# Chapter 3
# Basic Dynamics of Extortion Racketeering

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## 3.1 Introduction

The emergence and prevalence of systemic extortion depends on particular institutional arrangements, produced as adaptive responses of the interaction between different social actors. The following typology characterises these arrangements in six categories, involving three main social actors: criminal organisations,[1] state and civil society. While the six categories focus on institutional arrangements that foster systemic extortion, the typology could be loosely described as presenting two categories focusing on each of the three main social actors: state, criminal organisations and civil society (see Fig. 3.1). The predominant social actor in each category derives from the relative importance of that actor for the specific aspect of the institutional arrangements addressed by each category.

The first two categories of the typology focus on whether the state is able to meet the citizen's demands for security. The first category, "state responsiveness", enquires about the institutional capacity for response of the state. It discusses the state's ability and will to exercise control over the everyday activities of citizens. The second category, "dissociation from the state", addresses the implications of particular instances where there is a willing disassociation of certain social groups from governmental institutions. In the third and fourth categories, attention is shifted towards the crimi-

[1] The notion "organised crime" is sometimes contested due to its generality and the fact that sometimes it theoretically attributes to the criminal organisation a level of cohesion and stability that is rarely seen in practice (Paoli & Vander Berken, 2014). In this case, because the focus is on systemic extortion, the notion "organised" is used referring to criminal structures that are relatively widespread, remain reasonably stable over long periods of time and, most importantly, are perceived by other social actors, who act according to those perceptions. Because the focus is on institutional arrangements generated from adaptive responses of different agents, this last factor is fundamental for the analysis.

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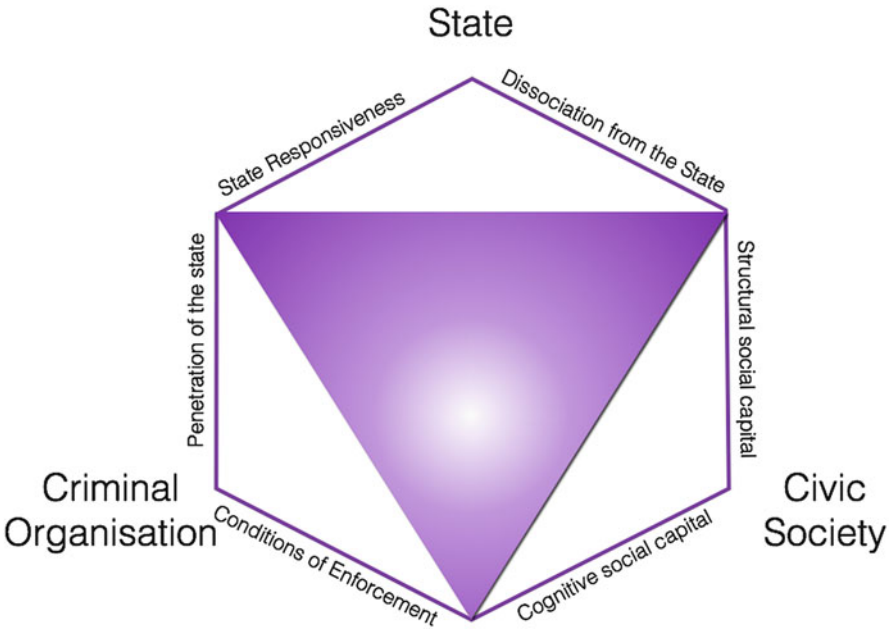


**Fig. 3.1** The dimensions of a typology of ERS. The three social actors are the state, civil society and criminal organisation. For each actor two subcategories are developed through which their role in an ERS and their interaction with other actors are categorised

nal organisation and the conditions that enable its acquisition of power. The third category, "institutional penetration", analyses the way criminal organisations can permeate traditional institutions and practices. The fourth category, "conditions of enforcement", enquires about the factors allowing criminal organisations to achieve and maintain its institutional penetration. Finally, the last two categories address the victims, linking social connectedness and vulnerability. Social connectedness is approached using the concept of social capital. The fifth category, "cognitive social capital", focuses on emotional and cognitive processes that could foster systemic extortion by reducing the victims' sense of self-control and their access to social support. The last category centres on structural determinants that shape social resources to which a victim has access. It enquires about the objective external conditions of the social connectedness. It is labelled, accordingly, "structural social capital".

## 3.2 The State

### *3.2.1 State Responsiveness*

Systemic extortion dynamics often depend on the exploitation of strategic spaces, both geographical and social, by the criminal organisation. The character of this exploitation, however, is sometimes muddled by a misleading interpretation of the

spatial dimension of criminality. Extortion, and crime in general, has frequently been conceptualised suggesting that there is a power void or gap within a circumscribed space which is filled by the criminal organisation (e.g. Sung, 2004). While a weak normative framework and the lack of governmental institutions can certainly foster the emergence of criminality, referring to a power void creates confusion, for it implies that "presence" is the most important variable. Yet, in contexts of systemic extortion, where the activities of the criminal organisation are usually linked to the everyday activities of citizens in the overworld, state agents need not be absent and, sometimes, are actually crucial for the emergence and consolidation of the criminal organisation (see Pagden, 1990 for an example).

