The travelling concept of organized crime and the stabilization of securitized international cooperation: a translational reading

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Introduction

In the many years of its evolution, the concept of organized crime has shifted multiple times its meaning, functions and principal operational logics in the political discourse from being an issue of little concern to being considered a key security threat facing states and societies world-wide. The process started with diffuse notions of Mafia, which first spread to and became translated in the USA, where the term “organized crime” itself was created in discourses of the late 19th and early 20th century, and from there it was adopted in various other sites, the EU, UN, G7/G8 as well as further domestic settings, prominently in Europe and Latin America. Far from being a process driven by a single actor or a small group in relation to a single valued referent object, organized crime was continuously constituted and reconfigured through different operational logics, rationalities and a sense of the rules of the game in different fields of action. What emerged in the 1990s and temporarily stabilised as an excessively broad and securitized notion of “transnational organized crime” in political discourse, had in fact developed and was held together through those previous encounters in different locations at national, regional and global levels.

Organized crime as a travelling concept illustrates that the evolution of collective interpretations of perceived threats often transcends time and space: once interpretations are established in one location, typically - but not necessarily - at the national level first, their further genesis will extend beyond the geographical and temporal dimensions of their initial invention. Accepted interpretations of threats thus have the potential to travel to and establish connections among locations, be they national, regional or global, this way encountering a great variety of local discourses and operational logics in and among these locations on their travel. Each encounter may then transform the initial interpretation and adapt it to the particularities of the new location, which may in turn inspire new, or reconfigure existing, operational logics and connections as a result.

How can one capture this process of emergence, spread and transformation, which establishes connections within and among locales with regards to accepted interpretations of perceived threats and the concept of organized crime more specifically? What happens when the collective interpretation of a perceived threat created and temporarily established in one location encounters a new one? How does the “foreign” meaning become incorporated and productively appropriated into the new location or not, and with what effects? What are the driving forces of this process?

It will be argued in this chapter that the concepts of securitization and translation offer useful tools for capturing and reflecting upon these processes, focussing analytically on the performative and political effects of concepts and conceptual travel more generally. To begin with, the chapter will provide an overview of securitization theory and translation, followed by a brief introduction to organized crime narratives and their process of transnational spread. Next, section 2 will apply these reflections to the action of the United States with regards to organized crime, demonstrating its construction as a “threat”, placing crime in the realm of national security and legitimizing the use of extraordinary means. Section 3 will explore the active exportation of the US concept of organized crime in international cooperation, examining how many partnerships with external actors have taken a securitized form. Section 4 will conclude by asking whether there are indications of a “securitization fatigue” in the international stabilization of organized crime in recent years, which would coincide with the
emergence of new policy entrepreneurs and norms replacing the previous securitized approach to organized crime, specifically with regards to narcotics.

**Subject matter and theoretical toolset**

*Securitization in translation*

At its core, securitization aims to conceptually transform the notion of national security into a distinct discursive reading of (radical realist) security practice (Stritzel and Vuori 2016). In securitization theory, “security” is not seen as an objective condition, but as the outcome of a specific discursive process which brings about new security situations by successfully representing them as such. According to the theory, with the articulation of something as a matter of (national) security, a speaker dramatizes an issue as an existential threat to a valued referent object so that he or she can legitimately claim a need to treat it with extraordinary measures, involving the breaking of normal rules of regular political process (Buzan et al. 1998, 24-9; Wæver 1995, 35). The defining feature of securitization is therefore a specific rhetoric which marks an issue as a threat to survival, requiring priority of action and a sense of extreme urgency, so that audiences accept - or at least do not oppose - measures that would otherwise not be acquiesced.

This understanding of the logic and effects of “national security” has its origins in the transformation of military and political discourse from defence to national security in an evolving Cold War context under Harry S. Truman where the concept of security emerged as a tool to explain the United States’ relationship with the rest of the world and to curtail the traditional American mistrust of standing armies in this context (Yergin 1977, 193-4). While defence was usually understood as following geopolitical lines, security was freed from this constraint, as it could be defined according to the needs of “national interests”. Therefore, national security (specifically as subsequently outlined in the (in)famous National Security Act of 1947) provided a means to retain a form of radical “ragione di stato” (state reason) policies of very profound, potentially absolute, state authority and preservation in an era when democratic ethics seemed to be making such a way of thinking increasingly unacceptable. First the national interest, and then national security, were thus ways to address the “democrat’s dilemma” in the US context of combining democratic values in domestic politics with a perceived amoral and anarchic international system. As such, national security could justify drastic international measures including military interventions, political assassinations and war as well as severe restrictions on individual freedom and citizens’ rights in the domestic sphere.

