dominant culture.[197]

Caplan thus describes a tattoo as an indicator, a strong identifying marker with cultural implications. Therefore by choosing a gang or mafia tattoo, an

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[196] P. Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images As Historical Evidence* (London, 2001).
[197] Caplan, *Written on the Body,* xiv.

individual is not only making a statement about belonging to a group but also a difference.

Mythology

The mythologies and legends that certain mafias create can also influence the perception of the community around them and potential members. The use of mythologies relates to what Hobsbawm discusses in *Bandits*:

> If a typical brigand wants a long career he must be or show himself to be a philanthropist, even as he kills and robs to the best of his ability. Otherwise he risks losing popular sympathy and being taken for a common murderer or robber.[198]

Here Hobsbawm is describing a social bandit, a peasant outlaw regarded as a criminal by the state, but who was considered by the people to be a hero, a champion, and fighter for justice, a man to be admired and supported.[199] This was a figure who was supposed to right wrongs, avenge in cases of injustice and especially promote fair relations between the strong and weak and the rich and the poor.[200] One of the specific types of social bandits that Hobsbawm describes is 'the Noble Robber,' the most famous of which is Robin Hood. This image, separate from the much harsher reality and far removed from nobility, is of the champion, the righter of wrongs, the bringer of

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[198] L. Lombardi Satriani and M Meligrana eds., *Diritto Egemone e Diritto Popolare: La Calabria negli studi di emologia giuridica* (Vibo Valentia, 1975) cited in Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 19.
[199] Hobsbawm, *Bandits,* 20.
[200] *Ibid.*, 30.

justice and social equality.[201] The relationship between this form of social bandit and the peasants was one of total solidarity and identity.[202] Some mafias such as the yakuza attempted to recreate this type of relationship through traditional mythology. By drawing on the same themes the organisation hoped to benefit from the same level of support and acceptance within the community in which they lived which would strengthen their position.

However in a critique on Hobsbawm, Blok contends that brigandage extends beyond popular protest and rather than championing the poor and weak they often terrorised, intimidated and obstructed peasant action.[203] In order to understand the behaviour of bandits Blok believes that it is necessary to consider the wider society in which peasant communities exist particularly in respect to protection, he used the hypothesis 'the more successful a man is as a bandit, the more extensive the protection granted him'.[204] He argues that the element of social protest is expressed in the myth that builds up around the bandit and that myth is facilitated by the physical absence of the bandit.[205] In response Hobsbawm argued that the myth cannot be completely removed from the reality of the banditry, the bandit is not necessarily a social protester but the role as a champion of peasant discontent is ascribed to them by peasant society. There is a distinction in rural public opinion between 'good'

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[201] Hobsbawm, *Bandits,* 47.
[202] *Ibid.*, 20.
[203] A. Blok 'The Peasant and the Brigand: Social Banditry Reconsidered', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 14/4 (September 1972), 494-503, here 496.
[204] *Ibid.*, 498.
[205] *Ibid.*, 501.

bandits and 'bad' bandits which can be traced in conversation, in song and story.[206]

Even more important is Benedict Anderson's concept of 'imagined communities' which can be utilised as a means of analysing the societies which a mafia can create.[207] Anderson describes a nation as a community which is socially constructed and ultimately imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of that group. This is different from an actual community in that it is not and cannot be based on face to face interaction; instead members hold in their mind a mental image of their affinity and participate in the creation of their perceived reality. 'Imagined communities' is a very powerful notion; indeed this concept of fraternity makes it possible for people to willingly die for such a community. This social phenomenon is capitalised on and created by the mafias and gangs and made into tradition. For some members the group can become the only family and community they know and the territory that they occupy becomes the world in which they live. The social and cultural elements are integral in creating this 'imagined community.' It is here that the mafias serve to create mythologies through a heritage and lineage that provide history (often created) and substance for this community. The cultural elements reinforce this, providing separate forms of language, songs, image, tattoos, all of which can act as a bonding function and a form of distinctiveness.

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[206] E. Hobsbawm, 'Social Bandits: Reply', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 14/4 (September 1972), 503-505, here 504.
[207] B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 2006).

Mafia identity is not created in isolation nor does it solely originate from within an organisation, identity is also strongly influenced from 'without'. Elements of criminal identity are constructed externally by agency, by interaction with the outside world. For example, how the externally generated image of the mafia that is portrayed in a book or film has been internalised by a group and influenced its practices. These can range from a choice of nickname to the adoption of a technique or idea, in *Codes of the Underworld*, Gambetta observed how in the film *The Godfather* a mafioso takes his own life before testifying against the fictional Corleone family to protect his relatives. Suicide is rare among mafiosi yet Antonino Gioé who was arrested in connection with the killing of Judge Giovanni Falcone also took his life, in probability to signal he was not going to betray the organisation,[208] a decision that may have been influenced by the film.

A useful element of identity that is constructed from 'without' is the immediate impact it can have as an efficient communication tool; for example, fiction can provide a common vocabulary or visual imagery that is recognisable and understood and that can reach people whilst maintaining the need for secrecy for a criminal organisation to use. The theme song from *The Godfather* 'acts as an icon that gives a clear meaning without constituting evidence of affiliation.'[209] Fiction can also help to create and spread the codes of behaviour in cases when it may be difficult for example, to a newcomer or member of the next generation. Criminal organisations are able to use the influence from 'without' to project the image they wish to in wider society. By

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[208] Gambetta, *Codes of the Underworld*, 263.
[209] *Ibid.*, 266.

using a form of behaviour, phrase or vocabulary from a film for example, they are informing wider society that they are the subject of that story.

Another external influence which can impact organised criminal sub-cultures is the specific environment within which they operate. For example, until 1992 the Japanese yakuza was able to operate in a relatively open manner and therefore could display elements of their identity without fear of repercussion. Elements such as legislation that focus upon criminal organisations for example, the Boryokudan Countermeasures Law in Japan and the RICO (Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act) in America and police pressure on mafias all influence how much an organisation may need to protect its identity. Following the introduction of the Boryokudan Countermeasures Law, elements of the yakuza identity were reduced, gang signs were taken down and flags and tie pins were removed. For the triads identity is something that is often required to remain hidden, for example, for those groups operating in Hong Kong keeping identity a less overt part of their culture is important, because membership of a criminal organisation itself is an offence. In comparison the Sicilian mafia retains some of its traditional rituals and does not have the political or police pressure to consider. However, with groups such as the Addiopizzo, that aims to support businesses to avoid extortion payments in Palermo and a number of key arrests in the Cosa Nostra this perception is beginning to change. The Russian mafiya with the most fluid, less structured identity does not operate within a high police and political pressure situation that influenced the construction of identity. Rather the identity reflects the flexible network of

Russian organised crime with a focus less upon history and mythology than the other established organised criminal sub-cultures. The change in how identity is used and developed can be influenced by the environment; even gangs with a more obvious use of identity recognise that following an incident which increases police scrutiny it is important not to promote gang affiliation too prominently to encourage unwanted police attention.

III.   Constructing criminals through sub-culture

Throughout this thesis I consider (and refer to) a mafia as a form of sub-culture, a term and concept about which there is considerable debate. It is thus important to look at not only definitions but also how the term 'sub-culture' is used. The culture in sub-culture refers to a 'whole way of life' which makes the world understandable to the members of that group. The 'sub' has notions of distinctiveness and difference from the dominant or mainstream society. By this determination, as Barker contends, the concept of a sub-culture depends on its opposite.[210] Sub-cultures depending on their perception and the view of the observer are condemned to and/or enjoy a consciousness of 'otherness' or 'difference'.[211]

Approaches to sub-cultures developed at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham during the 1970s where the focus was on conceptualism and the analysis of youth sub-culture in terms of opposition to and incorporation into dominant culture. Each youth sub-culture,

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[210] C. Barker, *Cultural Studies Theory and Practice*, (London, 2003), 378.
[211] S. Thornton 'General Introduction' to K Gelder and S Thornton eds. *Subcultures Reader* (London and New York, 1997), 5.

or so it has been argued, sought to mark itself off from the dominant culture while simultaneously also accommodating certain aspects of it.[212]

Albert Cohen believed that deviance arises at those points in society when structure and culture come into conflict.[213] For example, working-class boys who are deprived through the structural forces of society would commit 'deviant' acts which reject the values of the middle-class culture. 'Pressure' develops at such points and distinctive sub-cultures arise, which exhibit values and activities that oppose those of a dominant 'respectable' culture. This approach, which focused on the activities of gangs, deviant sub-cultures, their core ideas and values, was developed and refined in subsequent American research by Cloward and Ohlin.[214]

Matza argued that although sub-cultural values may explain some aspects and forms of delinquency, deviant behaviour is in reality more irregular. Matza focused on the general considerations of youth sub-cultures which were not criminal and he believed that sub-cultures developed at points where social control is relatively weak, or when individuals are between life stages, such as during their adolescence.[215]

However, a criminal gang is a coherent form of 'deviant sub-culture'. Baldwin et al contend that:

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[212] E. Baldwin, B. Longhurst, B, Mc Cracken, M. Ogburn, G. Smith, *Introducing Cultural Studies,* (Essex, 2004), 316-317.
[213] Cohen, *Delinquent Boys,* 34.
[214] R. Cloward and L. Ohlin *Delinquency and Opportunity* (New York, 1960).
[215] Baldwin et al, *Introducing Cultural Studies*, 318.

Sub-cultures must exhibit a distinctive enough shape and structure to make them identifiably different from their 'parent' culture. They must be focused around certain activities, values, certain uses of material artefacts, territorial spaces etc. which significantly differentiate them from the wider culture. But, since they are sub-sets, there must also be significant things which bind and articulate them with the 'parent' culture.[216]

For mafias, the parent culture is the criminal world, the world of organised crime and within that they operate as distinct mafias. Although they are different, they derive from the same culture of criminality. The dominant culture is that of the wider society run by the government and agencies of power. In its activities and main concerns the sub-culture will share some things in common with both the parent culture and the dominant culture. This is the case for a mafia. Obviously their criminal activity differs greatly from the values of dominant society, but some of the other elements of their society such as wanting their society to work together, wanting to succeed and do well, infiltrating the economy, the society and its institutions produce commonalities. Baldwin et al define the structure of a sub-culture as that which

...therefore, take(s) shape around the distinctive activities and 'focal concerns' of groups. They can be loosely or tightly bonded. Some sub-cultures are merely loosely defined strands or 'milieux' within the

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[216] Baldwin et al, *Introducing Cultural Studies*, 322.

parent culture: they possess no distinctive 'world' of their own. Others develop a clear, coherent identity and structure.[217]

The mafias take on this role to varying degrees: some are very tightly bonded with a distinctive world of their own; others occupy a much looser-knit structure yet still demonstrate that they are separate from 'organised crime' in general.

The sub-cultures which are often held up as examples include the Teddy Boys, the Mods, the Rockers and the Skinheads, all of which have or had a peculiar dress, style, focal concerns and an environment that set them apart as distinctive groupings, both from the broad pattern of working-class culture as a whole, and also from the 'ordinary' working-class boys.[218] This is reflected in a mafia and the importance of image to provide distinctions, as well as language, mythologies and histories that set them apart from other criminals as well as the rest of society.

Sub-cultures often use bricolage. This is a process of defamiliarisation, in which ordinary things are perceived in an unfamiliar or strange way. Hebdige describes this as a way of sub-cultures responding to the world around them by creating meanings that are different from those of the dominant culture or group, reordering cultural symbols to communicate fresh meanings.[219] Clarke used the example of the Teddy Boys who wore an Edwardian upper-class

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[217] Baldwin et al, *Introducing Cultural Studies,* 332.
[218] J. Clarke, S. Hall, T. Jefferson and B. Roberts, 'Subcultures, Cultures and Class' in S. Hall and T. Jefferson eds. *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain* (London, 1991), 8 cited in Baldwin et al, *Introducing Cultural Studies*, 333.
[219] D. Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979).

look of the bootlace tie and brothel-creepers for their own identity. This bricolage can be seen in the tattoos and slang terminology used by the a mafia, taking an image or word which has one meaning and imposing their own meaning upon it. Paradoxically what can happen is that forms of social expression from sub-cultures are often incorporated into the dominant social order through the conversion of sub-cultural signs such as dress being turned into mass-produced objects, or the 'labelling' and re-definition of deviant behaviour by the police, media and judiciary.[220] The 'gangster criminal' image which is popular in America, is emulated by a large proportion of mainstream youth. Certain colours, clothes and slang specific to gangs can be seen in wider society. Gambetta describes an incident in Los Angeles in which a group of young people who were dressed in a 'gangster image' strayed into the wrong district and were shot by a gang, one person was killed. Gambetta explains that the gang were protecting the property rights of the use of the image in their territory.[221]

Mafias do have a culture, a way of life; some have a fixed structure, a code of behaviour, a form of language, a code of tattoos, rituals and rules that influence their behaviour. For example, the ritual of *yubitsume* is one of the most famous acts that distinguish the yakuza culture. The top of the smallest digit was ceremonally cut at the joint and presented to the leader of the gang as a mark of apology.[222] Saga describes how Eiji, the yakuza he wrote about, once cut off the tip of the little finger on his left hand and wrapped it in paper

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[220] Baldwin et al, *Introducing Cultural Studies,* 341.
[221] Gambetta, *Codes of the Underworld*, 181.
[222] Kaplan and Dubro, *Yakuza*, xvi.

in order to apologise to another gang boss for his behaviour with a woman.[223]

Sub-cultures often distinguish themselves from what they perceive to be the 'mainstream', but they also differentiate amongst themselves and in doing so create hierarchies of participation, knowledge and taste.[224] The members of a mature organised criminal group such as the mafias often do promote a sense of 'otherness', but this is usually in comparison with the rest of the criminal world. Mafias such as the yakuza and triads actively promote their position as elite members of the criminal class and the Sicilian mafia encourages their reputation as the traditional mafia. They do not consider themselves to be common criminals, but rather an elite class of criminal with a noble heritage. This is especially important to those who go to great lengths to encourage and endorse the link to their noble ancestors.

Sub-cultures have certain norms, attitudes and values which are distinctive to them as a social group. When some members of society experience similar circumstances and problems which are not common to all members, a sub-culture tends to develop. Sub-cultures come in many, varied and disputed forms, and although there is no consensus about the definition of a 'sub-culture' even amongst the contributors to the *Subculture Reader*, including Gelder and Thornton, most would agree that sub-cultures can be broadly defined as social groups organised around shared interests and practices and: '…have something in common with each other (i.e. they share a problem, an interest, a practice) which distinguishes them in a significant way

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[223] Saga, *Confessions of a Yakuza*, 146.
[224] Gelder and Thornton ed., *The Subcultures Reader*, 88.

from the members of other social groups.'[225] The term is also used to look at social worlds generally perceived as mysterious, esoteric and arcane. Some of these worlds are secretive; others are public in their clothes, music and behaviour.[226]

An extension of this idea is that sub-cultures have been seen as spaces for deviant cultures to renegotiate their position in resistance to the dominant culture. Sub-cultures are often defined by their opposition to the values of the larger culture to which they belong, in other words the dominant culture. By committing crimes, a mafia is automatically acting in opposition to the values of wider society. However, mafias do not act in political resistance to the present political system; rather they are usually happy with the current political situation as they have found ways to infiltrate it and use corrupt officials. Mafias use the current society and system to make money. They are not revolutionaries attempting to create a new world order; after all they would lose their power and position this way. Their organisations are not a protest against a dominant culture. The Russian mafiya, the *vory v zakone,* began their life as an anti-establishment society which was at war with wider society. An internal war over this very issue of working with the authorities transformed the *vory v zakone* into the precursors of the Russian mafiya adept at working with the authorities.

Brake considers five functions that sub-cultures may perform for their participants that are useful in considering with regard to mafias: providing

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[225] Gelder and Thornton ed., *The Subcultures Reader*, 1.
[226] *Ibid.*, 1.

solutions to socio-economic structural problems; offering a form of collective identity different from that of school and work; winning space for alternative experiences and scripts of social reality; supplying sets of meaningful leisure activities in contrast to school and work; and furnishing solutions to the existential dilemmas of identity.[227]

Mafias do meet some of these individual functions. They are able to provide certain socio-economic opportunities to people who may not have been able to gain respect, power and economic advantage within their own community. A form of collective identity is also provided by joining a mafia, becoming part of a brotherhood and a family that in some circumstances is held in a higher regard than a member's own family. The collective identity is cemented through codes of behaviour, style of dress and appearance, types of tattoos and certain language or slang words. In some cases a mafia will provide a set of leisure activities for its members, in the sense that there are certain things that are important for the image of a mafia, such as where a member eats, what a person is seen to be doing and with whom. They are not, however, trying to win space for alternative experiences, nor are they trying to campaign for the rest of society to recognise their way of life or appreciate their alternative experience. In fact, it would be detrimental if society became aware of the full extent of the life of a mafia. Indeed they are trying to operate a specific way of life successfully and without getting caught. A mafia is able to provide solutions to dilemmas of identity just as a gang is able to, by providing a response to the problems caused by the social position of its

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[227] Barker, *Cultural Studies,* 379.

members. They provide solutions for how to solve the problems of making a living[228] and give members a form of identity that the dominant culture cannot provide.

Elements of a mafia identity, an image or tattoos, can be examined to see to what degree they parallel and reflect the structure, style, typical concerns, attitudes and feelings of the social group.[229] This is a concept known as homology; it describes the symbolic connection between the values and lifestyle of a group and is useful to consider with regard to the identity of mafias. Willis described the connection between a structural position in the social order; the social values of subcultural participants and the cultural symbols and styles by which they expressed themselves.[230]

To study the identity and therefore the cultural framework of an established criminal organisation such as a mafia requires a combination of literature on the specific mafia, sources that reference subcultural markers such as language and tattoos and studies on how the concept of an identity is created, mafias who use mythology seek to differentiate further by creating a shared history, tradition, reputation or even a brand image.

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[228] Baldwin et al, *Introducing Cultural Studies*, 321.
[229] P. Willis, *Profane Culture,* (London, 1978), 191.
[230] Barker, *Cultural Studies,* 379.

Chapter Four - Myths and Legends

Myths and legends have been used throughout history to communicate stories, pass down traditions, establish models of behaviour and explain the origins of rituals. Mythology is a continuing social practice within every society from Greek mythology to modern urban legends. Building and reinforcing a particular mythology around a criminal sub-culture is an important part of creating a recognised identity that members can relate to and with which they can connect. This in some cases is recognised by wider society which creates its own expectations. However using mythology to create an identity does not automatically indicate a strong cultural model. Some criminal sub-cultures take a practical approach to mythology and use it as a form of advertising, a brand image that they invest in for a variety of reasons, for example, to improve relations with the communities in which they live.

Organised criminal groupings around the world have created various mythologies and histories, all of which serve a different purpose. The use of traditional mythology is the kind used by the yakuza and the triads with a focus upon ancestors, heroic attributes, legendary origins, a noble past and invulnerability. Therefore, by fostering such an association, a group is able to demonstrate that it is not just a criminal organisation but also that it has a history of helping people.

In this chapter I will explore how the yakuza, triads, Sicilian mafia and Russian mafiya have handled mythology within their particular criminal sub-cultures as part of identity formation.

I.   Yakuza: 'The Robin Hoods of the East'

The yakuza do not cast the image of themselves as an organised criminal gang at all, but rather as a chivalrous group that dates back through history. They weave themselves into history as protectors of the Japanese people in the guise of noble warriors, both strong and fair. The official yakuza history portrays the group's ancestors as underdog folk heroes who stood up for the poor and the defenceless, drawing comparisons to how Robin Hood supposedly helped the peasants of medieval England.

Such figures were portrayed in plays, folktales and songs, heroes that championed the weak such as Ude no Kisaburo, or One-armed Kisaburo, a skilled swordsman who protected the townspeople. Kisaburo was excommunicated by his fencing teacher due to an affair with a woman; in order to seek his forgiveness he severed his right arm as an act of remorse and then went to battle the thugs of Tokyo.[231]

The yakuza claim that their lineage extends back to a group called the *machi yakko*, servants of the town. These were gangs of clerks, shopkeepers, innkeepers, artisans and labourers who were organised by local construction

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[231] Kaplan and Dubro, *Yakuza,* 6.

bosses[232] and arose to enforce order and defend the people. They also operated as mutual aid societies for victims of the Tokugawa era. These included farmers who had found themselves without land due to land taxes, debtors, and warriors who were without masters.[233]

The *machi yakko* were from the Tokugawa era which was the time of the shogunate, a period in Japanese history running from 1603 to 1868 when Tokugawa Leyasu unified the country of Japan in 1603 following the Sengoku Period of warring states. Civil war ended and an extended period of peace began in Japan, and the services of thousands of samurai warriors were no longer needed.[234] Although Japan had overcome a period of civil war, it was not yet a stable nation. The new era of peace left as many as 500,000 samurai unemployed and there were not enough jobs.[235] The country was becoming more business orientated than feudal and the once elite position warriors held was gone; instead they were increasingly marginalised. Those who could not find a place in this society and join the merchant class found themselves as wandering bands of 'masterless samurai' known as *ronin. Ronin* discovered that although they did not have to answer to a lord they also had no definite means of support. A number of *ronin* wandered across the country looking for employment or, failing this, found other means of surviving, through thievery and criminal methods, or by preying on townspeople and peasants. A proportion of these lived as separate gangs, known as *hatamoto*

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[232] Kaplan and Dubro, *Yakuza*, 5.
[233] Hill, *The Japanese Mafia,* 38.
[234] P. Lunde, *Organized Crime: An Inside Guide to the World's Most Successful Industry* (London, 2004), 95.
[235] Kaplan and Dubro, *Yakuza*, 5.

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yakko 'servants of the shogun' or *kabuki mono* 'the crazy ones'.[236] The *machi yakko* defended against these gangs. Setting themselves against the *kabuki mono* reinforces the romantic image of folk heroes that the modern yakuza use in public, ordinary town folk 'chivalrous commoners' who stood up in defence of those that needed help.[237] Both *yakko* groups disappeared by the late seventeenth century after repeated crackdowns by an alarmed shogunate.[238]

Chobei Banzuiin was the most renowned *machi yakko* around whom tales and plays circulated. Banzuiin became a leader of the *machi yakko* of Tokyo following a move to be with his brother, a priest in 1640.[239] Great deeds were associated with Banzuiin that enhanced his reputation. For example, a town girl was rescued from assault and a couple was able to marry despite their different social class, examples that all indicated the behaviour of a chivalrous commoner (*otokodate*).[240] This was exactly the kind of ancestor that the yakuza wished to have and indeed claimed to have. The yakuza were tapping into a well-known, established mythology that had connotations of bravery and protection, as the ones who worked in the best interests of the people. By association the yakuza gained from this reputation and tradition.

The modern yakuza seized an opportunity to reinforce this reputation and to present a more recent example of their title as the 'Robin Hoods of the East' when the Great Hanshin Earthquake (also known internationally as the Kobe

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[236] Kaplan and Dubro, *Yakuza*, 4.
[237] C. Altman, 'The Japanese Yakuza' www.umsl.edu/~altmanc/yakuza.html.
[238] Kaplan and Dubro, *Yakuza*, 5.
[239] Kaplan and Dubro, *Yakuza*, 6.
[240] Kaplan and Dubro, *Yakuza*, 6.

Earthquake) hit the Kobe area at 5:46 a.m. on Tuesday 17 January 1995.[241]

This was a devastating natural disaster that killed 5,200 people, injured 30,000, made 300,000 people homeless and damaged 110,000 buildings.[242] Whilst the government response was slow, ineffectual, confused and lacked coordination; the yakuza used their contacts and authority to provide and distribute supplies to the area. The yakuza provided food, clothing and other essentials to thousands of residents and were described by the media who were covering the event as being more effective in helping Kobe residents than the local or national government during the first two weeks due to their organisation. However, the news media also noted that most of the items donated by the yakuza were obtained from local merchants and corporations who did not dare to refuse their requests.[243] Philanthropy by the underworld is not disinterested, the reconstruction of Kobe will cost a significant amount of money and the yakuza will be in a position to take a higher proportion of the end contract. The earthquake also encouraged goodwill towards the organisation at the beginning of an enormous urban renewal project within which there were a number of opportunities.[244]

The situation was repeated on 11 March 2011 after the Japanese earthquake and tsunami which left over 10,000 dead. The yakuza sent supplies such as food, water and blankets to evacuation centres and patrolled the streets to

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[241] G. S. Fukushima, 'The Great Hanshin Earthquake', *Japan Policy Research Institute Occasional Paper* (2) (March 1995) http://www.jpri.org/publications/occasionalpapers/op2.html.
[242] *Ibid.*
[243] B. Lafayette De Mente, *Japan's Cultural Code Words: Key Terms That Explain the Attitudes and Behaviour of the Japanese* (Tokyo, 2004), 309.
[244] P. J. Katzenstein*, Cultural Norms & National Security: Police and Military in Post war Japan*, (New York, 1998), 76.

prevent looting.[245] The yakuza may have genuinely wished to offer assistance but there are also pragmatic reasons to offer support, it provides an opportunity to show themselves in a positive way and to curb public hostility towards them and after destruction follows construction. There would be ample opportunity for the yakuza to make money both through legal and illegal methods from the clean-up project and the number of rebuilding contracts that would follow. Fukushima had just passed a yakuza exclusion ordinance earlier that month; however in the aftermath of the tsunami there was little time to check the credentials of those applying for work, emergency aid or debris-removal contracts.[246]

Another romantic image the yakuza exploited is that of the samurai, internationally recognised figures. The yakuza attempted to draw parallels between the way the samurai lived their life and the way the yakuza live in the same honourable way, living according to the code of *bushido*. The code values masculinity and aims to demonstrate this by the endurance of pain, hunger, or imprisonment.[247] Violent death was also traditionally seen as a poetic, tragic, and an honourable fate. The concepts of *giri* and *ninjo* are central to the link that the yakuza have fostered between themselves and the honourable samurai. *Giri* is a moral obligation, a strong sense of duty felt between members and is described as the 'social cloth' that binds much of Japan together. *Ninjo* is emotion, human compassion and the ability to

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[245] J. Adelstein, 'How the yakuza went nuclear', *The Telegraph* (21 Feb 2012) http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/japan/japan-earthquake-and-tsunami-in/9084151/How-the-Yakuza-went-nuclear.html.

[246] A. Rankin, '21st-Century Yakuza: Recent Trends in Organized Crime in Japan – (Part I 'The Structure and Activities of the Yakuza), *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, (February 2012) http://www.japanfocus.org/-Andrew-Rankin/3688

[247] Kaplan and Dubro, *Yakuza*, 17.

empathise with people. Kaplan and Dubro describe the concept as having: 'Among its many interpretations is generosity or sympathy toward the weak and disadvantaged, and sympathy towards others.'[248]

This tie to chivalry and patriotism reinforced the 'Robin Hood' style of romantic image that the yakuza projected to the public.[249] As Kaplan and Dubro argue this view has been actively promoted by individual members of the yakuza. In an interview in 1984 Kakuji Inagawa a respected *oyabun*[250] from the Inagawa family, said:

> The yakuza are trying to pursue the road of chivalry and patriotism. That's our biggest difference with the American mafia, it's our sense of *giri* and *ninjo*. The yakuza try to take care of all society if possible, even if it takes 1 million yen to help a single person.[251]

By adopting *giri-ninjo,* the yakuza enhanced their standing in society and showed that like the best samurai they could combine compassion and kindness with their strength.[252] They cherry-picked the best characteristics of the *machi yakki* and the samurai and then by association insinuated that the yakuza also hold these same honourable and noble traits. This is much more effective than trying to sell the brand image of the yakuza to wider society, existing members and potential members from scratch. Instead association

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[248] Kaplan and Dubro, *Yakuza*, 17.
[249] C. Altman, 'The Japanese Yakuza' www.umsl.edu/~altmanc/yakuza.html.
[250] *Oyabun* – father role, boss.
[251] Kaplan and Dubro, *Yakuza*, 18.
[252] *Ibid.*, 17.

with a tried and tested brand is likely to be more successful and quicker. The prevailing opinion of the yakuza in Japan reflected this success.

In reality, however, it is more likely that the current yakuza are descendants from a much less noble and legendary past, as traditional gamblers, *bakuto* (gambling was illegal but widespread) and street peddlers, *tekiya*, who were low caste outsiders, a past that would not aid their public image.

The peddlers bonded together into gangs of *tekiya* for mutual interest and protection and by 1740 the strongest gang leaders were appointed to organise trading, allocate sites and collect rent.[253] In order to eradicate competition and protect the gangs, a form of protection using violence was used.[254] *Tekiya* had a reputation for selling shoddy merchandise and ran protection rackets in marketplaces. In order to have control of the marketplace, the *shogunate* recognised *tekiya* groups and gave their leaders official status, which allowed them to carry swords and use a surname.

