

Call for chapters:

We are looking for 2-3 contributions to complete a volume to be published in late 2017. If interested please send an abstract to alessandra.russo@sssup.it by the 15th of October 2016.

"The good, the bad and the ugly"

Exploring boundaries between the informal, the criminal and the immoral

Editors

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Rationale

The primary goal of this volume is to explore the complexity of informality and variety of forms informal transactions and practices may take, from the extra legal to illegal and immoral activities.

Recent empirical works have drawn attention on the range of activities happening out of the control of a state (see for example Schroeder, Chappuis and Kocak 2014; Knudsen and Frederiksen 2015). Although concepts like informality and illegality have been used to define them, we know that the abovementioned activities are quite different in nature, and they need to be investigated via a further deconstruction. They can be illegal – that is, going against legal codes, informal – that is legal in their nature but concealed from the state, immoral – going against either public morale or morality defined by one or several groups embedded in state structures.

The interplay and interactions among actors, institutions and networks involved in these activities, are still under-explored and under-conceptualised: this volume has been conceived as an attempt to fill this gap.

Initially considered marginal (and often invisible) practices performed by a minority of peripheral actors, recent studies – often inspired by a framework developed by Scott (1984, 2012) - have emphasised their importance in shaping various forms of governance in spite of/beyond the state (Morris 2012; Polese and Morris 2015; Polese et al. 2016; Polese 2016; Russo 2016; Strazzari 2012, 2013).

The volume is organised around three main themes:

The social morality of crime

Top-down approaches to the fight of organised crime see a pivotal role for the state (criminal justice, intelligence, police and the army). However such approaches often

overlook the social and economic embeddedness of organised crime, and its relevance for a number of communities and individuals whose daily survival is at stake. Organised crime does not take place in a social and political vacuum, but rather is deeply entrenched in social structures and networks as it provides an alternative to formal authority and formal economic structures.

There are, thus, large numbers of people who make a living thanks to the structures and networks liaising with or rooted in criminal organisations. As a result, criminal organisations are not only tolerated but potentially widely supported. At the same time, the state apparatus (and its national and local representatives) should not be considered by default as an institution engaged in an all-out war on "illegality": on the contrary, it is worthy studying in-depth its commitment to selective forms of pressure and fight against informal and criminal activity. The existence of areas of tolerance, connivance and collusion needs to be explained.

Opposition of "us" (the people, often informally organised) against "them" (the elites, formally representing the state)

The romanticisation of the role of the criminals and outlaws can support a narrative of "us" (the people) against "them" (the state), especially in instances where state capacity is weak and informal criminal structures provide governance. This can lead to justifying illegal activities against the state as a way to contest it and participate in political processes.

Mechanisms for informal resistance towards the state can be both passive (non-compliance) and active (actions that harm the state and contrast or deny its material and symbolic power). Social support of actions classified as illegal contributes to the construction of a societal narrative opposed to the one promoted by the state and through which excluded or marginalised actors play a role in the political field (Gupta 1995).

Informality and resistance

We see a continuity between informal actions and practices and contestation of state structures and institutions, especially because resistance to the state's authority and power often occur informally. Informal resistance is developed, for example, through instances of "infrapolitics" (Scott 2012b), that is, the simultaneous actions performed by a number of individuals in the same manner - unaware that other people are acting in the same way.

In other words, a social or protest movement can exist for a long time unaware of being part of a broader phenomenon. Infrapolitics can evolve into a more defined movement, with a leader and a common ideology, or simply remain in the shadow; similarly, resistance can take the form of contentious politics or move further. Interestingly, this pattern may apply to the emergence and development of insurgent and terrorist organisations.

Please send a 300 word abstract and a short biographical note to:

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Perspective authors are welcome to contact the editors to discuss their proposal. We promise to give full consideration to abstracts received by the 15th of October 2016.

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