Against this background, the critical political purpose of securitization theory that evolved in the late 1980s context of (second) détente but became more prominent after the end of the Cold War is not only to analytically capture and explore but ultimately also to potentially escape this dangerous logic of security: “More and more trans-national activities should become purely ‘economic’, ‘social’ and ‘political’” (Wæver 1989, 314) rather than issues of security where states claim the right to use any means necessary to hinder a development which goes against its perceived interests. Furthermore, proponents of securitization theory argued that the pitfalls of conventional, previous understandings of security could be avoided by focusing not on what security means, on what security does but, or more precisely what is done by “speaking” or “doing” security, and by studying its social and political effects.
As we will see, this latter aspect is particularly relevant when the (securitized) concept travels and encounters different contexts and thus potentially generates very different social, political and cultural dynamics, as well as socio-political effects. When (securitized) concepts travel, they reach beyond the specific discursive dynamics of their initial location and genesis. Concepts typically encounter a variety of new discourses which potentially reiterate, transform or challenge the interpretations initially associated with the concept and adapt it to the particularities of the new setting. As argued in this chapter, processes of securitization in a certain setting will take the form of translations, understood as performative processes of transformation of meaning through notions of passage and encounter (see Stritzel 2011a; 2014, 56-60).

At the heart of this understanding of translation is a particular claim with regards to the production of knowledge, which suggests that producing knowledge continuously transforms past or related meaning, and that such a process of production is never entirely original. As a consequence, from this perspective, the notion of translation deliberately places any particular concept or production of security in specific temporal and spatial sequences, conceptualized as emergent and continuing communicative relationships, which actively (re)creates and connects different forms of agency. As Freeman (2009, 441) pointed out: “What is described as translation is often the result of multiple iterations by multiple actors […] The sense of ‘source’ or ‘origin’ is simply a translation we have failed to reconstruct. What we think of as research or policy or practice is an emergent property of complex and continuing communicative relationships.”

This general aspect of concept formation read through translation lenses is significantly exacerbated in a scenario of transnationally travelling concepts. Here, the presence of multiple audiences and criteria for the temporary discursive hegemony of a concept become visible. Furthermore, a securitizing move becomes considerably more unstable and unpredictable because the intended effect of, for example, persuading an audience to provide legitimacy for a speaker to deal with a perceived threat in one setting may lead to delegitimation and loss of power for this or other speakers in a different setting (and with regards to different “relevant audiences”). In such cases, the declaration of an emergency condition in relation to a particular issue may have the effect of persuading one audience and centralizing a process of decision-making in one setting, but the opposite effect of resistance, polarization and/or empowerment of new actors and practices in a new setting (Acharya 2011; Zwingel 2016). Thus, securitizing moves and their social and political effects differ in substance and effect, while happening on a continuous, gradually transforming basis. These transforming processes are typically heavily interspersed with distinct local operational logics and are thus translated differently in different places and at different times. From a translational perspective, they are the product of multiple iterations reconfiguring existing narratives and thereby (re)connecting different forms of agency in and among different settings (Stritzel 2014; 2011a). It is this potentially highly ambivalent and contradictory assemblage of different dynamics that establishes, spreads, and holds together securitized concepts and (international) cooperation.