The organisation of *tekiya* was split into ranks: the boss (*oyabun)*, the under-boss, officers, enlisted men and apprentices.[255] There were even rules to live by according to the 'Three Commandments of Tekiya': one, do not touch the wife of another member - established due to members being away peddling; two, do not reveal secrets of the organisation to the police; and three, keep

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[253] Hill, *The Japanese Mafia*, 37.
[254] *Ibid.*, 37.
[255] Kaplan and Dubro, *Yakuza*, 10.

strict loyalty to the *oyabun-kobun*[256] relationship. These rules are still relevant to the modern yakuza and the *oyabun* still maintains a key role. In the past he controlled his *kobun*, allocated stalls, and controlled the availability of certain goods and collected rent and protection money.[257] Members of a *tekiya* could travel around the country to other gangs and pay membership to other bosses to ensure favourable conditions for trading.[258]

The actual term yakuza refers to the historical roots of the yakuza as specifically *bakuto*, gamblers. '*ya*' - eight, '*ku*' - nine, and '*sa*' - three is the worst possible hand in a traditional Japanese card game, *Oicho-kabu* and is a slang term meaning 'loser' due to the low-scoring hand of cards.[259] The term was used to refer to the gamblers themselves, inferring that they were outside wider society. Gambling can be traced back to early Japan; organised gambling gangs emerged within the Kamakura period 1185 - 1392 and recognisable *bakuto* organised gangs emerged 1600 – 1867.[260] The most powerful bosses of gambling gangs became significant figures with some even operated as labour brokers in the construction industry and as moneylenders.[261]

The *bakuto's* contribution to Japan's criminal history included traditions such as finger cutting and tattoos, both of which are still used amongst the modern

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[256] Oyabun-kobun – 'father role – child role' The oyabun provides advice, protection and help, and in return receives the unanswering loyalty and service of his kobun whenever needed. Kaplan and Dubro, *Yakuza*, 8.
[257] Kaplan and Dubro, *Yakuza*, 11.
[258] *Ibid.*, 11.
[259] Hill, *The Japanese Mafia*, 36.
[260] *Ibid.*, 37.
[261] *Ibid.*, 37-38.

yakuza. Certain gangs gained a measure of official sanction and became adept at working with authorities, less formally so than the *tekiya*. These early moves by authorities to recognise, work with and even co-opt the underworld broke important ground,[262] in how the *tekiya* and *bakuto* were perceived and used.

However, the yakuza actually appear to have more in common with the *hatamoto yakko,* the enemies of the *machi yakko*, from which they claim to be descended. Elements such as reactionary political views, exaggerated attire, elaborate rituals and defiant self-exclusion are all more indicative of the yakuza.[263] The yakuza also shared their fierce loyalty to their gangs, the belief and assumption that it was the gang that took priority and that they would protect one another in any circumstance even against their own families.[264] The image of these rebels from the Tokugawa era was very important; they wore eccentric costumes, had unusual haircuts, demonstrated strange behaviour, used elaborate slang, and carried low hung long swords, which almost dragged along the ground, they had a swaggered walk, a specific slang and unusual names for the gangs, such as *Taisho Jangi - gumi* 'All Gods Gang'.[265]

Comparing these characteristics with those of the *machi yakko,* it is obvious which would be most successful in cultivating a positive public opinion. The yakuza have worked hard to establish and share their mythology and one of

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[262] Kaplan and Dubro, *Yakuza*, 15-16.
[263] Hill, *The Japanese Mafia*, 38.
[264] Kaplan and Dubro, *Yakuza*, 4.
[265] *Ibid.*, 4.

the methods they have used is through yakuza film. The media can reinforce mythology; for instance, the heroic-style posters that featured Hitler, Stalin and Mussolini. [266] The radio amplified their voices and film has enabled them to be captured with a god-like status such as Hitler in Leni Riefenstahl's film *Triumph of the Will* (1935) which showed Hitler being worshipped by his followers.[267] The creation of the yakuza's own media image formulated in the production of gangster films has enabled a visual reminder of their noble ancestry and has been a handy recruitment aid over the years. The classic situation explored in these films is that the one-dimensional good samurai-yakuza is torn between obeying the criminal code of conduct and helping ordinary people harassed by authorities and other criminals as for example, in the film *'Brutal Tales of Chivalry'*, (*Showa Zankyodu* 1965). The plots reinforced the virtue of absolute duty towards one's gang, and the yakuza code. The gangster was shown as a compassionate human being. If he did carry out evil it was because a corrupt yakuza had taken advantage of his devotion to the code. The good yakuza then kills the bad ones and re-establishes the honour of the organisation.[268] This kind of plot is guaranteed to obtain the desired portrayal of the yakuza and their history, and brings to life the mythology and values that they promote, potentially to the next generation of yakuza.

Director Paul Schrader described Japanese gangster films as 'probably the most restricted genre yet devised', composed of 'litanies of private argot, subtle body language, obscure code, elaborate rites, iconographic costumes

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[266] Burke, *Eyewitnessing,* 71-72.
[267] *Ibid.*, 71-72.
[268] Varese 'The Secret History of Japanese Cinema', 109.

and tattoos.'[269] He claimed this differed from their American or European counterparts in that they do not reflect the feeling, situation or what was happening in that country or to that group of people at the time. The dilemma of social mobility seen in Western gangster films of the 1930s or the despair of what Schrader called post-war film noir, for example, is not explored and the films are not placed by the wider setting. Instead yakuza films are organised around the conflict between social obligation of *giri* and personal inclination *ninjō*[270] in which the original fight between good and evil is culminated in a 'show down' of some sort with the defeat of the bad guys.[271]

The yakuza had a direct say in the production of studio films about themselves. They helped with the production of the films and current members were employed in the industry. One of the most successful studios of the yakuza film, Toei Studios, employed a general director Kouji Shundo who had once been a yakuza.[272] The portrayal of the yakuza tended to be as a positive patriarchal force in society.[273] Taking the mantle from the samurai, the yakuza became the last defender against the decadence and corruption that crept in from modernisation and contact with the West.[274] This was an ideal medium to control and put across how exactly the yakuza wished to be seen; the films could reach a large number of people and their popularity could ensure that the noble gangster image was carried on in the minds of wider society. Film was being used in the same way as plays, songs and

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[269] P. Schrader, 'Yakuza-Eiga: A Primer Film Comment' Volume 10, (1974), 8-17 cited in Varese 'The Secret History of Japanese Cinema', 106.
[270] *Ibid.*, 106.
[271] *Ibid.*, 106.
[272] Kaplan and Dubro, *Yakuza*, 142.
[273] Varese 'The Secret History of Japanese Cinema', 108-109.
[274] Kaplan and Dubro, *Yakuza*, 141.

stories had been in the past. The correct tone in a film could also prove to be a useful recruitment aid, as well as a marketing tool, appealing to certain individuals to join this 'honourable' way of life.

Yakuza bosses took an interest in their individual portrayal, and demanded to pre-approve the content of the films; they also encouraged the production of biographies about themselves and their gangs. In 1973, the Yamaguchi-gumi, Japan's largest criminal syndicate arranged for a trilogy chronicling the life of its boss, Taoka Kazuo.[275] In 1984 a film based on the life of Kakuji Inagawa, the boss of the crime syndicate Inagawa-kai was released, entitled *A band of daredevils* (*Shura no Mure).* The Inagawa-kai helped with the production of the film.[276]

Criticism did not sit easily in a genre that was heavily controlled. Juzo Itami, a Japanese director produced films including *The Gentle Art of Japanese Extortion* (*Minbo no Onna,* 1992) and *Women of the Police Protection Program* (*Marutai no Onna,* 1997) that did not portray the yakuza in a favourable light and he spoke out and criticised the yakuza openly. Juzo Itami was attacked by a group of men, slashed across the face and arms and in December 1997 fell to his death from the eighth floor of a building in suspicious circumstances.[277]

The yakuza initiation reinforced its mythology and was formal in its structure and symbolic in its detail. The *oyabun* and the initiate sat facing each other

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[275] Varese, 'The Secret History of Japanese Cinema', 118.
[276] Kaplan and Dubro, *Yakuza*, 141.
[277] Lunde, *Organized Crime*, 105.

with their cups of sake. These were mixed by the guarantors, known as *azukarinin* who oversaw the ceremony and mixed the sake with salt and fish scales which was poured into cups.[278] In comparison to the initiate, the cup that belonged to the *oyabun* was filled considerably more to demonstrate his status, both parties took a drink from their own cups and then each other's.[279] This exchange of sake cups was to symbolise the blood connection between the *oyabun* and the initiate who was now the *kobun*.[280]

Following this the *kobun* was then warned about his solemn duties:

> Having drunk from the *oyabun's* cup and he from yours, you now owe loyalty to the *ikka* [family] and devotion to your *oyabun*. Even should your wife and children starve, even at the cost of your life, your duty is now to the *ikka* and *oyabun*. Or from now on you have no other occupation until the day you die. The *oyabun* is your only parent; follow him through fire and flood.[281]

Not only was the degree of loyalty expected made clear, but the *oyabun* was given a god-like status, untouchable and infallible.

However, the myth of loyalty and the sanctity of the *oyabun-kobun* relationship was not as strong when put to the test in 1997, following an inter-gang conflict within the Yamaguchi-gumi, that resulted in a murder. The gang

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[278] http://www.crimelibrary.com/gangsters_outlaws/gang/yakuza/2.html?sect=25.
[279] *Ibid.*
[280] http://altman.casimirinstitute.net/yakuza.html.
[281] H. Iwai, 1966, cited in Kaplan and Dubro, *Yakuza,* 9.

that was responsible for the murder, the Nakano-kai, was expelled from the Yamaguchi-gumi. Once it became clear that the Nakano-kai was not going to be re-admitted to the Yamaguchi-gumi, and the future looked bleak, the members' loyalty to the gang began to dissolve. Life outside the protection of the Yamaguchi-gumi with a vastly reduced earning potential and the possibility of retaliation was hard and resulted in many members deserting.[282] By the time the top executive committee lifted its ban in June 2001 on the re-admission of Nakano-kai subgroups, its numbers had reduced drastically. This behaviour may have been practical and economically driven but it did not reflect the traditional yakuza ethics of unquestioning obedience to one's boss, especially as the Nakano-kai had a strong reputation for loyalty. When put to the test, however, the subgroup's members quickly fled to the security of the main syndicate.[283]

The yakuza also carried out other ceremonies known collectively as *girikake.* These were used to mark important events within a group and could be used to exercise control. *Girikake* could reaffirm the goals of the organisation and the place of the individual within it, for example, the seating arrangements of individuals and subgroups when waiting outside prison to meet at a jail release ceremony. Seating arrangements were also important and reinforced tradition in wider society as well as within the yakuza.[284] In *Confessions of a Yakuza*, Saga describes a homecoming ceremony outside of prison in which members waited with a change of clothes for the former prisoner and called

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[282] Hill, *The Japanese Mafia*, 242.
[283] *Ibid.*, 242.
[284] *Ibid.*, 78.

out their thanks to the individual for the prison term which they had served.[285]

This was followed later by a formal thank you and an envelope of money earned whilst 'on the job' along with a coming-out party in which the yakuza member once again reported for duty to the boss and older members.[286]

The yakuza also performed a conflict resolution ceremony known as *teuchi* (literally 'hand-striking') which played on the fair and chivalrous reputation of the yakuza and was used when there were no inter-group links. A trusted and respected third party acts as a guarantor for the reconciliation, and then, if the terms of the agreement are broken, the dignity of the third party is insulted and would need to be avenged. The ceremony worked through the potential loss of face and therefore respect which is increased with the number of witnesses to the ceremony.[287]

II.   Triads – The Hung Heroes

China has a long history of secret societies and groups from which the triads claim their descent and this history is heavily mythologised. The heritage and nobility of these groups could be used to reinforce the public perception and identity of the triads. These groups date back to the authoritarian Zhou dynasty of 1100 – 221 B.C. and have a tradition of self-preservation through unity and patriotism.[288] Due to the sheer size of the country, China was governed in autonomous provinces or districts, which aided the emergence of

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[285] Saga, *Confessions of a Yakuza*, 102-103.
[286] *Ibid.*, 104.
[287] Hill, *The Japanese Mafia*, 72.
[288] Booth, *The Dragon Syndicates*, 28.

secret societies. These local administrations created ideal conditions to breed corruption; they were independent, autocratic, undemocratic and almost impossible to dismantle.[289]

The *Chih Mei*, or Red Eyebrows, were the first of these secret societies to be recorded and originated in the Shandong province. The Red Eyebrows fought against Wang Mang, a usurper who overthrew the Western Han dynasty in AD 9 and were involved in deposing him. Following this, they continued as bandits.[290] The name Red Eyebrows came from their visual image; the members painted their eyebrows scarlet to look more terrifying, emulating demons that were believed to have red eyelids. They were used to living in opposition as a challenge to the socio-economic and political order of Wang Mang, and following their success in what they perceived as restoring things to how they should be, they were not treated favourably. By resisting authority, the bandits demonstrated that they had the potential to exercise power and rebel.[291]

Other secret societies which also took part in political activities, then moved from patriotism to outlawry or vanished from sight included: the *Tieh Ching* (Iron Shins), *Tung Ma* (Copper Horses), Iron Necks, Green Groves and Big Spears.[292] One of the most influential was The White Lotus Society – or *Pah Lien* - an underground Buddhist movement, which, according to legend was founded in the fourth century by the famous Buddhist teacher Eon (Hwui-yin)

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[289] Booth, *The Dragon Syndicates*, 29.
[290] *Ibid.*, 28.
[291] Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 12.
[292] Booth, *The Dragon Syndicates,* 29.

at Rozan, south of the Yangtze River, where he set up a community worshipping the Amitabha Buddha, the Buddha of the Pure Land, a mystical plane attained by meditation.[293] The community revolved around eighteen monks, the so-called Eighteen Sages of Rozan. The White Lotus Society changed its name a number of times in order to avoid infiltration and persecution. These names include the White Yang Society, the White Lily Society or the Incense Smelling Society. The White Lotus Society was also affiliated with other religious-based groups, such as the Eight Diagram (or Celestial Principles) Sect, the Nine Mansions Sect and the *T'ien-ti Hui* or Heaven and Earth Society, which was also known as the Hung Society.[294]

In 1344, the White Lotus Society was revived by Han Shan-tung, who, in collaboration with four other rebel leaders, Liu Fu-tung, Li Erh, Tu Tsun-tao and Su Shou-hui, rose against the Mongols with an army known as the Red Turban Rebels.[295] The army undermined the Yuan dynasty and was joined by Chu Yuan-Chang, a Buddhist monk, who was an excellent strategist and made his way to the top of the rebel army.[296] Chu Yuan-Chang later became known as Hung Wu, the first Ming dynasty emperor in 1368.[297]

The White Lotus Society was another example of what a secret society could do when united and mobilised and the ruling administrations were becoming very wary. An imperial edict was issued by the second Ch'ing emperor, K'ang-his, in 1662, which banned secret societies and was followed by the banning

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[293] Booth, *The Dragon Syndicates,* 31-32.
[294] *Ibid.*, 32.
[295] *Ibid.*, 32.
[296] *Ibid.*, 32.
[297] *Ibid.*, 32.

of other societies. The White Lotus had staged a major revolt against the Ming in 1622, helping to weaken it enough that the Ch'ing could take power.[298] The secret societies went further underground and became a focus for pro-Ming insurgency; they formed alliances and began to develop common rituals, secret signs and passwords.[299] The White Lotus Society gradually disappeared, but metamorphosed into or joined up with the Hung Society also known as Hung League. In 1761 it was renamed the *San Ho Wei*, or the Three United Society. Members saw the world as tripartite, a unity of the three main powers of nature: heaven, earth and man. Many of the early society flags, used in ceremonies or paraded into battle, bore a triangle. Both the name and the emblem are the origin of the modern term for all Chinese secret societies, the triads.

The term 'triad' is the English designation used to describe the emblem of the society, a triangle. This symbol represented the Heaven and Earth Society, the Three in One Society and the Three Dots Society. They were known as the Hung societies, the *Hung Mun* (Hung League), *Tien Ti Wei* (Heaven and Earth Society), and *San Ho Wei* (Three United Association or Three Unities Society). Therefore the term triad applied only to the major group of secret societies, known as the Hung. The Chinese themselves do not use this term but rather refer to the societies either under individual names or collectively as *Hak Sh'e Wui*, the Black Society.[300]

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[298] P. Huston, *Tongs, Gangs and Triads* (Lincoln, 1995), 28.
[299] Booth, *The Dragon Syndicates,* 33.
[300] *Ibid.*, 34.

The mythology the triads have consciously developed and promoted involves patriotism, loyalty and secrecy. They claim to be societies who strive to restore order, return things to how they should be and yet are persecuted for their loyalty and actions. Parallels can be drawn to the image the yakuza use; this is another example of a criminal sub-culture which claimed to be descendants of noble, honourable men who strive to do what is best for the people against a dishonourable enemy.

The specific historical and mythological event which is used to demonstrate the beginning of the triads is based upon the destruction of the Shaolin (*Shiu Lam* or *Siu Lam*) monastery, a Buddhist temple at Mount Songshan in the Henan province in 1644 during the Ch'ing reign. The monks, strategists and martial-arts experts assisted the emperor in a campaign against the Eleuths, a Mongol tribe from the North West. However, as with the Red Eyebrows 1,500 years earlier, they became a political threat and those who had originally deployed them ordered the monastery to be burned down.[301] Only five of the monks escaped and they became known as the 'Five Former Progenitors' or The First Five Ancestors. They secretly organised the Hung Mun or Hung Societies, noted above, to promote the overthrow of the Ch'ing and the restoration of the Ming.[302]

The five monks supposedly saw the four Chinese characters that make up this phrase *'Fan q'ing – fuk ming'*[303] blazing in an incense burner.[304] This

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[301] Booth, *The Dragon Syndicates,* 41-42.
[302] Arsovska and Craig, '"Honourable" Behaviour and the Conceptualisation of Violence in Ethnic-Based Organised Crime Groups', 228-229.
[303] Booth, *The Dragon Syndicates,* 34.

phrase is an important part of the triad mythology and is a reinforcement of their noble heritage and also an indication of how significant oral tradition is to the conveyance of these myths and legends.[305] In fact this became the oath and part of the triad initiation ritual[306] which in itself is used to reinforce mythology.

Initiation ceremonies were an important method of reinforcing any mythologies, reaffirming that the new recruit had made a decision to enter into a society that was rich in history. This is most obvious in the complex triad initiation rite that included 36 oaths that had to be taken and a physical journey through gates, all indicating elements of their past. The oaths were a mix of the general and practical with historical and mythological references to impress the importance and history of the organisation. For example, 'If I should change my mind and deny my membership of the family I will be killed by myriads of sword,' or 'If I rob a sworn brother or assist an outsider to do so I will be killed by five thunderbolts.'[307] These are very clear general points that the new recruit needs to follow, that were embellished by historical references to the 'Hung family' and mythical connotations of thunderbolts and a myriad of swords.

In 1960, W.P. Morgan, a police inspector in Hong Kong published an account of the elaborate triad initiation rituals based on his own experiences and interviews with imprisoned triad members. Morgan detailed that the room

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[304] Lunde, *Organized Crime*, 107-108.
[305] Arsovska and Craig, '"Honourable" Behaviour and the Conceptualisation of Violence in Ethnic-Based Organised Crime Groups', 228-229.
[306] Lunde, *Organized Crime*, 108.
[307] W. P. Morgan, *Triad Societies in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong, 1960), 157-60.

where the initiation was held had walls that were adorned with records of the lives of the First Five Ancestors and other Hung heroes. Morgan also documented that the individual had to step through a bamboo hoop which represented the hole through which the monks escaped from the Shao Lin monastery and also served as a symbolic enactment of rebirth.[308] These were all important visual reminders to the recruit of the glorious history and past of the group they were entering into and therefore the gravity of their decision.

In China, a secret society was generally known as either a *hui* – an association – or a *chiao*, meaning a sect. The authorities had other names for them: *hsieh-chiao* (vicious sects), *wei-chiao* (false-god sects), *chiao-fei* (bandit sects), *yin-chiao* (obscene sects) and *yao-chiao* (perverse sects). Within a secret society the leaders' authority was absolute; members were bound to them by oaths of allegiance and often came from the same place. They were united by common ritual and a sense of brotherhood. Indeed some triad societies called themselves families rather than a *hui.*

Where Chinese societies were established overseas, the *hui* began to influence those societies. The *hui* had their own structures including a court, methods to deal with offenders, ways to dispute arbitration and witness contracts of business and marriage. The *hui* carried out social-benefit activities and were integral to the lives of the Chinese population living abroad, even aiding in confrontations between the Chinese community and local government and they often provided relief in times of hardship. They

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[308] Lunde, *Organized Crime*, 109.

provided and indeed still do provide a support system for Chinese immigrants abroad; they were a friendly face in an unknown and sometimes hostile environment.[309] The triads could provide economic aid or help with social situations for the lower classes of China who had moved to foreign shores.[310] However, they also acted as outlaws and as such robbed, pillaged, killed, kidnapped and extorted under the slogan of *Tafu-chih p'in* ('Hit the rich and help the poor'). This image of the noble Robin Hood outlaws who were redistributing wealth across society was just that, an image; the leaders received the bulk of the money.[311]

It was rare for civilians to challenge the authority/power of the triads not just from fear but also because there was a belief that the secret societies and the triads had an almost divine right to do what they did: they were religiously constituted, rooted in Chinese history and legend.[312] This displays the power of a well constituted mythology. These societies had permeated Chinese culture; they provided an image of patriotic, noble people who have mythological and religious roots.[313] The *hui* offered members a variety of religious ideals including immortality and a better after-life. Variation within both political and religious spheres appealed to peasant recruits who made up a significant proportion of triad membership.[314]

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[309] Lunde, *Organized Crime*, 108.
[310] Arsovska and Craig, '"Honourable" Behaviour and the Conceptualisation of Violence in Ethnic-Based Organised Crime Groups', 232.
[311] Booth, *The Dragon Syndicates,* 42.
[312] *Ibid.*, 43.
[313] *Ibid.*, 43.
[314] *Ibid.*, 43.

The triads managed to be accepted into the wider Chinese society and exert control in the societies that settled in foreign countries by providing an alternative sub-culture that could offer a different political or religious scene. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the triads had become an alternative sub-culture and one of its major strengths was its ability to appear both indispensable and invincible.[315] Mythology was important both in creating this role for the triads and then in reinforcing it. Mythology not only explained the history and therefore existence of a triad group; it also provided legitimacy with an historical pedigree.[316]

III.   The Yakuza and Triads: The Significance of a Robin Hood-style mythology

The yakuza and triads have worked hard and continue to do so on their image as noble, loyal and honourable members of the criminal class, who have a history of ancestors who were brave and helped people in their society. One of the reasons is that these all merge to create a patriotic Robin Hood-type figure which is more readily accepted by the public.[317] It is much easier for public relations if the public believe they are dealing with a (criminal) group that is entrenched in their national culture, and has been part of the country's history and popular culture.

For the yakuza, it is easy to see why the status of folk heroes of the *machi-yakko* was chosen over the *hatamoto yakko* to be their ancestors. This legend

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[315] Booth, *The Dragon Syndicates,* 45.
[316] Haar, *Ritual and Mythology*, 5.
[317] Kaplan and Dubro, *Yakuza*, xviii.

took on a life of its own through stories, plays and songs featuring the *machi-yakko* as the hero. The yakuza have aligned themselves with a group that society can look up to, a group that historically has helped society. Therefore almost immediately the image of the yakuza does not have the negative connotations that other organised criminal gangs suffer from.

Likewise, as Peter Huston discussed in *Tongs, Gangs and Triads*, Chinese criminal groups were able to tap into a rich vein of popular respect for secret groups, sworn societies and 'noble bandits', such as the twelfth-century outlaws of the Huai River region, who fought against the Sung dynasty.[318] Subsequently mythologised in *Outlaws of the Marsh* (sometimes translated as *The Water Margin*), one of the four great classical novels of Chinese literature, these bandits were probably just that, but they became an enduring symbol of resistance to oppressive or uncaring authorities. Chin identified that, historically, 'Triad norms and values have thrived in social milieus where the dominant culture was perceived as alien and foreign.'[319] This could be a Mongol-dominated dynasty such as the Sung, or British-ruled Hong Kong or simply in the wider world around a Chinatown in the West. In any case there is something in the triad mythology that allows it to represent itself as associated with Chinese values and the defence of the ordinary person against alien elites.

The results of this use of traditional mythology demonstrated by the yakuza and the triads help to explain why it is used. Public perception among the

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[318] Huston, *Tongs, Gangs and Triads*, 52-53.
[319] Ko-lin Chin, *Chinese Subculture and Criminality* (Greenwood, 1990), 141.

Japanese, which included many police officers, believed that organised crime in Japan had a noble past.[320] Triads live outside the law, but they have never been outside wider society. Lintner described the triads as being useful for big business, government agencies and the police. Despite the triads operating extortion rackets, gambling dens and prostitution rings, the streets that they controlled were largely free from petty criminals and 'disorganised' crime.[321]

The historical background and criminal activities of the triads are socially important. This is because their socio-cultural influence within the Chinese underworld and broader society in general remains all-encompassing. The triads paved the way and became role models for other underworld actors.[322] The use of traditional mythology promoted that the ancestry of these organised criminal groupings was so noble, honourable and mythological that they become 'bigger than us', a feeling of being ordained and a sense of infallibility.

IV.   Sicilian Mafia

The Sicilian mafia and the Russian mafiya do not use a traditional Robin Hood style mythology, even if they do use folklore to communicate their myths and legends. Folklore is not as rigid or as structured as its traditional counterpart, but its malleability is what enables it to be moulded to fit whatever purpose is required. Traditional mythology connects to a remote past but folklore can be

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[320] Kaplan and Dubro, *Yakuza*, 4.
[321] B. Lintner, 'Chinese organised crime' *Global Crime,* 6/1 (February 2004), 84-96 here 89-90.
[322] Arsovska, and Craig, '"Honourable" Behaviour and the Conceptualisation of Violence in Ethnic-Based Organised Crime Groups', 232.

based within any time frame. Folklore is based on the passing down of stories and mythology being circulated through the society; it is not about a structured family tree or ancestral roots, rather it is a more flexible approach. There are variations on the folklore mythology throughout the structure but the general points still apply. For example, there are variations in the initiation ceremony for the Sicilian mafia which is not as prescribed as that of the triads, but the main objectives are achieved. This folklore mythology is about a sense of honour and specific expected behaviour and reputation rather than definite events or specific periods of history which are drawn upon.

One myth surrounding the Cosa Nostra is that they descended from the Sicilian Vespers of 1282, when the people rebelled, whereas another suggested that they derived from an eighteenth-century sect of avengers known as the *Beati Paoli*.[323] Stories surrounding the origin of the word 'mafia' claim that it derived from the battle cry of the Sicilian Vespers throwing off French occupation and creating the kingdom of Sicily: *'Morte all Francia Italia anelia!'* (Death to the French is Italy's cry!)[324] Another suggestion is that it was an abbreviation supporting Mazzini's Republican movement, a command to wreak havoc across the Sicilian countryside in 1850.[325] Giuseppe Mazzini desired the unification of Italy and was associated with a number of secret societies. The command was: *'Mazzini Authorizes Theft, Arson and Poisoning'*, *'Mazzini Autorizza Furti, Incendi, Avvelenamenti'* (M.A.F.I.A.) and

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[323] Gambetta, *The Sicilian Mafia*, 132.
[324] Z. Aviles, 'Mafia History' http://www.planetpapers.com/Assets/1120.php.
[325] T. Hunt, 'Is There A Mafia?' (2002) http://www.onewal.com/maf-art01.html.

is linked with the unfounded idea that Mazzini was the forefather of the mafia.[326]

That mystery shrouds the meaning of the word and the fact that there are many variations on its origin have enabled an assortment of stories and origin myths, all of which portray the mafia as having honourable roots and have helped to create a belief that the mafia was born in order to protect and help the less fortunate. It was about portraying historical situations to best suit an external image that they wished to attain.

The word 'mafia' first appeared in an official document in 1865 in a letter from the *delegato di pubblica sicurezza* in Carini near Palermo, who justified an arrest by referring to a *delitto di mafia.* Therefore the word did not emerge from inside the mafia but rather from external sources.[327] The word mafia first appeared in a dictionary in 1868. Gambetta explained that the term itself may have come from Arabic, an adjective that evolved into *mafiusu* or *maffiusu* in Sicilian dialect through combination with a similar sounding term, *marpiuni* or *marfiuni*, found throughout Italy, meaning astute impostors. In reference to a man, *mafiusu* in nineteenth-century Sicily was ambiguous, signifying a bully, one who was arrogant but also fearless, enterprising and proud.[328] It began to be used as a generic term to refer to criminals not only in Sicily but also for any ethnic groups. Lupo in *History of the Mafia* identifies an interesting point about the first appearance of the term mafia in Italy and America in the nineteenth century and draws some areas of commonalty. The term mafia

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[326] Gambetta, *The Sicilian Mafia*, 261.
[327] *Ibid.*, 136.
[328] *Ibid.*, 136.

appears to have been linked to political subversion and the survival of a distant past which are in conflict with modernity. For example, in America at this time the term mafia was associated with foreign plots and alien conspiracy and a fear of the migration of those who were different with perceived archaic values.[329] That said, in Antonino Calderone's testimony in Arlacchi, *Men of Dishonor: Inside the Sicilian Mafia* he claimed that the mafia would call itself the Cosa Nostra, an association of men of honour not the mafia.[330]

The Sicilian initiation ceremony was historically not as rigid or arranged as that of the triads or yakuza. Although it has now reportedly disappeared, it was certainly steeped in history and although each ceremony was not performed in exactly the same way they did all follow the same themes. When Tommaso Buscetta, a high ranking man of honour broke the code of *omertà* (a code of silence with regard to the authorities) in the mid-1980s and spoke to the authorities, he disclosed his experience of the initiation. Buscetta said that the initiation consisted of a blood oath and an oath of obedience. In order to become a member of the Sicilian mafia the potential recruit had to be presented for initiation by at least three men of honour from the particular family. Blood was drawn from the initiate's finger and sprinkled on the picture of a saint, the picture was then set on fire and passed from hand to hand while the new recruit swore to keep the code of Cosa Nostra, to which he was bound to for life.[331]

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[329] Lupo, *History of the Mafia*, 5.
[330] Testimony of Antonio Calderone published by Arlacchi, *Men of Dishonor*, 19.
[331] Lunde, *Organized Crime*, 68.

This ceremony created an atmosphere and situation that reinforced the gravity of the decision the new recruit had made and the importance of the group into which the recruit entered. Gambetta described the Sicilian mafia rituals as having the purpose of sealing a contract that cannot be sanctioned in conventional ways. It is a strong symbolic act. 'When the index finger is pricked, the *rappresentante* informs (the novice) that he must take care never to betray the family, because in the Cosa Nostra one enters with blood and leaves only with blood.'[332] This initiation would bind the individual to the group; the novice was required to assume a new identity permanently, to become a 'man of honour' and be ready to sacrifice even his life for the mafia family.[333] The ceremony was more powerful than a contract and instilled a sense of fear to encourage loyalty to the group and way of life; the new recruits became 'brothers' to all members.