This misrepresentation of the role of governmental agents in systemic extortion is, in part, due to the fact that the notions "state presence" and "power void" presuppose a relatively static conceptualisation of the spatial dimension. Several concepts associated with space are taken as subordinate or by-products of general forms of interaction and social organisation. The concept "territory" in modern political thinking, for example, is often a subordinate of political and cultural aspects associated with the concept of nation-state. Its role is almost circumstantial. These static conceptualisations of spatial dimension lead to thinking of space as something that can be objectively partitioned, providing inadequate foundations for concepts such as "monopoly of violence" and "legitimacy" (Elden, 2013). That is particularly problematic when analysing extortion. The legitimacy of a political system, for example, is often associated with an alleged uncontested monopoly of violence. This, however, would be the case only if major institutional actors can interact with each other exclusively through competition. Yet, in different forms of criminality, including extortion, the coexistence of several actors, either legal or illegal, with the ability to exercise widespread violence is common. In Japan, for example, the Yakuza has historically worked alongside the Japanese Government and right-wing elites. More recently, it has also established working relationships with the Chinese triads, which operate, for example, in some areas of the entertainment sector in Tokyo, traditionally controlled by the Yakuza (Hill, 2014).

In extortion dynamics, then, the spatial dimension is important not much in terms of presence, but of responsiveness. Space can influence governmental responsiveness insofar as it is a product of social interaction (Gieryn, 2000; Thrift, 1996). Under such approach to space, the absence or inadequate response of governmental agents is but one factor shaping and being shaped by everydayness. In the case of systemic extortion, it is important to analyse how different power dynamics between victims, perpetrators and other individual and institutional actors allow for the emergence and maintenance of extortive dynamics, associated with certain social and geographical spatial configurations. The nature and character of power are linked to particular contexts where power asymmetries are identified and reacted upon by the participating actors (Foucault, 1982), either by physical displays of contentious politics or social control (Solt, 2012) or through a symbolic framework, operating through subtler mechanisms, e.g. media (van Dijk, 2012).

The rural–urban divide is a space-based power asymmetry that could prove difficult to eradicate, even for a responsible, committed and willing state. Urban and

rural areas are often differentiated by demographic factors, such as population density. Yet, especially in underdeveloped countries, the difference is mostly characterised by significantly lower access to political, social and economic resources in rural populations (The World Bank, 2014). This limitation in resource access has been widely exploited by criminal organisations such as guerrilla movements. The FARC, for example, has established several protection rackets in rural areas of Colombia (Ferro & Uribe, 2002). In some areas where they have full control, the organisation works almost as a "family" movement. Families of FARC members usually provide intelligence or goods, such as food. Increasing state presence is unlikely to undermine the power of the criminal organisation, for it does not target its source, which is the existence of kindship relationships within that space.

Spatial power asymmetries need not be entirely linked to geographical features. Markets, for example, can equally defy governmental control because of the pace, volume and diversity of interactions. Different types of markets pose different challenges for control. The global financial market fosters different criminal activities because (a) criminal activities are usually carried out by people inside the market during their everyday job (Marroco, Fisher, & Kishida, 2008), (b) full information about the transactions is rarely available and (c) institutional responses against white-collar crime tend to be rather weak (Nelken, 2012). Financial agents providing services to criminal organisations can be easily extorted into continuing working in illegal transactions. In cases where there is no immediate awareness of the source of the assets, financial agents might have problems demonstrating their innocence and, even if they do, their reputation could be irreparably damaged (Friedrichs, 2010; Levi, 2014).

Extortion dynamics in more basic markets, such as urban agricultural markets, are somewhat different. The *Mbare Musika* market is the most important agricultural market in Harare, Zimbabwe. Around 2500 trader and tens of thousands of visitors converge in the market daily. The value of goods traded ascends to over 36 million dollars annually (Muzulu, 2014). Most transactions in the market are carried out using informal methods. Criminal organisations, e.g. the Chipangano gang, have developed extensive extortion rackets that take advantage of the availability and accessibility to a large amount of informal transactions in a relatively small physical space.

Using space as a production resource when analysing extortion contextualises the phenomenon of interest; it sets physical and social boundaries. The acknowledgement of these boundaries allows identifying constraints on the use of social and individual resources, based on roles, beliefs and expectations of the participants. Spatial boundaries determine social phenomena by linking expectations with actions in the production and reproduction of power structures in particular contexts. Extortion in financial markets, as mentioned, depends on individuals that are highly positioned in the power structure because of their knowledge and skills. This position provides, among others, advantages when facing law enforcement institutions.

Under this perspective, power voids are not really voids inasmuch as they usually reflect particular institutional arrangements, mediating tensions between the

objective power structure and the expectation of participating social actors. In Rio de Janeiro, for example, pacification campaigns carried out by the Brazilian government in the *favelas* have not followed a uniform pacification front, but have instead focused on geo-strategically located *favelas*, because of the more general political and economic implications of keeping these *favelas* away from the reach of organised crime (Felbab-Brown, 2011). The construction of expectations is also symbolic. It is noticeable, for example, how the recent wave of immigrants to the European Union has been reported using the notion of "migrants" instead of "refugees" by most media outlets (Malone, 2015), because of the implication this might have, among other things, on the political and legal responsibilities of the European countries.

### *3.2.2 Dissociation from the State*

Systemic extortion may depend, it was argued, on the ERS's ability to exploit strategic social or geographical spaces. This exploitation was associated with the development of power structures that allow the criminal organisation to impose its will on the victims. The first category focused on power relationships within a unified social or geographical space. Systemic extortion, however, could also occur in situations where there are processes of dissociation of the victim from the state, regardless of the power, presence and responsiveness of governmental institutions. The power dynamics that allow for extortion on this second category come from the fragmentation of the power structure, and therefore of social and geographical spaces, due to willing or conscious actions of the victims. While in some cases poor state response and victim's dissociation can occur simultaneously, it is important to keep them separate, for, as it will be shown below, there are populations with a high degree of vulnerability under the category of dissociation from the state that would barely be covered by the category of state responsiveness.