The concept of organized crime

Origins of contemporary organized crime narratives are deeply interspersed with much earlier notions of Mafia in Italian and American discourse. According to Henner Hess (1973, 1-4), the term “Mafia” itself first appeared in a 1658 document containing a list of heretics
referring to “boldness”, “ambition” and “arrogance”. These personal traits subsequently turned into distinct social constructions of masculinity within the Italian discourse and are today associated to the concept of “Sicilianism” in Italy. Both references to the Arabic “mahias”, meaning a bold man or braggart, and origins of the word that refer to the meanings “outstanding”, “manly” or “handsome” (Hess 1973, 1), as well as “mahud”, meaning “rejected”, strongly resonate with the perceived moral codes that are assumed to have evolved in Southern Italy at that time. They are marked by “a proud awareness of one’s own personality, of independence in every respect, the ability to look after oneself and to defend one’s own dignity at any price” (Hess 1973, 9). Grounded in these moral codes, according to this narrative, single criminals organized themselves in loosely structured groups and cliques which occasionally cooperated with or fought against other such groups. In the course of the 20th century these early images were combined and partially replaced by notions of Mafia as an almighty “parallel society”, a quasi-state within the traditional democratic state that would challenge conventional forms of governance and power and would thus pose an imminent danger to the democratic state in its liberal existence (Smith 1975, 40-5).

These narratives encountered the American discourse in the late 19th and early 20th century, where they became merged with the newly coined term “organized crime”. While the exact words “organized crime” were presumably first used in the 1896 annual report of the New York Society for the Prevention of Crime, in those days organized crime had no stable meaning and could be understood only in context (Woodiwiss 2003). Since the 1920s, the term then increasingly stabilized in the American discourse and enabled a first wave of politicization and partial securitization, specifically with the Kefauver Committee hearings onwards. This led in the 1950s under the pro-active leadership of Robert Kennedy to several emergency acts including the influential Racketeer Influenced and Corrupted Organizations (RICO) statute of 1970 (Paoli and Fijnaut 2004; Stritzel 2012). The process of securitization further intensified and eventually initiated a significant radicalization and militarization of the discourse specifically in the context of Richard Nixon’s and subsequent US presidents’ “War on Drugs” in which issues in relation to organized crime were portrayed and practiced most clearly as an imminent “national security threat” to the USA, particularly under Ronald Reagan. This had significant domestic and international effects including a process of increasing militarization of US domestic policing as well as international enforcement and crop eradication strategies in several Latin American countries, perhaps most prominently Bolivia, Colombia and Mexico. The increasing militarization of organized crime narratives and political practices coincided with a comprehensive externalization strategy by the USA bilaterally and through international organizations such as the UN (Nadelmann 1994). The UN Conventions in this area (1961, 1971, 1988) were here particularly instrumental in exporting the US securitization of organized crime to the global stage, temporarily establishing a “global norm” of repressive law enforcement in relation to drugs. It also paved the way for the influential UN conference on transnational organized crime with the Naples Political Declaration and Global Action Plan signed in 1994 which is today widely seen as a crucial turning point in the cooperative global fight against organized crime.

Yet, to the extent that the concept of organized crime this way left the US location and travelled, through active externalization and local adaptations, to new ones, the concept was now also confronted with several new local discourse traditions and distinct operational logics in these locations which were not always under the full control of the USA. Thus, the process of spreading and the meaning of organized crime significantly diversified and fragmented as a result and increasingly went beyond a straightforward story of simple US
exportation. In addition to the initial US dominance in the securitization and spread of organized crime as a concept to the world stage, its subsequent evolution was marked by the agency of various local adaptations of organized crime. Hence, this constitutes its genesis overall as a tale of multiple translations that temporarily stabilized securitized international cooperation.

The securitization of organized crime

As identified in the section on securitization in translation, a “security” issue arises through a discursive process in which a traditionally non-security issue is redefined by a sense of existential threat, extreme urgency and national/state survival. Hence, the first essential questions to answer empirically are whether and how the USA indeed successfully securitized its approach to issues in relation to organized crime, thereby establishing a new norm from its own belief system and domestic setting, but then also increasingly through exportation to other states.

