1. France: criminal organisations, urban gangs and politics*

Jean-Louis Briquet and Gilles Favarel-Garrigues

INTRODUCTION

Organised crime has only recently become an issue on France's public agenda, and its potential links with politics even later. Unlike the situation in other countries such as the United States (US) or Italy, the political dimension of criminal groups – the exchange of protection for services between those in the underworld and politicians, the so-called political–criminal collusion in corruption networks and illicit economy, and the clandestine relationship between violent entrepreneurs and the state – has largely had no bearing on government agenda. Neither has it been a mobilising force for political groups, social movements or professional sectors (judiciary, police, journalism, intellectuals) who, much like what happened with the Italian anti-mafia movement during the 1990s, would come to place this political–criminal question at the heart of the political debate and law enforcement efforts.

In the absence of demand from governments, civic associations or political parties, academic research has been largely uninterested in these issues, while official data on the subject is scarce and insufficient. Nevertheless, some historical and scientific studies, judicial and parliamentary inquiries, and journalistic investigations exist. This means that there are enough diverse and reliable sources to begin to paint a picture, albeit incomplete, of the relationships between criminal organisations and political institutions in France.

In this chapter, after retracing the history of the fight against organised crime in France and highlighting the lack of interest of its relationship with politics, we draw on cases where sufficient material exists to elaborate this picture. We focus, firstly, on the 'auxiliary' functions (security, election campaign organisation, illegal deal facilitation) that criminal players secure for politicians; and secondly, on the existing local-scale political machines or political–criminal configurations, using Corsica as a case study.

The snapshot that emerges in this chapter strengthens the hypothesis that, contrary to popular opinion, France is not protected from phenomena related to the criminalisation of politics. This hypothesis is based on the existence of a strongly centralised and bureaucratised state on the one hand, and on the other, the fact that criminals were solely involved in activities that were almost exclusively delinquent. This gave political–criminal agreements an evidently more fragile, temporary and fragmented form than those they undertook in other contexts (Briquet and Favarel-Garrigues, 2010).

ORGANISED CRIME IN FRANCE: ITS HISTORY AND FEATURES

Urban Crime, Trafficking and Criminal Organisations (End of the Nineteenth Century–1970s)

The phenomena of delinquency that emerged in France with the rise of illicit activities in cities, and the violence that ensued, have long been associated with the marginality of the ‘dangerous classes’, with the unrest and dangers provoked by poverty and social exclusion among the underclass of urban ‘ghettos’ (Kalifa, 2013). At the end of the century, the perception of these phenomena began to change as new criminal figures emerged that became a focal point for the authorities and for public opinion: professional criminals or criminal corporations (to use the police’s terminology of the time), namely individuals who were specialists in criminal activities, who operated in organised gangs and made a living from crime. From the 1920s onwards, the term ‘*milieu*’ was used in the press and by law enforcement to describe the criminal world that controlled illicit activities (thefts and fencing, prostitution, illegal gambling, drugs, counterfeit currency) in large cities (particularly Paris and Marseille) through the use of violence, the establishment of structured networks and territorial control (leisure and port areas) (Auda, 2009).

Police and media reports first highlight how the traditional criminal underworld became an organised and hierarchical network of illegal business enterprises; these risks exaggerated the importance of the structure of the urban criminal world, which historians believe is much more fragmented and mobile today (Farcy, 2007). Protection and collusion from within the police force and the political world are also mentioned. Thus, in *Panorama de la pègre (Overview of the Criminal Underworld)* Blaise Cendrars (2006 [1935]) describes the emergence ‘of specialised and equipped groups of criminals . . . who, following the model of the great industrial *konzerens*, have managed to combine their interests to guarantee exclusivity and the expansion of crime in specific ports, stations, cities, regions’ (ibid., p. 4); he then underlines how ‘tycoons of the criminal underworld’ within ‘state organisations’ benefit from ‘powerful personal protection’: corrupt customs and police officers hide trafficking or local councillors protect them in exchange for ‘money which discreetly enters campaign funds’ or goes into the ‘services’ provided (ibid., pp. 114–115). The journalist-turned-author echoes official enquiries that were concerned with the insertion of ‘gangsters’ into local politics (as electoral agents or subsidisers), but also national politics (the Stavisky affair played a central role in this; the embezzler’s arrest in 1934 provoked a scandal after it was revealed that he benefited from extensive support within the police force, justice system and political world) (Jankowski, 2002).

