

Crime and violence on the margins of society: How justice-based power vacuums create deprived neighbourhoods

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Abstract

How have crime, conflict, and violence shaped the social structure of neighbourhoods across diverse spatial and temporal landscapes in marginalised urban communities? To address to this central question, this study examines the socio-political dynamics of New York City and Palermo, as well as the role of authoritarian actors, by juxtaposing different historical periods and contrasting the influences of political institutions with extra-legal entities such as gangs and mafias. Utilising visual images, archival documents, and geographical mapping, the study introduces the concept of 'justice-based power vacuums'. This novel theoretical concept elucidates the mechanisms through which coercive power fosters social environments susceptible to extra-legal domination, effectively entrapping vulnerable groups, be they ethnic or racial minorities or economically disadvantaged groups. I argue that while crime, conflict, and violence, especially under the auspices of gangs and mafias, often become the focal point, it is the obscured role of political authorities that stands as the genesis of such complex social problems. The present comparative historical social research indicates that recognising and addressing these obscured political influences is essential for a holistic

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understanding and subsequent mitigation of the structural challenges in urban social life that create deprived neighbourhoods across time and space similarly and perpetuate marginalisation in these communities.

KEYWORDS

comparative and historical sociology, crime & deviance, race & ethnicity, social stratification, sociology

1 | INTRODUCTION

Racialized urban design and urban development across the post-war world created inequality, social segregation, and spatial injustice (Darwin, 2007; Pulido, 2000). One of the most notorious slum landlords in the 1950s was Perec (Peter) Rachman, who was involved in the brothel business and was prosecuted for this reason in London (Green, 1979). He also abused migrants from the West Indies by overcharging them because they did not have the same protection of the law as other citizens had, and he encouraged hostility between white and black residents to make more profits (Schofield & Jones, 2019). Similarly, Fred Trump Sr. used legal loopholes to racially discriminate against black residents interested in renting flats from Trump-owned complexes. Residents were forced to apply for help from the New York City Commission on Human Rights and the Urban League in 1972 to officially draft a complaint (New Frontiers, 2019).

I began this article with these two examples to highlight how those non-political actors, in positions of authority, facilitated conflict and discrimination by capitalizing on intersectional injustice, using legal loopholes, and establishing networks with political actors. The marginalisation of vulnerable groups manifests different forms of violence that plunge communities into suffering with the prevalence of social and political conflicts. The multifaceted relationship between various power holders in a hierarchically ordered society creates the conditions for social and political disparities in urban areas (Speak & Graham, 1999; Vaughan, 2005). In the presence of crime and violence, extra-legal actors seek opportunities within grey spaces of law and politics to strengthen their authority (Abello-Colak & Guarneros-Meza, 2014). In different historical epochs, social conflict has stimulated tumultuous events and criminal activities that have significantly impacted the socio-political milieu of urban centres, prompting both political dissent and demographic changes (Freitag et al., 2015; Haller, 1970; Knepper, 2015; Lasslett, 2018). However, we do not have a clear understanding of how 'coercive power', exercised by political as well as non-political authorities, shapes deprived neighbourhoods in diverse social contexts and distinct historical periods characterized by crime, conflict, and violence. The present study seeks to address this pressing query by elucidating the complex dynamics that increased the vulnerability of communities in the quarters of New York City from the 1860s to the 1870s and Palermo from the 1950s to the 1980s.

Tilly (1985) illustrated cogently that power agencies are not only extra-legal and violent institutions, but that the monopoly of violence by political authorities, particularly state organizations and their war-related activities leads to much more destructive catastrophes. Massey and Denton (1993) highlighted how racial segregation is an outcome of historical and institutional processes such as discriminatory housing policies, redlining, and racial violence that can effectively generate spatial concentrations of poverty, with African Americans often being disproportionately situated in deprived neighbourhoods. Yet we know relatively little about how different actors generated deprivation and conflict in socially and politically diverse geographies and at different times when violence was present. In addition, our knowledge of the impact of urban violence is limited when both state actors and extra-legal actors, such as gangs and mafias, bring devastating effects through concerted actions in diverse political and social geographies and different time periods. This comparative historical case study aims to fill this

gap by comparing the role of state institutions, gangs, and mafias simultaneously. Exploring different impacts of conflict and violence across multiple locations and historical periods within a socially stratified urban context may reveal a critical socio-political context for identifying the actors and clarifying the complexity of power relationships that contribute to the creation of deprived neighbourhoods.

Barnes (2017) convincingly argues that we should no longer segregate organized criminal violence from political violence. Criminal organizations have, over time, engaged in politics through the accumulation of violent power, mirroring the dynamics of non-state armed groups. Their complex relationships with the state have led to heightened violence levels and the acquisition of political influence. By shifting our focus towards agencies marginalizing urban communities within the political context, we can conceive more effectively how powerful actors maintain social control through conflict, deprivation and violence taking place in urban space. Besides, this perspective enables us to ascertain the degree to which actors conceal their roles in exploiting their social and political positions (Atkinson & Millington, 2018). The aim of this article aims to address these gaps by unveiling the common factors that explicate how political authorities (state institutions) and extra-legal actors, (gangs and mafias), expanded their authority, developed a resilient governance model, and contributed to the deprivation and of urban social life across different geographies and time periods.