Domestic securitization and norm emergence: from politicization to securitization

First stage: between politicization and securitization

When early Italian narratives of Mafia entered the USA in the late 19th century, representations of organized crime initially remained diffuse and strongly linked to popular culture, marked by a complex body of diverse narratives and anecdotes about gang fights, bosses, saloons, prostitution and different forms of “criminal entrepreneurship” of early urban crime in America (Glaab and Brown 1976). According to these narratives, gradually more organized forms of criminal activity evolved out of the anarchy of the immigrant ghettos and the criminal leaders that had been established increasingly sought protection through collaboration with politicians and policemen. These stories of corruption and a growing ”political machine system” in early 20th century USA received a further boost with the Prohibition period, which also entered into mass culture, especially the US gangster film. Typical constructions of masculinity such as power, ambition, bravery, strength and violence that had marked Italian narratives about the Mafia as Sicilianism here gained a strong entrepreneurial, business-like notion with most films focussing on single charismatic leaders. The creators of the gangster genre thus adapted traditional constructions of Mafia masculinity to US socio-political culture and the settings of modern urban society, for which cities such as Chicago were perceived to be particularly emblematic at that time.

From the 1920s onwards, political interventions stabilised and politicized these popular representations and added an element of specificity and (temporary) fixity to the concept of organized crime in the American discourse. The first of these initiatives was the Kefauver Committee hearings of 1950. They constitute a decisive period for the initial political framing of organized crime, created a distinct plot structure for the perceived threat in the US setting and helped to initiate a first wave of intensification in the political discourse. Crucially, this process eventually forced the influential, but initially very sceptical, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) under J. Edgar Hoover to side with a growing coalition of securitizing actors in order to (re)gain leadership in the initiative, for which Robert Kennedy provided the necessary political backing (Wilson 1978, 202-3; Smith 1975, 187). In the early 1960s, a strong coalition consisting of the FBI, the Federal Bureau of Narcotics (FBN) and a proactive Attorney General Robert Kennedy could work together to establish organized crime as an
existential threat in the USA and introduce several emergency acts, including the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupted Organizations (RICO) statue of 1970 (Paoli and Fijnaut 2004, 26-7).

With regards to rhetoric, during this first stage of emergence, securitizing actors in the USA clearly applied a language of existential threat and securitization (Stritzel 2012, 561-3; 2014, 89-93). This is true for all principal securitizing actors at that time including Kennedy ([1966] 1994, 75, 162, 253), Kefauver ([1951] 1968, 12-7), Anslinger (1962, 9, 17), McClellan (1962, 269-71) and J. Edgar Hoover (Stritzel 2014, 91). Yet, it is less clear at this stage whether a process of securitization was also fully implemented. While measures constituted a new situation of rather far-reaching repressive law enforcement that went beyond “normal political procedures”, they at least did not militarize the actual practice of dealing with issues in relation to organized crime. One could argue that they were not practiced as national security, at least if narrowly defined.5

Second stage: between securitization and militarization

A process of securitization as militarization was instead only truly initiated and practiced under the presidencies of Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan when the previously established existential threat of organized crime was rearticulated and transformed in the securitized practice of a War on Drugs. This coincided with a change in focus from gambling and racketeering to narcotics, which paralleled a growing trend between 1961 and 1988 indicating a general shift in dealing with narcotics towards securitization: the initial drug use paradigm of proactively eradicating the causes of addiction and abuse, changed into a reactive focus on criminality, law and order, and punishment, transforming the image of the drug user as a dangerous threat that needed to be contained before he or she could harm the society and the state. Furthermore, after reports of American soldiers in Vietnam engaging in the widespread use of heroine reached Washington, the attention for the War on Drugs increasingly also shifted globally establishing not only the drug user as threat to the state, but also drug trafficking. This triggered a perceived need for partnerships with external states, especially those where the production was perceived to be occurring as well as other perceived “drug consumer states” in Europe.

The domestic process of this development began with the Controlled Substances Act of 1970 and US President Richard Nixon’s famous declaration of a War on Drugs in 1971 which initiated a change in discourse and practices (Musto 2002). Radio and television networks became eager to donate advertisement time to public information campaigns about the drug threat, to incorporate drug themes into their dramas, or to create new dramas that focused on drug enforcement (Epstein 1977, 165-72). This public awareness campaign finally culminated in Nixon’s Special Message to Congress on June 17th 1971 in which he portrayed the problem of drug abuse as a “national emergency” against which “effective war” had to be waged and “worldwide escalation” initiated (Nixon 1971). Most notably, apart from further funding for large media campaigns and educational programmes and the emergence of new anti-narcotics lobby groups and organizations, this included punitive legislative measures such as inclusions of no-knock warrants and strict mandatory sentencing, as well as substantially increased numbers of arrests and incarcerations of drug users and distributors (Bewley-Taylor and Jelsma 2007). The National Security Directive 221 in 1986 then formally identified drug trafficking as an existential threat to the US state, a theme which
later found its way into the 1988 UN Convention Against Illicit Trafficking of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Crick 2012).