The mythology of the initiation was not predetermined, there was not one agreed description of the initiation; the accounts of the descriptions of the mafia ritual differ, even if it is only in a few details. Each account was for a different fraternal organisation, showing the difference between each organisation as well as between each report. There were very similar aspects but the actions and the order of the proceedings were different. For example, the Fratuzzi of Bagheria in the late nineteenth century had a similar ritual to those reported for other, similar fraternities, but with a blasphemous variation at the end.[334] The descriptions of the ritual of another, the Fratellanza of

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[332] Gambetta, *The Sicilian Mafia,* 153.
[333] L. Paoli, 'Italian Organised Crime: Mafia Associations and Criminal Enterprises', *Global Crime* 6/1 (February 2004), 19-31 here 21.
[334] Gambetta, *The Sicilian Mafia,* 263.

Girgenti from Lestinhi in 1884, was the first account to contain the actual words of the oath. The details differed from previous iterations of the ritual; the index finger was pierced rather than the thumb, and the finger was tied with a thread in addition to being pierced.[335] Precise detail thus varied from group to group, year to year; the ritual was never fixed nor consistent.

External view of folklore mythology

The folklore mythology used by the mafia was not just promoted internally; it was also used externally by the public, police, politicians and media. For example, a Sicilian photographer Natale Gaggioli, always used to put a leaf of a prickly pear next to the corpse of a mafia victim, as he believed without it, it did not look like a mafia murder and therefore he would not be able to sell the picture.[336] This connection between the media and the mafia and how each projected and shaped the other is an interesting point which is raised on a number of occasions when looking at cultural elements of criminal sub-cultures, especially language and visual indicators, such as clothes.

How the mafia was viewed externally was important; Hess claimed that the word mafia has been confused and misinterpreted by journalists, jurists and foreign authors. In fact what can be traced is the behaviour pattern of mafiosi in various historical situations and the role they played in the history of Sicily.[337] Paoli shared this view that the mafia was perceived as a form of behaviour and power. Rather than an organisation, mafiosi embodied sub-

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[335] Gambetta, *The Sicilian Mafia,* 263.
[336] Hess, *Mafia and Mafiosi*, 127-128.
[337] *Ibid.*, 161.

cultural values and exercised specific functions within their communities.[338]

Those values surrounded honourable behaviour and conforming to certain

rules of cunning, courage and ferocity. The role of the mafioso was as a tough

customer, a man of courage and self-control, not necessarily violent but

someone with the potential to be so when needed. When violence was used,

it needed to shock and amaze. Being a mafioso was about the possession of

superior strength and force; he should be honourable and able to demonstrate

successful acts of aggression.[339] It involved the ability to become respected, a

'man of honour' strong enough to avenge himself for any insult and to offer

any such insult to his enemies.[340] Arlacchi described the culture of the

mafioso as one which encouraged and idealised violence. Indeed he referred

to Usi who characterised the culture in the following way:[341]

> The mafia is a certain consciousness of one's own being, an
>
> exaggerated notion of individual force and strength as 'the one and
>
> only means of settling any conflict, any clash of interests or ideas';
>
> which means that it is impossible to tolerate the superiority or (worse
>
> still) the dominance of others.[342]

If the mafia was not an organisation but rather a type of behaviour and

attitude that was rooted in the identity of every Sicilian, then Sicilian culture

and the mafia become confused and interlinked. This connection served the

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[338] Paoli, 'Italian Organised Crime', 19.
[339] Arlacchi, *Mafia Business,* 4.
[340] *Ibid.*, 3-4.
[341] *Ibid.*, 4.
[342] G Pitrè Usi, *Costumi e pregiudizi del popolo Siciliano,* Vol II, (Bologna 1969), 292 cited in Arlacchi, *Mafia Business,* 6.

interests of organised crime: it confounded the idea of the mafia in the minds of the wider society as well as in a legal context. Dickie explained the implications of the concept:

> Smudging the line between the mafia and Sicilians could also make legal measures against the mob look futile. If the supposedly primitive Sicilian mentality was to blame, how could the mafia be prosecuted, short of putting the whole island in the dock? *'Tutti culpevoli, nessuno culpevole'* If everyone is guilty, no one is guilty.'[343]

The mafia culture had at its centre a precisely defined idea of a man: a courageous man who goes to the heart of things, '*Omu di panza e di sustanza',* who does not waste time in idle talk. This was an idea that was shared with Sicilian culture that a true man with few words was capable of settling complex problems with a single gesture or commanding glance. This was linked to the ability to gain respect without turning to the law and being able to protect family and property. In Sicily the concept of honour traditionally surrounded women and property and the ability to protect both in line with social status. Men of honour were different; people were honourable who were born into an honourable family, but men of honour were made, not born, and could come from a humble origin.[344] If one was not entitled to the deference of others through birth, then violence was another means of attaining that respect.[345]

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[343] J. Dickie, *Cosa Nostra: A History of the Sicilian Mafia* (London, 2004), xvii.
[344] Catanzaro, *Men of Respect*, 46.
[345] *Ibid.*, 27.

Whether the mafia is a specific form of behaviour or traced back to stories of throwing off foreign occupation is irrelevant to the power of the constructed mythology of the Sicilian mafia. Both elements can be useful to the image that is portrayed and the mystery enables the mythology to be whatever it needs to be at the time.

V.   The Russian Mafiya

The folklore of the Russian mafiya focused back to the *vory v zakone* and the *vorovskoi mir*, the thieves' world or criminal underworld. Chalidze noted that the thieves' world deserved to be regarded as a social institution; it had its own internal cohesion and ethical code.[346]

There have always been ordinary criminals present in Russia. During the time of Peter the Great (1695-1725), 30,000 criminals were allegedly living on the outskirts of Moscow alone.[347] These were criminals, who merely stole other people's property. Although they sometimes lived as separate and isolated gangs, they lacked the organisation and cooperation that distinguished the *vorovskoi mir*. Outlaw bands became the symbols of the struggle against aristocratic landowners and the oppressive state.[348] After the 1917 revolution, political criminals became the heads of juvenile criminal groups and took the name of *'zhigani.'*[349] *Zhigani* borrowed the traditions of the criminals, but adapted them to promote their political message and to avoid assimilation into

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[346] Chalidze, *Criminal Russia,* 34.
[347] Serio and Razinkin, 'Thieves professing the code', 73.
[348] Handelman, 'The Russian 'Mafiya',109.
[349] Serio and Razinkin, 'Thieves professing the code', 73.

the world of the criminal.[350] Some of these political criminals who headed the groups developed a series of rules, such as not to work and not to serve in the military; rules that could be found in the later code by which the *vorovskoi mir* lived.[351] The connection between the political and the criminal finally split following conflict over the social status and recognition the political criminals desired.

The origins of the *vorovskoi mir* can also be seen in the artel, an ancient Russian institution akin to the European 'guild' that preserved its original form up to the beginning of the twentieth century.[352] Both thieves' and beggars' artels existed and components of their structure and organisation were reflected later in the *vorovskoi mir.* Beggars' guilds and the thieves' society in the nineteenth century were therefore among the forerunners of the modern Russian gangs. The essence of an artel was the agreement by its members to carry out some economic activity, on the basis of equal rights and responsibilities.[353] The artel was strengthened by mutual responsibilities, the use of joint labour and common capital.[354] Artels went by different names in different parts of the country, sometimes specialising in different occupations across society as well as in the underworld of 'thieves' and beggars. For example, in the mid-seventeenth century, artels were present amongst the industries of fisheries, dairy production and gold mining.[355] Internal

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[350] Serio and Razinkin, 'Thieves professing the code', 73.
[351] *Ibid.*, 73.
[352] Chalidze, *Criminal Russia*, 37.
[353] *Ibid.*, 39.
[354] A. Karyakin 'The History and Traditions of Teamwork in Russia' http://www.workteams.unt.edu/newsletter/Archive/v5-3.html Work Teams Newsletter 5/3 (1995).
[355] *Ibid.*

organisation varied; from the eighteenth century, some had charters and functions prescribed by laws; others, more in line with the structure the *vorovskoi mir* adopted later, functioned on the basis of oral or even tacit agreement among their members.[356]

An obligation incurred by a representative of the artel had to be fulfilled. If a member of the artel was responsible for any damage to the artel, or any other contracting party, and the fault was his, then he had to repay the damage. If the individual could not meet the payment, then it became the responsibility of the artel as a collective.[357] This process of working as a community, and also being responsible to that community, later became the key to the fraternity of the *vory*. New members were nominated and accepted the obligations of the artel in a ceremony. If these obligations were disregarded, or the general morality of the artel was offended, sanctions were imposed upon the members.[358] In the cases of thieves' artels and beggars' artels, the associations were secret, and a special language was used that was unintelligible to outsiders. This reinforced the closed nature of the group.

The notion of family, unity and the insular nature of the *vorovskoi mir* appealed to some parts of society. After the First World War, the Revolution and the Civil War, there were a number of homeless peasants, jobless workers and hungry deserters who turned to crime to survive. The *besprizornye* - the homeless, rootless, orphaned children whose numbers

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[356] Chalidze, *Criminal Russia*, 37.
[357] *Ibid.*, 39.
[358] *Ibid.*, 40.

rose to seven million[359] at this time were especially attracted to the *vorovskoi mir*. The closed nature and the idea of detachment from society of the underworld captivated the *besprizornye*; it offered a support system and a consistent force present in their life. Individual families accepted some of these children but often they were neglected, exploited or abused. Alternatively they found themselves in over-crowded children's homes. The large number of children who did not qualify for care or who ran away from the homes in which they were placed took to the streets, often turned to crime, and thus prison camps became their new homes.[360] They grouped in various cities and met up with past friends. They even had their own form of slang, songs and solidarity. The notion of rejecting society's ethical values, prohibitions and the anti-establishment ethos of the *vorovskoi mir* and the freedom that came from this rejection were tempting especially when the *besprizornye* were disregarded by the majority of wider society. The *vorovskoi mir* was appealing to those who wanted the strength and solidarity that was present in such a fraternity, albeit at the expense of others. In his camp memoir *Years Off My Life,* Gorbatov documents a thief named Vasya who had taken this route. He had lost his mother when he was two and his father was hanged in Ukraine during the Civil War. An aunt had brought him up, but he had run away, become homeless and joined some thieves who robbed a savings bank which resulted in a twelve-year sentence in Kolyma.[361]

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[359] M. Galeotti, 'Criminal Russia: the Traditions Behind the Headlines' in M. Galeotti, *Russian and Post-Soviet Organized Crime* (Aldershot, 2002), 4.
[360] W. Z. Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917-1936* (Cambridge, 1993), 77.
[361] A. V. Gorbatov, *Years off my Life: the Memoirs of General of the Soviet Army* (London, 1964), 140.

Soviet society shaped the thieves' society. The use of terror as an instrument of political control meant that for those who did not agree with the Party or who were not convinced by the propaganda, opposition was dangerous. In order to eradicate all real or potential enemies, there was an escalating campaign of arrests, imprisonments and executions in the 1930s. Major purges were carried out on members of the bureaucracy, the Party, the armed forces and the intelligentsia as well as many workers and peasants who became victims through some of the policies implemented, such as collectivisation.[362] Stalin altered the penal system which had already been expanded by Lenin; inmate labour was connected to the economy for the first time by collectivising and implementing the first Five-Year Plan.[363] From then on Soviet labour camps had a dual identity both as prisons and production units. Convict labour was used to build canals and in industries such as timber felling and logging, the mining of coal, gold, platinum and non-ferrous metals, and construction work of all kinds, especially in inhospitable regions.[364] It became a vital source of human and economic resource for the state and provided cheap labour in remote places. The performance of each camp director was measured by successful inmates' 'correction' and economic productivity.[365] The labour camp directive meant that prisoners had to accomplish designated work tasks in exchange for their subsistence and were rewarded according to the amount of work done.[366] In the early 1930s, a

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[362] J. Laver, *Joseph Stalin from Revolutionary to Despot* (London, 1993), 40.

[363] M. Jakobson, *Origins of the Gulag, The Soviet Prison Camp System 1917-1934* (Kentucky, 1993), 142-143.

[364] G. Hosking, *A History of the Soviet Union 1917 – 1991* (London, 1992), 199.

[365] R. Karklins, 'The Organisation of Power in Soviet Labour Camps', *Soviet Studies,* XLI/2, (April 1989), 276-297 here 278.

[366] R. D. Cressey and W. Krassowski, 'Inmate Organization and Anomie in American Prisons and Soviet Labour Camps', *Social Problems* 5/3 (1957), 217-230 here 221.

normative act was passed that regulated the activities of the Gulag. Therefore the camp system had become a legally sanctioned instrument for exerting political influence on society.[367]

The expansion of the Gulag system of the Soviet era encouraged and aided the growth and development of the *vory v zakone.* The thieves became the aristocracy of the prison camps and this criminal phenomenon was mentioned in the majority of camp memoirs and books that were written about this era. Robert Conquest, in *Kolyma, The Artic Death Camps*, noted that: 'The camps gave birth to a cruel hierarchy of inmates, where cunning and experience determined ranking and survival. This was the time of the *vory* and the *pakhany*, the cream of the criminal elite.'[368]

This is where part of the folklore of the Russian mafiya lies, that this thieves' world was cemented in such a violent, harsh environment and that this society survived and created an order and set of rules by which to live. Some of the most notorious camps were in such inhospitable surroundings as Magadan and the Kolyma River basin that they were essentially a frozen continent that could only be reached by the convict ships. This gave rise to a hard image of survival and toughness of a group bred in the bleakest of surroundings, but also the elite stratum of the criminal underworld, the 'aristocracy' of the prison camps. The mechanisms of control throughout the Soviet labour camp system were harsh and brutal. Prisoners were kept at an extremely low level of

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[367] Adler, *Beyond the Soviet System*, 19.
[368] Pakhany were senior *vory v zakone*, who also controlled gangs.

sustenance physically and emotionally.[369] The authorities perceived that the political prisoners constituted the main threat, so therefore they provided the thieves with favourable conditions. Political prisoners found themselves virtually helpless, terrorised by the thieves, with the encouragement and approval of the camp administration.[370] The thieves bullied, stole, attacked and raped with impunity. The political prisoners did not pose a united front, and they were weak from exhaustion, because they were assigned the heaviest jobs and received little food. As a group they were distrustful of others and vulnerable.

Conquest describes this underground criminal world as a sub-culture that had its own speech, jargon and obscenities.[371] The members of the *vorovskoi mir* possessed their own values especially loyalty, honour and solidarity, a way of life, a communal fund and a code that structured and influenced this way of life.[372] The code or rules that the thieves lived by were perceived by their society to be honest and uncorrupted, unlike the politics that governed the lives of the rest of wider society.

The initiation of the *vorovskoi mir* involved the individual being presented to the criminal society and every possible exploit and accomplishment was offered up to the collective judgement.[373] If the thieves agreed on a judgement that allowed this initiation to take place, then one of the senior thieves would rise and finalise the process with the ritualistic phrase: 'Look on him, and look

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[369] Karklins, 'The Organisation of Power in Soviet Labour Camps', 283-284.
[370] Glazov, '"Thieves" in the USSR – A Social Phenomenon', 152.
[371] R. Conquest, *Kolyma The Artic Death Camps* (London, 1978), 79.
[372] Glazov, '"Thieves" in the USSR – A Social Phenomenon', 141.
[373] Dyomin, *The Day is Born of Darkness*, 124.

well: Remember, the sentence isn't subject to appeal. We're all responsible for him now!'[374]

The criminal was now a member of the *vorovskoi mir*, a recognised member of the elite fraternity. A nickname was also formally given at the ritual, indicating a transition into this new world.[375] He was considered part of a nation-wide fraternity, and status within the *vorovskoi mir* applied wherever the criminal might travel. This was the initiation into the *vorovskoi mir* as a *blatnoi,* a 'made man', a thief and member of that world. [376] A further initiation was that of a *vor*, when a *blatnoi* was elevated to the status of a *vor*, known as the 'the crowning of the *vor'* indicating the status that was involved. It took years of training and tests until the title of *vor* could be claimed and respected.[377] Many *blatnye* aspired to become *vory*, the highest possible honour that very few achieved. *Blatnye* belonged to the same environment and abided by the same rules of behaviour as the *vor*, but did not have the same status.

In order to attain the title of *vor* a criminal had to be proposed and elected by at least two other *vory.*[378] The criminal needed to demonstrate considerable leadership skills, personal power, charisma and intellect. This did not need to constitute a formal education but a demonstration of wits and self-

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[374] Dyomin, *The Day is Born of Darkness*, 124.
[375] Varese, *The Russian Mafia*, 150.
[376] *Ibid.*, 150.
[377] Glazov, '"Thieves" in the USSR – A Social Phenomenon', 144.
[378] Friedman, *Red Mafiya*, 10.

education.[379] Respect had to be earned through the character, and faithfulness to the traditions that the criminal profession held to be important.[380] Other requirements normally included at least three years of experience of stealing, under the guidance of an experienced *vor*, known as a *pakhan*.[381]

To reach the elevated status of *pakhan,* it was not necessary to have specific links to certain important families; instead the individual must be a man widely recognised amongst the underworld for his skills, experience and authority.[382] For the *vorovskoi mir,* these elements were deemed essential in order for a criminal to be initiated and allowed to take his acceptance oath, however, they lost their importance as the situation changed. By the 1950s an impressive prison record no longer commanded automatic respect as the *vory v zakone* were striving to stay out of prison and any previous or current involvement or connections to the authorities were also less important.

The initiation rituals for the *blatnye* or the *vory* were not structured or highly defined which makes them difficult to pinpoint and explain; each initiation seems to have been different and only based on a loose structure. The documentation of the initiation ritual was often blurred and confused between that of the *blatnye* and that of the *vory*. This is understandable because of the lack of formality and structure that surrounded the initiation of the *vorovskoi*

[379] O. J. Finckenauer and J. E. Waring, *Russian Mafia in America*, *Immigration, Culture and Crime* (New York/London, 2000), 100.
[380] Volkov*, Violent Entrepreneurs*, 59.
[381] Varese, *The Russian Mafia*, 150.
[382] A. Dolgun, *Alexander Dolgun's Story An American in the Gulag* (London, 1975), 140.

mir unlike other criminal cultures. The descriptions of the rituals that mention 'the crowning of the *vor*' are indicative of the initiation of a thief to the elevated status of a *vor*. Many of the other descriptions are actually describing the initiation of a *blatnoi* a 'made man', a thief of the *vorovskoi mir*.

The modern Russian mafiya uses the history of the *vory v zakone* to demonstrate their loyalty, sense of fairness and, most importantly, strength. For example, in stories of 'heroic thieves' such as Pushkin who died in the internal war, the *Such'ya voina* from the late 1940s to the early 1950s: 'When the scabs laid him on a sheet of iron and lit a fire underneath, he shouted out the words that I would be proud to use as a motto, if only I felt worthy of them: Hey, tell everybody I die a thief.'[383]

This is also supported by myths surrounding individuals operating in other countries. For example, when Vyacheslav Kirillovich Ivankov from Vladivostok moved to New York in 1992, the MVD (Russian Interior Ministry) warned the FBI. Various stories about his past crimes and his intentions in America to take over businesses and organisations began to circulate and the American press constructed a reputation that suited him based on the versions of the myths despite their being inaccurate in reality.[384]

Solzhenitsyn suggested that literature has also glorified the criminal especially Soviet literature, such as Victor Nekrasov's heroic thief, Master Sergeant Chumak, in the *Trenches of Stalingrad* and Tatyana Yesenina's Zhenya, in

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[383] Quoted in A. Terz, *A Voice from the Chorus* (London, 1973)*,* 149.
[384] Robinson, *The Merger*, 139.

The Miracle of the 20th Century.[385] Therefore the *vorovskoi mir* mythology was built upon ground work already laid:

> According to tradition, a thief or an outlaw is always a dashing knight errant, a handsome young cavalier, agile and elusive, hard but just and enjoying universal esteem. There exists a mass of stories and songs in which the thief appears a romantic hero.[386]

The folklore style of mythology to which the Sicilian mafia and the Russian mafiya subscribe is based on assumed behaviour and is therefore more flexible than the use of traditional mythology. Rather than specific historical events forming a noble, heroic group to which a lineage can then be claimed, the emphasis is the creation of a form of behaviour and reputation, a notion of behaving honourably and the consensus to live life in a set way.

The flexibility of folklore enables elements of the myth to be restructured and rebuilt to best prove a point. This encompassed a sense of 'back in the good old days', the view that in the past members of the mafia helped their families and were noble and good and now this is not the case and their power is abused.[387] Here the myth was moulded to make older members seem that they belonged to a nobler age in comparison to power-hungry new members. Despite the concept of past nobility being false, it does not lessen the change in how mythology was used. In the 1950s and 1960s, the folklore mythology

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[385] Solzhenitsyn, A 1992 The Gulag Archipelago 1918-1956 An Experiment in literary Investigation III-IV.
[386] V. Bukovsky, To build a Castle, My life as a dissenter, (London, 1978) cited in F. Varese 'What is the Russian Mafia?', Low Intensity Conflict and Law Enforcement , 5/2, 129-138.
[387] Z. Aviles, 'Mafia History' http://www.planetpapers.com/Assets/1120.php.

altered to benefit the group using it as accumulated wealth began to take the place of traditional symbols to demonstrate superior authority, influence and success in the Sicilian mafia.[388] Wealth became the basis for reputation and respect, no longer just feats of violence or the capacity to demonstrate power and defeat rivals.[389]

For the *vory v zakone,* the change in their folklore was a little earlier and actually culminated in a violent and bloody internal war the *Such'ya voina*, the Scabs' War from the late 1940s to the early 1950s.[390] By accepting and taking advantage of the role the authorities had helped create for the thieves of controlling and bullying the political prisoners who were incarcerated alongside them but given worse conditions and longer sentences, they were collaborating with the authorities, a clear violation of their traditional ethos. This conflict increased further during the Second World War between those who felt that it was patriotic or who were forced or coerced to fight and those who believed it was a betrayal to the *vory v zakone*. Those who fought and returned were declared turncoats, informers, *suki* 'bitches' or scabs[391] and a war ensued. The victors were the *suki* and this victory symbolised the breakaway from tradition and towards a new code that allowed for collaboration with state authorities.

Folklore may not be as structured as the use of traditional mythology but it has a strong rationale. Not being so restrictive and formal means that folklore

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[388] Arlacchi*, Mafia Business*, 58.
[389] *Ibid.*, 59.
[390] Serio and Razinkin, 'Thieves professing the code', 74.
[391] Chalidze, *Criminal Russia*, 71.

is accepted by society but it can also easily be manipulated to suit the situation that is required, adapting to any problems with image in society and with recruitment. However, it is not as powerful; it does not have the ordained, untouchable feeling that is prescribed and repeated in the organised criminal groups that used it, inherent in how they are perceived and treated by society and their importance.

VI.   Why use mythology?

Whether it is the use of traditional mythology or folklore, it is important to analyse what makes organised criminal groupings use mythology at all. It is clear that public relations are an important part of this decision, as creating a mythology that sets up an image of honour and of a group that will help all members of society encouraged tolerance and legitimacy in wider society. This enabled criminal sub-cultures to court society and therefore strengthens the relationship of the criminal group with that society. If the group is successful in this, then the public will not push for legislation, will not be antagonistic to the group and therefore not interfere too much. Hill explained the importance of mythology for the yakuza: '... in conditioning the perceptions, held by both the gang members themselves and the wider society, of the place the yakuza/boryokudan hold in Japanese society.'[392]

There is also a degree of rationalisation. The creation and use of mythology helped to rationalise and excuse activities whilst mythic and legendary roots

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[392] Hill, *The Japanese Mafia*, 36.

help members and outside communities alike to do this. For the yakuza, being able to claim ancestry that stems back hundreds of years is a source of legitimacy that translated into power and prestige in Japanese society. Honourable mythology can promote pride and purpose. As Seymour notes: 'Yakuza are not criminals, a Tokyo boss explained. Criminals are antisocial, unpatriotic, and undisciplined, like animals. Yakuza are not wild animals. We have tradition and obey the law. It's our own law but its law just the same.'[393]

This kind of shared history, identity and qualities helped to encourage a cultural identity, a sense of belonging to something big and established a brotherhood for members of the group. This is a technique surprisingly similar to that used by some big businesses, transmitting a shared symbolic language, a sense of belonging and differentiation.[394] By identifying with patriots and folk heroes, groups such as the triads established a connection, even if members come from different areas and have communication problems.[395] These connections with figures such as folk heroes set them apart from the 'common criminal' and elevated them; a glorious history that is chivalrous and noble must indicate the elite of the criminal world. If the activities are for the ultimate good of the country then surely this explains and justifies certain actions for the 'greater good'? Gambetta described how mythology can be accepted: 'The tension between highly desirable actions

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[393] C. Seymour, *Yakuza Diary: Doing Time in the Japanese Underworld* (New York, 1996), 16.
[394] Gambetta, *The Sicilian Mafia*, 132.
[395] Lunde, *Organized Crime*, 108.

and highly pessimistic expectations can indeed lead one to the point of embracing mythical beliefs.' [396]

The sense of mystery that surrounds many organised criminal groups was often perpetuated intentionally by the groups themselves in order to increase their power and potential for intimidation. Mythology is a useful tool to enhance this mystery and to create a reality that otherwise would not exist. Gambetta described the mythology surrounding the world of the Sicilian mafia, which contained an array of symbols and expressions and were 'made up of an almost surrealist cocktail of bogus and genuine sources, mythical and prosaic characters, fiction and reality.'[397]

By pretending that they are radically different from other criminal groups through mythology, serious organised criminal sub-cultures can encourage a blind loyalty rather than trust with its members. A self-inflated view of oneself personified the myth; for example, within the Sicilian mafia the individual mafioso became part of this myth: he considered himself part of the criminal elite and distinguished himself as such. An image was created of the mafia as guardians of the social order and the executors of justice.[398] Gambetta used a quote from Antonino Calderone, a mafioso to make this point: 'You will forgive me if I make this distinction between mafia and common criminals, but it really

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[396] Gambetta 1988b, 223-224 in Gambetta, *The Sicilian Mafia*, 46.
[397] D. Gambetta, 'In the beginning was the Word: the symbols of the mafia', *Archives europeennes de sociologie*, XXXII/1 (1991), 53-77, here 53.
[398] Catanzaro, *Men of Respect*, 26.

matters to me. It matters to all mafiosi. It is important we are mafiosi, the others are ordinary men. We are men of honour.'[399]

A sense of superiority came through the mythology and identification with the group, elements which reinforced each other. The myth inflated the reputation and enhanced the self-esteem and the self-image. It thus was key for those over whom the group sought power. The members seemed to buy into the mythology that the groups projected and as such aimed to live up to it and claim their place as the elite of the criminal underworld.

By portraying an image of protection, the mafia are doing what the government should be doing and by association exploiting the theme of the corrupt, uncaring government that cannot or does not wish to help its people and does not honour loyalty. The criminal grouping is very firmly on the side of the people against this government and acts as a tough protector exploiting any lack of trust that was felt between the state and subjects. Historically some of these criminal groupings also fulfilled roles that belonged to the state, in some cases with more effectiveness and legitimacy than the state. For example, in Western Sicily and Southern Calabria the mafia successfully policed the wider population, settled conflicts, and recovered stolen goods and enforced property rights.[400] Sicily had historically always been governed by foreign rulers, which gave the mafia an extra dimension, here they had nationality on their side against the 'foreign conquerors' of whom the peasants

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[399] Gambetta, *The Sicilian Mafia*, 46.
[400] Paoli, 'Italian Organised Crime', 22.

were naturally suspicious and many began to see the mafia as a form of protection against alien rule.

VII.   Mythology, what mythology?

Not all organised criminal groupings use mythology. The Latin American drug cartels do not construct a mythology of any sort but focus upon fixing prices and controlling any non-cartel competition. These cartels emerged from a background which was ideal for the drugs trade; based in Colombia, with access both to the plant from which cocaine is extracted, coca, and a long sparsely populated coastline on the Pacific and Caribbean which enabled easy shipment and concealment.[401] The largest of these were the Medellin and Cali cartels. The Cali cartel was founded in the 1970s by Gilberto Rodriguez Orejuela and Jose Santacruz Londono, originally to smuggle cocaine from Peru to the United States.[402] These groups were opportunistic and did not attempt to integrate into society or court public opinion; they were not groups that valued the history of their group, but rather they arose from opportunity and acted as entrepreneurial criminals. The cartel was built around a cell-like structure that consisted of six to ten trusted employees which facilitated supervision of all aspects of the drug-running business and provided protection to the higher ranking bosses based in Colombia.[403] These organisations are very much about business and rational choice rather than perceiving a need to construct or mould a history or mythology.

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[401] Lunde *Organized Crime*, 183.
[402] *Ibid.*, 185.
[403] *Ibid.*, 186.

The 'Big Circle Boys' are an organised criminal group from mainland China that lack the same traditions and mysteries of the triads. They were made up of former Red Guards and others sent to the Chinese labour camps, which were marked by the large circles on Chinese maps of the time, leading to the name. These were a loosely affiliated group of gangs that operated independently and cooperated only when needed, in contrast to the triads. [404]

The mythology that is connected to gangs is also very different to that used by established criminal sub-cultures such as those I have explored. Gangs do not attempt to create an elaborate history in the Robin Hood-style mythology or even subscribe to a folklore. There is no desire to appear to be a saviour of the people; gangs are not trying to find a role in wider society; but prefer to operate outside of it as much as possible. They do, however, have a variation of mythology, one of which Klein highlighted in his study of gangs in 1971, the mythic nature of violence in gang life. There is no denying that violence is an important part of gang life in initiations, drive-bys, shoot-outs and, in some cases, as a reason to leave a gang.[405]

However, the threat of violence is much higher than the actual violence that takes place. Indeed the threat of attack from a rival gang is part of the gang myth and helps to reinforce the perceived need for protection. This encourages members to join a gang and also increased the solidarity and loyalty of existing members.[406] The threat of violence acts as a justification to carry out violent acts in order for self-protection and, in direct contrast to the

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[404] 'Transnational Criminal Activity' (Nov 1998) www.fas.org/irp/threat/back10e.htm
[405] Decker and Winkle, *Life in the Gang*, 273.
[406] *Ibid.*, 23.

mythology observed by mafias, this myth isolates the gang further from wider society. Individual members could also attain a mythic status, for example, King David, a Crip leader, and King Piru from the Bloods, who encouraged symbolic links between gangs in different cities.