I introduce 'justice-based power vacuum' as a novel concept that signifies a social and political condition wherein the individual rights and welfare of citizens go unaddressed due to either the complete absence or inadequate presence of political authority. Based on the two examined cases, I assert that a justice-based power vacuum offers a better theoretical concept to deconstruct the role of diverse actors and hierarchical power relationships in the intervention of multiple and heterogeneous actors to rule a territorial area through coercive violence. A comparative analysis of New York City and Palermo reveals that the divergent intensities of social deprivation in each locale can partially be attributed to identity-centric factors in New York City, and control-centric factors in Palermo. In both cases, these conflicts similarly aggravated a justice-based power vacuum that confined certain communities to the margins of society and created deprived neighbourhoods regardless of diverse socio-geographical contexts or different temporal epochs. For a more holistic understanding of the elements responsible for generating a justice-based power vacuum, I suggest that it is necessary to analyse both the role of political authorities and extra-legal actors in tandem. In doing so, we can obtain a better understanding of hierarchical power relationships, why the role of political authorities becomes less visible, and how extra-legal actors extend the scope of their influence. This would allow us to unravel the underlying causes of the 'justice-based power vacuum' more effectively from an ontological and epistemological perspective.

I have divided the remaining part of the article into four main parts. To begin, I engage with the relevant conceptual and theoretical framework to examine power vacuums and their relationship with authority and violence. Second, I justify the case selection and methods that I used in this study to collect data. Third, I examine the case of New York City by revisiting the social history of the Five Points neighbourhood from the 1850s to the 1870s, and next I present Palermo's urban social history from the 1950s to the 1980s. Drawing upon the analysis of the events in the two cities, I endeavour to clarify how justice-based power vacuums fuel conflict through identity-centric and control-centric factors, respectively. Then, by comparing the two cases, I present an analytical framework elucidating the emergence of justice-based power vacuums and deprived neighbourhoods. I conclude the article by highlighting the study's original contribution to conflict theory and the concept of power vacuums from a comparative historical perspective, pointing out its limitations, and offering further methodological suggestions for future research.

2 | JUSTICE-BASED POWER VACUUMS: A THEORETICAL CONCEPT TO EXPLORE CRIME, CONFLICT, AND VIOLENCE

Power has been an important concept of sociology, international relations, and political science disciplines with respect to how authority influences social organizations, dictates relationships between states, and exerts control over societies (Krasner, 2009; Mann & Haugeard, 2011; Martin, 2002; Popitz, 2017). The most violent and conflictual

form among different types of power is coercive power which is often characterized by reliance on fear, intimidation, and the capacity to impose unfavourable results upon individuals who are unwilling or unable to comply (De Dreu, 1995; Kriesberg, 1982, p. 116). Employers of such tactics may resort to physical violence, revocation of privileges, or punitive measures in order to assert their authority over others. By instilling dread or the sense that punishment is possible, those who deploy coercive power seek to shape behaviour or encourage conformity (Malešević, 2022). Lengyel (1954, p. 47) is renowned for being one of the earliest theorists to articulate the concept of 'power vacuum', which is characterized by an absence of ability, while taking into account that power should be widely seen to be commensurate with the potential to maintain authority and control. In the wake of state failure and weakened state institutions, power vacuums have been extensively studied for their potential to provoke a heightened level of conflict and violence as more influential entities struggle to assume authority in the absence of effective governance (Boaz, 2010; Burt, 1999; Kassab & Rosen, 2020). Historical evidence indicates that political authorities across different temporal and geographic contexts have adopted strategies of tacitly promoting the rise of extra-legal authorities through the use of coercive power, as seen in China from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century (Luo, 2023). Conversely, political authorities in nineteenth century Oklahoma have been observed using these extra-legal authorities by casting them as outlaws to further their own authority (Obert, 2021). In light of these examples, it is pertinent to consider the implications of state action regarding the exercise of power and its effects on both political and extra-legal authorities in regard to the perpetuation or suppression of violence.

Tilly (1985) argued that the monopolization of 'internal violence' is a crucial element in the state's process of centralization. This process involves the incorporation of potential competitors who are willing to recognize the authority of the state to secure their privileged positions within the system. The presence of gangs, while existing within the state, typically does not immediately threaten the state's monopoly on violence. In such cases, conflicts tend to remain contained within the realm of criminal activity. For instance, the situation in New York City illustrated how conflicts within criminal organizations did not become an immediate priority for state intervention. Similarly, when the mafia becomes entangled with political corruption, state institutions may not be fully motivated to address the underlying issues that empower the mafia, as seen in the Sack of Palermo. This can lead to limited state responses, especially when organized crime activities, whether related to gangs or mafias, do not directly challenge the state's monopoly on violence, as demonstrated in the New York case study, or when certain state actors benefit from these relationships, as observed in the context of the Sack of Palermo. Building upon these findings, as emphasized by Jacobs (2020), organized crime groups experienced limited law enforcement challenges during the 1920s and 1930s, thanks in part to FBI Director Hoover's refusal to recognize them as a national menace, which contributed to their ongoing existence and expansion. However, it wasn't until after Hoover's death in 1972 that the FBI underwent a transformation, prioritizing the dismantling of Italian-American organized crime families, as noted by Woodiwiss (2015).

