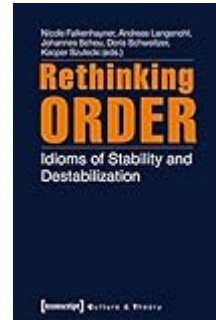




Regine Schöenberg, Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung. *Transnational Organized Crime: Analyses of a Global Challenge to Democracy.* Bielefeld: Transcript - Verlag für Kommunikation, Kultur und soziale Praxis, 2013. 308 S. ISBN 978-3-8376-2495-3.



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R. Schöenberg u.a. (Hrsg.): Transnational Organized Crime

Transnational Organised Crime (TOC) is back on the agenda. While historically it is no new phenomenon, the decade between 1991 and 2001 saw the growth of TOC as a (defined) policy issue in the broader international political economy. To fill the security space that opened up in the so-called post-Cold War environment, a diverse array of security, law enforcement and military agencies were able to redirect their functions and interests by propagating the seriousness of this ânewâ transnational threat to global/national security and stability. See Adam Edwards / Peter Gill (eds.), *Transnational organised crime. Perspectives on global security*, London 2013. While TOC never really dropped off the agenda, the signing of the Palermo Convention in 2000 was quickly overshadowed by the events in New York on September 11, 2001 and their aftermath. See André Standing (rapporteur), *Transnational organised crime and the Palermo Convention. A reality check*, New York 2010. Yet, as the honeymoon period for the âwar on terrorâ evaporated in the smoke and debris of controversial conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan and a global financial earthquake connected to unfettered financial exploration, TOC has resurfaced as a priority threat to national and inter-

national security. Compare the U.N. Security Council, Statement [made on behalf of the Security Council, at the 6717th meeting, 21 Feb. 2012, in connection with the Council's consideration of the item entitled 'Peace and Security in Africa'], 21 February 2012, S/2009/PRST/4 and White House, Strategy to combat transnational organised crime. Addressing converging threats to national security, July 19, 2011, Washington.

Transnational Organized Crime: Analyses of a global challenge to democracy should be understood as a contribution to the reinvigorated debates that have emerged as TOC again takes centre stage in the global security imagination. The conception of the work is rooted in a 2011 Heinrich-Böll Foundation-hosted international conference on TOC which had the intention of raising awareness about 'the interdependency of criminal structures, legal economic processes, and the respective political orders' (p. 9). As the co-editor Regine Schöenberg writes, 'transnational organized crime is an inherent feature of economic globalization and represents more than just the dark side of that development path'. With this opening statement Schöenberg attempts to redirect

popular perceptions of TOC as the 'dark side of globalization' See Mois Naim, *The Five Wars of Globalisation*, in: *Foreign Policy*, 28 December 2003, pp. 1â7, URL: (22.11.2013). towards a more mature contemplation of how the entangled nature of legal and illegal activities intrinsic to the evolution of the current global economic system is threatening democratic life built on assumptions of 'transparency, accountability, and participation' (p. 295).

This compilation comprises 25 contributions by authors hailing from diverse professional backgrounds, including academics, journalists, politicians, activists, as well as representatives of civil society organisations and private industry. The authors offer an array of perspectives on the causes, historical development, forms and effects of TOC in 12 countries across regions of Latin America, Africa, Asia, the Balkans and Europe. The editors thus aim to construct a holistic picture of the multidimensional threat that TOC poses to democracy on a global level by means of academic articles, essays, reports and interviews.

The work is divided into two sections. The first part 'transnational issues of organised crime' offers three articles respectively focusing on money laundering (Chapter 1), cyber-crime (Chapter 2), and the problematic nature of the international justice system in both fighting and facilitating organised crime (Chapter 3). These chapters are supplemented by two thought-provoking interviews with professionals in the realms of tax and finance where corruption is highlighted as a central, embedded, feature of the international financial system. More than just introducing some 'current global challenges' (p. 13), the first part highlights several key features of TOC that seem to run like a thread through the rest of the book, namely 'the interwovenness between legal and illegal economic activities and the underlying normative conflicts regarding the legitimacy of action' (p. 16).