The scenario in Marseille is the most documented illustration of the links that existed between criminal groups and the political world, continuing until the 1970s. As demonstrated by Simon Sabiani’s career as deputy mayor and member of parliament (MP) from 1928 to 1936 (moving from close to the left to the fascist right) but also by those socialist figures in municipal politics, the criminal underworld actively intervened in local political life (Montel, 2008, 2010). Not only did criminals support politicians by arranging security at public meetings, taking part in activism and electoral campaigns, plotting frauds or using violence to intimidate or counter adversaries (during strikes or union demonstrations for example), but they are also key players in the urban clientelist system dominated

by public figures. Being well established in some neighbourhoods and close to sections of the population to whom they provide jobs and protection (in the harbour trade and small businesses), the members of the *milieu* are in a position to mobilise voters in favour of those candidates who favour their illegal activities in return (information, protection from repressive activities), and contribute more generally to their integration into the networks of the local economy and the municipal government (Monzini, 1999).

This type of political–criminal configuration, in which professional wrongdoers act as violent assistants and suppliers of votes to political actors, disappeared progressively during the two decades of the post-war period (Peraldi and Samson, 2005, Ch.10). Several factors account for this: resorting less to violence in political competition and struggles with trade unions; the existence of mass political parties and a powerful, municipal, clientelist machine, capable of autonomously framing and controlling the electorate; the orientation of the Marseille underworld towards international trafficking, which was more lucrative than its traditional activities but less susceptible to consolidating its local integration in and its influence on populations; the weakening of previous figures of the *milieu*, who had woven secure relationships with municipal elites, thanks to their mutual participation in the Resistance movement, and which since the 1970s were supplanted by the ‘gangsterised’ delinquents whose social influence was limited to the underground world they operated in. Paola Monzini summarised the situation well: ‘the Marseille criminal elite is transforming itself into criminal business elite networks that are mainly active outside of the region, which have links with the territory that are becoming almost invisible’ (Monzini, 1999, p.173).

It can be understood how, in these conditions, the political aspects of the criminal phenomena faded into the background of the public’s attention. Apart from moments of effervescence such as the Stavisky scandal, press campaigns against the ‘deputy gangster’ Sabiani, or later on, matters of corruption which evoked the dishonourable collusion of some Gaullist leaders with suspicious businessmen (Garrigues, 2013), above all it is the delinquent activities of organised crime which interest public authorities and law enforcement.

Thus, the subject of organised crime in France equals *grand banditisme* (‘great banditry’), a term which is forcing its way back into administrative and police vocabulary, to identify professional wrongdoers. The predatory activities (robberies and extortions) and trafficking (of arms, drugs and counterfeit money) of these professional wrongdoers are the near-exclusive focus of the specialised services’ repressive operations called the Office central de répression du banditisme (Central Office of Repression of Banditry) which was established in 1973, at the expense of the wrongdoers’ eventual complicity in the official spheres of politics and public administration.

Modern Movements against Organised Crime (since the 1980s)

The initiatives against transnational organised crime, promoted by international institutions and adopted in national political and administrative arenas, have radically changed the framework of the crime issue in France. Repressive policies were made to be a central focus whilst creating a new threat: mafia networks combining the highest-performing groups of offenders in global criminal markets. In France, and as a result, authorities became aware in particular of the penetration and influence of foreign mafias, which helped to marginalise once again the issue of political–criminal relations.