This led to a substantial empowerment and increase in the size and presence of American federal drug control agencies, including the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), and the construction of a joint endeavour of the US military, police and intelligence agencies to combat this new threat to national security. The DEA, originally designed to act in conjunction with local police forces in the War on Drugs, increasingly turned international, opening more than 45 international offices between 1970 and 1989 alone and acting as the central agency to coordinate combat operations in Latin American countries as part of Special Enforcement Operations to eradicate drug export networks world-wide (Nadelmann 1994).

In returning to the Copenhagen School’s definition of securitization, one can see that the US approach to managing narcotics checks all the necessary boxes. The securitization of drugs developed out of a socio-political process, facilitated primarily by political leadership which shifted a relatively limited and non-popularized topic to the forefront of national security concerns. Drug control became the War on Drugs, legitimizing the use of increased enforcement and the militarization of responses by attaching a benign subject to national security and by emphasizing a requirement for urgent response. The War on Drugs, the related Controlled Substances Act, and leadership-driven political and media campaigns supported the securitization transition of existing domestic narcotics approaches. Equally, one can say that the evolving War on Drugs paradigm represents a new standard of appropriateness in the US discourse, challenging conventional and entrenched models of previous action. The new norm which emerged in the USA was the securitization of drug enforcement, eventually supported by a 64% approval rate in public opinion polls in September 1989 of increased enforcement measures against what Americans now viewed as the number one threat facing their state and which fuelled the US governments’ push to export these new domestic standards and ideals abroad.

Internationalizing domestic securitization

From the 1980s onwards, the USA convinced a critical mass of countries to join its War on Drugs both bilaterally and by using international organizations as a platform for the promotion of its own agenda, institutionalizing the securitized War on Drugs as a specific set of new international rules and practices.

The last 40 years have been hallmarked by the United States acting as the principal bulwark for an international drug control regime that emphasized criminality, enforcement and a partial militarization of the subject matter (Reuter 2013). Original treaty negotiations first culminating in the 1914 Hague Convention as well as more contemporary initiatives through the UN, including the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs and the 1988 Convention Against Illicit Trafficking of Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances, were indeed initiated and strongly influenced by the USA. This is particularly true with regards to the latter. The 1988 Convention Against Illicit Trafficking of Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances requiring all signatory states to make possession of drugs a criminal offence, drew heavily on legal approaches, normative values and a language already established in US law at the time and was even partially pre-scripted by the National Security Directive 221 of 1986 (Crick 2012). Similarly, the UN definition of organized crime as a group was adapted and changed according to US standards, by focusing on specifically structured groups of people embodied
by narcotics traffickers and drug cartels (Crick 2012, 411). Interestingly, the USA in turn used the convention as a means of legitimizing their own national certification mechanism in which trade and aid agreements were directly tied to a number of counter-narcotics measures and foreign countries were required to deliver a report card to Congress on how they met the international agreement’s goals and objectives. The certification programme itself allowed the USA to apply discretionary sanctions in the form of ending preferential tariff treatment, limiting air traffic and increasing duties on product exports to the USA.6

Yet, pressure to follow the US approach was not only exerted directly and bilaterally as through the US certification system, but it also involved the agency of various international bodies and global initiatives that were influenced by the USA, mainly at the UN level, such as the UN Economic and Social Council, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, the International Narcotics Control Board and the World Health Organization (Ayling 2005). Some scholars have argued that several of these institutions such as the UN Fund for Drug Abuse Control became, in essence, direct tools of the USA with its funding deliberately directed to projects of US allies (Sinha 2001) while organizations such as the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB), charged to design and implement programmes to prevent the cultivation, production, manufacture, trafficking and use of illicit drugs, became the primary point of compliance advice for states party to the above UN treaties. Therefore, both international organizations - partially derived from American initiative and pressure - and domestic government bodies operating globally presented themselves as agents of change, pushing the world system towards a securitized approach to issues in relation to organized crime and narcotics.

