

Lush Life

Constructing Organized Crime in the UK

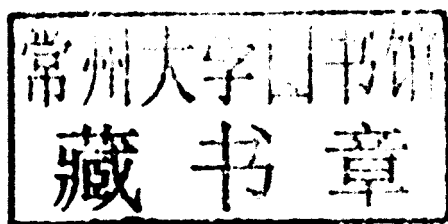
DICK HOBBS

Clarendon Studies in Criminology

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LUSH LIFE

CLARENDON STUDIES IN CRIMINOLOGY

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Charlie Porter of Plaistow (1929–2011).

Terry Jackson of The Steamship.

Snowy the Snout for his counsel to those in peril at the Old Bailey.

All the Jimmy Coopers.

General Editor's Introduction

Clarendon Studies in Criminology aims to provide a forum for outstanding empirical and theoretical work in all aspects of criminology and criminal justice, broadly understood. The Editors welcome submissions from established scholars, as well as excellent PhD work. The *Series* was inaugurated in 1994, with Roger Hood as its first General Editor, following discussions between Oxford University Press and three criminology centres. It is edited under the auspices of these three centres: the Cambridge Institute of Criminology, the Mannheim Centre for Criminology at the London School of Economics, and the Centre for Criminology at the University of Oxford. Each supplies members of the Editorial Board and, in turn, the Series Editor.

Lush Life: Constructing Organized Crime in the UK is an absorbing account of organized crime in the East End of London. Its author, Professor Dick Hobbs, has a distinguished record of research in the field over many decades. His previous books include: *Doing the Business: Entrepreneurship, the Working Class and Detectives in the East End of London* (1988); *Bad Business: Professional Crime in Modern Britain* (1995); and *Bouncers: Violence and Governance in the Night time Economy* (2003). Together his considerable corpus of work has made an important contribution to our understanding of the underworld of professional criminals, the workings of police detectives, and of private security. *Lush Life* has as its particular focus the constructed nature of organized crime and its changing history. However, it continues Hobbs' exploration of themes addressed in his earlier works: not least the operation of illegal markets, criminal entrepreneurship, and the implications of the development of the night-time economy for both. Yet again, Hobbs has immersed himself in the life of the East London neighbourhoods in which he was born and grew up to reveal the myriad ways in which criminal activity is an everyday feature of urban existence in this very impoverished part of the city.

Hobbs amply demonstrates how the historical construction of organized crime has been characterized by a continuing xenophobia about newly arrived immigrants whose closed communities and alien beliefs, customs, and practices seemed to fearful observers to threaten moral chaos. As this book reveals, the very term organized crime has been constructed and reconstructed over time as the structural conditions of its existence change. Successive chapters reveal the changing conditions, patterns, and practices of organized crime, its perpetrators, its beneficiaries, and its victims. Later chapters, grounded in ethnographic enquiry, examine variously the involvement of youth; the rise and fall of violent armed gangs; and the development of organized criminal markets. Although economic reward is clearly a central motivating factor, Hobbs' research also reveals the hedonistic, thrill- and status-seeking aspect to much activity. One particularly illuminating chapter analyses the role of violence, rumour, and gossip in managing reputations, constructing myths, and structuring the environment of illegal markets.

Organized crime is, of course, an umbrella term for any crime committed collaboratively. As such, it is not amenable to statistical record. Instead, Hobbs maps organized criminal activity by tracing the complex associations between offenders or, as he would have it, 'illegal entrepreneurs' over time and exploring their life histories. The result is a densely woven collection of sketches, vignettes, and personal accounts that combine to illustrate vividly the variety, innovation, and entrepreneurial energy of the criminal actors who are Hobbs' chief subjects. Larger themes explored in the latter part of the book include the impact of neoliberalism, globalization, the importance of cosmopolitanism, and of post-industrial decline on the activities of organized criminals. In tracing these influences, Hobbs situates contemporary organized crime within the wider political economy of twenty-first-century Britain.

Lush Life will appeal to students and scholars of sociology and criminology, as well as to the general reader intrigued by the world of organized crime and its actors, from the nefarious to the mundane. It furnishes detailed and powerfully drawn case studies together with a wealth of colourful, first-hand testimony that provide informative tableaux of criminal activity in the East End of London. Most importantly, this book supplies unparalleled criminological insights into the

cultural underpinnings and socio-economic processes that inform and animate the hidden world of organized crime.

For all these reasons, the Editors welcome this new addition to the *Series*.

Lucia Zedner
University of Oxford
October 2012

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And to my family, Sue, Nik, Pat, Lisa, and the Bruise.

Dick Hobbs
London
2012

List of Abbreviations

AFSJ	Area of Freedom, Security and Justice
EMCDDA	European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction
FACT	Federation Against Copyright Theft
HMIC	Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary
INCB	International Narcotics Control Board
NCA	National Crime Agency
NCIS	National Criminal Intelligence Service
NCS	National Crime Squad
NHTCU	National Hi-Tech Crime Unit
OCNS	Organised Crime Notification Scheme
OCTA	Organised Crime Threat Assessment
RARTs	regional asset recovery teams
RCSs	regional crime squads
SCDEA	Scottish Crime and Drug Enforcement Agency
SOCA	Serious Organised Crime Agency
UNTOC	United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime

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1

Introduction: Dubious Ideologues and Illegal Entrepreneurs

I don't want to read none of this glamour, none of this 'my mother never loved me so I was forced to do banks'. I did it for the money, for what I could pour down my throat and put up my fucking nose. For the house, for the cars ... for food on the table. For a life. For a lot of reasons. Will you write that? And all the horrible things that go with it, all the scams and nasty bastard dealing, the full-on stuff when people get hurt/go missing. You gonna write that? (Tony)

While writing this book I came into contact with venal, duplicitous, grandiose individuals whose inflated egos were entangled in morally ambiguous predatory cabals. Their true motives were often shrouded by a façade of renegade posturing behind which lay a deeply reactionary core generating ethically dubious activities that threatened to corrupt anyone negotiating entry to their secretive world. Certainly, I frequently found it degrading to work amongst these chaotic webs of voracious, status-obsessed opportunists—but enough of the British university system. I also spent time with people who were involved, whether full time, part time, temporarily, or peripatetically in criminal activity. I met their families, and drinking and business partners. I went to weddings, funerals, and parties. I sometimes sat in on conversations about their business dealings and mundane issues concerned with sport, family, violence, and the price of almost anything. Some of these people were full-time criminals, some operated businesses that featured illegal activity, while others flitted in and out of illegal activity. Some were violent.

This book connects with my previous work which stressed the way in which specific political economic environments produced cultural interpretations that located market relations as a central