The trend emerged with the creation in 1992 of the first parliamentary commission of inquiry in France which focused on mafias, and which in 1993 published a report on the 'means to fight the attempts by mafias to infiltrate France' (Assemblée Nationale, 1993). Against the backdrop of Judge Falcone's murder by Cosa Nostra in Palermo and the prospect of open borders within the European Union (EU) Schengen Space, the commission, without overlooking the existence of other 'crime syndicates', focused mainly on the Italian mafia, which in its eyes was 'the most direct threat to France and the most sophisticated model of criminal organisation' (ibid., p. 12). For the commission, France, compared to Italy, seemed to be 'isolated from high-level mafia crime', namely, the activities of 'violent assaults and trafficking which ensure control over a territory and produce an income' (ibid., p. 39). The only exceptions were the 'localised mafia-like situations' in Corsica and in 'certain suburbs' where groups of offenders have territorial anchorage and the links they have forged with the local community hold the risk of 'degrading the State's authority' (ibid., pp. 40–43). For the rapporteurs, their criminal threat was limited to money laundering activities. A 'mafia shell' seemed to be typical of investments in several lines of business which could be used to recycle the proceeds of crime: real estate, casinos, private clinics, waste processing, and so on. France, therefore, was by no means immune to 'crime multinationals', even though 'its State's police force' and 'the civic spirit of its people' limited their hold (ibid., p. 119).

This tendency to minimise the involvement of political actors in organised crime activities continued in the following years as a result of these two phenomena. On the one hand, deviations among political elites were mostly associated with corruption and financial delinquency. This was reflected in the increasing number of cases involving public officials (illegal financing of parties, falsification of public procurement, illegal commissions in international transactions) and increased public awareness, as well as the creation within the judiciary of institutions specialising in political and financial affairs (Lascoumes and Nagels, 2014). On the other hand, organised crime was primarily linked to criminal actors' predatory activities, in particular, drug trafficking and the resulting money laundering practices.

A report written by the Parliamentary Information Mission on financial crime and money laundering in Europe between 1999 to 2002 (Assemblée Nationale, 2002) took this view and was concerned about the establishment of foreign criminal organisations in the South-East of France and the infiltration of the local economy by 'suspicious capital'. Media coverage and international attention to transnational organised crime led the National Assembly (Assemblée Nationale) to legislate in this area. In accordance with the recommendations of the previously mentioned committees, the main aim was to strengthen the repressive means of the state. In 2004, for example, the law on the adaptation of justice to the evolution of crime was enacted in the name of combating organised crime. This law broadened the scope of offences relating to organised crime, and strengthened the penal measures to combat it: there was the creation of eight pools of specialised magistrates ('specialised interregional jurisdictions' or JIRS), undercover policing, proof of origin of their wealth by the offence suspects, and so on (Godefroy, 2004).

New institutions were subsequently created. Regarding the judicial police, the Central Office for the Fight Against Organised Crime (Office central contre la criminalité organisée), founded in 2006, replaced and reinforced the Service for the Prevention of

Organised Crime. The Service for Information, Intelligence and Strategic Analysis of Organised Crime, also known as the SIRASCO, was established in 2009 and centralised information on the development of this threat at a national level. The annual reports of these agencies were picked up by the press and provided a broadbrush picture of the mafia threat in France. As in the past, the danger was associated with organised crime, with trafficking in disadvantaged urban areas (of drugs, people, weapons, cigarettes, metals, counterfeit products, and so on) and with money laundering (particularly in the real estate sector).

The wrongdoing of foreign mafias continued to be reported (for more information on this issue in the years leading up to 2010, see Aubry, 2009). In the mid-2010s, the annual reports of French law enforcement agencies paid particular attention to the diversification of the ethnic or geographical origin of criminal organisations. The 'Africans' and 'Eastern European and Balkan gangs' changed the 'crime panorama' in France, alongside well-established groups such as 'the Chinese, Russian speakers and Italian mafias' (see the Director of the SIRASCO's remarks in Leplongeon, 2016).