Probably the most straightforward case of increased vulnerability due to the position of the victim in the power structure are members and associates of criminal organisations. Extortion is a widespread mechanism of interaction between and within criminal organisations. On the one hand, it often guarantees the permanence of less committed members or associates; on the other, it prevents disruption of business in lower scale criminal organisations. In Colombia, for example, different actors in the drug business operate under a widespread extortion racket established by guerrilla movements, particularly the FARC, given the control this guerrilla movement has of the areas where coca is grown (McDermott, 2014).

While it might not be in the interest of the state to protect the criminals, there are vulnerable populations that are caught up in this institutional power conflict. In not fully criminally oriented organisations, e.g. motorcycle gangs, members might get involved in criminal activities against their will, without a safe way out. In turn, many civilians are extorted of forced to work for criminal organisations. Most coca growing, especially in Peru and Bolivia, for example, is done by local residents,

which are either forced to grow coca or just do it because it is the only mean of subsistence they can find (Briceno & Bajak, 2015).

Vulnerable populations that eventually dissociate from the state need not be at the bottom of the power structure. There is, for instance, a particular form of corporate extortion in Japan, usually known as *sōkaiya*. In this type of extortion, criminals extort money from well-known companies or their managers, with threats as simple as disrupting shareholder meeting. In the case of *sōkaiya*, Japanese companies put up with the extortion and dissociate themselves from the state in order to keep a favourable institutional setting. Institutional means of control and accountability in corporate Japan are very weak. Even with the losses generated by extortion payments, companies can still thrive economically in a way that is not possible in other more regulated institutional settings.

Apart from the position in the power structure and the level of involvement in criminal activities, vulnerability might also be linked to social representations, cultural factors and institutional conditions of neglect. Systemic extortion is common in the prostitution business and it takes many forms, e.g. street-level pimping and human and drug trafficking (Human Rights Watch, 2000). In spite of high levels of victimisation, prostitutes are forced to isolate themselves mostly due to the negative moral representation of their profession (Bruckert & Hannem, 2013). Stigmas associated with prostitution derive in institutional neglect and repeat victimisation, both by state agents and general society (Farley & Barkan, 1998). Some vulnerable populations can be stigmatised in more than one way. Ethnic minorities with criminal records, for example, are frequently stigmatised both because of their ethnicity and their legal situation (Campbell & Deacon, 2006). Stigmatised population are a common target of extortion because of the vulnerability derived from the stigma, which in most cases is not necessarily linked to an association with criminal organisations.

Ethnicity is a cultural factor that can often lead to vulnerability. Successful integration of migrant communities, for example, depends on processes of acculturation. In some occasions there are technical, i.e. language, and cultural, e.g. religion, factors disrupting the process, which results in low levels of integration, civil participation and general well-being (Ho, 2014; Schnittker, 2002). These migrant groups might dissociate from the state because they are dependent on someone else for interaction with the outside world or because they are willingly rejecting the new culture (Phinney, 1990). Not fully acculturated communities are regular victims of extortion because of their level of isolation or autonomy, but also because ethnicity sometimes provides means of legitimation and control for the criminal organisation. Some victims tend to legitimise extortion by not taking it as such, but as a practice that fits their custom or traditions (Chin, 2000).

Dissociation can originate as a response to long-standing processes of institutional neglect. Successful levels of integration depend on the way political institutions deal formally and informally with processes of inclusion and exclusion. A democratic system might be designed in such a way as to formally or informally exclude a portion of the population (Holden, 2006). Voting is a typical example of the former. The latter is usually produced by the inappropriate functioning of the

institutional setting. Income inequality, for example, is linked to a decrease in political interest, discussion and participation (Putnam, Leonardi, & Nonetti, 1993). In the long run, it might generate widespread feelings of apathy, which often translate in dissociation from political institutions (Solt, 2008). In places like Latin America, where exclusion and inequality are chronic, disadvantaged groups' dissociation from the state combines lack of interest in political participation, lack of trust in governmental institutions and a fairly inefficient law enforcement governmental apparatus. As a result, different types of victimisation, including extortion, are rampant, while rates of denouncing, prosecution and conviction are low.

This second category addressed types of vulnerability that emerge from the fragmentation of social and geographical spaces. While poor or inadequate state response has more profound effects on those in lower or peripheral places in the power structure, willing dissociation can create fragmentation in any part of the power structure. Japanese corporations, for example, have significant economic and political capital. The extent and implications of dissociation are context dependent. Migrant communities, for example, are likely to achieve higher degree of integration when the host is a very multicultural society. Likewise, the degree of cultural separation affects both the chances of stigmatisation and dissociation. The contemporary narrative on terrorism, for example, depends on a particular geopolitical reconstruction of the East–West tension (Cowen & Gilbert, 2008). Identifying those fractures in the power structure and how they might develop into isolation or radicalisation are fundamental to understand adaptive responses that eventually allow for systemic extortion.