Harvey (1972) and Castells (2014) both noted the dire consequences of condoning social injustice in impoverished urban neighbourhoods. The powerful elite had rigidly held back opportunities from those of a lower social status, creating a breeding ground for alternative authorities to take hold. Thus, possessing power does not necessarily equate with maintaining justice. Studying the process of power vacuum is relevant when considering the ramifications of a leader's resignation, government collapse, or other scenarios which produce a void in authority. Such an event is commonly associated with adverse results; however, whether this is actually the case depends on the power structure that emerges to fill the void (Piazza, 2008; Rotberg, 2002). If the agents responsible for reestablishing order are focused on justice, equity, and public welfare, then positive outcomes may result from the shift in authority—as seen when dictatorships are replaced by representative democracies (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2006; Loxton & Mainwaring, 2018). On the other hand, if the individuals concerned are motivated by personal interests, discrimination, or violence, that could lead to further injustice and unrest (Levitsky & Way, 2023). Therefore, it is essential to analyse the power dynamics at play when a power vacuum arises to effectively assess potential consequences. This allows us to distinguish between power vacuums that may lead to positive changes and those that perpetuate injustice and conflict. In this respect, I define justice-based power vacuum as the absence or deficiency of a governing body or authority that considers and addresses the needs and rights of citizens in order

to promote their well-being. When a justice-based power vacuum exists, there may be inadequate institutions or actors in place to plan, design, and implement policies that prioritize the needs of citizens.

This is the reason that the repercussions of such reality may lead to dire consequences: political, social, and legal structures can be woefully insufficient in safeguarding citizens from injustice and neglect, creating a breeding ground for conflict, exploitation, and violence that ravage vulnerable communities. For example, Roberts (2022a) adeptly demonstrates how the regulation of Methadone is intricately tied to the long-standing history of racism against the Black community within the broader context of U.S. drug policies, particularly the War on Drugs, further exacerbating the marginalisation of Black communities, while also highlighting the far-reaching implications of this, including the mass incarceration crisis and collateral damage to marginalised communities (Roberts, 2022b). Besides, Roberts (2012) reveals the transformation of New York Mayor Robert F. Wagner, Jr.'s addiction approach in the 1950s, where his adoption of medicalization to secure medical professionals' support overlooked critical concerns like civil and economic rights, police misconduct, corruption, and housing security, ultimately paving the way for the adoption of methadone maintenance. In addition to failing to address the underlying causes of addiction, these policies, which were influenced by historical racism and political considerations, exacerbate the crisis of mass incarceration, and further marginalize communities. According to Alexander (2010), the U.S. criminal justice system functions as a contemporary system of racial control by disproportionately targeting Black men in the War on Drugs and wreaking havoc on communities of colour; in doing so, it formally upholds the principle of colorblindness while relegating millions to an enduring second-class status. In addition to systemic violations and inequities, the prison industrial complex's injustice is demonstrated by the need to eliminate legal and cultural barriers that marginalize individuals within the U.S. criminal justice system (Kerr, 2017). The aforementioned critical analyses illuminate the complex network of policies and historical relics that sustain racial inequalities and marginalisation. They underscore the severe repercussions that result from the absence of justice-based authorities that govern these systemic problems.

In the presence of justice-based power vacuum, decision-making processes may disproportionately favour certain privileged groups and powerful actors or fail to consider the concerns and rights of marginalised or disadvantaged populations. As a result of the neglect to implement meaningful policies, or careless execution of policies that fail to provide a 'justice-centered approach', inequality and social unrest may swell like an unstoppable tide. Such lack of proper governance by the political authority may lead to deeper societal divisions, conflict, and violence. Furthermore, the consequences of this absence of justice-based authorities extend beyond the realms of policy, as highlighted by Stevenson and Friedman (1994, pp. 524–526), where the casual exclusion of Black individuals from participation in various aspects of justice compounds the erosion of trial integrity and fairness, further perpetuating social harm and injustice.

The rich literature on conflict theory demonstrated how inaccessible resources and a lack of social mobility functioned as the fulcrum of stratified societies, leading to aggression and violence between competing agencies for power (Dahrendorf, 2022; Lenski, 1984; Runciman, 2018). The relationship between authorities (political or non-political) with violence in urban space is inextricably linked to the crucial component of rapid social and political changes that disproportionately affect disadvantaged communities (Góngora, 1975; Shihadeh & Steffenmeier, 1994; Sutton, 2020; Wu & Zheng, 2018). For example, in Brazil, political elites employed punitive containment policies in the 1990s to deregulate the economy, manifesting as penalization and militarization of marginalised urban areas which generated distrust in public entities and exacerbated existing violence (Wascquant, 2008). In Los Angeles, racially biased redlining practises from the New Deal perpetuated neighbourhood marginalisation, resulting in increased anti-gang policing in historically disadvantaged areas (Bloch & Phillips, 2022). Such actions, which are frequently the result of the absence or neglect of responsive political institutions, not only widen the chasm of mistrust and aggravate the violence prevalent in urban areas, but also lead to the formation of power vacuums. These voids, if not adequately filled by political institutions, provide opportunities for extra-legal entities to gain a foothold, exacerbating the level of urban marginalisation and highlighting the necessity of justice-based political governance to prevent such outcomes.