The links between mafias and the political world remained primarily associated with the island of Corsica, where 'mafia pressure' on local politics (Follorou, 2016), and even 'democracy', were mentioned following the assassination of a local official in Northern Corsica in 2014. Such links were also mentioned in relation to the South-East of France (in the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region) where several scandals suggested links between local elected officials, organised crime bosses and Italian mafia representatives (Cornevin, 2015). On 10 March 2011, the Italian Council of Ministers, acting on a proposal by the Minister of the Interior, announced the dissolution of the town council of Bordighera which is situated 20 km from France, on the grounds that the mafia had infiltrated its ranks. On 3 February 2012, a similar decision was issued concerning the neighbouring town of Ventimiglia. Links with France were mentioned in both cases (Basini, 2012). Hence, more than 20 years after the Aubert Report, police representation of links between criminals and politicians has hardly changed.

POLITICAL–CRIMINAL RELATIONSHIPS: SOME CASE STUDIES

Unlike the US, and even more so Italy, France has not made the mafia question a key issue in the public debate nor in national politics. Indeed, first of all, banditry and organised forms of serious crimes (trafficking and money laundering) have been a core issue for intelligence services and for specialised law enforcement agencies. More recently, they have given rise to major legislative and political initiatives.

But the prevailing view was that some specific traits of the mafia phenomena, which account for its remarkably dangerous nature, are only a minor characteristic of criminal groups in France, in particular their ability to penetrate and influence state institutions and political spheres. This situation has not prevented the fact that examples of collaboration between criminal and political actors have been unveiled and denounced in official arenas (parliament, law enforcement authorities), allowing us to describe here some of the principal forms that it has assumed in contemporary France.

The Dirty Work of Politics: Criminals and Violent Political Auxiliaries

All professions, wrote Everett Hughes, mix respectable tasks with less dignified tasks (Hughes, 1984 [1951], p. 338). This 'dirty work', which runs contrary to collectively recognised morality and sometimes legal principles, remains hidden from the eyes of the public and is frequently delegated to subordinate officials or to exterior auxiliaries. Within the realm of politics, specialist criminals or those close to criminal circles have been able to carry out this auxiliary role alongside political leaders, in particular in terms of the organisation of law enforcement to protect politicians by 'giving them a hand' with political adversaries and involvement in electoral campaigns.

The situation in Marseille during the 1930s and in the two decades following the Second World War has already been mentioned here. Members of the criminal underworld have acted as electoral agents or henchmen for local politicians. Others have participated in 'powerful squads', created in order to thwart the influence of workers' trade unions in the city port and the municipal government (McCoy, 1973, Ch. 2). Another example is the management of the Civic Action Service (*Service d'Action Civique*, SAC). Founded in 1959 in order to 'support the actions of General de Gaulle', it was very much linked to police forces, alongside which it has often played the role of unofficial auxiliary. This organisation, registered as a legal entity, acted as a service provider for leaders of right-wing parties, in a public but also secretive and irregular manner. The parliamentary inquiry established in 1981 (by a left-wing government, just after François Mitterrand came to power) to investigate the matter (*Assemblée Nationale*, 1982) was a result of several scandals in which members of the SAC were implicated.

According to this official inquiry, the services offered by the SAC to politicians included: 'logistical support to Gaullist parties' and their candidates across the organisation and the safeguarding of meetings, as well as the participation in electoral campaigns (displays, leaflet campaigns, mobilisation of militants) (*ibid.*, p. 111), violent 'commando operations' (*ibid.*, p. 139), blackmail, attacks, and 'real police activities' such as intelligence missions, surveillance and investigations of trade unionists and political opponents (*ibid.*, 159). In particular, in the 1970s, SAC members were redeployed in thuggish activities or found a 'cover' for such activities (drug trafficking, robberies, extortion and counterfeit money) in this highly structured organisation. In this way, the SAC welcomed thugs who provided their skills of violence, and in exchange benefited from police and political protection to the point where certain local organisations were able to change themselves into conglomerates of 'criminals looking for protection and a façade of respectability' (*ibid.*, p. 244), and 'organisations infiltrated by people who only wished to show their fists' (*ibid.*, p. 247).