The idea of immortality is also nurtured by gang members by referring to those who have died in the name of the gang as honorable, loyal gang members who are not forgotten. Jankowski in his research for *Islands in the Street* met some Chicano gang members who could recall who was killed in the last twenty years, before they joined the gang and before they were even born, because the history had been passed down to them. Jankowski explains that this was a method of keeping their own memory alive and ensuring their own immortality: if they remember those who have died when they are gone someone will do the same for them, which in turn lessens the fear of death and the limitations associated with that fear.[407]

Gang initiations also demonstrated less mythology and more brutality. For example, in the gang MS-13 the initiation involves being 'jumped in'; the prospective member must endure a 13 second beating at the hands and feet of the rest of the gang to demonstrate his toughness. In some circumstances a further demonstration of commitment may be required by killing or beating a designated victim.[408]

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[407] Jankowski, *Islands in the Street*, 140.
[408] Galeotti and Barksby, 'Bodies of Evidence', 10.

VIII.   Conclusion

There is no doubt that mythology is a very powerful tool. In *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence*, Burke explained how the man-eating myth has been used historically to dehumanise another culture or country by claiming that its members eat people. A disassociation with humanity created a justification for violence and ridicule. The concept of a man-eating myth may feel outdated in modern society, but the term terrorist follows the same principle and promotes ideas of extreme and mindless violence, suicide bombers and terror. The terrorist has replaced the Communist following the dissolution of the Soviet Union when we think of a common enemy for Western society.[409]

Mythology reinforces identity; it creates a common background and history and increases solidarity. Externally it not only encourages recruitment but establishes the group as something more than common criminals. At the same time it distinguishes them and in the case of Robin Hood-style mythology, creates a historical debt that wider society owes them. This all explains how mythology and its use fit into a cultural model.

Mythology can also be a marketing tool, a brand image for a criminal sub-culture that is as much a logical marketing device that smoothed the path of public relations as an integral part of a cultural identity. The yakuza have been proficient at this and, despite having obvious historical links to *bakuto* and

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[409] Burke, *Eyewitnessing*, 128. The concept of 'the other' is also relevant in how groups distinguish and exclude 'other' people who are not part of the group and reinforce boundaries and their own identity.

tekiya, promoted a rich honourable mythology around *machi yakki*. These supposed ancestral links have helped to condition how the wider society, potential members and, in some cases, existing members, see the yakuza. The image combines strength and masculinity with compassion to protect those who are weak, an image to which many multinational companies would happily aspire.

The reason that mythology is used and endures, even if it evolves, is its malleability. The form mythology takes is dependent upon not only what the organised criminal structure requires itself but also the country it operates in; the mythology can be shaped into what is required. The presence of mythology does not automatically indicate that a cultural model reigns supreme.

It seems as though the yakuza mythology is increasingly being perceived as a marketing tool by some members of wider Japanese society due to an increase in crimes targeting ordinary citizens and businesses. This contradicted the supposed aim to avoid inflicting harm on the common people taken from the legends of the *machi yakko*, *'jaku o tasukete: kyo o kujiki'* (help the weak: crush the strong). Previously the most contact the general public may have had with the yakuza was through the entertainment industry. However, the new predatory business activities the yakuza now operate in is damaging the romanticised perception of the yakuza code in the minds of wider society.[410]

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[410] Hill, *The Japanese Mafia*, 52.

The use of the oral culture is important to the success of mythology, ensuring that information is filtered through society and this form of communication lends itself so readily to grand stories of heroes that protect people and larger-than-life stories and characters. Also through rumour, stories became more legendary and amazing and more accepted by society as people are hearing these stories from people they know and trust, rather than constructed from an external source. However, this kind of communication is increasingly being squeezed out, as more and more people have access to more sophisticated forms of contact and a global perspective that questions and analyses information.

Established organised criminal sub-cultures have to change and develop in order to survive, and reactions to mythology reflect this. Once young recruits would dream of being famous heroes, then Al Capone style figures but now the dream involves a life-style, the life of a businessman or entrepreneur or at least their perception of one and all the trappings that accompany this. Roberto Saviano in *Gomorrah* commented upon the young boys aged 12 to 17 years that are recruited by the Neapolitan Camorra who wear bullet proof vests and carry guns and dream of being Flavio Briatore the entrepreneur with beautiful models on their arm.[411] In comparison with the legitimate opportunities available to them at that age of minimal wages and a lack of respect, the Camorra appears to offer them a career, an opportunity to be one

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[411] R. Saviano, *Gomorrah: Italy's Other Mafia* trans.Virginia Jewiss (New York, 2007), 109.

step closer to the life they aspire to. This is the new-style mythology, mythology reinvented.

Chapter Five - Talk the Talk

'One of the most fundamental ways we have of establishing our identity, and of shaping other people's views of who we are, is through our use of language.'[412]

'Knocking'

'*gryaznoi tachkoi ruk ne pachkai*' – 'don't soil your hands on a dirty barrow'

The individual words may be familiar but in the context of criminal mafias, more than a literal translation is required as the meaning is only intelligible to those who are initiated. They are examples of criminal argot, a variety of language used by a socially-marginalised community. It is an incomplete language, a lexicon, built on and subordinate to the grammar of the native colloquial language.[413] Criminal argot is often compiled of foreign words, obscenities or else takes a standard word and alters its meaning completely. This particular example is used by the *vorovskoi mir* and is known as *fenya.* 'Knocking' was used to mean speaking and dates from the time when the *vorovskoi mir* lived most of its life in prison and prisoners tapped on walls to communicate with one another.[414] 'Don't soil your hands on a dirty barrow' refers to the way that a *vor* would refuse to do any work at all in prison on

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[412] Thomas and Wareing, *Language, Society and Power*, 158.
[413] Bushnell*, Moscow graffiti*, 55-56.
[414] Applebaum, *GULAG*, 266.

principle.[415] Physical labour was supposed to undermine the honour and morals of the thief.[416] In fact if the camp authorities forced a *vor* to go out to work, he would deliberately cut himself or take some poison so that he could be sent to the sick-bay or even taken to hospital.[417]

Verbal indicators are an important tool in influencing how others perceive an individual or group and, as such, can strengthen internal cohesion. Various sub-cultures across society and history have used language and phenomena such as graffiti, signs and nicknames as a part of their identity, and criminal sub-cultures are no exception. How a criminal sub-culture uses language can communicate changes within an organisation or how it is perceived. Language and verbal indicators can mark territory, distinguish sub-cultures, demonstrate opinion, influences or a current way of life. Therefore, language is a dynamic part of an identity which when studied can communicate pieces of the history of the group as well as their current way of life.

The name *fenya* apparently dates back to the nineteenth century, when Russian thieves, bandits and convicts came up with the idea of inserting the syllables 'fe' and 'nya' between alternate syllables of every word, to maintain an enclosed secrecy for their language.[418] For example, *tyur'ma* (prison) would be pronounced *tyur'-fe-ma-nya*, while *sapogi* (boots) became *sa-fe-po-*

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[415] L. Finkelstein, 'The Russian Lexicon', *The Jamestown Foundation PRISM,* 7/3, (March 2001)
http://www.jamestown.org/publications_details.php?volume_id=8&issue_id=443&article_id=3803
[416] Volkov, *Violent Entrepreneurs*, 56.
[417] Finkelstein, 'The Russian Lexicon'
http://www.jamestown.org/publications_details.php?volume_id=8&issue_id=443&article_id=3803
[418] *Ibid.*

nya-gi-fe.[419] Although the insertion of syllables is no longer used, *fenya* still remains as a criminal argot and prison slang. There are a number of words to describe thieves and stealing as would be expected; for instance, stealing in a train station, (*derzhat' sadok)*, stealing on a bus, (*marka derzhat'),* an unplanned theft, (*idti na shalunya)* and a daytime theft (*dennik)*.[420] *Fenya* also covers many other aspects of life and as an argot documents lifestyle not just profession. For example, good food is jokingly called o-bacteria, (*batsilly na o)*, because the Russian words for butter, (*maslo)*, meat (*myaso)* and milk (*moloko)* all end in 'o'.[421]

Linguistic distinctiveness can often come from an intentional process of distortion. For example, Bushnell explained that 'One very common form of secret language, found in a variety of tribal and complex societies, achieves unintelligibility by a process of verbal play with majority speech, in which phonetic or grammatical elements are systematically reordered.'[422] A simplified example of this is the English language game of pig Latin in which initial consonants are transferred to the end of the word and followed by 'ay'.

Fenya reflects the viewpoint of its creators, the criminals, and documents both their lifestyle and also their views. For instance, the victim of a scam or

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[419] Finkelstein, 'The Russian Lexicon'
http://www.jamestown.org/publications_details.php?volume_id=8&issue_id=443&article_id=3
803.
[420] Applebaum, *GULAG,* 265.
[421] Finkelstein, 'The Russian Lexicon'
http://www.jamestown.org/publications_details.php?volume_id=8&issue_id=443&article_id=3
803.
[422] Bushnell, *Moscow Graffiti,* 222.

robbery is a *lokh* (dolt/bumpkin).[423] This was clearly intended to signify that there is no pity for victims; they can be and they should be robbed and this is reflected in the vocabulary. In comparison, *lyudi*, meaning people, is used within *fenya* to refer to members of its own sub-culture, therefore implying that the victims and outsiders are not on the same level and are sub-human. Such terminology was not static. For instance, those who took profitable positions in prison camps were originally referred to as *'pridurki'* or fools[424] but later this became obsolete. In comparison, the yakuza, who historically have had a more tolerant relationship with wider society, referred to 'common people' as citizens under the sun (*katagi no shu)*.[425]

Gang members also use derogatory terms for those in opposing gangs and those on the periphery of the gang, who wished to be members but who are perceived to lack the commitment and are referred to as 'perpetrators', 'busters' and 'wanna-bes'.[426] Derogatory terms for other gangs are listed in a handbook the New Jersey State Police Street Gang Bureau created for educators, community leaders, and law enforcement called *Know the Signs: A Guide to Gang Identification*. They include B/K, blood killer, which refers to a Crip gang affiliation and is used in a variety of different forms including products with BK in their names such as Burger King and British Knights, a footwear company. C/K, Crip killer, works in the same way and refers to a Blood gang affiliation. 'Crabs' is a derogatory term for Crips used by members

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[423] Finkelstein, 'The Russian Lexicon'
http://www.jamestown.org/publications_details.php?volume_id=8&issue_id=443&article_id=3
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[424] Glazov, '"Thieves" in the USSR – A Social Phenomenon', 147.
[425] Kaplan and Dubro, *Yakuza*, 112.
[426] Decker and Winkle, *Life in the Gang*, 99.

of the Bloods and 'Slobs' is a derogatory term for Blood members used by the Crips.[427]

The existence and use of such a language can tell us a considerable amount about the group that uses it and how it forms part of their identity. Having a separate language and form of communication can heighten group solidarity and encourage a sense of belonging and loyalty amongst members. Language is an obvious example which is in daily use and therefore a daily reminder that the group is distinct and separate from wider society and in cases such as *fenya*, the negative vocabulary used to describe the rest of society reaffirms this.

Language and the choice of words which find a translation in an argot can illustrate what is currently important within the group, what it values, its way of life, its attitudes, modes of thinking and its view of the rest of society. The current view of another criminal organisation or even comments upon members of the actual group, a rising star or a member who has fallen into disfavour may be reflected in the vocabulary used when discussing them.

I.   Argot, Cant and Jargon

Criminal sub-cultures use language in various guises creating differences in vocabulary, accents, grammatical variations and dialect and there are a number of definitions to catalogue this variety. Argot is used by those on the

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[427] New Jersey Criminal Statute definition NJSA 2C:44-3h in New Jersey State Police Street Gang Bureau, *Know the Signs: A Guide to Gang Identification: A handbook for educators, community leaders and law enforcement* (New York, 2005), 4.

fringes of society to describe a sometimes secret vocabulary that covers many aspects of the lifestyle of that particular group. It was originally used to describe the language used by peddlers and professional criminals in pre-revolutionary Russia and the thieves and beggars in France in the nineteenth century.[428] Maurer describes argot as:

> …a specialized language used by organized professional groups operating outside the law; these groups normally constitute criminal subcultures and the language is usually secret or semi-secret.[429]

'Cant' was a word used to describe the argot used by the swindlers, criminals and beggars of the Elizabethan underworlds in England; the purpose was to deceive and conceal, and the word derives from the Latin *canere*, to sing, which links to the beggars and wandering friars and the singing for alms.[430] In *A History of Cant and Slang Dictionaries*, Julie Coleman distinguishes between these different types of language.[431] She identifies jargon as being normally used by particular professional working groups for technical and specialised matters. Jargon can vary from region and speciality. It is the kind of language used within a large business organisation, where specific words and acronyms have an internal meaning. This can also be seen in criminal sub-cultures. For example, the Camorra used internal criminal jargon that described a way of killing, the 'Mondragone style' used by Augusto, a boss

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[428] J. Gumperz 'The Speech Community' (1968) in P. P. Giglioli ed. *Language and Social Context* (Middlesex, Baltimore, 1972), 55.
[429] D. W. Maurer *Whiz mob: A Correlation of the Technical Argot of Pickpockets with Their Behaviour Pattern* (Lanham, Maryland, 2003), 4.
[430] Gelder, *Subcultures*, 14.
[431] J. Coleman, *A History of Cant and Slang Dictionaries*, (Oxford, 2004).

from La Torre in Mondragone. The technique involves beating a body, throwing it in a well, followed by a hand grenade which shreds the body and covers the remains with earth which sinks into the water.[432]

Slang or flash are usually made up of phrases or vocabulary that is used in place of standard terms. Coleman also shows that slang is not attached to a profession or work, but is used by a closed group of people often united by a common interest. Criminal communities and vagabond communities have been associated with slang throughout history.[433] Beggar and vagrant sub-cultures often used slang to enable them to communicate without those outside their group understanding them. *Rotwelsch* was a language based on German but also contained words from Yiddish, Italian, Romany and other languages and was used among travellers and craftsmen from the middle ages onwards, before becoming associated with thieves and false beggars.[434] A sub-culture of thieves found in France in the mid-fifteenth century known as the Coquillards spoke a secret language according to the record of a trial in Dijon in 1455. A cutpurse was a 'harvester' and a 'white dove' was a thief who would share a room with a travelling merchant, then at night throw his goods out of the window to a waiting colleague. Their thievery was called 'earning' and their trickery 'science,' reinforcing what they did as a form of craft. However, much of the secret language of the Coquillards actually seems to have been a variant on the beggars' slang of the time; the Coquillards were

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[432] Saviano, *Gomorrah*, 268.
[433] J. Coleman *A History of Cant and Slang Dictionaries, Volume 2* (Oxford, 2004), 3 cited in K. Gelder, *Subcultures*, 14.
[434] Die Rotwelsch Grammatic 1520, Leeds University www.leeds.ac.uk/library/spcoll/virtualtour/die.htm.

comprised of people who lived on the margins of society following the Hundred Years War, those who had no home or trade to which to return.[435]

Slang is not a structured or a complete language. Sometimes it just denotes insults or boasts. For instance, when Sudhir Venkatesh first attempted to question gang members in Chicago with the inflammatory question: 'How does it feel to be black and poor?' he was taken 'prisoner' until the gang leader arrived. Whilst the gang was waiting they started to discuss what to do with him and Venkatesh noticed that their insults and boasts escalated. They initially believed he may have been from a Mexican rival gang which became the topic:

> These Mexicans ain't afraid of shit. They kill each other in prison, over nothing. You better let me handle it, boy. You don't even speak Mexican. Man, I met a whole bunch of them in jail. I killed three just the other day.[436]

When the leader of the Chicago gang known as the Black Kings arrived to inspect him, Venkatesh noticed elements of his communication: 'Few words were spoken; most of the communication was in the form of subtle nods, signals familiar to everyone but me.'[437] When the gang did speak it was both quick and contained vocabulary Venkatesh could not understand. An occasional interruption added to the confusion; 'Five-O on Federal' which Venkatesh later found out meant the police were on Federal Street. In 1989

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[435] Y. Ellis, 'Argot and Verlan', www.well.ac.uk/cfol/argot.asp
[436] Venkatesh, *Gang Leader for the Day,* 14.
[437] *Ibid.*, 32.

when mobile phones were not readily available, this type of information was passed manually from person to person.[438]

The use of language, whether it is an argot or slang, has a number of functions for the group. As Halliday notes: '...language actively symbolises the social system, representing metaphorically in its patterns of variation the variation that characterizes human culture.' [439] It can create secrecy for the group from the rest of society and those outside the group through a communication system that can hide true meanings by creating a linguistic system which is virtually incomprehensible to outsiders. When Tommaso Buscetta turned informer on the Sicilian mafia, his information and help was described as 'For us he was like a language professor who allows you to go to Turkey without having to communicate with your hands.'[440]

Techniques to create this kind of secrecy include using standard words but providing them with special meanings (neosemanticisms) and creating 'new' words (neologisms).[441] For example, when tough legislation was introduced against triad gangs in Hong Kong in 1956 it became illegal to belong to a gang, so members created alternative names for the gangs.[442] Members of the *Wo On Lok*, began to call themselves '*Shui Fong'*, which means 'the water room' because at the time there was a famous fizzy bottled water in Hong

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[438] Venkatesh, *Gang Leader for the Day,* 33.
[439] M.A.K. Halliday, *Language as Social Semiotic: The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning*, (London, 1978), 3.
[440] Dickie, *Cosa Nostra,* xix.
[441] B. D. Johnson, F. Bardhi, S. J. Sifaneck, E. Dunlap, Marijuana 'Argot As Subculture Threads: Social Constructions by Users in New York City', *British Journal of Criminology,* 46/1, (2006), 46-77http://bjc.oxfordjournals.org/.
[442] B. Lintner, *Blood Brothers The Criminal Underworld of Asia* (New York, 2003), 124.

Kong which shared part of the gang's name called '*On Lok*', or 'Peace and Happiness'.[443] *Wo Hop To* sounds similar to the Chinese word 'walnut', therefore its members began to use the word '*ngan hok*', Cantonese for 'hard seed.'[444]

Argot lives principally in the minds and on the tongues of individual speakers; it is created by its participants.[445] This can provide an identity for the group, something which its members have created for themselves to use amongst themselves: 'He talks like (one of) us' is equivalent to saying, 'he is one of us.'[446] By the 1700s the Tiandihui (Heaven and Earth Society) used code words and gestures to aid identification because expansion made it impossible to know every member. The most important password was 'five dot twenty-one' which was a split character for 'Hong'.[447]

To an outsider, the criminal argot could appear crude and contemptuous; for the users however, it gave them a sense of status.[448] It also reinforced in a very obvious way that they were different from the rest of society, and helped to distinguish the different ranks of the hierarchy within their society. Social groups and communities use language as a means of identifying their members, establishing their boundaries and even as a means of exercising social control.[449] When an individual is able to use argot confidentially and

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[443] Lintner, *Blood Brothers*, 124.
[444] *Ibid.*, 124.
[445] Maurer, *Language of the Underworld* cited in K. Gelder, *Subcultures*, 16.
[446] Sapir 1949 cited in K. Gelder, *Subcultures* (2007), 16.
[447] Linter, *Blood Brothers,* 47.
[448] M. Galler and H. E, Marquess, *Soviet prison camp speech a survivor's glossary* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1972), 32.
[449] Thomas and Wareing, *Language, Society and Power*, 158.

successfully, he /she is able to experience identity, solidarity and a sense of belonging and status. Before the *such'ya voina* (Scabs War), 1948-53, within the *vorovskoi mir* an extensive knowledge of *fenya* was a common prerequisite to becoming a senior *vor*. The code of the *vorovskoi mir* prescribed that a thief must teach his craft to a novice which included the proficient use of *fenya*. As this teaching took place over time, knowledge of *fenya* was indicative of the place of a thief in the hierarchy and indeed whether the individual was a genuine thief or an imposter.

Likewise in order to progress in the triads, yakuza or Sicilian mafia, it was important to be able to 'talk the talk', whatever that may be for the particular group, whether slang or argot. Although the meaning may be hidden, using an argot is an indication to outsiders of participation in a particular sub-culture and also the degree of an individual's involvement and integration into that society. Argot encourages and develops group identity and therefore the sub-culture becomes stronger. Maurer believes that underworlds develop specialist, secretive languages because they are organised outside or in some cases against the 'legitimate society'.[450] Underworld argot reflects an underworld structure. By this Maurer refers to language as a social function that is spoken in front of other members of the group and seldom in front of outsiders. Speakers of argot tend to be bilinguals, using their own idiom for in-group communication and the dominant language for interaction with outsiders.

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[450] Maurer, *Language of the Underworld* cited in K. Gelder, *Subcultures*, 16.

An anti-language such as *fenya* before the Scabs War not only reflected an opposition to wider society but also helped to create and maintain an alternative reality with a pre-occupation with the definition and defence of identity. Halliday described criminal sub-cultures as often having partial relexicalization, the same grammar but a different vocabulary specifically surrounding the activities that most distinguished them from the rest of society, such as a criminal act, victims, the police and the penalties. For example, the Elizabethan chroniclers of the pelting speech, a thieves' cant, list more than twenty terms for members of the fraternity such as a 'prigger of prancers' which was a horse thief, names for tools such as 'wresters', which were picking tools, and penalties such as 'trining on the chats' (hanging on the gallows).[451]

A common language highlights common activities and is useful in a practical sense for business, enabling members to communicate effectively. For example, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries 'shooting partridges' was the term used by the triads to mean highway robbery and 'eating ducks' referred to looting a boat.[452] The word 'piece' used by the Camorra in the expression 'to do a piece', to kill someone, came from the term used for contract labour or piecework.[453] Also, when needed, a common language or slang enables a group to converse secretly and also to reaffirm a separate identity by maintaining group boundaries. When someone from a sub-culture with a Jamaican or other Caribbean background is arrested, they are able to

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[451] Halliday, *Language as Social Semiotic*, 165.
[452] J. Chesneaux, *Secret Societies in China in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London, 1971), 29.
[453] Saviano, *Gomorrah,* 103.

use both argot and a thick West Indian accent to communicate in a language that outsiders (in this case, the police, prison officers and other criminal justice staff) do not understand. This same tactic is effective on the streets to prevent those outside of a particular group understanding what is being said.[454] Here the use of argot helps to create and maintain sub-cultural boundaries not only with the wider society but also with other cultures and groups.

Even the choice between the types of language can provide some clues about the groups which use them. Slang is generally seen as less secret, more public, more generally available and more respectable than argot: Edward distinguished argot 'as the language of deviant group, argot is itself a mode of deviance, a gesture of defiance against the straight world.'[455]

Anthony Burgess demonstrated this in his 1962 novel *A Clockwork Orange,* in which he invented a sub-cultural argot constructed mainly from distorted Russian. This use of argot highlighted how the teenagers who were using it were alienated from the society which they were terrorising. Their language created a barrier between them and the adult world and also allowed them to demonstrate hostile superiority.[456] In a mirror image Bushnell found when looking at graffiti in Moscow that non-English speaking groups often use English in their argot and graffiti because it corresponds to the images they wish to project. It promotes an association with the America and the United

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[454] Johnson, Bardhi, Sifaneck and Dunlap, Marijuana 'Argot As Subculture Threads: Social Constructions by Users in New York City', *British Journal of Criminology,* 46/1, (2006), 46-77, http://bjc.oxfordjournals.org/.

[455] A.D. Edwards *Language in Culture and Class The Sociology of Language and Education* (London, 1976), 23.

[456] Bushnell, *Moscow Graffiti*, 237.

Kingdom and demonstrates a rejection of their native culture. An alignment to a culture that may be disapproved of in wider society at the time of Bushnell's study is again another opportunity to be oppositional.[457]

Argot and slang are dynamic and subject to change in response to changing attitudes, and individuals must have knowledge of current vocabulary. This changing element of the living language enables argot to be an outlet and form of expression in regards to feelings, emotions and certain attitudes. In a study on the argot used by a marijuana-using sub-culture, rich argot was discovered to describe how people feel when under the influence of marijuana. These words are very specific to the act of smoking marijuana and to the feelings that are unique to the experience. These included words like *baked*, *crunked*, *bent*, *blazed*, *lifted* and *drigh* which describe very particular feelings associated with the act of smoking marijuana. Although a few of these words can also be used to describe being drunk, they encapsulate for the user the feeling at that time in that state.[458]

Following the Bitches War within the *vorovskoi mir,* the victors heralded a change in the criminal sub-culture which was reflected in the *fenya*. The vocabulary reflects a more organised and structured approach and a more modern and ambitious outlook. It seems to reveal in particular the recognition that if the group was to prosper, closer ties with the authority of the outside world would be beneficial. For example, the word *volk*, Russian for wolf, a creature revered and respected by the people of Russia, was used to

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[457] Bushnell, *Moscow Graffiti*, 200-201.
[458] Johnson, Bardhi, Sifaneck, and Dunlap, Marijuana 'Argot As Subculture Threads: Social Constructions by Users in New York City', 46-77, http://bjc.oxfordjournals.org/.

describe a particularly tough police officer.[459] Although this does not necessarily represent an accommodating attitude to the establishment, it does show a different way of looking at the outside world.

Argot and slang in wider society

By adhering to the linguistic norms of the group an individual establishes his/her membership in relationship to both the group but also to those outside the group in wider society. In some cases this demonstrates a clear distinction that they do not belong to the rest of society.[460]

The function of an argot to be deceptive depends on the needs of the group that uses it, and whether that language was directed at the outside world or rather towards the inner group. For groups such as the beggars of the nineteenth century in Russia, France and Britain, secrecy would have been important and traditionally argot is seen as a very secretive language to hide sub-culture communications from outsiders:

> Argot is almost never practiced in the presence of outsiders...silence is the overarching consequence of the native argot speaker.... They must restrict their conversation and not elaborate the argot in the presence of outsiders, especially threatening ones.[461]

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[459] M. Galeotti, *Criminal Russia, Sourcebook and Coursebook on 150 Years of Crime, Corruption and Policing, 4th Edition*, Keele University, 97.

[460] Thomas and Wareing, *Language, Society and Power*, 165.

[461] Kaplan et al. 'Argots as a code-switching process: a case study of the sociolinguistic aspects of drug subcultures', 1990, 145–7 cited in Johnson, Bardhi, Sifaneck, and Dunlap, Marijuana 'Argot As Subculture Threads'., http://bjc.oxfordjournals.org/.

In *Russian Underworld Slang and its diffusion into the standard language,* Cooper suggests that when a sub-culture is structurally close-knit, only a little of its language leaks out, but as it weakens, its contact with wider society increases and infiltration occurs.[462] Yet does a less guarded criminal language indicate a weaker sub-culture? Or does it demonstrate an increase in the interaction with the rest of society?

Today there is more of a cross-over and a degree of knowledge of certain argot or slang by wider society. Traditionally once a word was taken over by outsiders and was outside the group's remit, the value of that word would be lost and a replacement would be found.[463] This is another example of argot being a 'living language' and any infiltration of the group could be checked with how up to date the working vocabulary knowledge of the person in question was, trying to find the 'correct' words for that group at that time.[464] It was also used to keep amateurs who were pretending to belong to the underworld at a distance; a newcomer could be checked by determining if they had the proper knowledge of the argot or slang.[465] Terms were not only changed because they were in use in wider society but also because the language is created by the group and acts as a form of expression; changing attitudes and circumstances, interaction with other groups and members can all promote the creation of new words. Although older argot terminology may remain known, it can fall out of popularity and effectively cease to be used among current argot users.

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[462] B. Cooper, 'Russian Underworld Slang and its diffusion into the standard language', *Australian Slavonic and East European Studies,* 3/2, (1989), 57.
[463] Edwards, *Language in Culture and Class*, 25.
[464] *Ibid.*, 24.
[465] Chalidze, *Criminal Russia*, 57.

Certain criminal sub-cultures have sayings and slang shared with the wider society that surrounds them and this in itself indicates a less hostile relationship compared to those in which the argot carries derogatory words for outsiders or has a secretive nature. The slang and sayings of the Cosa Nostra such as '*A auti leva lu pani levacci la vita*' (If a man takes away your livelihood you take his life) and 'Lu t'amminazu, t'ammazza' (He who threatens you will also kill you)[466] were embedded in Sicilian culture. This helped to reinforce the argument that mafia was an attitude and not an actual group.