Preventing lower social classes from achieving social or political power reduces their opportunities for socioeconomic advancement, allowing the wealthy class to consolidate their rule (Robinson & Kelley, 1979). What emerges from this array of dependencies and networks is the pervasiveness of hierarchical power relationships. The authorities, whether political or extra-legal, that maintain social order prioritize the powerful class's interests and suffocate marginalised groups who are disproportionately affected from social and political conflicts. This causes the political authorities to react against revolting groups by suppressing and controlling them, resulting in the development of a police state, registering their disinterest in the conflict between different groups or the planting of violence within these groups (Cayli, 2018, 2019). However, in order to operationalize such a mechanism in a hierarchically ordered social system, conflict must be transformed into a highly instrumental tool capable of controlling the groups, alienating them, and channelling the conflict away from issues directly related to the abuse of authority (Musto, 2010).

Koonings and Kruijt (2004) warned us that due to the corruption and inefficiency of government agencies, organized violence would take root and spread. Coward (2015) then emphasized the importance of these warnings by directing our gaze away from the urban centres towards neglected neighbourhoods and infrastructures, creating a new type of polycentric agglomeration outside the city limits. This shift in focus put an urgent spotlight on areas long forgotten, forcing us to rethink traditional ideas about urbanity. Direct violence, or physical violence, is visible in the urban space in mafia wars or gang fights, whereas indirect violence manifests in structural violence, which torments people's lives through institutional policies, but it is not as visible as direct violence because its consequences range from poverty and social immobility to social deprivation and unequal access to state and social services (Galtung & Höivik, 1971, pp. 73–76; Winter 2012). Religious and ethnic conflicts bring its long-term impact on forming collective identities and expand the impact of direct violence (Malešević, 2010). Structural violence, or in other words indirect violence, produces alienation, repressive social outcomes, and deprivation (McIlwaine, 1999). Winton (2004, p. 166) stated that 'in urban contexts, it is deprivation as inequality that is the most important form of structural violence and that which relates most significantly to the emergence of everyday reactionary violence'.

Historical events shaped by the collaboration of various actors with the intention of causing violence against less powerful actors highlight the complexities of political dynamics in the use of violence (Pérez-Olivares, 2022). In remote urban environments and abandoned neighbourhoods, where structural violence manifested itself through the growth of illicit and informal economies, as well as criminal activity, a lack of jobs and a high rate of unemployment have been dreadful outcomes (Beckett, 1997). In neighbourhoods where such an informal system of conciliation does not exist, deprivation and criminalization increase the risk of marginalisation. Hence, socially deprived urban neighbourhoods serve as the most eminent spaces in which social marginalisation can materialize if the rehabilitation and improvement programs are not adequately thought out for such communities. Public opinion regarding marginalised groups and state policies also contribute to this process (Desmond et al., 2016). 'Place' is a particular zone to be exploited by offenders render the relevant targeted zone a suitable opportunity to establish their authority (Kim et al., 2013). This causal relationship reveals how the extra-legal governance plays a key role in urban transformation (Moser & Rodgers, 2005). On the other hand, political authority becomes the pivotal factor in determining the quality of social life in an urban setting, whether this results in widespread injustice due to the rise of social inequality. This elucidates the pertinence of evaluating the role of authority and violence in order to gain a deeper understanding of how power vacuums manifest themselves and generate widespread effects upon society.

3 | METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

This research sought to explore the manifestation of coercive power in different temporal and spatial contexts, thus a comparative analysis was conducted of two distinct social geographies: (i) Five Points neighbourhood of New York City from 1860 to 1870; and (ii) Palermo between 1950 and 1980. Comparative historical sociology contributes 'to

an understanding of the social world by providing general explanations of facts about diverse historical societies and cultures' (Kiser & Hechter, 1991, p. 24). Analysing causal regularities and concepts has been key drivers in multiple case selections for research inquiries in comparative historical sociology (Skocpol, 1984, p. 363). The two cases in this comparative historical social research did not emerge from a random selection. There are three primary accounts that demonstrate the pivotal role played by the choice of the two case studies. To begin, both cities underwent social transformations during the aforementioned time periods as a result of migration into the two cities, which triggered other social and political changes and manifested with the emergence of different political and non-political authorities. Second, social conflicts and existing inequalities fuelled gangs, mafias, and the political class's ability to dominate urban space in these cities in order to amass power. Despite their social, political, and cultural differences, the parallel motivations for extra-legal actors' ascension to social control are similar which provide an intriguing social context for navigating the urban history of New York City and Palermo. Third, even though deprivation and competition for power are present in both cases, the forms of violence employed in each case are distinct. When examining the cities of New York and Palermo, the former is more afflicted by identity-centric conflicts such as racial/ethnic tensions and religious strife, while the latter has been primarily shaped by control-centric factors including institutional corruption generated by the political-criminal nexus. I coined the term 'justice-based power vacuum' as a theoretical concept that emerged from the comparisons of the two cases. Authority and violence are the two key variables that contribute to the formation of this concept which both influenced the impact of injustice explaining the deprivation and marginalisation of neighbourhoods (see Table 1).