## 3.3 The Criminal Organisation

### *3.3.1 Institutional Penetration*

Within a social or geographical space, the chances of systemic extortion depend on the level of institutional penetration[2] the criminal organisation can achieve. Institutional penetration can provide the ERS with reasonably stable formal or informal means of control over institutional resources and mechanisms that facilitate extortion. This control is provided, as mentioned, not by a power void, but by institutional arrangements involving both governmental institutions and civil society. If certain activities are not typified as extortion, for example, there is a formal

[2] Institutional penetration does not directly correlate with the level of activity of the criminal organisation. Two criminal organisations can differ in the level of institutional penetration while being similar in the type and extent of their extortion activities. However, it is likely that the organisation with lower level of institutional penetration is required to invest more resources into securing the temporal extension of the extortion. Identifying these institutional arrangements does not provide much insight into what type of extortion is possible, but into what type of institutional arrangements are likely to lead to tenable systemic extortion.

legal arrangement that benefits the activity of the criminal organisation. Likewise, if the victim finds normative reasons for complying with the criminal's demands, there is an informal individual arrangement that facilitates extortion. This section focuses on how ERSs can take over power structures due to particular institutional arrangements. The next category focuses on the particular enforcement of their will on these spaces.

Institutional penetration has to do with power and control; these can be acquired and exercised in many ways. The literature on corruption and organised crime is framed in such a way to make the state, to a certain extent, a passive victim of organised crime (Hellman, Jones, & Kaufmann, 2003; UNODC, 2010). This approach to systemic political corruption, however, has three problems: First, it neglects that power dynamics are often the result of bargaining processes between individual and institutional actors within or outside governmental institutions (Karstedt, 2014). In some cases, state agents play a direct role in extortion. In Latin America, for example, there are large and powerful criminal networks working from within the state, targeting both individuals and criminal organisations. In 2014, for instance, 16 police officers, including a lieutenant colonel, were arrested in Rio de Janeiro, accused of extorting small drug trafficking gangs (EFE, 2014). In 2015, another 46 were expelled from the force after being accused of extorting small shopkeepers in exchange for protection (EFE, 2015).

The view of the state as a victim of organised crime also leads to underestimate the state's capacity to counteract organised crime. After Putin's rise to power, for example, law enforcement institutions have pushed the Russian mafia away from its traditional zones of influence (Volkov, 2014). This change does not seem to be associated with a generalised reduction of criminality levels or an increment in trust in political institutions (Levada Analytical Center, 2013; Taylor, 2011), but with the transition of the Russian political system into a competitive authoritarianism (Levitsky & Way, 2010).

Finally, the view of victimisation of the state is also problematic for it does not recognise the fragmented character of both the criminal organisations and the governmental institutions. The concept of "organised crime", as mentioned, is problematic because it gives criminal organisations a sense of unity and structuration that does not exist in real life (Paoli & Vander Berken, 2014). The same can be said about the state. Functional, bureaucratic and spatial differentiation has an effect on the operation of governmental institutions. Interaction between criminal organisations and the state varies significantly, according to the level of decentralisation of democratic institutions, as well as the separation and relatively high level of specialisation of different governmental institutions. Criminal organisations have historically bribed and extorted individuals in democratically elected positions with votes (Gambetta, 1990; Varese, 2014). The accumulation of political capital, however, does not help criminal organisations, for example, when interacting with the justice system, since people holding positions in this governmental branch are usually not elected democratically. In turn, because of the presupposed legitimacy in the exercise of violence, law enforcement agents, as attested by extortion rackets in Rio, can engage in forms of criminality that other governmental instances cannot.

The possible presence of powerful criminal networks within the state makes criminality a three-way relationship that blurs to a certain extent the distinction between public and private. The level of penetration of ERSs is determined by how the interests of the state, public and private criminal networks and organisations align over time and the type of relationship developed when there are common interests. In terms of reducing vulnerability, one aspect is whether different governmental institutions and factions are operating under relatively homogeneous goals. In some instances where these goals have been aligned, such as Russia and Georgia, governmental efforts to fight organised crime have shown noticeable results in a relatively short amount of time. In most cases, however, criminality is perpetuated through bribing and extortion of corrupt or criminal factions within the state.

Something similar happens with civil society. Traditional mafia-type organisations (MTO) furthered their role as brokers of social life by choosing partnership over competition in their relationships with actors in the civil society. The Japanese Yakuza, for example, has several so-called business brothers (*kigyō shatei*): individuals that are not officially connected to the organisation, but benefit from informal relationships, e.g. achieving cheaper production cost by avoiding the law (Hill, 2006). In occasions, these links have formal character. In the construction business in Italy, for example, the mafia had representation in the *comitati d'affari*, a group composed by politicians and entrepreneurs, which, for years, decided on the allocation of large-scale public works across the country (Paoli, 2003).

Criminal organisations can increase institutional penetration in civil society by diversifying the methods of extortion, without entirely moving away structurally from the services provided by the market or the government. Traditional MTO became successful brokers of social life by entering in markets in which there is an identifiable demand and competition, even if rigged, is possible. That helped making the distinction between their provision of good and services and extortion, to some extent, artificial for the consumers/victims. The concepts could be considered exclusive only by presupposing that the illegal provision by the criminal organisation is suboptimal, in comparison to a "perfect" provision by the state. Yet, that is hardly the case (Varese, 2014). Criminal organisations need not guarantee that they are the only one providing the service/good, nor that the service/good they provide is the best. They just need to make sure that victims/consumers perceived it as a plausible alternative. In some cases, given the level of inefficiency of the system and the victims' dissatisfaction and distrust in political institutions, the standard for "plausible" is very low.