The thieves of the *vorovskoi mir* had a rich body of their own sayings, proverbs and aphorisms some of which were also reflected in wider society. These usually underlined their beliefs in the impermanence of success, the need to take charge of one's own fate and the folly of others. Typical examples are:

> If you don't steal, you won't make it.
>
> He who can will swallow you
>
> You'll get used to it: if not, you've had it!
>
> Croak today if you wish, but I'll wait till tomorrow[467]

In modern society, gang argot and slang seem to creep into wider society through music lyrics, news reports, books and articles more than ever before and diffuse into slang used by the mainstream culture. An example of this is

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[466] J. Boissevain, 'Poverty and Politics in a Sicilian Agro-Town', unpublished manuscript 1964, 44 cited in Hess, *Mafia and Mafiosi,* 114.
[467] Galler and Marquess, *Soviet prison camp speech a survivor's glossary*, 23.

the argot word *crunked* from marijuana sub-cultures which was introduced to the mainstream culture through a rapper named Lil' Jon in his album *Kings of Crunk* (2002).[468] He used the word to describe being both high and drunk simultaneously and, as a result, young people began using it to describe that same feeling. Slang terminology for marijuana is also used and known by wider society and therefore found in slang dictionaries and government literature; for example, weed, pot, grass, reefer and Mary Jane all began as marijuana sub-cultural argot.[469]

Slang is becoming increasingly noticed by authorities and those who study gangs as indicators of gang involvement in some form. The New Jersey State Police Street Gang Bureau in its handbook *Know the Signs: A Guide to Gang Identification* highlights a number of common terms, such as 187, a gang term for murder or violence, B.O.S, beat on sight and Rocking or Representing, how gang members show affiliation for their gang, using clothing, showing hand signs etc.[470]

Moreover *The Times* created a glossary to accompany its article on the conviction of three teenagers, Jade Braithwaite, Juress Kika and Michael Alleyne for the murder of Ben Kinsella, a sixteen-year-old London schoolboy who was stabbed eleven times after a row about perceived disrespect in a bar. However, detectives had obtained a licence secretly to record Ben Kinsella's killers' every word whilst they were transported. The men discussed

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[468] Johnson, Bardhi, Sifaneck, and Dunlap, 'Marijuana Argot As Subculture Threads' http://bjc.oxfordjournals.org/.
[469] *Ibid.*
[470] New Jersey State Police Street Gang Bureau, *Know the Signs,* 4.

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getting their stories straight and targeting witnesses. In an attempt to disguise the conversation they used hushed tones and street language. *The Times* listed the key words and described much of the slang used by the defendants and indeed by gang members across Britain as being heavily influenced by the lyrics of American rap music. Detective Chief Inspector John Macdonald, who led the investigation, said the type of language the men used was often peculiar to a small group of friends. When one of the teenagers, Braithwaite gave evidence he dropped the street tones and was well spoken: 'he said he was speaking that way in the police van to keep face with the other defendants.' *The Times* provided a short extract of the transcript and also a glossary of some of the words used by the killers in the covert recordings. The vocabulary included Blood (a brother, usually from the same gang or area) Crib (a home), Shanked, (to be stabbed) and Mandem, (men, often from another gang). There is also an example of language roots closer to home, namely Boat, (meaning face from the Cockney Slang 'boat race – face'). [471]

The role of 'speech communities', social groups with shared linguistic norms, is discussed in *Language, Society and Power*. These groups can range across whole regions from a city street to a teenage gang.[472] This is even more evident in current times with speech communities stretching out borders with social mechanisms sites on the internet such as Twitter or Facebook. Social networking sites also disseminate slang; Strathclyde police have used sites such as Bebo and Facebook since summer 2008 in Operation Access,

[471] S. Bird 'Knife crime embedded in Britain's heart, says father as killers face life', *The Times* June 12 2009, 4-5.
[472] Thomas and Wareing, *Language, Society and Power*, 164.

to crack down on gang culture in Glasgow. Using the information, the police have made a number of arrests and seized a high number of weapons.

In some cases argot and slang can even make their way into the language of officials and politicians. When Russian President Vladimir Putin dismissed the arguments of the Communist Party leader, Gennady Zyuganov, by declaring 'We don't fucking need a military base in Cuba!' he was using slang known as *mat*, a distinctively Russian sub-cultural slang, as a show of power.[473] When President Putin uttered his public threat to the Chechen terrorists, promising to 'soak them in the toilet' (*mochit' ikh v sortire)*, he did not make sense in standard Russian. However, his message was not unclear or confused; he was using underworld slang, the word 'soak' means 'to kill' and the Russian nation understood this.[474] This is the use of criminal argot, *fenya,* at the top and the lack of any misunderstanding from the nation illustrates that in Russia, underworld slang and argot permeate the very language. The number of prisons and camps in Russia's history and a prison population that has numbered millions following the purges in the 1930s means that from 1917 to 1987, about one in every six citizens served time in prison.[475] Thus the language of criminals became comprehensible to almost the entire population. Some notable examples include: *'bez predel'* (without limits) originally a description of an out of control labour camp and *'v zhizhni'* (in life) a term originally for a person's prison occupation.

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[473] V. Erofeyev, 'Letter From Moscow Dirty Words The Unique power of Russia's underground language', *The New Yorker* (15 September 2003), http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2003/09/15/030915fa_fact_erofeyev.
[474] Finkelstein, 'The Russian Lexicon' http://www.jamestown.org/publications_details.php?volume_id=8&issue_id=443&article_id=3 803
[475] *Ibid.*

Finkelstein comments on why this infiltration of *fenya* into Russian language is so damaging and as such highlights the differences between argot and jargon and indeed argot and slang:

> The point is that this prison 'language' describes not merely the criminals' 'specialties'- swindling victims, investigators or wardens - but also everyday life in the prisons and camps: food, drink, sleep, drug-taking, women, homosexuality, attitudes to noncriminals. Moreover, criminal activities and recidivist criminals - the so-called 'thieves in law' [*vory v zakone*], the master criminals-are described with positive words of praise. Instead of 'to steal' [ukrast'], the proudly ironic 'to buy' [kupit'] is used; to rob is to 'mug' [vziat' na gop-stop]; an old con who carries weight in his circle is known respectfully as 'the chief' [pakhan].[476]

As we have seen, argot documents a whole way of life not just vocabulary or phrases specific to a profession or job and thus carries with it the views of the group on this way of life. Therefore, in this case the criminals are described using positive ideas and other groups of people such as women and homosexuals, crime victims and the police are scorned and degraded. Any woman (except the mother of a thief, who traditionally commands respect) is called a *dvustvolka* (double-barreled) or *shalava* (whore). A policeman is *musor* (trash) or *gad* (reptile). These can be dangerous, offensive and

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[476] Finkelstein, 'The Russian Lexicon'
http://www.jamestown.org/publications_details.php?volume_id=8&issue_id=443&article_id=3
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damaging concepts for a modern society to have seeping into language with the potential of permeating ideas and viewpoints.[477]

Fenya was used not only by Putin but also by other members of the Russian parliament at the time, the State Duma. Finkelstein believes it was used deliberately and emphatically by some members who wished to appear 'close to the people' and see *fenya* as a way of creating this impression. However, others have been using *fenya* since childhood, and are not even aware that they are using it.[478]

Criminal language can also be influenced by wider society. For instance, before the Godfather films, *Il Padrino*, godfather was not used by the Sicilian Campania criminal organisations. Rather they used the word *compadre* for the head of the family or an affiliate. After the film, Italian mafia families in America started using godfather instead.[479]

The use of appropriate slang or argot can indicate whether someone is a member of a particular organisation but in some criminal sub-cultures there are coded phrases that can also be used to determine this. For example, the triads use the phrase 'Where were you born?' This is not an unusual question in wider society and if the answer was a specific location then the person in question was not a triad. However, a triad would answer 'under a peach tree,' 'in an orchard of peach trees' or something similar. If further clarification was

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[477] Finkelstein, 'The Russian Lexicon'
http://www.jamestown.org/publications_details.php?volume_id=8&issue_id=443&article_id=3803
[478] *Ibid.*
[479] Saviano, *Gomorrah,* 250.

needed other questions could be 'Have you a mother?'[480] The correct reply was I have five (referring to the first five ancestors, the Sao Lin monks). 'Do you owe me money?' the reply dialogue following 'I paid you I recall.' 'I do not recall that. Where did you pay me? 'In the market.'[481] This is not an actual market but the Tai Ping market (a place in the legends and history of the triads, some groups were even referred to as the men of Tai ping.)[482]

Within the Sicilian mafia, it is not appropriate to introduce yourself as a mafioso, even to another man of honour. A third party, who must also be initiated, has to present one to another using a formula of: 'He is a friend of ours' or 'You two are the same thing as me.'[483]

A yakuza formal greeting is designed to make it clear who the person is and which family they belong to and who their boss is. In *Confessions of a Yakuza* Saga reiterated the importance of the formal greeting: 'These basic facts, and the way you deliver them, give them a good idea of what kind of guy you are.'[484]

Lost in translation

The vocabulary of an argot is often emotionally charged, ironic and metaphorical. It can be a form of expression for a group and the content of vocabulary and indeed the semi-pictorial language of graffiti can reflect this.

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[480] Booth, *The Dragon Syndicates,* 232.
[481] *Ibid.*, 233.
[482] *Ibid.*, 63.
[483] Dickie, *Cosa Nostra*, 36.
[484] Saga, *Confessions of a Yakuza*, 142.

Conflict within or between groups can be mirrored in linguistic conflicts, in which terms are used by people to identify themselves and their opponents. Groups can even stake their claim over owning their representation of themselves through language.[485] As such it can be difficult as an outsider to fully appreciate the message and a certain amount can be lost in translation. For example, the 'V' for victory hand shape demonstrates 'we will win' or 'we are best', but it does not easily capture the insolence, challenge and swagger that the gesture communicates.[486] The ironic connotations of the vocabulary of argot and graffiti make argot incredibly difficult to translate into anything but another argot or slang. For example, *menty* translates to pigs in English but not into any standard Russian word for police.[487]

Expressiveness, identity and integration only truly occur and are understood when they are used as part of the social interaction among participants. Even the lyrics of rap artists can appear relatively flat and inexpressive when just observed as plain text in comparison to being part of a music video which includes visual expressions, or other images such as clothing, props, cars, and women. Argot works in a similar way and when it is viewed in isolation, it loses some of its desired effect. Elements of the sub-culture are partially captured by argot words, but the expression, communication, identity and integration functions are still missing, and without the whole package to fully illustrate meaning, these are just words.[488] The whole performance and oral expression are important. In *Oral Traditions and the Verbal Arts*, Ruth

[485] Thomas and Wareing, *Language, Society and Power*, 164.
[486] Bushnell, *Moscow Graffiti*, 56.
[487] *Ibid.*, 224.
[488] Johnson, Bardhi, Sifaneck, and Dunlap, Marijuana 'Argot As Subculture Threads: Social Constructions by Users in New York City'*,* http://bjc.oxfordjournals.org/.

Finnegan uses the examples of the West African Limba stories and the tales of the Texan dog traders to illustrate the ways in which the art and meaning of stories are illustrated not just in the vocabulary but also in the delivery skills, the occasion and even the actions and reception of the audience. In Chapter six, Walk the Walk, I explore this further by considering the visual images that criminal sub-cultures use to construct an identity.

Language can also change within groups. In 1992 William Labov studied the language used by street gangs in New York and found that those in the centre of the group, the core members, demonstrated the most consistent use of the language in comparison to those on the edge of the gangs known as 'lames'.[489]

The language that mafias, criminal groups and gangs use not only has problems with translation due to emotion, irony and the use of foreign languages but also because it involves how people actually speak. Gambetta describes how a Sicilian mafioso would talk, stingy with words, affecting understatement, emitting oblique messages, elusive threats, allusive signs, and metaphors.[490] For example, if a market gardener refuses to pay protection money, firstly he could be given good advice, *consigli*, the advice from well-meaning friends; then there will be a more or less explicit threat possibly in the guise of an anonymous letter. Then the first of the *avvertimenti*, a symbolic warning such as a cross of pebbles in a field or a small heap of

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[489] Thomas and Wareing, *Language, Society and Power*, 165-166.
[490] Gambetta*, The Sicilian Mafia,* 127.

salt would ensue;[491] following this would be considerable material damage such as a fire or cutting down of trees. Next would be a donkey or mule with broken legs on his land or a beheaded dog or sheep.[492] This was all very symbolic to deliver results and to have maximum effect on those outside the sub-culture; an internal problem would require fewer symbolic gestures. Very little of these elements are easy to translate or indeed describe but this does not lessen the effect and importance they would have. Indeed an important part of language for the Cosa Nostra was the lack of it, the rule of silence highlighted in sayings that were used by all Sicilians:

L'oma chi parra assai nun dici nienti
L'oma chi pica è sapenti

The man who speaks much says nothing;
The man who speaks little is wise.[493]

Chiddu è lu bonu chi vidi e taci

A good man is he who sees and keeps silent.[494]

The code of *omertà*, the duty to keep a secret, a code for which violation can be punishable by death was considered a Sicilian phenomenon. Not only did the Cosa Nostra use it internally but also the Sicilian population generally

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[491] Alongi 1887, 145, cited in Hess, *Mafia and Mafiosi*, 113.
[492] Hess, *Mafia and Mafiosi*, 114.
[493] Anonymous: La Mafia, manuscript in the Biblioteca della Societa' Siciliana Perla Storia Patria in Palermo cited in Hess, *Mafia and Mafiosi,* 110.
[494] Boissevain 1964, 45 cited in Hess, *Mafia and Mafiosi*, 111.

remained silent with regard to the mafia actions. Indeed in the Cosa Nostra, no one says more than they absolutely have to; silence is significant and hints and fragments of phrases are usually enough to communicate what needs to be said. Judge Falcone observed that: 'the interpretation of signs, gestures, messages and silences is one of a man of honour's main activities.'[495] Here communication is subtle and those involved must be in tune with what is happening and the signs in order to understand what is occurring within their society.

After his arrest, Paolo Di Lauro, the 'boss of bosses' of the Camorra, appeared in court in 2005 and demonstrated how to articulate without speaking through gestures, winks and smiles. In the court room his son, Vincenzo Di Lauro, was able to gesture through protective glass and communicate effectively.[496] Vincenzo Di Lauro indicated his ring finger on his left hand which was reported at the time as referring to his wedding ring. In actual fact the ring, which in Neopolitan is *aniello,* refers to Aniello La Monica, the family patriarch and the ring finger itself symbolises faith or loyalty. Therefore Vincenzo Di Lauro was informing his father that the family who betrayed him and led to his arrest were the family known as *anielli,* the La Monicas.[497]

If men of honour do need to tell each other things then it is supposed to be with purpose rather than idle chat and there is an obligation within the criminal

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[495] Dickie, *Cosa Nostra*, 6.
[496] Saviano, *Gomorrah,* 132.
[497] *Ibid.*, 129.

sub-culture to speak the truth.[498] Obviously this is not always the case, but the idea does promote a form of mutual trust that is often in short supply amongst criminals. Giovanni Brusca, a mafioso who visited New Jersey, was struck by the difference in the American mafia when he was taken to a rather talkative dinner where the topic of conversation included talk of mafia families in public and in the presence of mistresses: 'In Sicily, none of us would dream of talking that way in public. Or even in private. Everyone knows what needs to be known.'[499]

Despite the Cosa Nostra not having a distinctive argot, there were specific elements of communication, the smallest details, variations and slips of the tongue that would alert a mafioso. Within a conversation a mafioso should not ask too many direct questions of another mafioso lest he be deemed suspiciously inquisitive. Buscetta observed:

> ...in my world questions are never asked, but the person you are talking to, when he thinks it is appropriate, leads you to understand, with a sentence, a sign of the head, a smile. Even silence can be revealing.[500]

This kind of elusiveness often leads to misunderstanding. Salvatore Cancemi, a mafioso turned state witness, highlights this point:

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[498] Dickie, *Cosa Nostra*, 6.
[499] *Ibid.*, 13-14.
[500] D. Gambetta, 'Godfather's Gossip', *Archives Europeennes de Sociologie*, 35/2, (1994), 199-223, here 221.

...if Toto Riina had suspected from just a look, if he had felt from just the smallest movement of the eyes that those of the Noce [a Palermo mafia family] were not following him [in his plan to kill Judge Giovanni Falcone] he would have all of us killed.[501]

The use of silence, signs and even stares held importance for the Camorra:

In the land of the Camorra a look is a question of territory; it's an invasion of one's private space, like breaking down a door and violently entering someone's home. A look is something more than an insult. To stare someone in the face for too long is already somehow an open challenge.[502]

Gambetta described the stony face that a mafioso needed to develop as being important because even eye movements could be interpreted. The Sicilia mafia were very attentive to aspects of their demeanour and appearance. The testimonies of mafiosi who provided evidence for the state show that every exchange was analysed for any hidden message or communication. Gambetta explains that standardising through, for example, the stony face, is one way of 'silencing' the communication effect that could be accidentally generated by variations.[503]

A mafioso represents a capacity for secrecy, keeping quiet, and planning revenge in silence is seen as a mode of distinction. The same respect for

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[501] Gambetta, 'Godfather's Gossip', 221.
[502] Saviano, *Gomorrah,* 254.
[503] Gambetta, *Codes of the Underworld*, 176.

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silence was apparent in the yakuza where a reputation within the organisation and from the police could be built on or destroyed depending on a response when under pressure. Saga reiterated this in *Confessions of a Yakuza*: 'With the yakuza, keeping your mouth shut when the screws were really on counted as a kind of medal.'[504]

II.   What is in a name?

Nicknames are another linguistic device used by a criminal sub-culture to establish either a group identity, an acceptance of an individual into a culture or a personal identity within a group. A member chooses or is given a nickname such as Mad Dog, Shotgun, Cop Killer and it is usually kept for life. This reinforces the group allegiance and cohesiveness of the group.[505] In some groups such as the *vorovskoi mir*, the nickname may be formally given at the initiation ceremony, marking the new life the criminal was about to embark upon a form of re-christening into their world.[506] The nickname reflected this and was usually based upon the individual's professional and personal qualities.[507]

Saviano highlighted in *Gommorah* that in the Camorra, members are called by their nicknames to the point when first and last names were often diluted and even forgotten. The chosen name thus can tell us something personal about

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[504] Saga, *Confessions of a Yakuza,* 92.
[505] W. B. Sanders, *Gangbangs and drive-bys grounded culture and juvenile gang violence,* (New York, 1994), 76.
[506] F. Varese, 'The Society of the vory v zakone, 1930s-1950s', *Cahiers du Monde Russe et Sovietique*, 40/3, (1998), 515-538 in Galeotti, ed. *Russian and Post-Soviet Organised Crime* (Aldershot, 2002), 7-30 here 7.
[507] Dyomin, *The Day is Born of Darkness,* 176.

the individual and indicate slang terminology for the group as a whole. A *vorovskoi mir* thief was nicknamed 'stumpy' because he had lost three fingers playing cards. He had no cash to play with in prison so had staked another prisoner's suit. He lost the game so therefore had to pay up. However, he did not manage to take the suit before the prisoner was moved. There was a meeting of the senior thieves to arrange punishment for not producing what he had bet with. After a compromise three fingers were agreed upon and subsequently knocked off. [508]

The Nuova Famiglia boss, Carmine Alfieri, received the nickname `o`ntufato*, the angry one, because of a dissatisfied sneer. Carmine Di Girolamo was known as *ó shirro*, or the narc, for his ability to involve policemen and carabinieri in his criminal operations. The nickname 'Lucky' Luciano came about because of the situation that Lucky managed to survive one night when he was found unconscious on Staten Island beach with his face slashed and his mouth taped over; this survival was deemed miraculous and earned him the title 'lucky'.[509] Bino Provenzano from the Sicilian mafia was nicknames *'u viddano'* the peasant, because of the cunning of his methods or *'u tratturi'* the tractor, due to his capacity for slaughter and his effect on an individual or a problem.[510] The Camorra also used ancestral links to create nicknames such as Mario Fabbrocino, the Vesuvius-area boss who colonised Argentina with Camorra money, known as *ó graunar* - the coal merchant - because of his ancestors. Nicknames, moreover, can also be linked to personal preferences such as Nicola ò wrangler Luongo for his fixation with the Wrangler four-

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[508] Gorbatov, *Years off my Life,* 140.
[509] Short, *Murder Inc*, 152.
[510] Testimony of Antonio Calderone published by Arlacchi, *Men of Dishonor*, 40.

wheeled drive car, the Camorra man's vehicle of choice. Nicknames for instance can also stem from physical traits; 'Giovanni capaianca Iacomino' received his for his premature *capelli bianchi* or white hair; Ciro Mazzarella ó scellone or angel, for his pronounced shoulder blades that look like an angel's wings.[511] Gotti was known as 'Dapper Don' due to his immaculate style and 'Teflon Don' because no charges would ever stick.[512] And of course there are inexplicable nicknames such as Antonio di Fraia *ú urpacchiello* which means a riding crop made from a donkey's dried penis.

Names within the yakuza are more subtle. Within the Japanese language, the speaker must learn the social hierarchy of respect and condescension and their place in that hierarchy. The words by which one chooses to address people are an important method of creating social distance or intimacy, showing one's place in relation to others or insulting someone.[513] Looking at this idea in 1995, American sociologist Harvey Sacks studied how names are used in introductions with regard to title and status. For example, 'Jim, this is Alice', or 'Jim, this is Dr Jones'.[514] The way people name others in an introduction can construct different identities in different contexts. This also enables an insult through the choice of address by not recognising rank or status in a name.

Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, originally published in 1978, explored the type of linguistic behaviour that people used to express interest

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[511] Saviano, *Gomorrah,* 54.
[512] Short, *Murder Inc.,* 354.
[513] Thomas and Wareing, *Language, Society and Power*, 164.
[514] *Ibid.*, 161.

and concern in others and was derived from work on conversational interaction in the 1960s by Ervin Goffman.[515] The main concern of participants of conversational exchanges is the preservation of 'face' for both those involved. Brown and Levinson identified a positive and negative face, the desire to be accepted and appreciated and the desire to protect one's self and maintain one's freedom of action. All conversations involve a risk to 'face' and a speaker's attempt to preserve 'face' is seen in complex politeness strategies which are designed to keep interaction running smoothly.[516] Politeness theory predicts that linguistic forms expressing positive politeness will have four main features and these can be perceived in criminal sub-cultures: one belittles the gravity of the topics being discussed, the first for example, by being jokey; the second refers freely to topics pertaining to the intimacy and the addressee; the third claims in-group membership by assuming shared experience and knowledge and using familiar, in-group vocabulary; and the fourth pushes group solidarity further by developing or using vocabulary specific to group members, distinguishing them from the outside world.[517]

The actual words and names that are used in linguistic behaviour, particularly with in-group vocabulary, can be linked to reputation, which Gambetta highlights as a commodity that even ordinary language recognises by the phrase 'good name'.[518] Reputation is valued by criminal organisations and members as the benefits are substantial. For example, members of the

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[515] P. Brown and S. C. Levinson, *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage* (Cambridge, 1978).
[516] A. Lodge, 'The Pragmatics of slang', *Web Journal of Modern Language Linguistics* www.wjmll.ncl.ac.uk/issue02/lodge.htm (1997).
[517] Lodge, 'The Pragmatics of slang', www.wjmll.ncl.ac.uk/issue02/lodge.htm.
[518] Gambetta*, The Sicilian Mafia*, 143.

yakuza join an established family name to share in its 'good name' and reputation. A member of the yakuza:

> …pledges his obedience to his *oyabun* [father/leader] in order to share in the 'face' of the family and enjoy the wealth it generates within its spheres of influence. The *ikka*, or family, has a proper name, such as the Sumiyoshi-ikka in Tokyo, which becomes a symbol of the power and authority of the group…[519]

A good name is in fact invaluable. In 1984 the Yamaguchi-gumi split in two over a leadership issue when one top executive broke away and formed a rival organisation, the Ichiwa-kai. The gang war lasted five years and the original membership of 13,000 for the Ichiwa-kai quickly dwindled. Many returned to the Yamaguchi-gumi when they realised that without the established reputation behind them life was much harder. Reputation and a good name all fed into a brand image for the yakuza.[520]

When a yakuza issues a formal greeting he must make it clear who he is, to which family he belongs and who his boss is: 'These basic facts, and the way you deliver them, give them a good idea of what kind of guy you are.'[521] The family name and the name of a boss carry weight by association but the individual must also take care to deliver this information in a respectful and confident manner in order to demonstrate he is worthy of his association.

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[519] H. Iwai 'Organised Crime in Japan', 1986, 219 cited in Gambetta, *The Sicilian Mafia,* 144.
[520] Hill, *The Japanese Mafia,* 50.
[521] Saga, *Confessions of a Yakuza*, 142.

Names can also be imposed by those outside the sub-culture. For example, the Camorra is a word used by police, judges, journalists and script writers. The word the actual clan members use is 'system' which everyone involved understood; for example, 'I belong to the Secondigliano System'.[522] Another term provided by an external agency was that of 'directory' that was used by the magistrates at the Naples District Anti-Mafia Directorate to refer to the economic, financial, and operative structure of a group of businessmen and Camorra family bosses in north Naples structured with a purely economic role. The Directory was believed to represent the real power of the organisation.[523] The recognition of this directory assumed that only those inept at business and desperate to survive still practised the kind of monthly extortions or door-to-door rounds and indicated a change or at least a perceived change in how the Camorra operated.

The name of a group or gang can also be a statement. For example, in Pilkington's study of Russian youth culture she comes across the *Fufaechniki* who were named after a padded jacket, (*fufaika)*, which was generally used as work clothes by manual workers in the former Soviet Union and indicated their social background.[524] *Kachki* was a group name which covered a number of individual gangs and is derived from *Kachat'sia* which means to pump iron, highlighting the body-building element of these groups' activities. Another term which was used by young Muscovites was *urla*' which is difficult to translate and is developed from *urodlivii* which means ugly but more in a

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[522] Saviano, *Gomorrah,* 38.
[523] *Ibid.*, 40.
[524] H. Pilkington, *Russia's Youth and its Culture: A nation's constructors and constructed* (London, 1994), 225.

social than aesthetic sense, referring to a yob, a lout or someone who is lacking in urban culture and may be from the country.[525] *Stilyagi* was a name for a youth cultural group which originated from a negative article written about young people. It refers to a lack of spiritual or political interest and a focus on dancing, fashion and music. The name was considered by the group as positive and they assumed it to refer to those who wore and adopted a Western style.[526]

The use of nicknames or unusual gang names is not a new phenomenon. In 1928 Ashbury studied gangs in New York City and particularly focused on the Five Point area. He highlighted the colourful names used by these gangs including Roach Guards, Pug Uglies, Shirt Tails and Dead Rabbits.[527] Within the Black Disciples gang from Chicago, gang members used the terms organisation, set and folks to refer to the gangs.[528]

III.   Songs

Songs can act as a language, a form of communication that has the ability to express the experience and feelings of a sub-culture. As such, they can reinforce an identity and communicate a shared history or mythology. Songs were a key element, for instance, of the life of a thief within the *vorovskoi mir* and held a sentimental place, evident in many of the lyrics. These songs had strong traditions and deep social roots. Often they reflected the life of the criminal world and recorded the story of the Soviet prison camp. Functionally

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[525] Pilkington, *Russia's Youth and its Culture,* 225.
[526] *Ibid.*, 226.
[527] Decker and Winkle, *Life in the Gang*, 4.
[528] Venkatesh, *Gang Leader for the Day,* 41.

songs took the place of prayers among the thieves; they were reflective and could bond a group of thieves with the shared experiences they described. [529] The following verse is from a song about the Solovetsky Islands, which constituted the first massive concentration camp. It formed an archipelago that was set in the White Sea, once a famous monastery:

They shipped us off to distant lands.

Water, marshes all around, and for crimes long since atoned for,

We're jailed on monastery ground.[530]

Emotion and expression were obvious in some of the songs, through the vocabulary used in the lyrics and the images that they created. Songs were a form of expression for thieves. The songs suggested their separate society and the content of the lyrics were experiences that they had shared and could empathise with.

Odessa

The thunder rumbles,

The quarantine comes!

They say all Odessa is reaming with thieves,

Crooks everywhere,

Not a second to spare!

The critical moment has come![531]

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[529] Glazov, '"Thieves" in the USSR – A Social Phenomenon', 146.
[530] Dyomin, *The Day is Born of Darkness*, 42.

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The horrific situations that were present in many camps could be addressed, communicated and shared within a song for the thieves. The construction site for the White Sea-Baltic canal was a terrifying camp and it was illustrated in this song:

> Bear Mountain lies along the canal.
>
> How many thieves there have fallen;
>
> They stood us on stumps,
>
> They stripped off our clothes,
>
> They beat us and buried us
>
> From night until dawn.[532]

The songs of the underworld were accompanied with prison songs, tramp lyrics, and wanderers' songs just as *fenya*, the language of the criminal underworld, used foreign languages. They were largely based upon the descriptions of the life styles and crafts of the thieves. Songs were about different professional categories and contained colourful and expressive lyrics. The thieves also used songs as a form of entertainment and storytelling.

A popular thieves' song from Soviet Russia is worth quoting at length here in order to show various elements of the thieves' life:

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[531] Dyomin, *The Day is Born of Darkness*, 43.
[532] *Ibid.*, 43.

I'm the son of a man from the underground.

A worker, a Party man.

My father loved me. I treasured him.

But consumption laid him down.

And so, without a father to support me.

I left home and went to the street.

And the street turned me into a thief.

And I soon was behind prison bars.

I began to wander, with a plan and without one.

And five times I landed in jail.

And in '33, with the canal completed,

I decided to leave the thieves' life behind

And cut all my criminal ties.

I arrived in town; I've forgotten its name,

I decided on factory work.

And they told me oh dear, a record. What's this?

Please be sure to forget our address!

I trampled that canal release underfoot

And went out into the street again.

And the criminal life took me back in its arms

And once again I was back behind bars,

And going the rounds of the camps.

Bars and bunks, year in, year out,

Ah, how hard it is to turn a new leaf

When the State won't come to your aid!

Deportation, deportation, cattle cars,

Once again, we're bound God knows where,

And with each day, and with each stop,

The taiga grows drearier, and all my hopes drop.[533]

The song expresses many of the themes present in the lives of the thieves and the *vorovskoi mir*. It documents the introduction of the boy to the underworld coming from the street, which was the fate of many of the *besprizornye*. It discussed the inevitable fate of a thief to return to crime, because of the problems incurred when he tried to live a legal life. An ex-convict, out of the underworld in normal society, who had little if any formal education, could not obtain the status, honour and power as well as the material gain of a thief's life. Therefore a thief would never have been able to obtain an equivalent life in the legal world. The inevitability of the return of the thief to the underworld is met with the familiarity of a return to a profession in which he is able to survive and is comfortable with. It is almost as if the thief has 'come home', which is why it was so hard to make the break successfully in the first place.