Ayling (2005, 376) shows that before 1989 41 states had engineered or were in the process of creating drug policies similar to those found in the USA. US and international pressure then added other 66 countries between 1989 and 1999. Furthermore, by 2003 the number of states which had signed the 1971 and 1988 conventions rested at 172 and 166 respectively (Bewley-Taylor 2003, 172), while as of 2013 those numbers had grown to 183 and 188.

The pressure to cooperate that the USA exerted through its international drug response regime and its direct involvement had particularly severe effects on Latin American countries and has been one of the main factors spurring the region’s armed forces to heavily intervene in domestic affairs with fifty thousand military troops to combat drug violence in Mexico under Felipe Calderón alone (Rawlins 2013; Lier 2012). Yet, initiatives were not limited to the UN or to coercive bilateral actions but were gradually also adopted more voluntarily by other international bodies and organizations including the TREVI Group, the G7/8 and the Council of Europe (Scherrer 2009) as well as within several national settings, through processes of local appropriation and translation.

Incorporating securitization in Europe

In Europe, organized crime narratives gradually entered both EU and European national discourses in the 1970s and 1980s and initiated a process of translation through voluntary incorporation before becoming part of a wider array of more autonomous European policy measures and narratives. With the exception of Italy, European states had initially understood organized crime to be an external, foreign issue and had not felt the need, up until the 1980s, to adopt legislation or specific instruments in this area (Mitsilegas 2003). Just a few decades later, this turned into a situation where organized crime featured with terrorism as the number
one threat to Europe’s internal security; as the second most important objective of the EU for its Area of Freedom, Security and Justice; as perceived to be profoundly interrelated with migration and terrorism; and as one of the regions with the highest amount of anti-organized crime initiatives (European Commission 2010; Fijnaut and Paoli 2004, 633-7). Similar processes of politicization and securitization occurred in parallel at the European national levels.

At the international European level, the 1986 Stoffelen Report by the Council of Europe (Council of Europe 1986) was initially most instrumental in creating an early threat perception for this issue in Europe. Furthermore, at the national level, member states such as Germany and Italy had increasingly adopted a narrative of organized crime as a security concern which rapidly evolved into attempts to upload this narrative to the EC/EU level. As a result, the initial heterogeneity in European understandings of organized crime gradually started to fade. Den Boer (2002) argues that this process was eventually marked by a principal change from counter-organized crime efforts at the national level to the European one and a move of the EC/EU from an initial position of securitization importer to a position of securitizing actor, facilitated by the completion of the Single Market and, subsequently, of the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice.

At the EU level, this process was at first not immediately reflected in EC/EU discourse and practices. It gradually made its way to the EC/EU through a process of portraying drug abuse as a threat to submerge Europe and as an issue where support should be demonstrated for international organizations active in this area, prominently the UN and the Council of Europe (European Commission 1986; European Council 1986). Although at the time there was no intention of replacing these organizations in the fight against drugs, the EC considered specific action essential “in view of the fact that the efforts of the individual member states to combat illicit drugs have so far failed to produce the desired results” (European Commission 1986, 5). In the mid-1980s one can thus see the beginning of a transition in Europe from a health perspective to a law enforcement one in the context of which “there is every need to improve and intensify international collaboration, particularly as regards the production and traffic of drugs” (European Council 1986: 6). This transition was significantly accelerated by the willingness to complete the Single Market, but also by direct contact between the US government and EC ministers, which included the participation of US representatives in EC ministers’ meetings as observers and the training of European police officers by the FBI (Fijnaut 1990).