The level of institutional penetration is, then, dependent on the possibility the criminal organisation has of achieving a power elite status (Wright Mills, 2000). Achieving this status hinges, initially, on the organisational capacity of the criminal organisation. Higher levels of specialisation allow for the control of larger and more complex institutional resources (Decker, Bynum, & Weisel, 1998). Deep and widespread control, however, is only possible if the criminal organisation incorporates or establishes links with individual or groups that broker access to key social resources the criminal organisation could not access itself, for example, the legal regulatory

framework (Garay-Salamanca & Salcedo-Albarán, 2012). These brokers, placed in different positions of the power structure, could have a willing or an unwilling role in increasing the criminal organisation's institutional penetration, depending on, for example, whether interaction is based on bribery or extortion. They could also have a passive or active role, depending on, for example, whether the contact with the mafia is direct or via intermediaries.

### *3.3.2 Conditions of Enforcement*

Once certain arrangements allow ERSs to penetrate specific institutional spaces, it is up to the criminal organisation to generate mechanisms through which its demands can be enforced. The mechanism chosen depends on the structural features of the criminal organisation, contextual social conditions and type of extortion. The possibility of long-lasting extortion depends on the resources criminal organisations and other actors involved have to invest for the exploitation of these institutional spaces, as well as the adaptive responses to institutional changes in the extortion landscape. Criminal organisations, for example, might encounter less institutional resistance when protection is genuine, but can equally change from a bogus to genuine extortion as an adaptive response to the emergence of other criminal organisations offering the service (Abadinsky, 1983).

Regardless of the type of extortion context, the existence of the criminal organisation is a social bad, leading to suboptimal results that need to be enforced by physical or symbolic means (Gambetta, 1990; Varese, 2014). The chances of paying are influenced by attitudes towards the criminal organisation and its perceived strength, both to impose to extortion and to punish the victim in case of non-compliance. A positive attitude towards the organisation and a perceived high strength increase the chance of paying; a negative attitude and a perceived low strength decrease it.

The perceived strength of the criminal organisation is a criterion that combines objective and subjective factors, both at the individual and the social level. When extortion is considered a matter of victimisation, judgements of the victim are linked to perceptions of vulnerability (Skogan & Maxfield, 1981). It is not so much about what the organisation does to enforce its will, but about the fear extortion generates in the victims. Fear is the result of judgements about exposure to risk, anticipation of serious consequences and lack of effective means of control over crime, e.g. chances of being able to escape (Killias, 1990). These three dimensions are evaluated by victims using both cognitive and emotional elements. The former are associated with evaluations of likelihood and cost, and the latter, with emotional responses based on mood or the vividness with which the occurrence of extortion can be recreated (Loewenstein, Weber, Hsee, & Welch, 2001). Emotional elements have been shown to greatly distort judgements of vulnerability (Jackson, 2008), making it possible for an organisation with objectively limited means to enforce the extortion.

Attitudes towards the criminal organisation depend, among other things, on the moral foundations for concepts such as fairness and righteousness and their applications to particular episodes of victimisation, on the reconstruction of the criminal's otherness and the physical and symbolic contexts associated with victimisation episodes. Regarding the first one, not everyone considers the same action amounts to victimisation or crime. That is particularly true in situations where violence is mostly symbolic, e.g. gender violence (Fischbach & Herbert, 1997). The criminal's otherness is important in fostering or hindering negative judgements. The acknowledgment of difference is one of the reasons why, for example, there are widespread prejudices linking violence with migration (Tileaga, 2006). Finally, context is important for it points to the individual's beliefs about a fully functional society. Signs of urban decay, e.g. broken windows and graffiti, are usually mentally associated with disorder and crime, event though that need not be the case (Villarreal & Silva, 2006).

While individual attitudes and perceptions about criminal organisations can significantly vary within a group of victims, there are some general aspects of the extortion relationship that can have widespread effects on these attitudes and perceptions. The conditions for enforcement are initially linked to the type of institutional penetration. The broker role adopted by traditional MTO gave them a central position, connecting diverse social institutions and individuals. This allowed them to develop strong and long-standing bonds and partnerships with people in government and civil society, which facilitated the exploitation of institutional spaces due to the lack of resistance. The apparent ubiquitous and sometimes positive character of the MTO participation in social life is, in part, one reason why the anti-mafia measures have developed an ethical component aimed towards local population (La Spina, 2008).

Traditional MTO have also positively affected attitudes and perception of strength through a strategic use of violence. These organisations are not reluctant to use violence to enforce their demands. Yet, they have managed to keep a relatively low or good profile, due, in part, to particular efforts of moderation and self-regulation. Numbers for kidnapping in Italy, for example, have not steadily increased due to the pressure this type of crime puts on the delicate relationship criminal organisations have with each other and with the state (Dickie, 2008). Likewise, unofficial accounts suggest that, in Tokyo, the Yakuza has not been entirely pushed away from areas such as the entertainment sector, partly because the police considers that this criminal organisation helps maintaining low levels of petty crime (Hill, 2006).

The level of violence is partly associated with the nature of the service attached to the relationship of extortion. Attitudes towards the Italian mafia in the USA, for example, are more negative than in Italy, partly because these organisations did not take a role as brokers of social life. They, instead, got involved mostly in illegal and criminal activities (Varese, 2014). The low participation in the legal economy and the decisively abusive character of its extortion rackets has prevented the American mafia from developing the same normative nexus to civil society and governmental institutions of its Italian counterpart (Anderson, 1965). A factor that was also different for the American mafia is the ethnic background. Traditional MTO often appeal to ritualistic cultural factors. These factors generate cohesion and obedience within

the organisation. They also strengthen their position within civil society, by reinforcing a social representation of shared practices, which facilitates recruitment and widespread loyalty, among other things. Shared ethnic background seems to be particularly important to consolidate the continuity of the criminal organisation over time.