The bonds established in the fight against subversion between police officers, radicalised right-wing militants, politicians and criminals demonstrate the existence of arrangements and agreements based on tolerance between these different parties. The relationship clearly distinguishes itself, however, in political-mafia pacts such as those, which have notably been described in the case of Sicily. This is in particular because these relationships are not embedded in stable political networks and in structured coalitions capable of investing in institutions of official political power and to exploit them for criminal mafia organisations' purposes (Catanzaro, 1991). It is confined to the simple management of political 'dirty work' by violent entrepreneurs also likely to operate on criminal markets.

During the 1970s the proliferation of scandals, the weakening of the Gaullist protectors of the SAC in government, the rejection of certain politicians for fear of being compromised, but also the increasingly unnecessary recourse to violence in political struggle and the reduction of 'confrontational situations' with the weakening of the Communist Party, all led to the decline of the SAC until its dissolution in 1982 (Audigier, 2003, p. 326), and more generally to that of political-criminal collusion based on the violent political system of auxiliaries. Cases in this area disappeared, discounting those linked to the Front National's security personnel, which, however, were only tangentially related to the matter of delinquency – through common law cases being mentioned in which members of the Protection and Security Department of the far-right party or their participation in security and mercenary societies appeared – in favour of political violence and control over opponents (Assemblée Nationale, 1999).

Brokering and Electoral Machines

The transformation of political conflict explains why recourse to third parties became a priority following a policy of electoral mobilisation and winning over 'changeable' sections of the electorate. In the general context of the weakening of channels of contact between citizens and political parties, it is necessary in the end to appeal to third parties (so-called 'brokers'), a group that can be seen to include violent entrepreneurs. A number of recent cases suggest that the individuals involved in delinquent activities can be co-opted into political networks to fulfil the role of being the third party. Whether this is as associative actors or 'big brothers' able to calm down youth violence, they are characterised by their local notoriety and their capacity to mobilise the population, giving voting instructions as electoral agents, distributing goods and favours as part of a clientelist relationship with the person in office, even encouraging protest action.

These cases are often presented as reflecting the world of poor suburban areas, following the idea originally expressed in the Aubert Report (Assemblée Nationale, 1993) and subsequently adopted more widely, according to which the development of drug trafficking goes hand in hand with a mafia-type economic system, characterised by the commercial fabric being controlled by racketeering, dirty money being invested in legal activities, but also redistribution in the guise of jobs or revenue amongst the sections of the population involved in controlling the territory and providing legitimacy (Assemblée Nationale, 1993, pp. 41–42).

According to Michel Kokoreff (2007), the similarity between *banlieues* (the suburbs) and 'mafia groups' 'is not so much of a recognised fact, as it would fulfil the ideological function of a *repoussoir*' (ibid., p. 73). He recalls that, from the start of the 1990s, a parliamentary report on the violence in the *banlieues* already alluded to 'mafia logic' and 'mafia climate', which characterised the collusions between traffickers and residents of poorer working-class estates on the outskirts of major French cities (ibid., p. 75). A decade later, the equation 'black market = mafia' was met with consensus at the heart of the French political class. However, while 'organised crime' is characterised by the existence of collusion with the political and business worlds, no evidence is available to substantiate the idea of the existence of such a link with trafficking activities in these areas. Rumours pertaining to corruption or protection, explaining the supposed impunity of a trafficker or their rapid or unhoped-for career change, were as popular as they were unwavering.

A decade later, the existence of mafia groups in the vulnerable districts was associated with banditry and drug trafficking. While armed confrontations connected to drug trafficking, notably in Marseille, made the headlines, law enforcement agencies introduced the term *narco-banditisme* in the mid-2010s; a 'structured and interdisciplinary' form of organised crime showing the alliance between 'big shots from the estates' and 'mafia barons' (Capdepon, 2015). If the existence of links between these two worlds was denounced, the question of their connection with the local political elites, on the other hand, was not clear-cut.