The discourse in the EU setting was marked by a gradual translation of the rather diffuse concept of organized crime into, essentially, “operationalizable data”, as made evident in various organized crime “reports” starting with the “Organized Crime Situation Reports” of 1994 and 1995 up to the more recent “Organized Crime Threat Assessment” reports (Vander Beken 2006). The ultimate purpose of these initiatives was to operationalize and technocratically control organized crime through processes of translation from a diffuse political and (pop) cultural concept into a “standardized mechanism” marked by agreed upon common guidelines for measurements, methodologies for data collection, questionnaires, statistics and eventually a harmonized, common response to the issue at stake (Council of the EU 2000a: 2000b). This way, organized crime was reconfigured through a distinct operational logic and rationality in the specific setting of the EU, which locally adapted organized crime for the perceived needs of the new context.
Another example at the national level of distinct local redefinition and appropriation are visible in Germany (Stritzel 2011; 2014, 95-116). Here the process of translation of organized crime into a distinctly German narrative of Organisierte Kriminalität was first visible in various expert journals and major institutional initiatives. Similar to the EU level, organized crime here also became adapted to the specific operational logics, bureaucratic interests and established professional routines which eventually, since the mid/late 1980s, became merged with high-level political initiatives and the process of Europeanizing internal security as described above. Yet, for these translations to work for the specific German setting, organized crime had to be recontextualized and redefined, appropriating US narratives for a new setting (Stritzel 2011b; 2014). At the level of legal definitions and operational procedures, this was mainly achieved through a series of institutional redefinitions from the early 1970s until the early 1990s which consecutively blurred, and eventually erased, previous Mafia and US organized crime connotations of “elaborate organizational structures” and “extensive divisions of labour”, to replace them with more flexible and abstract German definitions of organized crime (Stritzel 2014, 102-6). This deliberate “conceptual stretching” (Stritzel 2011b, 2496-7) also made organized crime more compatible with the diversity in Europe.

Towards securitization fatigue and resurgence?

In the previous sections, the emergence of a global organized crime discourse has been reconstructed as a securitized practice that evolved through US initiative and pressure as well as through processes of local translation. To conclude, it is necessary to point to scholars who see traces of a securitization fatigue in the international cooperation with regards to organized crime and narcotics, in recent years marked by developments towards legislative decriminalization and legalization. Indeed, several critical producer states increasingly seem to be developing new norms towards narcotics activities with the aim of reducing related violence and criminality. For example, Bolivia declared in 2008 the cessation of their participation in the War on Drugs, stating that the DEA would have facilitated conflict and violence particularly in the state’s Eastern lowlands (Friedman-Rudovsky 2008). Similarly, the former heads of Brazil, Mexico and Colombia argued in 2009 that prohibitionist policies based on eradication, criminalization and militarization had failed and were responsible for the violence linked to narcotics trade (Cardoso et al. 2009). Former Mexican President Felipe Calderón (2006-2012) also eventually joined the growing group of these new policy entrepreneurs in 2012 by arguing that consumer states in the West need to accept more responsibility for the drug violence crises affecting Latin America. Instead, the region should rather become a testing ground for alternative approaches including market solutions and legalization as means of reducing cash flow to organized crime (Luhnow 2013). Perhaps most prominently in 2011, the Global Commission on Drug Policy (comprised of several presidents from production states, former heads of UN bodies and business leaders) published an influential “Report on Drugs” recommending a transformation of the global prohibition regime towards experimental models of legal regulation and decriminalization as a means of undermining the power of organized crime and ending associated violence. By 2013 more actors joined this anti-securitization movement. Uruguay, as an example, became the first state to legalize the cultivation and distribution of marijuana in 2013 (Forero 2013); and Gil Kerlikowske, Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, the official “White House Czar” under Obama, argued that the USA should shift to treatment over incarceration and securitization (Fields 2009) and end the previously strongly law enforcement-centric War on Drugs (Pollack 2013).
If these voices are indeed robust indicators of a principal change in US and global policies, as some scholars - perhaps too optimistically - claim, then they would reflect a profound replacement of existing norms of appropriateness and the beginning of a new “norm life cycle” of non-securitized domestic and international policies with regards to narcotics. In other words, in the terminology of securitization theory, the organized crime discourse with regards to narcotics that had stabilized as securitized international cooperation through multiple local translations would have been successfully desecuritized, at least temporarily.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to reconstruct the emergence, spread and temporary international stabilization of organized crime as a securitized narrative and practice and to thereby conceptualize and explore these processes through the lenses of securitization and translation. Organized crime as a securitized practice and temporarily established international norm evolved gradually through processes of travelling and translation. From a diffuse cultural narrative, it turned into a political and eventually securitized US national discourse, which then spread to other perceived consumer and producer states as well as various global, regional and national institutions and initiatives. Although powerful securitizing speech acts and single political initiatives by political leaders, particularly in the USA, could be clearly identified and given relevance, it would be insufficient to focus on this aspect alone. Securitizing moves and their social and political effects differed in substance and effect, and they happened on a continuous, gradually transforming basis. They were the product of multiple iterations reconfiguring existing narratives and thereby (re)connecting different forms of agency in different settings. These ambivalent and contradictory processes combined, heavily interspersed with distinct local operational logics and thus translated differently in different places and at different times, allowed stabilized securitized international cooperation with regards to organized crime. As I hope to have illustrated in this chapter, the constitution of organized crime as a securitized international discourse has been created and is still held together by these power-laden, yet ambivalent encounters as well as the constitutive processes of translation within and between them.
References