Compliance with the criminal organisation's demands depends on a complex network of objective and subjective factors, related to features of the criminal organisation, the victim and the social context. The victim-perpetrator relationship does not have to be of antagonism. When it is, the effectiveness of the extortion depends on perceptions of vulnerability. Compliance is achieved by different combinations of symbolic and physical violence, which are linked to exercise of power either through processes of bargain and punishment (Lawler, 1992).

## 3.4 Civil Society

Extortion has some shared features with other forms of criminality, such as its dependence on the exercise of violence, while, at the same time, it displays some distinctive features, such as the development of trust networks that, to a certain extent, modify or regulate the exercise of violence. Moving from this general perception to a more throughout characterisation of extortion dynamics is difficult, for it is an extremely diverse phenomenon that can take many forms. It is usually understood as a social and economic transaction that is underlain by a coercive relationship between the parts. Yet, even in the most widespread case of protection rackets, the character of the transaction and the coercion mechanisms cannot be easily generalised.

Extortion is better understood as an umbrella concept, grouping a diverse set of practices that allows the perpetrator to take a position of enforcer in the social structure that, by its causes or consequences, is considered morally reproachable, economically inefficient and, in general, socially inconvenient. When it is systemic, the most important feature for an account of victimisation has to do with its extension in time. The typology uses the concept of social capital to capture the most relevant aspects of the temporal dimension of systemic extortion from two different angles: the way it affects, on one side, the cognitive or perceptual aspects of associational bonds or social activity and, on the other, the extent and intensity of these bonds. These two groups are labelled in the literature as "cognitive" and "structural" forms of social capital (Almedom, 2005; Harpham, Grant, & Thomas, 2002), which are the last two categories, respectively.[3]

[3] For a more thorough justification of the inclusion of the concept of social capital see Anzola & Elsenbroich (2015).

### 3.4.1 Cognitive Social Capital

The literature on social capital could allow explaining the prevalence of extortion by focusing on how systemic victimisation produces or takes advantage of low social connectedness. The threat of extortion is an instance of what in psychological and health literature is known as a "stressor", i.e. a social demand for modification of the person's behaviour (Carr & Umberson, 2013). In order to prevent negative effects on the victim's well-being, different coping resources and strategies need to be implemented. Some of these resources rely on the person's confidence in his or her ability to overcome the stressful situation (Pearlin, Menaghan, Lieberman, & Mullan, 1981). Systemic extortion, however, is problematic because it is a stressor that requires behavioural modifications to be sustained over long periods of time. The prevalence of extortion increases emotional distress, in the form of depression, anxiety and/or anger, leading to an increased perception of powerlessness and hopelessness (Ross & Mirowsky, 2006).

Along with coping resources associated with the person's sense of control, stress can also be dealt with by the acquisition of social capital from which instrumental, emotional and informational assistance can be obtained. Systemic extortion, however, tends to target populations where access to the required support networks is hindered by objective and subjective conditions disrupting the formation and acquisition of social capital. Income inequality, for example, is an objective circumstance that hampers the access to appropriate coping resources and significantly affects overall mental health (Lynch & Kaplan, 1997). Income inequality can also affect coping resources indirectly, by negatively affecting the cognitive mediators that link emotional distress with the objective conditions of disadvantage generated by limited income. It can, for example, prevent a victim from coping with the distress, by affecting the victim's beliefs on social justice (Wilkinson, 1992). In some cases, negative beliefs or feelings associated with objective conditions, such as income inequality, can be structurally amplified. The feeling of uneven social justice might be worsened by the sense of powerlessness generated by emotional distress, which might lead to even greater impacts on mental health and social capital (Harpham, Grant, & Rodriguez, 2004; Ross & Jang, 2000).

Sustained compliance in cases of systemic extortion is partly achieved due to the poor social capital most victims have before the extortive relationship is established. This lack of social capital, at a cognitive level, will likely be associated with impoverished mental health. The key to success, however, is likely linked to the fact that the threat of victimisation can reinforce the cognitive and emotional traits that increase the sense of powerlessness and hopelessness in the victim. Evidence for that is found in, perhaps, the most researched case of repeat victimisation: domestic violence.[4] Domestic violence is a type of victimisation with very low levels of

[4] As a point of conceptual contrast, domestic violence has the advantage of being a rather isolated form of systemic victimisation. It is clearly delimited within the boundaries of the household. In turn, the context and participants are likely to remain reasonably stable throughout the process.

report, in spite of the existence of relatively simple ways to avoid victimisation. The literature shows that the decision to terminate an abusive relationship is mediated by emotional and rational elements. Emotional aspects are particularly relevant when judging deviance and victimisation. Victims emotionally attached to their victimisers seem to be more willing to justify the victimisation or even be reluctant to acknowledge that the relationship is abusive (Felson, Messner, Hoskin, & Deane, 2002). Emotional responses to domestic violence that prevent reporting might also be reinforced by individual and social stereotypes surrounding this type of victimisation, e.g. victim-blaming (Yamawaki, Ochoa-Shipp, Pulsipher, Harlos, & Swindler, 2012). Rational elements seem to play a role when victims consider the presence of the victimiser has an important impact on their well-being, for example, when the victim depends economically on the victimiser or when reporting might expose involvement with illegal activities (Felson et al., 2002).