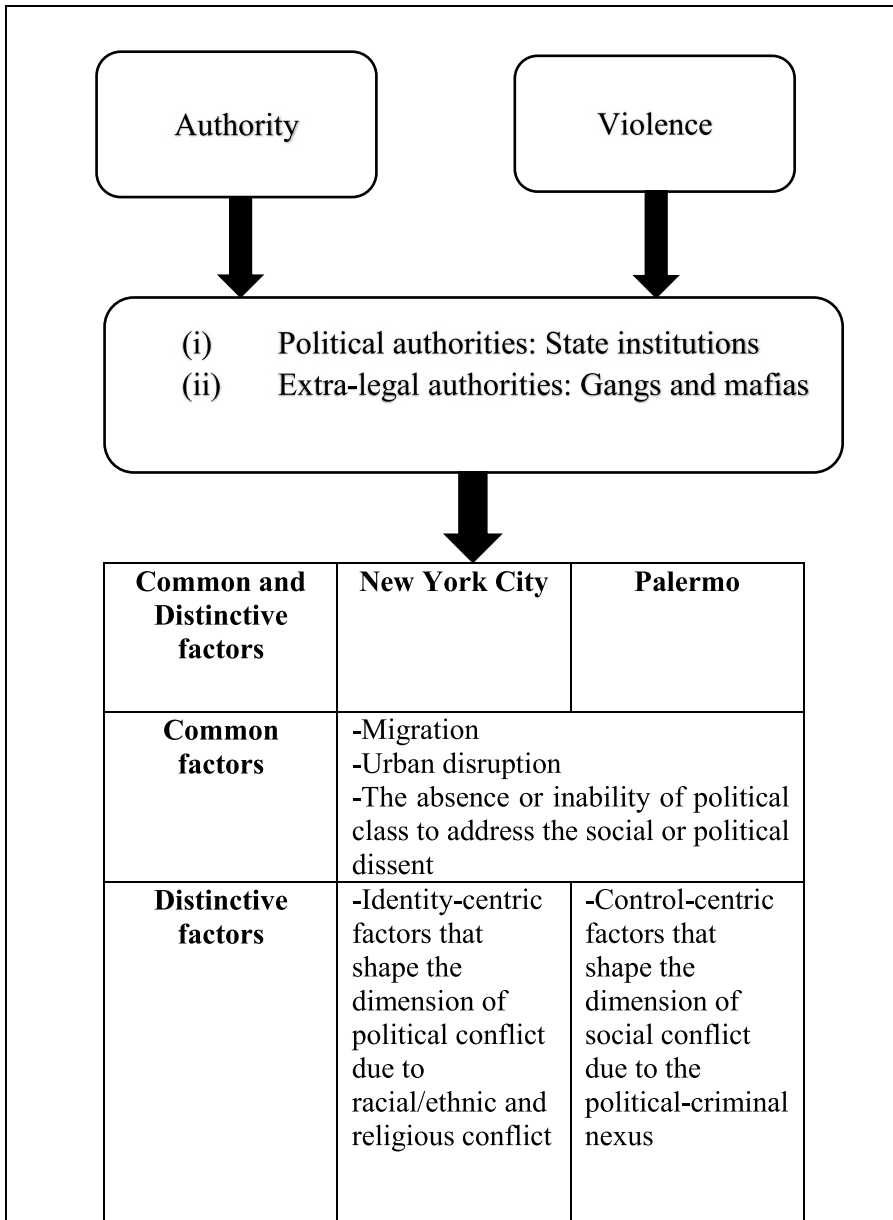
In order to understand the social and political conditions of New York and Palermo at the time, I referred to a variety of visual sources from news outlets. For instance, newspapers that stigmatized and marginalised poor urban communities in New York by depicting gangs and migration as the source of the problem. Additionally, I documented a Palermo neighbourhood where the mafia had granted construction villas, as well as consulted archival sources and court documents which expose the political-criminal nexus in Palermo. All sources were listed in the footnote. Finally, to help readers gain insight into how historical roots of justice-based power vacuum persist even today while contemporary resisting movements struggle to liberate urban space from the oppression of organized crime groups. I created a map displaying the number of Palermo shopkeepers in each neighbourhood who have joined a civil society organization and are refusing to pay extortion money to the mafia.

4 | COERCIVE-POWER OF AUTHORITIES AND VIOLENCE IN THE FIVE POINTS, NEW YORK CITY

The oppressive nature of authority and violent dominance become more evident when we take a closer look at the power dynamic between those in charge and those in conflict with another group. Mapping out the authorities that govern an urban area reveals social, political, and cultural tensions—a dark mirror that captures an otherwise hidden world of inequality and control. Conflicts bring direct violence to the forefront of everyday life, as evidenced by urban riots and migrations to cities (Bhavnani et al., 2014). The Five Points of Lower Manhattan, New York City, can serve as an illustrative example for exploring how identity-centric factors, such as race, religion, and ethnicity, can lead to the propagation of criminality and violence in densely populated urban neighbourhoods. It is also noteworthy that the political authority overlooked or neglected the strife felt within these areas as state authorities failed to extend any meaningful reprieve from the marginalisation that many of these neighbourhoods suffered (see Figure 1).