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1 In line with the philosophy of language in the tradition of Austin, Wittgenstein and Searle the Copenhagen School argue that by saying something, speakers inevitably create what Searle would call “institutional facts” (Searle 2010, 8-10). From this perspective, the discursive establishment of something as a matter of security constitutes it as an “institutional fact” which differs from “brute facts” such as the physical
existence of something, as it needs human institutions as well as human agreement and recognition for its existence. Specifically, securitization gives objects or people a status of “(national) security” and with that status a function that it cannot perform without the discursive establishment and collective recognition of that status. At least this is what Yergin’s (1977) prominent study on this topic suggests. For alternative readings of the various complexities and ambivalences of post-World War II US security discourse, see e.g. Bowie and Immerman (1998); Dockrill (1998); Hogan (1998); Gaddis (2005).

For example, in the USA before the 1940s, “reasons of state” combined with sovereign immunity meant that any state document could be deemed secret. With the passing of the Federal Tort Claims Act of 1946 US citizens then gained the right to sue the state, yet with the National Security Act of 1947 the state limited its general state secrets privilege to security issues, so that “reasons of national security” limited citizens’ access.

Social anthropologists such as Henner Hess (1973) also use the term “cosche” or “cosca” to describe these loose associations of early Sicilian mafiosi. This image of the Mafia as, essentially, Sicilism is famously represented in the Italian opera “Cavalleria Rusticana” by Pietro Mascagni in 1890, which was also prominently referred to in “The Godfather – Part III” by Francis Ford Coppola. In the central scene towards the end of the film, a Mafia killer launches an attack on Don Michael Corleone while he is watching his son performing the Turiddu in Cavalleria Rusticana in the Teatro Massimo in Palermo. However, these anthropological interpretations of the origins of Mafia narratives have recently been challenged by Mafia historians such as Salvatore Lupo (2002) or John Dickie (2008), especially in light of the Falcone investigations of the early 1990s (see Lupo 2002, 7-41; Dickie 2008, 86-96). Lupo and Dickie argue, instead, that the concept of Mafia has its origin in (popular) cultural and political usages of the 19th century. In this context, they specifically refer to narratives of the Mafia as a hierarchical criminal organization that has also been related to the emergence of the Camorra in Campania (Saviano 2011).

This ambiguity is partly due to the vagueness in the concept of national security that the Copenhagen School draws upon. While the National Security Act of 1947 clearly militarized the relationship between the USA and the Soviet Union under Truman, national security can be and has been practiced very differently. This is not only true for countries with a distinctly “civilian” foreign policy tradition such as Germany, Japan or Sweden but also for the USA itself. As Freiburg (2013, 48-94) illustrates, arguably already Truman but certainly Eisenhower and Dulles clearly thought of national security in more comprehensive terms than mere survival, simple self-preservation or excessive militarization (see also Stritzel and Vuori 2016, 47-50).

A decertification process was prominently utilized against Colombia between 1996 and 1997 as the Clinton Administration was dissatisfied with Colombia’s national efforts in battling narcotics (Vasquez 2003). In Bolivia, Colombia and Mexico the USA offered extensive Special Forces training to the national counternarcotics police forces, provided substantial financial backing to paramilitary counter-drug units typically commanded by national military officers, and provided comprehensive military equipment and vehicles for related activities (Benneyworth 2016). For example, as part of “Plan Colombia” alone the USA increased their foreign aid for Colombia to $1.3 billion in 2000.