Rational and emotional judgments regarding the decision to terminate an abusive relationship could be significantly affected by the temporal extension of this type of victimisation. The literature acknowledges that one important factor preventing victims from escaping domestic violence is the mental health issues derived from episodes of repeat victimisation. The prevalence of domestic violence is linked to negative effects violence has on beliefs of self-worth and personal control, which, over time, lead to feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness (Fischbach & Herbert, 1997; Kennedy, Bybee, & Greeson, 2014). Adaptive responses to repeat episodes of victimisation end up in the loss of sense of personal control, which decreases the victim's ability to cope with the victimisation. The literature shows that, because of the loss of sense of personal control, informal support networks, such as family and friends, become fundamental at the moment of taking the decision to terminate an abusive relationship (Chang et al., 2010; Fugate, Landis, Riordan, Naureckas, & Engel, 2005). Victims of domestic violence that do not have this support are less likely to judge their situation as negative and seek help.

Victims of systemic extortion are likely to display similar inhibitors to those displayed by victims of domestic violence when deciding whether to report. The involvement in illegal activities is a straightforward concern, which is particularly relevant in cases of symbiotic extortion, where the victim and the perpetrator might be working in collusion. Victims might also be reluctant to report when the criminal organisation is involved in the provision of social and public services. Reporting the extortion in these cases might have a negative impact on the victim's well-being that might far outweigh the advantages. In cases of systemic extortion there might also be emotional inhibitors for reporting. As mentioned above, cultural and symbolic aspects could significantly affect the social representations of crime and deviance. Extortion carried out by Chinese gangs in New York is socially validated by the shared ethnic background. Likewise, the *oyabun-kobun* kinship institution of the Yakuza or the *omertà* code of the Sicilian mafia are linked to traditional and positively valued symbolic structures that, among other things, increase validation of the criminal organisation's activities (Ishino, 1953; Paoli, 2003).

While a reasonably good amount of literature can be found about the context of victimisation in systemic extortion, there is a lack of information linking the context

to, first, prior deficiencies in the victim's mental health before the extortive relationship is developed, and, second, the boosting of these deficiencies or the development of additional ones due to the sustained stress and emotional distress generated by a constant threat of victimisation.

### *3.4.2 Structural Social Capital*

The notion of structural social capital focuses on objective conditions of social connectedness. It enquires about the extent and intensity of this connectedness and the implications it has on people's well-being. Because of its macro character, structural social capital depends on social conditions of production and reproduction. It differs from other forms of capital, such as human and economic, in that, because it is a public and not a private good, it is created as a by-product of social interaction (Coleman, 1990). Due to this, the production of social capital cannot entirely rely on economic or political institutions. If social links are not there, it is likely that social capital will be underproduced.

Systemic extortion is particularly common in contexts where structural conditions hinder the development and accumulation of social capital. These conditions might come as a result of long social processes, where extortion is coupled with additional social, environmental and individual stressors, or be linked to specific life events, which produce immediate adaptive responses. Objective conditions of disadvantage could be worsened by the stress and emotional distress caused by sustained exposure, which, in time, might lead to social withdrawal (Kawachi, Kennedy, Lochner, & Prothrow-Stith, 1997). Important life events, e.g. violent victimisation, might also lead to social withdrawal. Individuals who have been victimised tend to have less social participation, partly linked to a decrease in trust in the community (Stafford, Chandola, & Marmot, 2007).

There are other important conditions of vulnerability beyond social withdrawal that can foster the emergence of systemic extortion. Some communities have been shown to have high levels of social cohesion in spite of relatively disadvantageous socioeconomic conditions (Fassaert et al., 2011; Villarreal & Silva, 2006). They, however, are vulnerable because there is not enough social connectedness outside the group. This is a factor captured by the distinction between bonding and bridging social capital. The former focuses on social connectedness between individuals that share the same background or display similar signs of belonging, and the latter on social connectedness at the institutional level or with individuals from different social groups (Putnam, 2000). A third type of social capital: linking social capital, could be added, to encompass social capital produced by social interaction through formal channels or official institutions (Szreter & Woolcock, 2004). The previous categories of the typology show that bonding social capital is not sufficient for preventing systemic extortion. Many social groups described in the section on dissociation from the state, for example, display high levels of bonding social capital. Yet, they are still easy targets for systemic extortion. Bonding social capital is fundamental

for personal development and the sense of self. Yet, it only provides individuals with a relatively small range of material and symbolic resources. These resources are particularly limited when dealing with large institutional actors, including criminal organisations. It is unlikely, for example, that small communities have at their disposal communal resources to counter the institutional means for violence criminal organisations usually have.[5]

The addition of linking social capital seems to be particularly relevant for the context of extortion and victimisation, since different institutional channels have different degrees of legitimacy and social validation. Formal institutions are important because they usually provide access to more diverse and effective institutional resources. In the South of Italy, for example, trust in traditional political institutions as well as levels of civic participation and political engagement are low (CNEL/ISTAT, 2014). It has been suggested that this is a crucial reason for the emergence and persistence of MTO in the region (Putnam et al., 1993). The problem of low social capital in contexts of low civic participation and political engagement is that the generation of social capital cannot be met by traditional political institutions because of the disconnection between citizens and state.