A genre of Russian music known as chanson which romanticises crime stretches back to pre-revolutionary Russia but was most influenced by the Soviet era and is still popular in modern Russia. Despite the popularity of chanson in Russian culture it is often denounced and officially discouraged by Russian politicians and is usually relegated to sporadic broadcasts and late

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[533] Serio and Razinkin, 'Thieves professing the code', 87. Appendix A.

night time slots on TV and radio despite its popularity.[534] Arcadiy Severnyj

was an underground singer of street song and prison folk song in St

Petersburg until the 1970s and wrote down and documented more than 1000

criminal folklore songs.[535] The sympathies of chanson and criminal songs lay

with the criminal for example, in the song 'Leningrad' about a little boy who

worked as a thief at a railway station and was beaten to death by a police

officer or the famous Soviet criminal song ' Murka'. Murka surrounds a female

character that betrays her fellow criminals and takes a job in the police station

because she falls in love with a police officer; she is condemned to an

impoverished life and is killed for her direct contact with the police.[536]

The romanticism within chanson was also reflected in some Soviet films for

example, the hero in the film *Beware of the Car*, 1966 was an insurance agent

who was also a car thief. However, in the style of Robin Hood he never steals

from good people only from 'bad' thieves or criminals. The money he acquires

from selling the stolen cars he gives to charity. His best friend is the police

officer who is working on the case and describes the main character as being

guilty, but not guilty.[537] The criminal drama *My Friend Ivan Lapshin*, 1984

however has a starker criminal character. Based on a novel by Yuri German

and adapted by Eduard Volodarsky this film is set in a fictional provincial town

called Unchansk in 1935. The film is a set of recollections of a man who in

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[534] S. Kishkovsky 'Notes From a Russian Musical Underground: The Sound of Chanson', *The New York Times* (16 July 2006)
http://www.nytimes.com/200702400&partner=rssnyt&emc=rss
[535] Articles About Russian Criminal Songs 'Arcadiy Severnyj (Arkadiy Dmitrievich Zvezdin) (March 12 1939 – April12 1980) Underground star, popular singer of 1970s', http://arkasha-severnij.narod.ru/foreign.html
[536] Articles About Russian Criminal Songs, M. Aptekman, 'Modern Russian History in the Mirror of Criminal Song', http://arkasha-severnij.narod.ru/foreign.html
[537] 'Beware of the Car' 1966, Internet Movie Database, http://www.imdb.com

1935 was 9 years old and his experience of living in a communal flat with his father and a criminal police investigator Ivan Lapshin. The story surrounds different events in the town including Lapshin's investigation into the Solovyov gang of murderous criminals.[538]

IV. Graffiti

Graffiti can act as a visual language in which it is possible to see a conversation unfold and a criminal sub-culture may communicate without a physical meeting. Markers of territory and specific gang symbols can also reinforce a shared identity and gang representation. In *Moscow Graffitti* Bushnell argues that civilization and graffiti are inextricably intertwined. The Italian 'graffiti' meant the scratchings or writing incised on objects and were found on the clay vessels, dishes and walls of the classical world.[539] These scratchings marked ownership, authorship, described the contents or proclaimed the god to whom the offering was dedicated and were found in churches, caves and monasteries.[540] For example, in Kiev, graffiti was found on the walls of the Cathedral of St Sophia which dates back to the late eleventh century that referred to the rulers of Kiev as *kagan*; this was the title of the rulers of the Turkic Nomad federation, providing information of what was happening at that time.[541]

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[538] T. Wood 'Time Unfrozen: The Films of Aleksei German', *New Left Review,* (7, January-February 2001), http://www.newleftreview.org
[539] Bushnell, *Moscow Graffiti*, 1-2.
[540] *Ibid.*, 2-3.
[541] *Ibid.*, 5.

Graffiti functions like an argot, and as such was used as a form of language for those groups on the fringes of society. Just as with argot, graffiti can be antagonistic and contemptuous of the language and society that it is detached from or on the fringes of.[542]

In the handbook that the New Jersey State Police Street Gang Bureau created *Know the Signs: A Guide to Gang Identification* it states that graffiti may be an indicator of gang activity and provide examples of specific symbols such as crowns, pitchforks and stars as shown in figure 2 (image found at Crip graffiti, Bloods Street Gang Intelligence Report, Commonwealth of Virginia, Department of State Police, Virginia Fusion Center, November 2008, 11. http://info.publicintelligence.net/BloodsStreetGangIntelligenceReport.pdf) which is a traditional presentation of Crip graffiti and also includes BK, which stands for Blood Killer. They highlight cross-outs for gang names or individuals as indicating disrespect or that the writer is going to attack that person.[543] The handbook even specifies individual font styles and lettering for certain gangs such as old English and block lettering used by MS-13 and 18th Street New Jersey gangs.[544]

Like other examples of argot, graffiti draws on neighbouring languages, native slang, internationally-understood symbols, and foreign words and gives new meaning to these borrowed terms, thus creating a composite vocabulary that is unique.[545] It is not the individual parts of the vocabulary but the whole

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[542] Bushnell, *Moscow Graffiti*, 55.
[543] New Jersey State Police Street Gang Bureau, *Know the Signs,* 13-14.
[544] *Ibid.*, 8-9.
[545] Bushnell, *Moscow Graffiti*, 56.

composition that renders argot and in this case graffiti incomprehensible to outsiders.

In figure 3 (image from *Jon Wade* found at Into The Abyss: A Personal Journey into the World of Street Gangs by M.K. Carlie, http://faculty.missouristate.edu/M/MichaelCarlie/what_I_learned_about/GANG S/graffiti_and_other_identifiers.htm) we see the picture of Sorenos graffiti, a California Hispanic gang. The Spanish word *sur* means south and the '13' is a reference to the thirteenth letter in the alphabet, M. The M in Spanish is *la eme*, which, in gang terminology, refers to the Mexican mafia. [546]

Graffiti, the most visual language, can define and support a sub-culture; it may depict the initials or name of a gang, a member's loyalty and allegiance to it, show social and cultural characteristics, mark territory, advertise status and send messages to rival gangs. For instance, Sanders highlighted how the police used graffiti '…The police use the tagging to find out what we were up to just like the gangbangers do. You can tell everything about a hood by reading the walls.'[547]

Graffiti can also distinguish territory. For example, within gang territory in Los Angeles lamp posts have been used as totem poles covered in graffiti as markers to clarify to which gang a particular street belongs.[548] Michael K.

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[546] M.K. Carlie, 'Into The Abyss: A Personal Journey into the World of Street Gangs', http://faculty.missouristate.edu/M/MichaelCarlie/what_I_learned_about/GANGS/graffiti_and_o ther_identifiers.htm.
[547] Ruben Alvarez, ex-gang member quoted in W. B. Sanders, *Gangbangs and Drive-bys*, (Cambridge, 1994) 94-95.
[548] Kemp, *Gangs II*, 142.

Carlie demonstrates this on his website 'Into the Abyss: A Personal Journey into the World of Street Gangs' by describing a list of nicknames, which was an entire gang's membership painted on a telephone pole in Kansas City. The pole acted as a marker to show where the gang's territory began and a clear indication of ownership.[549] This medium could be updated to demonstrate changes; if one of the names was crossed out with an X then this person could be a target for an attack or have already been killed. Lists such as these are able to act as a bulletin board for those in the know, illustrating current or future criminal activities or any disputes.

Michael K. Carlie discussed information received from a gang (unit) member who specialised in Hispanic gangs and described graffiti as a symbolic language with some symbols being so meaningful that anyone who covers or disrespects them faced violent retribution. The gang (unit) member stated that the information that can be gained from understanding graffiti was vast:

> If you come to know what the various symbols mean you can better understand the gangs' language, come to view the gangs as a sub-culture, get to know who belongs to the various gangs, where they live, as well as what they may have been involved in, what they are doing, and what they are planning on doing.[550]

[549] Carlie, Into The Abyss: A Personal Journey into the World of Street Gangs, http://faculty.missouristate.edu/M/MichaelCarlie/what_I_learned_about/GANGS/graffiti_and_other_identifiers.htm.
[550] *Ibid.*

Graffiti thus was being used by the gang unit to extract up to date relevant information about specific gangs. It was valuable information in part because it was valued by the gangs themselves.

Bushnell considered the graffiti of fan gangs in Moscow which were usually fans of sports clubs and found that it reflected many of the gangs' social characteristics and demonstrated elements of their life and behaviour, some of which were otherwise hidden.[551] In 1977-78 fans began to use team logos in graffiti and acquired a sense of identity which graffiti demonstrated. Graffiti enabled the group to self-advertise, expressed a collective social entity, communicated messages and existence and could claim and mark out territory. The youth cultural group known as *stiliagi* used graffiti to demonstrate their history of persecution by society. In Soviet society their appearance of long hair and narrow trousers would have stood out, as the following example shows: '*stiliaga - modny no vsegda golodny*' (a stiliaga is fashionable, but always hungry).[552]

The use of graffiti was an assertive social act. In addition to its content, it challenged authorities in terms of the public defacing of spaces and it also challenged rival gangs.[553] Decker and Winkle studied graffiti in their work on gangs in 1996 and observed that graffiti could identify both the gang territory and the location of the gang itself. The message often targeted rival gangs and sometimes neighbourhood residents and members of the gang.[554] The

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[551] Bushnell, *Moscow Graffiti*, 39.
[552] *Ibid.*, 39.
[553] *Ibid.*, 40.
[554] Decker and Winkle, *Life in the Gang*, 130.

territory of a rival gang is often a location for a gang to deface with graffiti. In fact it was possible to see a gang fight played out in graffiti with one gang's emblem being defaced or superimposed by another or turning an emblem into a negative connotation. For example, the logo for Spartak football club was turned into the word meat which is a slight on the origins of the club which was originally sponsored by Moscow's retail trade organisations.[555]

V.   Gestures

Language can also have a visual expression with facial movement and hand gestures. For gangs this is an obvious point with hand signs that are frequently 'flashed'. Each group that uses these more visual forms of language prides itself on its identity and individuality. Hand signs often form letters unique to the name of the gang for example the letter B from the Bloods shown in figure 4 (image found at Blood hand sign, Bloods Street Gang Intelligence Report, Commonwealth of Virginia, Department of State Police, Virginia Fusion Center, November 2008, 10. http://info.publicintelligence.net/BloodsStreetGangIntelligenceReport.pdf) and can be used as a greeting among members or to offend a rival gang.[556] They can be a short-hand to communicate gang affiliation and can even communicate desires, threats, anger, disrespect and are usually used by gang members rather than serious organised criminal sub-cultures.[557] Viewing almost any of the 'Ross Kemp On Gangs' television programmes reveals any

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[555] Bushnell, *Moscow Graffiti,* 45.
[556] Sanders, *Gangbangs and Drive-bys*, 76.
[557] Carlie, 'Into The Abyss: A Personal Journey into the World of Street Gangs' http://faculty.missouristate.edu/M/MichaelCarlie/what_I_learned_about/GANGS/graffiti_and_o ther_identifiers.htm.

number of gang signs which are frequently flashed to the camera from gang members and prison inmates. Often as the camera crew passed by there were a barrage of arms thrust through windows, bars or cars manipulated into the hand sign for their gang in defiant pride.

There is a gesture used within the Cosa Nostra and across Sicily of taking the thumb and quickly drawing it across the check like a knife. This indicates *sfregio*, a cut across the face which is a form of punishment used for traitors.[558] *Sfregio* can also mean an insult or affront which makes someone lose face. For example, one mafioso could carry out *sfregio* by damaging the property protected by another mafioso.[559]

Triad members also recognise each other by hand signs. Within their own company, these are overt, for example, appearing in the ritual dance during the opening of a ceremony and in giving and receiving objects with the hand set into a tripod shape.[560] Other hand signs are used to denote rank or else represent and reinforce the mythology of the group such as the character *sh'e*, meaning snake, which relates to the ancestor Wu Tak-tai. The index and middle finger form a fang like shape but the hand too is a rough approximation of the calligraphy of the character.[561]

A triad can demonstrate his own society and rank through hand signals, for example, the way a cigarette is held or money is offered or accepted or even

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[558] Hess, *Mafia and Mafiosi*, 114.
[559] Dickie, *Cosa Nostra*, 165.
[560] Booth, *The Dragon Syndicates*, 231.
[561] *Ibid.*, 232.

in the style of holding a pen.[562] In *Secret Societies In China In the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Jean Chesneaux details the accepted codes of gestures and signs of recognition including how to offer a pipe, how to offer tea, signs used in times of fighting and disputing and how to offer rice to a stranger to find out who he is. Some of these guidelines seem very complicated and may not have been adhered to regularly by every member but they do offer an insight into the use of signs for the triads and how they feed into their mythology. For example, in how to offer a pipe:

> There is a mode by which a pipe is to be offered; that is, when I hold a pipe between the thumb and forefinger of both hands, with both the thumb upwards, and offer it to you, you will receive it in the same manner, but pressing my thumbs with yours, and if you are one of those who have joined the Society, in the flower garden, you will after taking the pipe from me, touch your teeth with the end of it, before lighting it.[563]

The Tiandihui (Heaven and Earth) society created secret gestures as well as words to recognise members as their population grew and also to aid communication as the dialects and areas of its members diversified. The most common gesture involved the use of the three middle fingers, which would be pointed towards heaven or pressed against the chest.[564]

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[562] Booth, *The Dragon Syndicates*, 232.
[563] Chesneaux, *Secret Societies in China*, 27.
[564] Lintner, *Blood Brothers,* 47.

VI.   Conclusion

Criminal language can provide information about the group that uses it due to the functions which it carries out for that group: identity, secrecy, communication and expression. Using a particular argot or slang provides an identity and demonstrates distinction from the wider society and other groups. When discussing the elaborate jargon, recognition dialogues, and intricate sign-language of the triads, Barend J. ter Haar states that it was more important in strengthening internal ties than for keeping things secret.[565] An individual form of communication reminds and enables the group using it to be apart from wider society, Pilkington comments on the slang used by youth cultural groups: 'The importance of these expressions lies in the sense conveyed by them as well as the fact that their articulation in slang removes them from the formal world.'[566]

In this way argot has an organisational role; it can provide a source of internal cohesion and the possibility for expression that helps to create a common identity. Language represents the meanings in social systems through experiences of reality and our relationships with each other.[567] Decker and Winkle discuss how group language, argot and symbols which they term collective representation maintain order in a gang due to its isolated nature. They also discuss the idea of not only maintaining order but also the power of

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[565] Haar, *Ritual and Mythology of the Chinese Triads*, 462.
[566] Pilkington, *Russia's Youth and its Culture,* 263.
[567] Halliday, *Language as Social Semiotic,* 162.

the collective in influencing behaviour 'mutual excitation', even behaviour that gang members may not normally be involved in.[568]

Secrecy appears to have a less important role today with a greater cross-over and knowledge in wider society of criminal sub-culture terminology. This function is determined by the needs of the group and as such can tell us what kind of sub-culture is using it, how closed they are and how they interact with wider society, even how wider society sees them. The *fenya* of the *vorovskoi mir* in the 1930s was heavily influenced by prison camp speech which was rich in proverbs and referred to basic needs such as hunger and dealing with the authorities due to the amount of time the group spent in prison. However, by the 1950s *vory* were striving to stay out of prison and the vocabulary for other members of society was becoming less antagonistic.

Historically communication enabled a gang to communicate with each other or in some cases with different elements of a group and get messages across without any misunderstandings or if necessary without any infiltration from state agencies or other groups. More relevant now is the ability of argot and slang to communicate what is relevant and important to that group at that particular time. For example, if studying Soviet Russian youth sub-cultures looking at their language shows they valued the *utiugi* in their world; *utiugi* being middlemen who would make a profit through buying or selling to foreigners. The importance of *utiugi* is demonstrated by the adoption of many

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[568] Decker and Van Winkle, *Life in the Gang*, 6.

of their trade words into the youth slang.[569] The words often reflected the national origin of the foreigners in question such as *Britisha* (Brits), *grin, baksy* (bucks) and *firma* (foreigner)[570] and were a source of pride for the groups who were often pleased with any connection to the West.

Expression in argot and slang can provide an emotional outlet, a way for a group to express how it is feeling. Therefore it is possible by using the vocabulary to find out what is important and current in a group, what is happening to them right now and how they are feeling about situations. For example, Saga in *Confessions of a Yakuza* mentions that there is a yakuza saying which states that a yakuza should be willing to risk his life to give a brother a meal and a night's shelter. This demonstrates the sacrifice and obligation that a yakuza was supposed to show another when in real trouble.[571]

Argot and slang potentially have the capacity to provide alongside other cultural markers of criminal sub-cultures information about that group and indeed the surrounding culture which may not normally be obvious. If all language and words have the capacity to convey beliefs, information and emotion then this is especially the case for the emotionally charged and ironic argot and slang used by those criminal sub-cultures who sit on the fringes of society. There is information to be extracted if we listen to the meaning carefully enough. However, there are limitations to the true understanding of an argot; due to the nature of the language, certain elements can be lost in

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[569] Pilkington, *Russia's Youth and its Culture*, 223.
[570] *Ibid.*, 224.
[571] Saga, *Confessions of a Yakuza,* 193.

translation and the full effect may never be appreciated by an outsider or explained clearly enough by those who are initiated.

At the same time, the language used by criminal sub-cultures is dynamic and can illustrate change in a group or can act as a cultural critique and demonstrate a change in wider society. Today wider society seems more interested than ever in this side of criminals and as such more people and elements of society such as music and fashion seem to wish to emulate the look of a 'gangster' and want a piece of this image. The 'gangster' image incorporates talking like a gangster, acting like a gangster and looking like a gangster, with the correct clothes, walk, attitude and posture. Politicians are trying to forge closeness with the public by using slang, and rappers are using gang words and signs in videos to heighten their reputation and increase their appeal. To hint at being associated with something that goes against the grain and is in opposition to or on the fringes of wider society is perceived to be cool and defiant; it can therefore equate to a successful image for a music artist or even Vladimir Putin. Also by demonstrating an affiliation with gang life the artist can show a grass roots connection that he/she began from humble origins on the street. This is a popular image and concept to tap into both from those in gangs and the mainstream.

Historically not all criminal groups use language in this way. Egmond's study of underworlds in the Dutch Republic of the seventeenth and eighteenth century showed that although there were some examples of thieves' jargon

there was no evidence of a single specific thieves' language.[572] These criminal groups did not regard themselves as members of one underworld, they not share a common language, rituals admission or exclusion or recruitment and despite a degree of mobility, some jargon and nicknames they did not differ from other members of the urban working class at that time.[573] The criminals continued to follow and invest in the cultural norms of the larger society they were part of and often observing the religious customs and gender roles as well as the language.[574]

By using a language specific to a criminal sub-culture an individual is identifying himself as belonging to that sub-culture, adopting linguistic principles, distinguishing how a word is spoken and the words that are used. These variations and distinctions are created and encouraged by the group, demonstrating the promotion and use of a shared group identity. Using a shared language or accent is a powerful means for an individual to fit into a new community, or, if required, to disguise membership or distance oneself from a particular social or regional group, or to move closer to another group to which he / she may wish to belong.[575]

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[572] F. Egmond 'Multiple Underworld in the Dutch Republic of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries' in C. Fijnut and L. Paoli, *Organised Crime in Europe: Concepts, Patterns and Control Policies in the European Union and Beyond* (Dordrecht, the Netherlands, 2004), 77-108, here 91.

[573] Egmond, 'Multiple Underworld in the Dutch Republic of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', 92.

[574] Egmond, 'Multiple Underworld in the Dutch Republic of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', 92.

[575] Thomas and Wareing, *Language, Society and Power*, 159.

Chapter Six - Walk the Walk

> *Ein Bild sagt mehr als 1000 Worte.*
>
> (A picture says more than a thousand words), Kurt Tucholsky

Whilst Chapter five, Talk the Talk, considered the languages that criminal sub-cultures have used to communicate and to construct an identity, criminal sub-cultures have also developed a variety of recognition symbols and signs as well as a language in order to recognise and be recognised. In some cases the visual image could be enough to make an immediate impression. For example, how the person dressed, the tattoos they had and how they carried themselves; in short, whether that member of the criminal sub-culture could 'walk the walk'.

If the image was carried off successfully the need to explain an affiliation to a criminal sub-culture would be redundant:

> The members would hand over his name card, with his organisational affiliation prominently displayed in the top right-hand corner, or ensure that his tattoo and amputated fingers were visible.[576]

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[576] Hill, *The Japanese Mafia*, 139.

Physical attributes such as tattoos, clothing, signs, behaviour and even where people go can all contribute to a collective identity. But has this form of identity creating and communicating changed? Are there patterns in how this identity works and when or if it is used?

This physical identity is often the first indication that an individual is involved in a criminal sub-culture. For example, when Philippine authorities were concerned by criminals arriving from Japan in 1991, they established a yakuza profile which specified that immigration agents should look for: '...flashy clothes, expensive jewellery, punch-perm haircuts, arrogant manners, severed pinkies, and striking tattoos.'[577]

Kaplan and Dubro interviewed a plain clothes custom patrol officer, Al Gano who had an even more detailed method he used to identify a yakuza which also highlights how the image can change over time:

> There's a couple of ways you can spot a yakuza, For one thing, your average Japanese tourist…well, walks humbly. Yakuza, they strut. Another easy sign is when they arrive in a group. The boss – the oyabun - is usually surrounded by his boys - the kobun - and they're carrying his bags, lighting his cigarette, and saying, 'hai! hai!' (yes, yes).[578] They used to all wear crew cuts, But now a lot of them wear

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[577] Kaplan and Dubro, *Yakuza,* 255.
[578] *Ibid.*, 286.

punch perms, tough expressionless faces and a lot of flashy polyester clothing.[579]

Criminal authorities can also use image as a means of identifying criminals. New Jersey Criminal Statutes define a gang as:

…three or more persons associated in fact. Individuals are associated in fact if (1) they have in common a group name or identifying sign, symbol, tattoo or other physical marking, style of dress or use of hand signs or other indicia of association or common leadership… [580]

Throughout history, images reinforce how we make sense of our present situation and therefore visual indicators can be useful historical sources. Our understanding of ancient Egypt would be poorer without the testimony of tomb paintings. Evidence of social practice such as hunting and the European evidence of cave paintings of Altamira and Lascaux all create a fuller picture of life at that time. The Bayeux Tapestry is one of the most important primary sources of the history of England.[581] The value of photographs as evidence of nineteenth-century social history is integral in helping to construct a 'history from below' focusing on the everyday life and experiences of ordinary people.[582]

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[579] Kaplan and Dubro, *Yakuza,* 286.
[580] New Jersey Criminal Statute definition NJSA 2C:44-3h in New Jersey State Police Street Gang Bureau, *Know the Signs*, 1.
[581] Burke, *Eyewitnessing,* 10.
[582] *Ibid.*, 12.

However, images are mute witnesses and it can be difficult to translate their testimony into words. To use them effectively is to be aware of the weaknesses; images are not an innocent eye, or totally objective. An image is a snapshot in time, a point of view and opinion and this is especially the case within organised crime or when considering a reaction to an image from someone outside of the criminal sub-culture.

A portrait, for example, whether painted or photographic is more of a social illusion than reality; it depicts a special performance rather than ordinary life. However, these images still offer useful evidence to anyone interested in the history of changing hopes, values or mentalities. Even changes in representation can provide clues about a situation; for example, the frequency of images of the naked body in Renaissance Italy, compared with their rarity in the Middle Ages apart from Jesus' Crucifixion, offers a clue to changes in the ways in which bodies were perceived in those centuries.[583] Royal statues or 'state portraits' not only show images of individuals as they appeared at the time but also as theatre, as the public representation of how a monarch or member of state should look.[584]

If the formality of Tudor and Elizabethan portraits such as that of Anne Boleyn in the first half of the sixteenth century and the more flamboyant Stuart portraits such as King Charles II are compared to more modern royal portraits, the differences are evident. Modern images reflect a more relaxed, informal and accessible relationship between the royal family and society, such as the

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[583] Burke, *Eyewitnessing*, 39.
[584] *Ibid.*, 68.

portrait of Prince Charles by Bryan Organ in 1980 which features the Prince in casual clothes sitting in a chair in an outdoor setting. This was reinforced in Rolf Harris' portrait of Queen Elizabeth II in 2005 whose aim was to avoid a formal type of portrait with pomp and splendour: 'I wanted to capture the lady as she is with all her humour and reality.' [585] In much the same way the change in the visual image of an organised criminal sub-culture can reflect a change in its hopes, values or mentalities.

Peter Burke has argued that images are neither a reflection of social reality nor a system of signs without relation to social reality but occupy a variety of positions in between these extremes.[586] When analysing images Burke highlights that it is useful to think in terms of 'gaze,' a term borrowed from the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) that refers to a 'point of view'. This could be the view of the artist or creator or the way the image is viewed: 'The gaze often expresses attitudes of which the viewer may not be conscious, whether they are hates, fears or desires projected on to the others.'[587]

An example of this is the image of a 'foreign race'. A positive historical image was that of the 'noble savage', a survival of the golden age cultures such as Tahiti in the eighteenth century. However, the majority of these images are negative, contemptuous and suggest a condescending fear that was underlined by hatred exemplified by that which has been directed at Jews.

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[585] R. Harris, 'Rolf shows off Queen's portrait', (BBC News, Monday 19th December 2005) http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/4541388.stm.
[586] Burke, *Eyewitnessing,* 183.
[587] *Ibid.*, 125.

The man-eating myth, which I mentioned in Chapter four, originates from this fear by which one culture (not always Western) dehumanises another by claiming that its members eat people.[588] Images of prejudices and stereotypes present a cultural encounter and the response of one culture in particular. What people in a given place and time view as 'sub-human' illustrates how they see the human condition.[589]

Advertising images can be a useful source for the study of past attitudes to commodities. Twentieth-century advertisers used psychology to appeal to the unconscious minds of consumers; through 'subliminal' techniques of persuasion by association, for example, the way in which the mental image of a given product is built up by associating various objects with its visual image. This form of conscious manipulation is what links sports cars to an association with power, aggression and virility, qualities symbolised by the name 'Jaguar.' Historically cigarette advertisements included images of cowboys in order to exploit a similar range of masculine associations. These feelings and emotions are projected onto inanimate objects. [590]

Burke concludes that the testimonies images offer as historical sources both supplement and support the evidence of written documents; they can enhance elements of the past that other sources do not present, especially when texts are few. This is often the case in certain areas of the informal economy of which criminal sub-cultures form part. Visual images can provide the view from below, or information about unofficial elements of society. Even

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[588] Burke, *Eyewitnessing*, 128.
[589] *Ibid.*, 139.
[590] *Ibid.*, 95.

inaccurate or prejudicial images of other cultures are in themselves excellent examples of evidence of prejudice and misconception.[591] Burke explained the power of images: 'our position face-to-face with an image brings us 'face-to-face with history.'[592] Visual indicators of organised criminal sub-cultures bring observers, and members of the wider society face to face with organised crime.

I.   Tattoos

Tattoos must be one of the most distinctive ways a member of a criminal sub-culture can be distinguished and therefore help to create an immediate identity. Tattoos have always had the ability to shock and mark out those who wear them as being apart from wider society in some way. This seems to stem from various societies and cultures historically using tattoos to mark those whom they perceived to be outcast such as criminals or slaves. For example, in ancient Rome slaves were tattooed with slogans. Tattoos date back at least 5000 years and have been used to identify tribes, classes and identities around the world. The practice of tattoos have been found in the earliest archaeological records from the Upper Palaeolithic era and are understood to have been visible indicators of age, social status, family position, tribal affiliation and so forth.[593] DeMello describes the tattoo as a powerful symbol of affiliation and identity which has the ability to communicate

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[591] Burke, *Eyewitnessing,* 185.
[592] S. Bann, *Under the Sign: John Bargrave as Collector, Traveler and Witness* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1994) cited in Burke, *Eyewitnessing*, 13.
[593] DeMello, *Bodies of Inscription*, 10.

status and identity for an individual within a community and for a collective identity.[594]

Within the underworld, they have emerged as visual signs of membership. For some criminal sub-cultures they fulfil a range of social and practical functions from commitment to providing a visual index of membership and rank.[595] For the criminal therefore the tattoo becomes an obvious choice to adopt as a badge, a symbol of pride for operating outside of wider society.[596] A tattoo can demonstrate an affiliation and commitment to a sub-culture and can therefore be indicative and reflective of that criminal culture. Tattoos are particularly prevalent amongst criminal gangs and may signify gang affiliation, the status of the individual in the gang, the nickname of the individual gang member, past crimes and experiences or serve as symbols for memorials to gang members, family members, and significant others who have died.

Not all criminal cultures have their own specific tattoo code and there are differences amongst the ones that do that can offer an insight into the criminal sub-culture that uses them. The Italian and Italian-American mafia do not have specific tattoos; if individual members wear them, it is a personal choice.