The chronicle of cases of political corruption can, however, help to elaborate the hypotheses in this field, by providing clues which allow us to develop an understanding of what political-criminal collusions can look like in France today, as exemplified by the 'Dassault system' saga in Essonne (Ghibaudo et al., 2015). Born in 1925, Serge Dassault held concurrent positions in the industrial (aeronautical and weaponry), media and (right-wing) political worlds, notably serving as Mayor of Corbeil-Essonnes from 1995 to 2009. He conquered the working-class town, previously held by the Communists and known for its vulnerable neighbourhoods, by drawing on his fortune to secure the support of the population. The clientelist policy introduced led to intermediaries able to maintain order in these neighbourhoods playing a more important role.

One such intermediary was René Andrieu who, after being in prison during the 1970s for a series of armed assaults, moved to the public housing estate of Tarterêts in the mid-1980s. There, he enjoyed a certain authority over youngsters, including when he was imprisoned for drug trafficking a decade later. Another intermediary was Younès Bounouara, a 'big brother' in Tarterêts who was very close to Serge Dassault. He maintained social order in disadvantaged neighbourhoods by distributing a part of the mayor's financial resources. In 2013, Bounouara shot one of his rivals and then fled, before turning himself in nine months later; he was sentenced in the first instance to 15 years' imprisonment for attempted murder, and he appealed. The Dassault system introduced in the commune demonstrated the development of a form of clientelism in which using violence to deter rivals or to gain access to the local council's favour and services became commonplace. This included threatening to incite riots in vulnerable neighbourhoods and thus damage the commune's reputation. Having been conditionally sentenced to imprisonment for corruption in Belgium in 1998, Serge Dassault had never been sentenced in France until 2016, even if the State Council had invalidated the election of his successor in 2009 due to suspected vote buying. Protected by the immunity that his senator position granted him since 2004, Serge Dassault was finally indicted in 2014 for vote buying, assisting an illegally funded electoral campaign and exceeding the authorised limit¹ for an electoral campaign.

Other examples seem to reflect similar situations in which neighbourhood gang leaders, known locally by everyone and involved in the black economy, are paid to act as electoral agents for elected representatives who preside over, for example, a regional council. In this case, clientelism frequently involves establishing associations, duly recorded albeit without any real activity, which seize public funding destined for community projects in disadvantaged areas. In exchange for the state subsidies that they claim, the brokers guarantee reliable electoral support for the elected representative. This form of clientelism, mediated by representatives from local associations, can be observed in several cases and over a relatively long period of time; nevertheless, it would be imprudent to overemphasise

its impact and to consider such an exchange as a standard model of political–criminal configurations in disadvantaged districts of French cities. Although the evidence available is too limited to be able to draw systematic conclusions for the picture at national level, the same cannot be said when examining the information available for certain regions, particularly Corsica.

Political–Criminal Networks: Political–Mafia Systems?

The authorities have often presented the situation in Corsica as approaching a mafia-style system. This analogy first appeared in the parliamentary report on mafia infiltration in France in 1992 which evoked the criminality in Corsica as resembling mafia-style groups. The rapporteurs wrote that: ‘several accounts cannot help but evoke descriptions of Sicily and Sardinia: the impunity of perfectly identifiable perpetrators of violence; the weakness of the administrative and judicial authorities . . . the links between political terrorism and crime’ (Assemblée Nationale, 1993, pp.42–43). The deterioration of public order in Corsica has fed this type of interpretation, especially since the assassination of the region’s prefect on 6 February 1998 by a commando group composed of independent nationalist militants. The parliamentary commissions created in response to this act of extreme violence all describe a context marked by the ‘malfunctions’ of the local authorities – fraud and embezzlement, weak controls and sanctions – and the diffusion of violence, liable to encourage ‘the emergence of a pre-mafia system’ (Assemblée Nationale, 1998, p.42) or ‘the ascendancy of a web of networks typical of mafia organisations’ (Sénat, 1999, p. 34).