The second section 'regional perspectives' once again presents a multi-professional approach to understanding the key issues raised by organised crime and its transnational variants in different regions of the world. It is difficult to summarise such a wide-ranging spectrum of descriptions, diagnoses, approaches and perspectives that focus on specific geographic locations and do not evenly describe 'regional' dilemmas, but rather country-specific developments. The general picture that may be drawn is that the evolution of organised crime in various parts of the world is neither particular to those regions nor a coherent development that can be understood in a

one size fits all diagnosis. Whether Afghanistan, India, West Africa, South Africa, Mexico, Brazil, the Balkans, Italy or Germany, organised crime and the networks that criss-cross national boundaries are embedded in the historical developments that have shaped the boundaries of states and the inequalities within and between them. Furthermore, to truly comprehend the devastating effects of organised criminal activity it is necessary to take into account the entangled nature of crime, politics and economics, on the one hand, and context on the other. TOC is thus not only some external threat to the territorial integrity of nation states but a structural dilemma that affects society across sectors and scales thriving on: the intersections between legal proceedings of global trade; the ignorance or consent of political actors regarding criminal networks; the secrecy and regulation of the financial sector; the new spaces opened for exploitation via the internet; and 'the materialistic or individualistic philosophy of our age' (p. 295). From the collective accounts it becomes evident that corruption acts as the connective tissue in the dislocated body that is TOC, ultimately being the real threat to transparency and accountability.

The book is a relevant contribution that strives to open up a space to consider TOC not as some myth or new enemy, but as an inherent feature in the international political economy and a corrosive force that, much like an illness, is compromising the health of societies across the globe. It is filled with interesting empirical details emanating from the practical experience of people who have worked within their professional fields for a long time, thus offering some expert opinions on issues that span across the boundaries of particular regions or disciplines. Finally the emphasis on cooperation between civil society and the state in holistically combating this threat to human security is an important message that is left with the reader.

On the other hand the work lacks an introductory discussion on the definition of TOC, which is itself a problematic feature in the topography of TOC discourse. While many of the contributors are aware of this, especially in discussions related regional action in West Africa and the European Union, organised crime still remains a confusing term and the reader is confronted with categories (cyber-crime), activities (smuggling, trafficking, money laundering, extortion), actors (organised criminal groups, syndicates, Mafias, gangs) and even at stages organised crime as an entity with agency. Secondly, an overemphasis on certain areas 'Afghanistan, Mexico, Brazil and Europe' calls into question the 'regional' as well as 'global' spread of discussion, with the

omission of important states such as China and Japan coming to mind. Moreover, "regional spaces" such as the Horn of Africa, or "zones" such as the "Cocaine Route" and "Heroin Route" that fall outside of the state-bound context offer alternative "laboratories" for investigating the transnational nature of the subject. Finally, there is a lack of reflection on the place of democracy "transparency, accountability, and participation" in the contextually specific discussions that are advanced by the many contributors. Democracy thus stands as a "universal" and undefined ideal rather than a central feature in the context specific manifestations of TOC.

Despite the above-mentioned gaps, the broad range of perspectives and multi-professional approach are refreshing and fit well into the editors' mission to focus on features of TOC that are not generally brought into

conversation with each other. The book successfully brings together the experiences of people working on the ground in specific sectors where organised crime is an everyday problem, yet doing so without jargon or abstract incomprehensible language. Thus, it is an effective vehicle to reach its intended wide audience comprising individuals from the legal, political and economic arenas, as well as stakeholders from civil society and private industry. Furthermore it offers an array of case studies that can lead to productive classroom discussions. Additionally the compilation introduces the reader to a network of professionals that are attempting to broaden the dialogue on a complex issue that reaches across all sectors of society, thus becoming a tool to facilitate the further connectivity between researchers and practitioners asking similar questions or grappling with similar topics.

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