Communication

Criminal tattoos, rather than being random decorative images, can communicate information ranging from an affiliation to a specific gang or

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[594] DeMello, *Bodies of Inscription*, 12.
[595] Galeotti and Barksby, 'Bodies of Evidence', 9.
[596] 'Gangs and Criminals'
http://salc.wsu.edu/Fir_F02/FS3/Psychology/gangs_and_criminl.htm

group through a visual language and a specific form of code. Tattoos help to exclude outsiders and those who may wish to claim membership or infiltrate a gang. They can provide a clear identification of sub-culture members. This is especially important where the groups are large and scattered across regions, cities and even countries. For example, as well as the patches worn on their jackets, Hell's Angels across the world can recognise each other by a series of distinctive tattoos, chiefly the image of a winged skull.[597] A tattoo thus can encode significant information about a criminal, his local affiliation, his rank within the organisation, his past activities, even his convictions. In this way for some criminal sub-cultures they are not just a uniform but a walking encyclopaedia full of information. DeMello builds on the communication further by considering the importance of 'tattoo narratives', the process by which people talk about tattoos and these narratives help to create meaning by creating a context for the tattoo.[598]

Street gangs tend to use simpler tattoos such as those based upon letters of their name (for example, ALKQN the Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation, an American street gang) or territory: in America telephone area codes or street numbers often appear. For instance, MS-13 tattoos are likely to be crude and simple, and demonstrate their loyalties and also their willingness to shock and defy conventional society. The most common images are the initials MS and the number 13 as illustrated in figure 5, (image found at MS 13 tattoos Mara Salvatruch http://www.tattooidea.org/2008/05/ms-13-tattoos-mara-salvatrucha-tattoos.html) the name Salvatrucha 'Eme Ese' (after the

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[597] Galeotti and Barksby, 'Bodies of Evidence', 9.
[598] DeMello, *Bodies of Inscription*, 3.

Spanish pronunciation of MS) or the 'Devil Horns'. These could be in letters and figures or an image of the hand sign which they use as a recognition symbol (made by extending the index and little fingers while holding in the middle finger and ring finger with the thumb).

Certain images may have a specific meaning but these tend to be for the individual rather than part of a group code. For example, a bullet or firearm may be used by a contract killer, or it could have been chosen for the design. There is no control over who may have these inscribed upon them other than a risk of ridicule for an inappropriate image. There is also considerable overlap between MS-13 and Latino gangs in general such as the use of spider webs and three dots (symbolising 'mi vida loca', 'my crazy life').[599] Despite the capability for sometimes complex crimes MS-13 still has strong links to the street and their tattoos symbolise this connection.

However, this has started to change in the twenty-first century: some new members are being advised to avoid tattooing themselves, or at least in visible locations. By not presenting gang tattoos or wearing characteristic colours (especially blue and white), individuals are less likely to be stopped and searched by law enforcement and therefore these new members can act as look-outs, couriers and traffickers.[600] This is especially true in Central America, where the authorities and rival gangs alike have targeted MS-13. Varese also reported that in the post-Soviet world the *vory v zakone* no longer

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[599] Galeotti and Barksby, 'Bodies of Evidence', 10.
[600] Galeotti and Barksby, 'Bodies of Evidence', 10.

valued tattoos as part of their identity as it became more difficult to control and police them out of the prison system.[601]

Within some gangs there will be a common denominator to the tattoos which are chosen to denote membership of that gang, for instance the three red dot paw print of the Bloods gang in the USA in the form of tattoo or burned onto the skin with a heated barrel of a gun or cigarettes shown in figure 6,[602] (image found at Bloods Street Gang Intelligence Report, Commonwealth of Virginia, Department of State Police, Virginia Fusion Center, November 2008, 9. http://info.publicintelligence.net/BloodsStreetGangIntelligenceReport.pdf) or the question mark symbol adopted by the Filipino BNG (Bahala Na Gang). Beyond that there may be common themes and certain shared tattoos that have meanings but it is up to the individual how many and which design they adopt. In comparison other groups have a code of commonly accepted designs which may represent certain acts or status and as such have to be earned.[603]

More sophisticated gangs tend to have richer repertoires but there are variations here as well. Traditional Russian mafiya tattoos are much cruder compared to the elaborate mythological images that influenced yakuza tattoos, and which included famous gods, animals, folk heroes, mythological figures, dragons, mountainous landscapes, seascapes flowers and gang

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[601] Varese personal communication to Gambetta, in Gambetta, *Codes of the Underworld*, 183.
[602] New Jersey State Police Street Gang Bureau, *Know the Signs,* 5.
[603] Galeotti and Barksby, 'Bodies of Evidence', 9.

insignias such as the scenes depicted in figure 7 [604] (image by photographer Anton Kusters, found at BBC News Today In Pictures: The Yakuza http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid_9572000/9572646.stm). Also prevalent are figures from mythical and theatrical traditions such as the legendary drunken Buddhist monk, Hanaosho Rochishin fighting a dragon, full blossomed Chrysanthemums representing the beauty of youth; and the descending dragon with a content look, closed mouth, and jewel enclosed in his claw, symbolising the successful attainment of a goal. The designs were detailed and formed elaborate body murals in which the images often flowed into one another to create a cohesive and detailed picture, an art form of which to be proud and which would have been costly in time, money and pain to imitate. These images would often cover a whole body, except for the hands, feet, neck and head. Therefore if the person was fully clothed as in figure 8 (image by photographer Anton Kusters, found at BBC News Today In Pictures: The Yakuza http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid_9572000/9572646.stm) (the tattoo would be hidden and even the small mark behind their eyebrows which some yakuza wore would have been difficult to detect.[605]

Russian organised crime has a language of tattoos that helps to identify a member of the *vorovskoi mir,* with specific tattoos having particular meanings. They could act as a biography, a prison record and an indication of hierarchical status. These would have at one time been inscribed on the body in the labour camps, using dangerous expedients such as home-made

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[604] Kaplan and Dubro, *Yakuza,* 14.
[605] G. W. G. Clement and B. McAdam, *Triads and Other Asian Organized Crime Groups* (The Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 1994), 117 in Lintner, *Blood Brothers*, 147.

needles and ink.[606] Justin McGuirk describes the Russian criminal tattoos as

an iconographic language that can be understood in and out of correctional

institutions from St Petersburg to Siberia and across Central Asia.[607] Russian

criminal tattoos which are often obscene are also steeped in a rich history and

set of cultural references including Russian identity and folklore, for example,

the image of a Russian Orthodox Cathedral in figure 9 (image found at J

McGuirk 'A graphical lexicon of the skin art of Russia's convict classes

impresses.' www.icon-magazine.co.uk/issues/012/tattoo.htm) meant that

prison was a home for a thief and the number of cupolas equalled the number

of terms served.[608] The use of the church as with other religious images such

as the crucifix is intended to show the near religious commitment of the

criminal to the *vorovskoi mir.* They rarely reflect the personal piety or zeal of

the wearer. Some icons are badges of honour, oaths of vengeance or even

symbols of devotion to the art of thievery. Others, including the Virgin Mary,

are supposedly worn to protect the wearer from the police or rivals, illustrated

in figure 10[609] (image found at Will Hodgkinson, Russian criminal tattoos:

breaking the code

 http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2010/oct/26/russian-criminal-tattoos).

They also show a willingness to distort the holiest symbols of mainstream

society. Associated with this is a common theme of devils, typically engaged

in a violent or sexual act, again intended to be defiant in its blasphemy.

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[606] Galeotti and Barksby, 'Bodies of Evidence', 11.
[607] J McGuirk 'A graphical lexicon of the skin art of Russia's convict classes impresses.' www.icon-magazine.co.uk/issues/012/tattoo.htm.
[608] I. Kulak, 'Signs of crime' in *International Police Review* (November/December 1998), 68.
[609] BBC news In pictures: Russian criminal tattoos
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/spl/hi/pop_ups/04/europe_russian_criminal_tattoos/html/5.stm

Since the *vorovksoi mir* truly emerged in the Stalinist labour camps, it is not surprising that Soviet iconography is identifiable. The faces of Marx, Lenin and Stalin were once tattooed onto criminals' chests in the mistaken belief that no firing squad would dare open fire at them, for example in figure 11 (image found at Lenin tattoo, D Baldayev, D Murrey, S Sorrell, S Vasiliev, Russian Criminal Tattoo Encyclopaedia Volume I (London, 2009), 146.) in which the acronym under Lenin's head spells thief while such symbols of orthodoxy as the Order of Lenin medal were often sported in mockery.[610] Likewise, the swastika was sometimes affected in the 1950s and 1960s, not out of affection for Nazi ideology but as an offensive gesture of defiance.[611] Varese explains that the vory tried to maintain exclusivity on the designs and even punished non vory who were caught wearing them by death.[612]

Tattoos often drew on the criminals' own experiences and culture. Different prison camps had their own signs. Criminals who had endured confinement in especially brutal places proudly tattooed themselves with the appropriate symbol to celebrate their survival and show it to their peers. Barbed wire and other marks of the Gulag were common, as well as playing cards. The latter represented how they spent their time as well as having a mystical role within criminal society as a symbol of fate and chance.[613] Tattoos in prison also held a psychological element; in the faceless community where every man was a number, the only real possession the prisoner had was his body.[614] Therefore it could become a form of empowerment by criminals' exerting control over

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[610] Applebaum, *GULAG*, 267.
[611] Galeotti and Barksby, 'Bodies of Evidence', 11.
[612] Varese, *The Russian Mafia,* 238.
[613] Galeotti and Barksby, 'Bodies of Evidence', 11.
[614] Bronnikov, 'Telltale tattoos in Russian prisoners', 58.

their own bodies despite what else was happening; even in prison they could still show their own will and identity.

How the tattoos are displayed can also provide clues about the groups that use them. Some tattoos are defiant and obvious such as the barbed wire across the foreheads of some Russian prison camp veterans or the teardrop favoured by many prison gangs. Facial tattoos immediately communicated a message and could rarely be less obvious; for example, barbed wire across the forehead, illustrated a sentence of life imprisonment without any possibility of parole.[615] Facial tattoos were strong images chosen carefully or else imposed by someone else for retribution or even a loss through payment in a card game. In comparison the most successful Russian mafiya tend to keep their tattoos on their bodies or arms, where they can be covered by clothing. Given the importance of the bathhouse in Russian culture, their true signs of authority would only be visible when relaxing with fellow criminals in this venue.[616] This is the same for the yakuza who have always kept tattoos on parts of the body that can be easily concealed in a business suit. This reflects a desire to blend into mainstream society and, often, an active desire to attain authority positions within it.[617]

In the documentary *America's Toughest Prison* which observed Ironwood State Prison in California, Officer Mike Smith, a gang specialist who works in the Investigative Services Unit, took photos of the inmates tattoos to help him to determine where the person is from, the dynamics of the gang, who he

[615] http://fitness.agava.ru/tattoo/pris/03html.
[616] Galeotti and Barksby, 'Bodies of Evidence', 12.
[617] *Ibid.*, 13.

associates with, what his nickname may be, and which of his friends may have been killed. Smith claims that a broad range of gang intelligence can be gained by studying the tattoos in prison. Each gang has a specific tattoo and style such as the white gang preference for skulls, demons and dragons, the black gang nicknames and the Hispanic gang images favouring Aztec cultural symbols. All of these tattoos help the prison staff to identify gang members and keep an eye on them as the documentary demonstrated the prisoners themselves say very little and deny any meanings connected to their tattoos. Following a gang riot in the summer of 2007 in the prison, Smith began to search the mail of the prisoners for any clues on the cause or possible repercussions. He found reference to a tattoo on a new prisoner which disrespected the Crip tattoo of thumbs up by having a thumb down. Not surprisingly this tattoo belonged to a Blood gang member.[618]

One of the most distinctive characteristics of the traditional *vory* was the lengths to which their tattoo culture was codified and controlled. Criminals may choose certain tattoos, but there was also a core 'visual vocabulary' which had specific meanings within the Russian and Soviet underworld. Only senior members of the *vorovskoi mir*, the *vory v zakone* earned the right to wear distinctive tattoos. These include: the thieves' cross - a large crucifix on the chest, an eight-pointed star on the breast, shoulder or knees symbolising a refusal to kneel or bow to anyone or crowns as shown in figure 12 (image found at Traditional vory v zakone tattoos, Thieves in law, Mafiacilia http://www.wix.com/drink4side/rustyfactor/page-2). These images of

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[618] 'America's Toughest Prison' documentary shown on Five TV in 2009.

decoration were placed across the body and came in the form of tattooed rings; epaulettes as illustrated in figure 13 (image found at Russian vory v zakone tattoo http://www.fourum.sonsofanarchyfrance.net), acronyms, facial tattoos, finger tattoos and religious or pornographic iconography. Tattoos could help to distinguish and identify the role of an individual thief within the underworld, they even provided elements of their past, present and future.

Particular tattoos mark specific experiences, specialisms and convict experiences.[619] This was especially the case with trademark tattoos for certain crimes. For example, images for murderers included skulls with daggers through or below them, or a skull with bolts of lightning zigzagging through it.[620] Other 'murder' images were pirates, a tombstone cross, a spade from a suit of cards, a severed head or human skeleton, and heads of predatory animals such as wolves, tigers and lions. Drug addict tattoo images included needles for shooting up, gin pouring out of a bottle, or a beetle or fly caught in a spider's web. The web indicated the situation drug addicts could find themselves in, one which they could not get out of. Addicts' images also included the flower head of a poppy and a deformed skull. The image of a flying eagle holding a woman or a sheep in is claws denotes a convicted rapist. The same image holding a suitcase in its claws indicates an experienced jailbird.[621] A giant eagle with razor sharp talons emblazoned on a criminal's chest announced their status as a *vor* a senior member of the criminal underworld of the *vorovskoi mir*. An eight-pointed star tattooed across a thief's chest just below the collarbone illustrated to other prisoners that the

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[619] Galeotti and Barksby, 'Bodies of Evidence', 12.
[620] Bronnikov, 'Telltale tattoos in Russian prisoners' 55-56.
[621] Kulak, 'Signs of crime', 68.

person was a professional criminal.[622] Vyacheslav Ivankov, nicknamed *Yaponchik* (Little Japanese), a highly respected member of the *vory v zakone* who operated in America wore this tattoo.[623]

Words themselves created mixed meanings just as the images of tattoos did; the whole words could portray one message, but each letter could also have a communication function as an acronym. For example, the Russian word for cat, *kot* as an acronym meant 'native of prison'.[624]

Mixed messages, acronyms and images ensured that this hidden language of tattoos could only be fully understood by those who possessed the correct information. It reiterated the fact that in this case the *vorovskoi mir* was a separate society, and to ensure that it was treated as such, it created its own language and form of communication. Some of the norms that the criminals lived by were tattooed upon the bodies of thieves, for example: 'The authoritative thief is an uncompromising rejector' 'avtoritetnyi vor – neprimirimyi otritsala.'[625] Within the *vorovskoi mir*, a new tattoo signified an event in the thief's career: 'The body thus became a kind of book where other inmates could read the thief's personal history, provided they knew the code.'[626]

A particular feature now fallen from fashion but still encountered in older criminals was for small signs in the form of playing cards to be tattooed to the

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[622] Bronnikov, 'Telltale tattoos in Russian prisoners', 53.
[623] W. Kleinknecht, *The New Ethnic Mobs – The Changing Face of Organised Crime in America* (New York, 1996), 284.
[624] http://fitness.agava.ru/tattoo/pris/03html
[625] Volkov, *Violent Entrepreneurs*, 56.
[626] *Ibid.*, 56.

backs of the fingers displaying particular skills and crimes. Finger tattoos were

a form of criminal curriculum vitae; they were a very visible and immediate

form of communication that was virtually always on show unlike body tattoos,

which could be covered by choice or incidentally by clothes. Individual finger

tattoos demonstrate a conviction. The array of finger tattoos placed on the

dorsal side of the finger, conveyed immediate messages, demonstrated in

figure 14 (image found at Dorsal tattoo, D Baldayev, D Murrey, S Sorrell, S

Vasiliev, Russian Criminal Tattoo Encyclopaedia Volume III (London, 2008)).

A snake wrapped around a dagger meant the wearer was convicted for

murder or grievous bodily harm.[627] A white cross on a black background

meant the wearer had been convicted for robbery the addition of a skull in the

centre indicated armed robbery.[628]A domino with a six in the middle indicated

a *shestyorka*, (broken man) who should not be feared [629] or a sixer, prison

slang for a gopher or an apprentice thief, who did what they were ordered to

do.[630] The number of black crosses on the actual hand was also supposed to

correlate to the number of convictions, according to Ivan Kulak's research on

the use of tattoos and the meaning they held within Russian criminality.[631]

At the height of the *vorovskoi mir* in the 1930s-70s, the code was strictly

observed and those who tried to use tattoos falsely to claim a status or

experience to which they were not entitled faced severe retribution, and could

even have the offending skin stripped from their bodies. Increasingly, though,

this code has been losing its strength. Many criminals still have tattoos but the

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[627] http://www.policeman.ru/9_tatou.htm.
[628] *Ibid.*
[629] Bronnikov, 'Telltale tattoos in Russian prisoners', 54.
[630] Kulak, 'Signs of crime', 68.
[631] Kulak, 'Signs of crime', 68.

correlation between image and meaning has been lost. Instead both career criminals and those who simply want to project a menacing image choose tattoos they like and have them commercially done. At the same time, many of the new generation of organised crime regard tattoos as old fashioned and counterproductive as they seek to build underworld empires behind facades of respectability. There is also a thriving business using modern treatments to remove tattoos from criminals no longer as eager to openly show their true colours.

Russian organised crime emerged in the Gulag labour camps, and its tattoos demonstrate both its determined and overt rejection of mainstream society and also the need to create a common and codified culture which could not easily be duplicated by the state or defied by members. However, as it increasingly penetrates legitimate business and politics, the so-called blue criminals (after the shade of the makeshift inks used in their tattoos) are being supplanted by a new generation who are avoiding obvious marks of their status.[632]

Tattoos are and were ostentatious; they are still present in organised criminal sub-cultures but are passing into history. Any ostentatious act by definition suggests that the actor wishes to give some message and can therefore be studied as a signalling device. In order for a sign to be strong, it must be used only by those who genuinely possess that attribute and it must be difficult to imitate. Tattoos are expensive both in time and money and have social stigma

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[632] Galeotti and Barksby, 'Bodies of Evidence', 12.

attached to them. Tattoos also place physical costs; they are painful, can cause health issues such as fevers and, frequently liver problems in later life. Bearing a tattoo, especially a large number of them or a particularly large or complicated design in itself immediately communicated the strength of its wearer, as well as their commitment to the underworld. A tattoo demonstrated an ability to bear pain and a disregard for the future, although this message that has been weakened by modern less painful machines.

Even if the specific meaning of each tattoo was unknown, the tattoos of the *vorovskoi mir* could generate a reaction and therefore still made a communication statement. This included a certain degree of respect, fear or interest; a reaction of some kind often resulted from seeing criminal tattoos en masse. This was frequently the case if the person was incarcerated with other members of such a criminal grouping. Camp memoirs taken from those imprisoned in the Gulags of Russia during the period of Stalin at the time of the height of the *vorovskoi mir* testify to this and many reactions involved acknowledgement of the seniority of the tattooed prisoner.[633]

Other criminal organisations may not have such specific meanings for each image but there was still a powerful communication function. In Hong Kong the communication function of tattoos has led to a saying: 'left a black dragon, right a white tiger'. According to popular belief, most triad members have a tattoo of a black dragon on the left bicep and one of a white tiger on the right;

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[633] Bronnikov, 'Telltale tattoos in Russian prisoners', 53.

in fact, many people in Hong Kong use this saying as a euphemism for a triad member. [634]

For established organised criminal groups there is often a history of tattoos. For the yakuza, tattoos are one of the most powerful methods of establishing and communicating their identity. They are intricate and therefore expensive to acquire, visible and widely recognised as being connected to the yakuza, and, therefore outside of Japanese society.[635] For example, it was not unheard of for a company employee to be fired if their tattoos were discovered.[636] Japanese society originally used tattoos as a form of punishment to ostracise and shame society's outlaws and make it easier to recognise them amongst ordinary citizens.[637] In the Japanese feudal period the authorities placed a black ring around the arm for each offence.[638] The tattoo is intimidating for ordinary Japanese people and as such has led to signs outside certain venues stating 'No tattoos allowed'. Wearing tattoos through choice showed the decision not to conform to society and took the original communication function, turned it around and made it the property of the yakuza. Hill explained that: 'By wearing a tattoo, a gang member is telling mainstream society not only that he is not part of it, but that he never wants to be so.' [639]

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[634] 'Tribal Tattoos Article: History of Tattoos'
http://www.tribal-tattoos.co.uk/article-history-tattoos.php
[635] Hill, *The Japanese Mafia*, 86.
[636] Herbert 1995, 9 cited in Hill, *The Japanese Mafia*, 87.
[637] Lintner, *Blood Brothers*, 147.
[638] Kaplan and Dubro, *Yakuza,* 14.
[639] Hill, *The Japanese Mafia*, 88.

In *The Japanese Mafia: Yakuza, Law and the State,* Peter Hill cites statistics regarding the motivation for yakuza to obtain tattoos and the majority, 53 per cent, answered that ostentation was the main motivation and 17 per cent answered intimidation.[640] The choice of ostentation indicates that tattoos are about communication, especially as in this case wearing a tattoo sends a definite signal of identifying the wearer as a yakuza and risking the disapproval from mainstream society.[641] Yakuza tattoos as a form of creating an identity are protected and if a non-yakuza was found wearing one he would face punishment for 'brand infringement'.[642] Although for hundreds of years gangs of gamblers and peddlers used tattoos, they became very much the property of the yakuza and as such are exclusive.

Internal Cohesion

The process of receiving and bearing tattoos as part of a criminal underworld can act as a bonding function, an 'in-group maker' and an acknowledged shared process which is distinctive to that criminal culture. This process is able to reinforce a shared identity, to cement and demonstrate the commitment, allegiance and membership of an individual to that criminal grouping.

Part of this stems from the pain that had to be endured when receiving a tattoo. For example, by wearing an intricate yakuza designed tattoo, the individual indicated that he had a certain amount of physical strength to

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[640] *Ibid.*, 87.
[641] *Ibid.*, 88.
[642] *Ibid.*, 88.

endure the pain of the process and also the number of hours required to receive the image. Gambetta describes the painful process of enduring a tattoo as a signal of toughness as well as a symbol of criminal membership a signal that was costly to produce which reinforced its robustness.[643] This was especially the case if the traditional method was used, in which the skin was hand pricked with a tool carved from wood or bone that had been tipped with a cluster of tiny needles, and was punched into the skin with a series of jabs.[644] Indeed it is widely believed that one of the initiation rites in becoming a triad member was silently withstanding the pain of receiving a large tattoo in one sitting, usually performed in the traditional hand-poked style.[645]

The danger of receiving tattoos also adds to the group commitment and identity. The process was potentially dangerous, especially if it was received in difficult or uncertain circumstances, such as prison. For example, if a member of the *vorovskoi mir* had received a tattoo in prison the instrument that was used could have been something as crude as a nail or anything sharp picked up. The process of making up dye in prison was tackled by using scorched rubber mixed with urine[646] or a combination of soot, sugar and ash mixed with urine.[647] Obvious problems of sanitation could arise throughout such a process for example, septicaemia, tetanus, blood poisoning and inflammation of the lymph nodes. The traditional tattooing methods of the yakuza also carried risks of infection and liver problems in later life when the

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[643] Gambetta, *Codes of the Underworld*, 188.
[644] Kaplan and Dubro, *Yakuza,* 15.
[645] 'Tribal Tattoos Article: History of Tattoos'
http://www.tribal-tattoos.co.uk/article-history-tattoos.php
[646] Bronnikov, 'Telltale tattoos in Russian prisoners', 50.
[647] Kulak, 'Signs of Crime', 68.

ink was injected. This method was still being used regularly in the 1970s but has now been replaced by modern tattooing machines.[648] There are other costs to acquiring a tattoo: the cost in time and money; a full yakuza tattoo could have taken three years to complete with traditional methods and a few million yen, around twenty-five thousand pounds. Modern methods may be quicker and cheaper than this but they are still costly. A tattoo demonstrates the bearer's ability to endure pain and, perhaps less consciously, a disregard for the future. [649]

Importance

The criminal sub-cultures that use tattoos hold the process in high regard. In order to rise to the position of senior *vor* within the *vorovskoi mir*, one of the criteria was the demonstration of the appropriate tattoos. Certain tattoos could also only be worn when they had been earned a sign of power a symbol connected to the individual's status in the underworld hierarchy. A man without tattoos in this world lacked social status but if this status was gained by misuse of the tattoos then punishment would ensue.[650] There was a degree of exclusiveness for the images and if a non-member of the underworld was caught with one of these exclusive images it could result a harsh punishment, even death. [651]

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[648] Hill, *The Japanese Mafia*, 87.
[649] *Ibid.*, 88.
[650] R. Poynor, 'An 'encyclopaedia' of Russian prison tattoos exposes a complex graphic subculture' 'Written all over the body' (53)
http://www.eyemagazine.com/opinion.php?id=116&oid=274.
[651] Varese, *The Russian Mafia,* 238.

However, there has been a move away from tattoos for the serious organised criminal cultures that once held them in such high esteem. Within the Russian criminal underworld as the 'new criminal' strives for a place in the legitimate as well as illegitimate market place, the secret messages become less applicable and less representative of what this new criminal is about. Laser treatment has weakened the tattoo process somewhat with the facility to erase an image that would have forever marked someone as a member of a criminal sub-culture. The individual no longer has to make a life-time decision; he can maintain that particular group identity for as long as it is convenient.

Seiji Iishiba, Tokyo police's anti-mob unit comments upon the changes in the yakuza:

> You can't tell who's who anymore. It's now like a department store even the most common traditions are changing younger yakuza are forsaking the full-body pictorial tattoos. They opt for a simple line drawing or phrase on their upper arm, more similar to the tattoos of Western youths.[652]

A full body pictorial tattoo does not appear to be worth the physical or financial stress; following the traditions no longer equates to respect or advancement with the organisation.

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[652] Kaplan and Dubro, *Yakuza,* 327.

Within a criminal sub-culture, tattoos reflect the changes in the underworld with changes in images, views on tattoos and how they are displayed. Tattoos are a changing and dynamic visual language and therefore reflect events that happen within a sub-culture and within wider society. For example, following the Second World War images of swastikas were used within Russian criminal sub-cultures and later still images of space rockets; for example, a drug addict tattoo of a devil on a rocket flying in circles to the moon along with the words, 'I'm headed for the moon for marijuana.' This is a living language that is able to reflect and respond to the changes in society. Creation of an identity in this way can communicate what the group that uses it find important and whether this is changing or disappearing.

Lambert explored Russian prison tattoos to find out about their meaning and the experiences of the individual convict whether this reflects the type of crime they have committed, their experiences of drugs or their standing in the prison. [653] The lowest echelon of the prisoners' caste system is the downcast, men who are usually forced to fulfil the sexual needs of other prisoners. They have to wear the tattoo of a naked woman in a state of deference or a pair of black eyes of a fly placed around the nostrils, on the cheeks, upper lip, ear lobe, near the eyes or on the neck. Another image was a round sun with rays radiating from it, with a back spot in the centre of the sun, and then white and black circles. Again this was a confusing image, because the symbol was ironic; it also meant 'I am in a circle of friends.'[654]

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[653] Lambert, *Russian Prison Tattoos.*
[654] Bronnikov, 'Telltale tattoos in Russian prisoners', 58.

The bearer of this tattoo is at the bottom of the hierarchy and as such will sleep in the worst position in the cell. Certain viewpoints can be articulated by choices of tattoo images, a bare-toothed scowl of an image of an animal indicates that the person will seek revenge on all who did this to him. [655] By using this method Lambert does not glorify the tattoos but sets their role and meaning in reality and provides a keen insight into the Russian prisoners. Tattoos reflect the psychological element and provide information on how the prisoner has changed, what he has been through and provide an outlet and element of control for the convict over his body.

However, not everyone wished to carry on this identity outside of the prison gates and for inmates such as Andrei Bulanov, drastic methods were taken to erase his most obvious tattoos on the top of his hands and therefore an element of his previous identity. Bulanov explained how he wanted to be part of a very different society and would not even associate with convicts once he was free; he therefore felt that the tattoos on the top of his hands would convey an inappropriate message. He erased these images by using a needle to scratch the tattoo, then added acid on a match to burn the image away. A painful process which left its own scar but one Bulanov was happy to live with in order to create a new identity.[656]

Prison tattoos and the tattoos of the 'thieves-in-law' are often blurred, making it difficult to distinguish which belongs to whom. The meaning of tattoos has changed from the time of the thieves reign and prisoners are aware and

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[655] Lambert, *Russian Prison Tattoos,* 22.
[656] Lambert, *Russian Prison Tattoos,* 18.

comment about this past and the break away from certain images such as stars on the knees or Swastikas on the biceps. The younger convicts confirm this and tell Lambert: 'That was in Stalin's time. Now, the youth just tattoo whatever they feel like.'[657] If the *vorovskoi mir* no longer has a monopoly on certain tattoo images then this dilutes the once potent effect they had as a signal and identifier of the group; this move changes what they deem to be important and how their identity has changed.

Tattoos throughout societies have changed and DeMello describes the diverse nature of tattooing and how it has shifted between classes and in meaning in each stage of its artistic and social evolution.[658] The tattoo itself has been redefined from the mark of the primitive, to a symbol of an explorer, from a sign of patriotism and a mark of rebellion to a sign of status.[659] There is no doubt that for criminals tattoos are a strong and distinctive form of identity which can act as social indicators, but they are not the corner stone of organisations that they once were; they do not wield the same power or commitment or indeed have the same impact. Criminals and tattoos will always be linked, but tattooing as a key element to the identity of serious organised criminal grouping is no longer a prerequisite.