The commissions identified collusions between delinquent social environments and the political and institutional worlds. Alarm was expressed by MPs at the situation – against the backdrop of widespread ‘state powerlessness’, ‘clientelism’ and of the normalisation of violence – at the ‘interest and influence networks’ based on ‘organised illegality’ by gathering nationalist movement activists ‘turned businessmen’, individuals linked to organised crime, but also directors of official bodies (administrative agencies for regional power, consular chambers) and some elected representatives (Assemblée Nationale, 1998, p.449). Senators were also concerned by the ‘interference’ of organised crime in official ‘economic and political life’ (Sénat, 1999, p.36).

The situation does not seem to have changed recently. In its reports in early 2016 on ‘organised crime in Corsica’, the SIRASCO underlined the ‘penetration of organised crime into local politics’. Indeed, several judicial inquiries were able to conclude that there were strong political trade networks in which criminal elements were present. Due to their role in allocating ‘public subsidies from the State and from European institutions’, as well as their administrative functions (concession of municipal land, granting building permits), some local elected representatives ‘are valuable partners and/or targets for criminal groups who can try to infiltrate this political environment upstream by having members of their family or clan elected, and downstream by trying to corrupt or to intimidate them’ (cited in Follorou, 2016).

Although the subject of the ‘Corsican mafia’ is sometimes used to discredit the nationalist political debate, it highlights the recognised processes in the criminalisation of politics (Briquet, 2010). From the 1980s onwards, violent entrepreneurs integrated themselves into the local economic fabric. This was the case for former nationalist activists who converted some of the skills they had acquired in their clandestine politi-

cal struggle (use of arms, violent reputation, raising 'revolutionary tax') into criminal entrepreneurship (within trading companies in the security, agriculture and tourism sectors). This was also the case for organised crime members who moved some of their delinquent activities (extortion, robbery, trafficking) to Corsica, and who benefited from the island's strong tourism industry to launder illegally acquired funds there. In the same way as the Sicilian mafia (Sciarrone, 1998), these men, who make a living from violence, have established strong and diverse collusive and cooperative relationships within their social environment.

According to parliamentary enquiries about Corsica, the distribution of aid to the agricultural sector and subsidies to commercial enterprises has often been diverted into profit for networks who unite 'the politicians who have control over credit and authorisations, racketeers – organised criminals or nationalists – who invest, embezzle or gamble with the money and certain institutions who are vested in developing an honourable façade' (Assemblée Nationale, 1998, p. 452). Links between elected politicians, local government officials and members of criminal groups became established during underhand and lucrative business operations and electoral campaigns, in which the 'bandits' were given the roles of 'electoral officers collecting proxy votes', 'participants in publicity campaigns', 'bodyguards', and as security agents for local politicians (Follorou and Nouville, 2004, in particular Ch. 15, p. 444).

However, current available information provides no evidence that these political–criminal networks have acquired the 'systematic' scale in Corsica which is often attributed to them, and have links with the Sicilian mafia (Catanzaro, 1991; Lupo, 1997). The inside links of these networks are neither stable nor consolidated. At best, there are sporadic and localised agreements between those involved in the industry of violence, economic players and political decision-makers, often under the cover of complaisant public authorities. These agreements do not translate into the formation of powerful political–criminal coalitions able to influence local public powers in a continuous and coordinated way, like in Sicily. Furthermore, the degree of organisation of the violent groups in Corsica is in no way comparable to those of the 'families' who make up the Sicilian mafia, who have far superior financial and military means at their disposal than the Corsican criminal players.

Furthermore, the debate on the mafia in France has tended to focus too much on the situation in Corsica, and more recently on the situation in Marseille, meaning that comparable criminal activity elsewhere does not receive public attention. Information in this area is very fragmented. However, certain legal cases have raised the issue of political–criminal links; but have not succeeded in putting them at the centre of any investigations, let alone in making them the sole focus of a criminal case. To take just one example, the prosecutor in charge of the investigation into the 1994 murder of Yann Piat, the MP for the department of Var, confirmed the existence of 'strong and sometimes quasi-institutional links between an influential but corrupt section of [the local] political class and major organised criminals, whose illegitimate power they exploited, surrendering in return their integrity, much of their independence and a percentage of their covert earnings'. The case was closed after those who carried out the assassination were convicted. Their motives are still unknown today (Ardid and Bourget, 1998, p. 124).