In those instances where traditional political and economic institutions fail, other forms of institutional support are necessary. As mentioned, given the material and symbolic stronghold of criminal organisations in the South of Italy, anti-mafia policies tend to emphasise the importance of the moral component linked to generating awareness. Intermediary formal institutions of civic character, such as *addiopizzo*,[6] which are considered more trustworthy by the citizens (CNEL/ISTAT, 2014), seem to have successfully filled the gap between citizens and governmental institutions, by providing citizens with new institutional channels that are both powerful and trustworthy.

The existence of relatively centralised institutional resources is important to counteract the institutional power of the criminal organisations, which is significant, given the fact that several forms of extortion are not relegated to the underworld. Most ERSs are not just economic syndicates engaging in criminal activities with the goal of economic profit; they are power syndicates that use extortion as a mean of acquiring and maintaining power. Criminal organisations need to make strategic use of violence to avoid dissidence and appease social unrest, in the same way the state does. Because they might be competing with other institutional actors for power, avoiding dissidence and unrest takes a central position.

Criminal organisations in the extortion business end up relying on social control practices similar to those employed by authoritarian states. These practices seem to

[5] In a sense, however, the development of protection rackets could be understood as an increase in social capital, given the fact that institutional means of violence are developed by a private actor that might not be considered an outsider. Taking into account cases such as the Chinese migrants in New York, it is likely that the perception of this private monopoly of violence as originating from bonding or linking social capital has significant influence on judgements about crime and deviance. A monopoly of violence that emerges as bonding social capital is more likely to be positively valued by the victims.

[6] http://www.addiopizzo.org

regularly target different forms of civic association and tend to undermine social connectedness (Stenner, 2005). Authoritarianism undermines social capital by explicit displays of material and symbolic violence, both by those who hold power and those who independently help from the periphery. Criminal organisations might hurt a victim that refuses to pay protection or is likely to report extortion to the police. Successful control, however, depends on strategic infusions of distrust that undermine the creation of social capital from within civil society (Solt, 2012). ERSs use extortion to negatively affect the outcome of social exchange, in order to reinforce the belief on the need for their existence, while at the same time increasing distrust within civil society (Gambetta, 1990).

Criminal organisations do not only affect individuals by decreasing their sense of self-control or their subjective feelings or beliefs about support networks, but by objectively undermining the extent and effectiveness of those networks. Contexts with low overall social capital or important imbalances in the amount of bonding, bridging and linking social capital are more likely to produce, over time, widespread conditions of physical and mental mobility. Criminal networks can, through social structures, directly or indirectly affect the effectiveness of individual coping mechanisms, by modulating cognitive and emotional responses to the threat of extortion. A reasonably mentally healthy individual, for example, is unlikely to overcome extortion if governmental institutions are not trustworthy. Some contexts can also boost the effect of the threat of extortion by pairing it with additional stressors. A victim is more likely to comply with the victimiser's demand when extortion is immersed in a context of generalised violence.

## 3.5 Summary

The presented typology of extortion racket systems focuses on the embeddedness of extortion rackets within society and extracted the dimensions of state, criminal organisation and victims. Each major axis was divided further into two subcategories. For the state dimension these were "state responsiveness" and "dissociation for the state", for the criminal organisation "penetration of the state" and "conditions of enforcement" and for the victims they were "cognitive social capital" and "structural social capital".

The major contribution of this typology is the acknowledgement that extortion rackets cannot be understood without looking at the dimensions of the political environment they exist in (i.e. state) and the social environment (i.e. civil society, which comprises potential and actual victims). Systemic extortion is a highly complex adaptive response, associated with interaction of different actors over time. Trying to analyse ERSs devoid of the context will not lead to understanding. This holistic view on ERSs in society results in the consideration of a number of relevant aspects hitherto not collectively analysed with ERSs.

### 3.5.1 Socio-Spatial Factors

Although spatial aspects of extortion have been considered, they have largely been seen as territorial power dynamics where space has been conceived as static. In the analysis presented here, a critical account of how social and physical conceptions of space are partly derived from the production and reproduction of power dynamics is developed. However, control of social and physical spaces can be achieved, not by taking advantage of a power void, but by shaping the power structure in a way that favours the enforcement of extortion agreements within a single space or by the willing fragmentation of spaces.

### 3.5.2 Socio-Normative Factors

By contextualising the existence of extortion rackets, the role of the different actors constitutes a normative landscape with an interplay of the particular beliefs and attitudes of the participating social actors regarding deviance, crime and victimisation. These beliefs and attitudes are affected by individual mediators, such as fear of crime, and structural mediators, such as ethnicity. They are equally affected by the level of institutional penetration, directly influencing the amount and character of the resources different social actors have to invest in order to enforce or repel extortion agreements. In most contexts where systemic extortion is widespread, there are noticeable overlaps in the interests of the participating social actors. These overlapping interests reduce resource consumption, making the enforcing of the extortion relationship tenable in the long run.

### 3.5.3 Social-Cognitive Factors

Although there has been a focus on victims of extortion in order to measure the extent of extortion in surveys (cf. CENSIS, 2003; SOS Impresa, 2007; Euripsped, 2007), the role of the victims has been underestimated in extortion research. The typology points to mental health issues associated with extortion. Systemic extortion is likely to increase mental morbidity by producing in the victim a sense of powerlessness and hopelessness and by preventing or hindering access to social support networks. Systemic extortion also affects the dimension and effectiveness of social support networks through the systematic use of violence and by implementing social conditions that hinder solidarity and social cohesion. This aspect has an interesting reverse manifestation in the rise of civic movements against extortion rackets, such as *addiopizzo* in Italy, which seem to unite entrepreneurs in such a way that resistance is continuously strengthened.

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