II.   Clothes and accessories

Identity can be created and reinforced by the clothes and accessories which members of criminal groups wear, creating a uniform, an indication of the

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[657] *Ibid.*, 17.
[658] DeMello, *Bodies of Inscription*, 3.
[659] *Ibid.*, 3.

cohesion of the group and the individual's loyalty to it. This type of uniform does not remain static. Gambetta describes the fashionable clothes choice of a mafioso as once being a fustian jacket (a jacket made from a blend of hard wearing fabric, such as cotton and wool) and a coppola hat, (a form of flat cap), which changed to a dark suit and a Borsalino hat, (a type of fedora) and later a leather jacket and dark glasses.[660]

In fact, dark glasses were used by film makers to demonstrate toughness in male characters. *Gun Crazy*, a film shot in 1949, directed by Joseph H. Lewis, was possibly the first film in which violent gangsters wore sunglasses. This appears to be an example of the influence of film onto the identity of a criminal sub-culture, as there were no records at that time of gangsters wearing them in reality. After they started appearing in films, however, dark glasses became a key element of the overall look of the gangster which the film was trying to represent.[661]

The Italian-American mafia is one of the most enduring images related to organised crime and the most famous of the gangster films, *The Godfather*, still one of the top grossing films of all times, offered a variety of inspiration for organised criminals as well as blurring the lines further between image and reality. The HBO television series *The Sopranos* that began in the late 1990s followed the life of a mafia family and its impact was so big that in one of the episodes in which a clothing firm known as Ramsey Outdoor went out of

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[660] Gambetta, *The Sicilian Mafia,* 127.
[661] *Ibid.*, 135.

business, the store had to advertise to remind customers they were still open because business had dropped.[662]

In his study on gangs Jankowski observed the informal dress code that gang membership had. The Chicano gangs dressed alike in mostly t-shirts and khaki trousers, hair cut to a medium length and swept straight back sometimes with the addition of a bandana or handkerchief tied around their head. Other gangs he observed such as the Puerto Ricans, African American and Dominican gangs in New York had emblems sewn onto the back of jackets, wore blue jeans with belts, metal wristbands and engineer's boots. Two of the Irish gangs he studied wore a uniform of loose green and white nylon jackets. However, some of these clothes worked so well as collective identifiers that some of the gangs Jankowski spoke to decided to stop wearing them because of increased police attention.[663]

Specific gang colours are another important identifier and American gangs have a number of colours which are attributed to certain gangs, for instance the Bloods usually wear red and black, the Crips wear blue and black, the Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation (ALKQN) wear Gold and black and MS-13 wear blue and white.[664] The specified colour can be demonstrated using clothes, bandanas, beads, hats and even shoelaces, and details such as what side of the body these items are worn can also be as important an identifier as the colour, for example, wearing accessories such as sunglasses in a certain way or wearing a belt buckle to the right or left of centre. Other

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[662] Albanese, 'North American Organised Crime', 9.
[663] Jankowski, *Islands in the Street,* 83.
[664] New Jersey State Police Street Gang Bureau, *Know the Signs,* 4-8.

signals include a rolled-up trouser leg, one shoe untied, hats cocked to one side or jewellery worn to one side of the body.[665] Some gang members will even go to the extent of having clothes custom made to advertise their affiliation adequately.[666]

This is not just a criminal phenomenon. Football fans wear the strip of their team as a recognisable identity and do not limit it to football matches alone but continue to wear it away from the stadium. A strong identity created through visual aids can thus be carried by the individual when he/she is out of his/her comfort zone or away from their 'territory,' which is perhaps why so many England football kits are seen when people are on holiday abroad. Criminals have to spend time in wider society outside their gang or criminal strongholds, so their identity is important. Uniforms are also an integral part of many professions and not unique to organised crime; the police, soldiers, traffic wardens, chefs and other groups all use a uniform to identify themselves to the public, each other and to create a collective identity for themselves and to communicate with others. The strength that can be gained from creating a collective unity and a distinct solid identity is not lost on all these groups which continue to use a uniform.

Circumstances can influence clothing and image style just as films can. After the Second World War, the yakuza began to emulate American style from

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[665] *Ibid.*, 11.

[666] *Ibid.*, 12. Another example is The Born to Kill Gang from Vietnam who created an identity that was easily recognisable with black clothing and pony tails. They also identified themselves with 5 dots, representing money *tien*, sex *tinh*, drugs *thuoc*, crime *toi* and jail *tu*. Youth Needs Love Patrick Du Phuoc Long with Laura Ricard*, The Dream Shattered: Vietnamese Gangs in America*, (Hanover, New Hampshire, 1995), 155-6 in Lintner, *Blood Brothers,* 371.

soldiers and gangsters in films, by wearing flashy outfits, loud floral shirts and shiny double breasted suits and crew cuts or permed curly hair.[667] However, the Japanese perceptions of American gangsters were skewed and sometimes based on gangster parody films such as *Guys and Dolls* and so the yakuza dressed in dark suits, dark shirts, and white ties, sunglasses and later in the 1960s crew cuts. Yakuza leaders took this acquisition of foreign style further with foreign cars despite the power of the eastern car market.[668]

A visual identity is not only created by clothes. Men of honour of the Sicilian mafia are expected to take a pride in their personal appearance even in prison and any neglect of this is a cause of concern. For example, Nino Gioè was placed in solitary confinement in summer 1993 and as he began to feel the pressure he let his beard grow and neglected to clean his clothes. This decline in appearance only increased the fears of the other mafiosi held in the cells on the same wing that he was about to break and inform. Instead Gioè committed suicide on the 28 July 1993.[669] It could be argued that he was relinquishing his identity as a mafioso and part of this was the change in his appearance. John Gotti earned the nickname the 'Dapper Don' through his attention to his image, in *Underboss: Sammy the Bull Gravano's Story of Life in the Mafia*, Maas describes it as culmination of every image portrayed in gangster films; 'With his diamond pinkie ring, meticulously styled silvery hair, a healthy tan from regular sunlamp treatments, his wardrobe of $2,000 custom-made Brioni double breasted suits and $200 handpainted ties, the

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[667] Lintner, *Blood Brothers,* 155.
[668] Kaplan and Dubro, *Yakuza,* 73.
[669] Dickie, *Cosa Nostra*, 17-18.

tabloids were soon naming him the Dapper Don.'[670] Sammy Gravano even commented on Gotti's appearance at the trial in 1992 in which he gave testimony, 'That first day John was like he always was. Sitting straight up, not a hair out of place, fancy suit, whatever, the big boss.'[671] However, following the damaging testimony of Gravano his demeanour began to change, Gravano describes Gotti on his last day of giving evidence 'My last day John ain't so erect anymore. He was slumping down. His hair is a little messy. His tie is crooked. I think he knew he was beat.'[672]

Changes in identity can also be a personal reflection; for example, Wan Kaik-Koi, the leader of the Macau chapter of the 14K Triads started as a juvenile delinquent and as such had scars and broken teeth from street fighting resulting in his nickname 'broken tooth'. By the mid-1990s Koi had risen in the organisation and owned several expensive sports cars, had several wives and numerous girlfriends, and in this elevated position he travelled around Macau surrounded by bodyguards in dark sunglasses, outlandish clothes and of course with teeth that were fixed.[673] However, his boss Kai Sze Wai thought Koi was too flashy in his image and behaviour. Koi was a poor loser who lacked discretion which could attract too much attention to the arrangements that existed between the casino tycoons, the government and the triads.[674]

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[670] P. Maas, *Underboss: Sammy the Bull Gravano's Story of Life in the Mafia* (New York, 1997) 343.
[671] Quoted in Maas, *Underboss* 472.
[672] *Ibid.*, 472-473.
[673] Lintner, *Blood Brothers,* 77.
[674] *Ibid.*, 77.

Outrageous or ostentatious clothes, suggests an arrogance and a defiant rejection of societal judgement. Such clothing signals the wealth, which within organised crime world as elsewhere, acts as an indicator of success. For a member of an organised criminal group demonstrating one's wealth, whether through clothing, jewellery, or cars, is therefore a way of advertising that you are a successful criminal.[675] The 'uniform' of the Russian gangster of the 1990s reflected this, a leather jacket or track suit and some prominent gold jewellery. Matich found evidence of this in her work on 'Mobster gravestones in 1990s Russia',[676] she documents how the luxurious funeral and magnificent gravestones indicate the power and wealth of the deceased.[677] The photographic representations on the gravestones can even demark rank, Matich describes the dress code of the foot soldiers as a jogging suit and trainers for a quick getaway and a leather jacket.[678] In comparison the image of the successful bosses known as 'authorities' or 'brigadiers' were more extravagant; expensive suits, silk shirts without ties and with some buttons unbuttoned, gold jewellery and a Rolex,[679] for example in figure 15 (image found at Russian gravestones, 'Tasteless extravagance of Russian gangsters' tombstones revealed' The Telegraph, 08 November 2009 http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/6530027/Tasteless -extravagance-of-Russian-gangsters-tombstones-revealed.html) the gold watch and gold ring are prominent. Some of the gravestones that Matich documents have even more details that surround the identity of the deceased and include religious affiliation and a car.

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[675] Hill, *The Japanese Mafia*, 83-84.
[676] Matich, 'Mobster gravestones in 1990s Russia'.
[677] *Ibid.*, 79.
[678] *Ibid.*, 85.
[679] Matich, 'Mobster gravestones in 1990s Russia', 86.

The gravestone representation of Mikhail Kuchin, the boss of Ekaterinburg's

Central gang includes a Mercesdes key chain decorated with a jewel

encrusted horseshoe hanging from his index finger, his trigger finger.[680]

Criminals are not the only groups who have chosen clothes to reinforce an

identity, students through various decades have had a casual outfit and

appearance that has enabled them to be identified by others. A 'look' or 'style'

can also be a means to distinguish amongst a group. In a recent article *The*

Sunday Times magazine observed and commented on the trend of an

increasing number of affluent public school students attending Newcastle

University following Princess Eugenie. The article highlighted the uniform of

these affluent students known as 'rah rahs'. The girls wore Ugg boots,

leggings and a smock style top and the boys sported quilted Barbour jackets

and beanie hats and the car used was a Mini.[681] This was a particular student

group that distinguished itself from the wider student population and used a

visual image to reinforce the difference.

III.   **Posture, signs and behaviour**

Body language is in many ways another layer of clothing in the process of

building up the identity; how a person holds himself, the powerful alpha male

assertive stance and how one walks all create and reinforce the chosen

identity. A description of a typical yakuza also includes a leer and a swagger

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[680] *Ibid.*, 99.
[681] 'It's grand up north in Newcastle' *Times Online* from *the Sunday Times* (28 February 2010) http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/education/article7041470.ece?token=null&offset=0&page=1.

which helped to distinguish them further from ordinary citizens.[682] In *Confessions of a Yakuza* Saga describes rules that governed many aspects of yakuza behaviour, the way one was expected to greet people above and below them, the way one would talk to them and show that they were listening.[683] There were three types of formal yakuza greetings, self-introduction on a one to one basis, in a group and in a threatening situation, the greeting itself constituted a half crouch or half bow and was difficult to mimic.[684] Even the choice of social events could be used to reinforce an identity. Sicilian 'work social events' usually revolved around manly pursuits like hunting parties and meals.[685] A mafioso needed to show other men of honour that they could be trusted through his behaviour. '…if a mafioso gambles, womanizes, and parades his wealth, he is likely to be considered unreliable and therefore expendable.'[686] Gambetta identifies that frequenting places where non criminals are unlikely to be found or at specific times of the day can signal a criminal identity; this could be specific bars, social clubs, boxing gyms, and gambling establishments.[687]

There was an expectation of high ranking members of the mafia to have a certain lifestyle which increasingly became more ostentatious. The myth surrounding a 'made man' in Sicilian and North American mafia includes his personal life. Wives were placed on a pedestal, but supposedly kept at home 'pregnant and bare foot' and the majority also have girlfriends who are part of

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[682] Kaplan and Dubro, *Yakuza,* 73.
[683] Saga, *Confessions of a Yakuza,* 80.
[684] Gambetta, *Codes of the Underworld*, 192.
[685] Dickie, *Cosa Nostra,* 14.
[686] Dickie, *Cosa Nostra,* 14
[687] Gambetta, *Codes of the Underworld*, 29.

the image and whom they lavish money upon.[688] Pasquale Locatelli had a

wife and three children at home in northern Italy from whom he was separated

and a woman he lived with in Spain with whom he had another child.

Apparently he kept sending her to health farms in the States which left him

time for his 24-year-old French girlfriend.[689] A wife and girlfriend were no less

important for the yakuza image especially as according to both police data

and the interviews Peter Hill carried out which found that a high proportion (28

per cent) of the yakuza, usually low-level members, were financially

dependent on their girlfriends, wives, or mistresses.[690]

Violent behaviour also has a communication function as discussed earlier in

the dissertation; it can settle disputes and build reputations to the point that

the more notorious someone is for violence the less he actually has to partake

in it.[691] Saga describes how important it was for a yakuza gang to appear

powerful and that any weakness in a fight would reflect badly on the whole

gang.[692] Any non-violent display acts of strength or threats are stronger and

more likely to be believed and therefore influential. Scars from a violent past

can reinforce this message further and can substantiate that the criminal is a

survivor.

Gambetta discusses the message that scars can also have within cases of

deliberate strategic self-harm amongst criminals specifically those within

prisons. He establishes that self-harm can communicate the ability to resist

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[688] Short, *Murder Inc.*, 58.
[689] Robinson, *The Merger,* 61.
[690] Mizoguchi 1997, 64; interviews Osaka, 1998 cited in Hill, *The Japanese Mafia*, 115.
[691] Gambetta, *Codes of the Underworld*, 91.
[692] Saga, *Confessions of a Yakuza*, 81.

punishment, endure pain and to go to extremes.[693] The reaction provoked in others to deliberate self-harm can be revulsion and fear which can signal danger or madness and builds a reputation specifically in prison quickly.[694] At the same time, deliberate self-harm can also demonstrate an intensity of beliefs and a willingness to sacrifice for those believes. Martyrs throughout history have undertaken various forms of self-harm including starvation and burning themselves alive to signal the intensity of their convictions.[695]

IV.   Physical signs

Some of the signs which identify a member of a criminal sub-culture are more specific than clothes, tattoos or accessories. In wider society we are barraged with these kind of signs which mark out a message or identity; for example, a 'CCTV in use in this store' or 'Smile you are on CCTV' sends a clear message to all those who use the shop, informing shop-lifters or any criminal to think twice before trying to commit a crime.

Barthes described the 'rhetoric of the image' the ways in which it operates to persuade or coerce spectators into making a particular interpretation encouraging them to identify with a victor or victim or alternatively placing the viewer in the position of an eyewitness of the event represented.[696] A 'Vote Liberal Democrat' on a car window indicates to the world a voting preference and encourages others to vote in the same way, showing solidarity and that there are a number of people thinking the same thing. This is why at general

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[693] Gambetta, *Codes of the Underworld*, 124.
[694] *Ibid.*, 129-130.
[695] *Ibid.*, 146.
[696] Barthes 1957 cited in Burke, *Eyewitnessing* , 179.

election time in the UK until recently a multitude of posters and wooden garden signs filled an average street. This was to demonstrate a commitment but also to persuade and deliver a message.

Organised criminal sub-cultures can use the same methods. In the quiet village of Pak Tin in Hong Kong in 2000, a car was parked in the village, with a sign on its dashboard indicating that its owner belonged to the well-connected Sun Yee On Triads. This car was meant to intimidate the villagers into selling their property to a developer who had hired the triads and wanted to turn the village into a complex of high-rise flats. If that message was not clear, a funeral van, which was an obvious sign of bad luck, was parked in the village.[697]

The yakuza took on a similar role in the 1980s as *jiageya* (land turners) or 'land raising specialists' used by companies to attain desirable properties. The yakuza encouraged owners and tenants to vacate the land. In some cases a visit by a *jiageya* agent would be enough to persuade a landowner or tenant to move but if it was not, the yakuza would open an office in the neighbourhood, increase intimidation and cause a drop in property prices.[698]

Up until 1992 the yakuza held a proud and obvious place within Japanese society and as such used signs as any business or corporation would; gang offices were publicly advertised and the crest and name of the gang was on

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[697] Lintner, *Blood Brothers,* 11.
[698] Lintner, *Blood Brothers,* 138-139.

display.[699] In fact, for years the yakuza identified themselves with lapel buttons and business cards embossed with the gang's emblem which identified their syndicate, rank and name as well as phone and fax number. The name of the gang was inscribed on flags and lanterns, and they had their own official songs and cushions sporting their emblems, as well as their own magazines containing photos of their members, which they would send not only to those members but also to the local police. [700] Popular magazines *Jitsuwa Jidai* and *Jitsuwa Dokyumento* specialised in yakuza-related issues and were avidly read by both gang members and police alike as a way of keeping up to date with underworld affairs.[701] One magazine typical of the genre and published by the Yamaguchi-gumi had inside its front cover a list of what was purported to be the moral principles of the gang. It also contained poems about nature and love, stories about outlaws in Japanese history and eulogies for dead gangsters. There were complaints and articles about injustices in Japanese society and also articles about how powerless the police were in the face of rape, street robberies and murder until the gang came to the rescue.[702] The magazine ended with personal information on individual gang members about to be released from jail, and the kind of welcoming ceremonies which awaited them. Some even had legal columns in which lawyers answered questions from readers.[703]

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[699] Hill, *The Japanese Mafia*, 6.
[700] Clement and McAdam, *Triads and Other Asian Organized Crime Groups*, 120 cited in Lintner, *Blood Brothers,* 141.
[701] Hill, *The Japanese Mafia*, 3.
[702] Lintner, *Blood Brothers*, 141-142.
[703] *Ibid.*, 142.

The Boryokudan Countermeasures Law subdued the majority of these visual indicators and the yakuza stopped wearing lapel button and only handed business cards to other yakuza.[704] The Yamaguchi-gumi took great steps to avoid falling victim to the new law by studying its provisions, reorganising their groups, and removing nameplates from gang offices.[705]

The Sicilian mafia also used physical signs but they were less commonplace than yakuza and less business oriented. Dickie highlights the association between the Sicilian mafia and religious symbols, for example, a parade through town beneath the banner of a saint, a protector par excellence whom they were sponsoring here on earth.[706] He discusses the concept of advertising and the impact of reputation: to be seen associated with a powerful symbol enhances one's credibility and power.

Symbolic images can also be used as threats, such as tarot cards, post cards of crosses and coffins and the severed heads of animals; the most famous made so by the film *The Godfather*. Dickie also mentioned that in the 1980s a metal heart, of the kind donated to Catholic churches to give thanks for grace received, known as ex-voto, was perforated by bullet holes and used as a symbol.[707] Issuing threats by means of symbolic objects may seem old-fashioned, but it had some advantages. Obscure signals can instil terror with minimum exposure for the person involved, no voice, no writing, no risk of

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[704] *Ibid.*, 142.
[705] Hill, *The Japanese Mafia*, 204-205.
[706] Dickie, *Cosa Nostra,* 129.
[707] Dickie, *Cosa Nostra,* 130.

being overheard, less potential to be traced and the meaning is understood without being explicitly told.[708]

One of the most famous symbols belonged to the Black Hand gang, not a single organisation but a form of extortion used by individuals that involved the symbol of a feared mythical society: La Mano Nera (the Black Hand). [709] For an Italian immigrant in America receiving an anonymous letter from the Black Hand was intimidating. The letter would demand money and was embellished with an illustration such as a skull, crossbones or a dagger and always accompanied by a black hand drawn or in the form of an inky palm and fingerprint. From 1910-1912 Chicago's Black Hands were credited with nearly hundred victims paying at least $500,000 a year.[710]

The method of a murder could also be symbolic. In Northern American organised crime there were two murders in Philadelphia in the 1980s which were intended to send a message. The first body was found in the boot of a stolen car and had been tortured and surrounded with torn $20 notes to symbolise that he had been killed for being greedy. The second was a loan shark who was the boss of a money lending business; the body had $500 in the pocket and a gold watch, to ensure the death was not mistaken for a mugging.[711] Gambetta describes these kinds of displays as an example of a signal from one to many; the message was clear and communicated to a number of criminals, the viability of the signs is that the specific details of the

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[708] Gambetta, *The Sicilian Mafia*, 130.
[709] Short, *Murder Inc.,* 30.
[710] *Ibid.*, 30.
[711] Short, *Murder Inc.,* 1.

murder will be leaked to the press.[712] In comparison an honourable death would have been quick, private and without mutilation.

Funerals were another chance for a display. For example, Dean O'Bannion leader of the Northside Gang in Chicago was murdered in 1924 and was described in the press as 'lying in state'; the casket and the flowers each cost $10,000. One newspaper reported it as the day when 'The elite of the gun world gave O'Banion a magnificent funeral, a testimony of the leadership he had attained when gunplay makes millionaires.'[713] The funeral of Giuseppe Masseria, a mafia leader in America who was murdered on the 15 April 1931 at a Coney Island restaurant was also an event, involving a $15,000 coffin, 40 Cadillac funeral cars and huge displays of lilies in the shapes of clocks with the hands pointing at 3:20, the hour which he died.[714] The display of identity reflected both the deceased and the group who were arranging the funeral; it demonstrated wealth, respect and that the people within that group were looked after, even in death. Yakuza members were expected to send a gift of money to a funeral which matched the relationship they held with the deceased or if a member's wife or close relative passed away.[715] Funerals were also an opportunity to communicate the shift of power in an organisation. Gambetta describes how a funeral is an opportunity to show that new alliances are formed and a new boss is chosen.[716] Participation in funerals, such as the involvement in the funeral procession and kissing the deceased

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[712] Gambetta, *Codes of the Underworld*, 163.
[713] Short, *Murder Inc.*, 80.
[714] *Ibid.*, 152.
[715] Saga, *Confessions of a Yakuza*,194.
[716] Gambetta, *Codes of the Underworld*, 163.

and the manner of this participation can be used as public displays aimed at informing an audience of the changes that will follow the bosses' death.[717]

V. Conclusions

The visual identity for a criminal sub-culture is still an important element, but certainly for serious established criminal sub-cultures how it is delivered has changed and it is less about standing out. Rather it is a resource that can be used when required by the particular part of the organisation that needed it. For example, the uniform of the young men of a triad gang who were used for intimidation included black t-shirts, and chests and biceps adorned with tattoos of dragons and phoenixes. These members may be required to demand rents or 'persuade' local residents about a certain course of action through their aggressive behaviour such as swearing, kicking doors and intimidation.[718]

In comparison when Heung Wah-yim was arrested and brought before Hong Kong's High Court. Heung, the Dragon Head of the Sun Yee On, one of the colonies' most feared Secret Societies did not even remotely resemble the stereotype of a gangster. The press described him as 'appearing like a solicitor's clerk.' Linter describes these differences:

> At lower levels, young triad members may look like the thugs they are, complete with tattoos and pagers so that they can quickly respond to

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[717] *Ibid.*, 163-164.
[718] Lintner, *Blood Brothers*, 11.

the gang's call for muscle in some dark part of Hong Kong or Macau. But the new generation of Dragon Heads, Incense Masters, Vanguards and Red Poles have abandoned their greasy T-shirts and blood-dripping meat cleavers for pinstriped suits and briefcases.[719]

The old-fashioned bandits may have passed into folklore, but an entirely new breed of entrepreneur is emerging on the fringes of China. The business like, pinstriped suit-wearing managers of the Sun Yee On have shown where the future lies…[720]

This kind of distinction is also being reflected in some of the criminal gangs. 'Wannabes' are known to sometimes wear tattoos and other identifiers in their effort to be recognised as gang members, get arrested, and build a reputation for themselves. This is contrasted by more experienced gang members who tend to camouflage their gang membership in order to avoid detection by police and other rivals. Some gang members are even opting to have their tattoos removed, either because they want to escape detection by police or because they want to distance themselves from the gang; quit, get married or find legitimate employment. Some even try to leave their gang.

As a new generation of criminals rise up in established criminal sub-cultures, the types of rituals discussed in this chapter begin to be disregarded as the drive for success and money supersedes the role of tradition. *Jingi* has fallen out of favour with the yakuza; tattoos no longer hold the same relevance for

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[719] Lintner, *Blood Brothers,* 125.
[720] *Ibid.*, 127.

the Russian *vorovskoi mir* which once killed if their designs were used falsely; and *yubitsume* is not religiously followed to appease an argument. Kaplan and Dubro explained that: 'Most are the members of a new more adaptable generation of Japanese criminals, far too busy making money in Honolulu or Hong Kong to worry about severed fingers and sake ceremonies.'[721] These changes alter the tone and identity of a group, which is reflected in how the yakuza in Hawaii, who were once deemed outsiders and misfits by other yakuza groups have spearheaded the yakuza's move abroad.

The idea of an unquestioning obedience 'if a boss says a crow is white' is weaker with younger yakuza who were less willing to obey bosses at every step, with even fewer ready to put down their life for some abstract devotion to duty.[722] The yakuza rule of silence has also weakened like its equivalent *omertà* in the Sicilian and American organisations, resulting in an increase in informers; some yakuza are even turning in their boss for ordering a murder, an act that would have been unthinkable years ago.

Demands by yakuza leaders that subordinates amputate fingers or have tattoos are now extremely low. This seems to be indicative of the trend away from the use of *yubitsume* amongst groups, in preference for fines as a form of punishment. It is questionable whether tattoos have ever been systematically demanded by bosses. Horishi, an Osaka-based tattoo-master argues that many modern-minded bosses actually encourage their subordinates not to have tattoos so that their future may not be confined to

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[721] Kaplan and Dubro, *Yakuza,* 327.
[722] *Ibid.*, 327.

traditional yakuza activities.[723] It is also a practical decision to avoid identification as a gang member as the yakuza becomes less open and accepted by wider society.

A change in a visual image in order to be less obvious or move in different circles is not a new phenomenon. For the Camorra in the period from their emergence up until 1860, it was important for them to be recognised as Camorristi to be able to intimidate people. So many adopted a kind of uniform, including tight jackets and wide trousers, often with a beret, tattoos and several rings on their fingers. But as some aspired to enter the middle classes, their dress became more respectable and inconspicuous.[724] The established criminal sub-cultures still have a visual identity but the requirement of that identity has changed and therefore so has its use.

Chapter Seven - Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to demonstrate that there has been a change in the social and cultural aspect of established criminal sub-cultures by analysing the changes that have taken place in how identity is created and utilised. Criminals are constructed in a variety of ways and an identity in a mafia not only communicates signals and creates group cohesion, it also signposts any changes in attitude and behaviour of the group. If there has been a change in how criminals are constructed, then this can demonstrate a change in the

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[723] Hill, *The Japanese Mafia*, 214.
[724] Behan, *See Naples and Die*, 34.

organisation that constructed them. By focusing upon the identity of established organised criminal sub-cultures, it is possible to identify a departure of such groups constituting for themselves a cultural framework towards an identity that has more in common with business models.

The study was comparative and I analysed mafias internationally, selecting organisations that were distinct in their backgrounds, environments and countries as well as in how established they were, their culture and the relationship and reputation within wider society. Thereby they represent a range of mafias across the world and in addition present cultural identifying markers such as tattoos and constructed mythology. This thesis reflected the range of the comparative study and used a wide selection of secondary literature that incorporated a blended historical study by also utilising perspectives from sociology, criminology and cultural anthropology.

Through a range of evidence it is possible to demonstrate that there has been a change in how identity is employed. As we saw in Chapter four, mythology and legend are still in existence and create a shared background and history but are equally used to shape the reputation and the brand image of an organisation. Mythology remains useful because of its malleability and its ability to change and evolve into what is required by the organised criminal structure that uses it and the country it operates in.

Criminal language can reinforce an identity as shown in Chapter five, as well as create secrecy, communication and expression. The emphasis of criminal

language is now less about secrecy and the prevention of infiltration and increasingly that language and vocabulary can suggest beliefs, information and emotion. The language used by criminal sub-cultures is dynamic and has the capacity to illustrate change in a group or in wider society. Wider society seems more interested than ever in this more accessible side of criminal identity and as such it is mimicked in conjunction with elements of the visual image of criminal identity.

As discussed in Chapter six, a visual identity is still an important aspect of an established organised criminal sub-culture but the content of that identity has evolved. Traditional ceremonies and rituals, tattoos and *yubitsume* no longer hold the same relevance for the new more flexible generation of criminals that have emerged in recent years from established criminal sub-cultures. By adopting less of what Gambetta describes as costly signs, signals that involve costly actions such as *yubitsume* and traditional tattooing, an individual is not as easily identified as a member of a criminal organisation and may not be confined to that particular lifestyle. However, it does create a visual identity that like criminal language is easier to mimic by others.

This thesis highlights that the traditional social and cultural model of established organised criminal sub-cultures has evolved and the use of identity indicates that instead organisations are operating with elements that have more in common with a business model, whilst retaining the corrupt, violent and illegal methods of an organised criminal group. Over the last twenty years there has been an increased focus by mafias on business based

structures and decisions with less regard for the local and cultural networks which were traditionally important. Mafias have moved away from a structured identity that influences different areas of its members' life. It is not that identity has disappeared; it is still an important feature of criminal sub-cultures but rather it is used with a contextual approach, whereby organisations create and negotiate criminal identities at different scales, by which a street level identity might be more distinctive. The same level of identity is not essential for the structure or the whole organisation. Identity can still signal a powerful association and can therefore still be useful for street presence and intimidation but equally may be detrimental in other levels of an organisation.

Inevitably due to the comparative approach emphasised in this dissertation, it has not been possible to fully study all aspects of the identity of the established organised criminal sub-cultures. Nevertheless what this has shown is that despite differences in the history and use of identity between the Chinese triads, Japanese yakuza, the Sicilian mafia and the Russian mafiya, the way identity is created and applied has changed. The Russian mafiya demonstrated that an established organised criminal sub-culture could operate in a flexible manner using criminal networks that do not require a traditional established social system of shared experiences and values that guide behaviour but which instead focus upon supply, demand, control and use of illegal goods and services. The other mafias have exhibited similar changes in the social and cultural aspect of their organisations.

However, a mafia is still a community and as Anderson's concept of imagined communities explains, members hold in their mind a mental image of their

affinity and perceived reality. Social and cultural aspects regarding the history of mafias, the meaning of their symbols and their culture and the creation of an identity are important areas of future study. Identity can change over time and by studying how it is used and has changed could provide further insights into criminal sub-cultures. A wide range of criminal organisations could be studied and compared as well as analysing the use of identity over time or in relation to a specific circumstance or set of events. Social and cultural observations can provide information about the group that use them and catalogue changes in opinion, experience and structure that may be difficult to recognise elsewhere. This dissertation has shown that there has been a change in the social and cultural aspect of established organised criminal sub-cultures and it is possible to recognise that change by studying how identity is used and criminals are constructed.

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