The Five Points was a notorious neighbourhoods in the 19th century that was widely recognized as one of the worst slums in the city (Riis, 1998) (see Figure 2). Anbinder (2001, p. 67) points out that infectious diseases, unemployment, deplorable living conditions, and crime tightened their grip on this densely populated area, and he adds the Old Brewery, once a local producer of beer in the area, was converted into a block of poorly built flats and described as 'a vast dark cave, a black hole into which every urban nightmare and unspeakable fear could be

TABLE 1 Explanation of variables (authority and violence) and the case selection based on common and distinctive factors in the formation of deprived neighbourhoods.



projected'. However, there were businesses and shops near the Five Points that elicited such outrage that they wrote a letter to the New York City municipality requesting the area's clearance. Lening Gustav narrated these contradictions in the Five Points among different social classes existing in a very close proximity in this part of Lower Manhattan in his article for New York Times in 1873, stating, 'In most cities of the "old world," the poor have their chosen locality, and the rich theirs. The districts of the strugglers are indisputably their own. Nor do hovels or tenement houses usually exist in glaring proximity to the residences of the more highly favoured. However, here it is otherwise. In the Metropolis of America, the most abject misery and the most exuberant wealth may be seen



FIGURE 1 A street in the Five Points, 1870. The street shows the poor social conditions of the Five Points, where the street lacks a decent infrastructure, similar to many streets in the slum. Collection Name: Vanderbilt, Paul: Wisconsin Thematic Panels Project, 1965–1967 and 1982–1984.



FIGURE 2 Villa Deliella prior to its destruction during the Sack of Palermo, as seen in the accompanying photograph situated behind Francesco Crispi's status. Villa Deliella was demolished in 1959 during the Sack of Palermo.

dwelling side by side. Luxury and starvation are near-by neighbours' (Gustav, 1873). The newspapers published numerous illustrations and photographs of poverty and social neglect in the Five Points neighbourhoods, as depicted in the following figure (see Figure 3).

The Five Points was a unique urban environment that fostered an amalgamation of numerous ethnicities, races, and religions such as Irish natives, immigrants, African Americans, Protestants, and Catholics. However, as Borchard (2007) notes, the omnipotent hierarchical power structure imposed upon these different groups promoted a culture of animosity among them and ultimately prevented this section of the city from becoming an idealized American melting pot. Indeed, the headlines of newspapers were often dominated by reports of disputatious conflict between rival gangs in the area; perhaps none were more notorious than the Dead Rabbits, a gang comprised mainly of Catholic Irish immigrants (Ernst, 1994). The influx of Irish immigrants to New York City in the 19th century, brought forth a sharp increase in racial tensions and territorial control. This tension further exacerbated through the emergence of gangs such as the Dead Rabbits and the Bowery Boys (Cook, 2014, pp. 41–44). Members of these organizations used public space as an arena to display their authority and power. Deplorable



FIGURE 3 Homeless people in slum neighbourhood. Life sketches in the metropolis—Our homeless poor—Early morning in Donovan Lane, near the Five Points, 1872, illus. in AP2.L52 1872 (Case Y) [P&P] Repository. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC 20540 USA.

living conditions which accompanied poverty created a culture of crime amongst the Irish immigrants, thus prompting them to commit acts of lawlessness to survive whilst increasing solidarity by joining the Dead Rabbits gang led by Priest Vallon. However, this led to an urban battle between the Dead Rabbits and the Nativists gang led by Bill the Butcher in 1846, consequentially resulting in Priest Vallon's death (Mattie, 2003). The presence of a large population of immigrants in the region posed a significant challenge to the power and authority of nativist gangs that sought to maintain control through illegal activities. Furthermore, many members of these nativist gangs, including those belonging to the Bowery Boys group, were Protestant and vehemently advocated for white supremacy, while actively opposing immigration and emancipation of African Americans (Walkiwitz, 2003).

The abysmal presence of state institutions, particularly the paucity of police forces, jobs and social welfare initiatives, aggravated the destruction caused by riots that were barely quelled in the 1850s (Gilfoyle, 2004; Gráda, 2005). Even after the riots, urban violence occurred on occasion. *The New York Times* reported one of these incidents, stating:

Last evening the difficulties of the night before broke out in a new place, lasted for hours, and the military were called out to assist the Police in dispersing the belligerent parties. On Centre-street, at the corner of Worth, a crowd of rowdies—to the number, perhaps, of 1000—was assembled, and an equal number, or even more, at the Five Points. Pistols were fired, brickbats thrown, inoffensive persons beaten, and nearly a dozen individuals more or less dangerously wounded.