CONCLUSION

The vast majority of specialists on criminal activity in France agree that organised crime is distinct from the mafia as it exists in, for example, the US or Italy. Using a definition of the mafia based on three specific elements – the use of violence, access to considerable financial resources linked to illicit activities, and ‘mutual infiltration’ with the political world and institutions – Michel Kokoreff (2007, p. 78) concludes that no mafia exists in the French suburbs, notably because of the weak organisation and hierarchy within criminal groups; their inability to entrench themselves enduringly in the legal economy; and the absence of stable and long-term links between traffickers, the political world and the business world (*ibid.*, p. 83). On Marseille, Laurence Montel (2010, p. 26), who writes that ‘unlike Italy’, France has not had to ‘tackle mafia organisations, whose power is based on the control of particular areas and the progressive infiltration of the legal economy’, echoes Cesare Mattina (2014), who notes that contrary to Italian mafias, French criminal groups have never managed to combine economic and financial power with any kind of political power over the areas they control (*ibid.*, p. 35). Players in the French criminal world are not especially rooted in particular areas and only rarely seek to exercise a political hold on the populations of those areas, and their political role has been ‘practically non-existent’ (*ibid.*, p. 30).

The catalogue of links between criminal groups and the political world in France that we have proposed leads to the same conclusion. If these links existed – and continue to exist today – they have been, for the most part, limited to support functions for political activities in both unlawful forms (violent auxiliaries) and lawful forms (mobilisation of voters), without successfully forming integrated, durable and structured systems that unify political and criminal arenas. Two main factors explain this phenomenon: (1) the fragmentation of criminal arenas and their specialisation in trafficking activities which do not require an established presence in a territory or substantial ties to that territory’s population; and (2) the solidity of political and administrative institutions, not only as a result of the strong autonomy acquired by public bureaucracies in France in relation to external interests and pressures, but also as a result of the importance of the resources that these bureaucracies were able to distribute to the population without resorting to foreign service providers and intermediaries which, in other national contexts, could be the criminal actors. A third factor which could be studied further focuses on the lack of emphasis on political–criminal links in the public debate on criminality in France, and in political, law enforcement and judicial responses to the problem of organised crime. One consequence of this has been the scarcity of sources available to describe the political–criminal collusions in France and to measure their intensity.

Our conclusions are dependent on this scarcity and are therefore particularly unclear. They could only be confirmed or disproved, better clarified or nuanced, more thoroughly illustrated and informed, on the condition that the judicial authorities, public institutions as well as intellectuals increase their consideration for and adopt an opinion on the subject of political–criminal links. Several recent publications (such as the graphic novel-style reporting of Davodeau and Collombat, 2015, on the dark years of the Fifth Republic, for example) and television documentaries on the affairs of the 1970s and 1980s in France, bear witness to this renewed interest which must, however, be relayed through official initiatives (such as parliamentary commissions or the establishment of specialised

archives) in order to support academic research. This is a matter of needing to understand the implications, not only scholarly but also political, as these implications could bring about a critical reflection on the history of contemporary France and on the memory of this history.

NOTES

- * Translation of text: Holly Archibald, Tamla Berry, Chris Bhamra, Katy Brown, Alice Clark, Georgia Corp, Agatha Doorley, Jenny Fox, Katy Golder, Georgina Lucas, Lily New, Grant Scott, Elizabeth Watt, Sarah Watts, Rachel Wilson (MA Translation and Professional Language Skills and MA Interpreting and Translation Students, M2016–2017, Department of Politics, Languages and International Studies, University of Bath, UK).
1. Serge Dassault died in May 2018, before any final judgment. His death put an end to the judicial proceedings.

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