(New York Times, 1857)

In the years that followed, urban violence forced a sizeable portion of black residents to flee the Lower Manhattan area, with many relocating to Brooklyn (Gorn, 1987). The Dead Rabbits riots occurred on 4–5 July 1857, between Irish gang members and indigenous gang members, the majority of whom were Bowery Boys members and Joel Tyler Headley who witnessed the event that time stated that almost a thousand gangs were involved in the riots, and their members benefited from the chaos and anarchy, providing them with opportunities to profit from

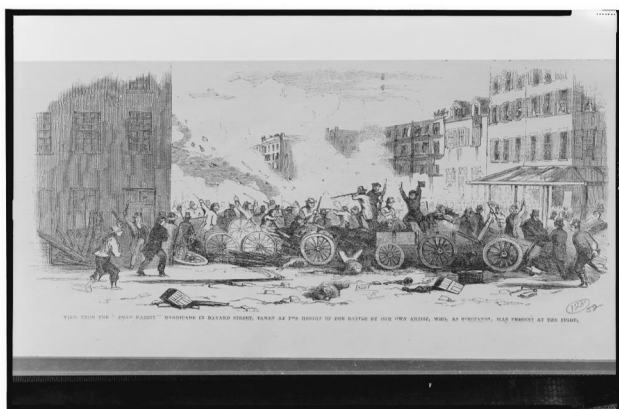


FIGURE 4 View of fight between two gangs. 'Dead Rabbits' and the 'Bowery Boys' engaged in regular fights in the Sixth Ward, New York City, illustrating the fight on 4 July and 5 July 1857. Illus. in: Frank Leslie's illustrated newspaper, v. 4, (1857 July 18), p. 108.—Call number: Illus. in AP2.L52 1857 (Case Y) [P&P] Reproduction Number: LC-USZ62-121644. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA.

riots by looting and destroying Protestant churches, as well as setting fire to the homes of people who supported African American emancipation (Headley, 1873) (see Figure 4).

Critiques were also made against this type of marginalisation of socially disadvantaged groups living in slums as orientalist in nature, as it distorts everyday reality for popular expectation and generates counterarguments that such reactions would serve the powerful class's other interests (Yamin, 1998). Mayne (2007, p. 232) mentioned, for example, 'slums are representations of actuality, created by words and images, and achieved a spurious imaginary reality in the realms of public opinion and public policy. In so doing, they also achieved tangible (and deplorable) expression around the world in heavy-handed slum clearance, city "improvement," and "renewal" projects that tore apart working-class neighbourhoods rather than empowering residents to improve them'. The Five Points neighbourhood suffered a fate similar to that of the already deprived urban space, and residents were subjected to political neglect. Neglected communities in slums indicate extreme poverty and social inequality, which are inextricably linked to social stratification and the state's inability, indifference as well as reluctance to resolve social conflict between different religious communities, or racial classes where identity-centric factors are influential as it happened in the case of Five Points. On the other hand, riots between diverse communities transform the urban space into a venue of social conflict, elevating not only gangs but also state institutions to the forefront of discussion as leading authoritarian actors who created justice-vase power vacuums.

The implementation of coercive power, as evidenced by the fierce feuds between gangs and state apathy to address the issue, provoked a deleterious effect on African-American neighbourhoods. Specifically, numerous black inhabitants were coerced to depart for Harlem because of the organized violence by gang members in the Five Points area (De Jongh, 1990).

The most viable alternative for many residents was to relocate to another suburban area in search of a safer environment, which was challenging by the lack of available opportunities for social mobility. The origins of the conflict reveal that the country's immigration policies at the time, racial and religious tensions, and the state's inability to address the conflict through the adoption of a spatial justice paradigm contributed to the emergence of deprived neighbourhoods as violence prevailed on the streets of the Five Points area. Residents of the Five Points were not only subject to gang violence but were also coerced into a powerless social position by state institutions. However, the role of state institutions in addressing the underlying violence and identity-centric factors that catalyse conflict was less prominent. Instead, gang presence and politico-cultural tensions garnered greater focus

than expecting state entities to develop viable policies rooted in principles of justice. Hence, the role of state institutions in conflict and violence has become less visible, which has resulted in justice-based power vacuums.

5 | COERCIVE POWER OF AUTHORITIES AND VIOLENCE IN PALERMO

Examining the interplay between political authorities and extra-legal authorities allows us to elucidate how the cooperation of state institutions with the mafia has become a detrimental consequence of control-centric factors and deficiencies in a justice-based social and political system. One of the most prominent manifestations of this could be seen in the sack of Palermo (*Sacco di Palermo*) which indicates the destruction of the distinctive architectural style of Palermo and its citrus fruit groves by the mafia and politicians whose cooperation and corruptive practices created building blocks from the 1950s to the 1980s (Schneider & Schneider, 2005; Ursetta, 2012). The pernicious merger of politics and organized crime in Palermo resulted in the obliteration of its iconic Liberty-style villas, Arab-Norman architecture, and green belt close to the city centre (Scalia, 2023). In the post-World War II period, the population influx into the city and urbanization provided perfect cover for mafia members to enter the construction sector and thus expand their stronghold by controlling strategic locations (Lupo & Mangiameli, 1990). The political contacts of leading mafia members, particularly Salvatore Lima and Vito Ciancimino, with the mayors of Palermo provided them with rich opportunities to reap the benefits of their cooperation with the political class who utilized real estate speculation rather than the restoration of historical buildings (Ciancimino & La Licata, 2010) (see Figure 2).

The demolition of Villa Deliella was a deeply unsettling event for the residents of Palermo. I had the opportunity to interview a local resident who was just 9 years old when the destruction occurred, and he vividly described the impact it had on his family. According to him, his mother returned home that day filled with frustration and anger. He recounted, 'My mother came home frustrated and filled with anger. They destroyed Villa Deliella, and she was furious because she used that street to go to work ... I remember that in the years that followed, the city continued to expand by demolishing other beautiful villas with ugly apartment blocks, and we later learned that this was the result of mafia collaboration with politicians'. The daily newspaper *L'Ora*, which extensively covered mafia-related news in the city at the time, closely monitored the destruction and its aftermath and wrote articles about it (see Figure 5).

It became increasingly clear that these transformations were not merely urban development projects but were the result of collusion between the mafia and politicians. This revelation added another layer of anger and frustration among the residents, who felt powerless in the face of such corruption and exploitation of their city's landscape. Palermitans bore witness to the profound transformation of the city's architecture brought about by the proliferation of unsightly building blocks (see Figure 6).

Salvatore Lima remained office as the mayor of Palermo from 1958 to 1963 and then from 1965 to 1968. Vito Ciancimino, mayor from November 1970 to April 1971, was a close ally of the most vicious mafia boss, Bernardo Provenzano. When Tommaso Buscetta, a member of Cosa Nosta, became a *pentito* (informant) after his arrest, he stated that Ciancimino was 'a pushy Corleonese¹ embezzler, made a vast fortune in bribes' (Popham, 2006). This period created an entrepreneurial mafia class that played a major role in the business sector and the growing urban economy (Arlacchi, 1983). Their new investment areas distinguished them from traditional mafiosi, who consolidated their power primarily in agriculture and rural areas during the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Lupo, 1993; Pantaleone, 1962; Porto, 2001).

The Antimafia Commission, established by the Italian Parliament in 1962, demonstrated how Cosa Nostra operations were characterized by corruption and violence. Corruption and the use of violence aided in the development of the mafia's political networks, enabling them to accumulate power. Consequently, its political and organizational strategy resulted in the creation of the necessary mechanism for territorial control and expansion. According to the report:

CRONACA DI PALERMO
BISOGNA INTERVENIRE IN TEMPO PER SALVARE IL PATRIMONIO ARTISTICO

Chi sono i responsabili della "fine" del villino Deliella di Palermo

Il piccone ha già compiuto la sua opera. Tra un mese il villino sarebbe stato dichiarato monumento nazionale. I motivi della fretta del proprietario. Le insidie trattative con la Pubblica Amministrazione. Perché va essere la sede della Galleria d'Arte Moderna. Perché l'Assessorato comunale ha autorizzato la demolizione?

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FIGURE 5 While examining the demolition, L'Orà raised a crucial question: who ultimately bears responsibility for the final fate of Villa Deliella di Palermo, as highlighted in bold. Source: L'Archive di L'Orà, Biblioteca Regione Siciliana.

Cosa Nostra employs a distinct political strategy. The occupation and government of territory in competition with other legitimate authorities, the possession of vast financial resources, the availability of an illegal and well-equipped army, and the program of unlimited expansion are all characteristics that distinguish Cosa Nostra as an organization open to change based on the logic of power and convenience, bound by no rules except the protection and development of their own organization. Cosa Nostra's political strategy is not copied by others; rather, it is imposed on others through corruption and violence.²

The Antimafia Commission's mentioned paradigm explains how Cosa Nostra operates to achieve its goals through strategic networks with political elites, the public sector, and city council. These networks aimed to control the urban space. During the sack of Palermo, city residents witnessed the demolition of opulent villas and their replacement by multistorey buildings. The demolition of Villa Deliella, a remarkable example illustrating the finest representation of Liberty and the Art Nouveau style, was the most notable example of this devastation. On a Saturday night, 28 November 1959, at the request of the city council, Villa Deliella was demolished. The mafia and real estate speculators despicably expanded the city as a result of decisions made by the political class, many of whose members were Cosa Nostra members or collaborated with them. This expansion primarily targeted the eastern part of the city, constructing shabby and poorly designed residential houses (see Figure 7).



FIGURE 6 The present-day residential blocks in Palermo have supplanted the once-distinctive villas that previously occupied their locations. Beneath each of the contemporary buildings captured in the photo, one can read the original names of the villas or palaces, accompanied by the respective street names. *Source:* Photographed by Baris Cayli Messina.



FIGURE 7 City map of Palermo. The curved arrows show a major part where the Sack of Palermo occurred. The map was created by the author. *Source:* Baris Cayli Messina.

Angelo Siino was implicated in the use of illegal bribes to influence public contracting procedures, thereby serving as a conduit between mafia organizations and the municipal government. Following his arrest, he decided to cooperate with the law enforcement. His interrogation with the magistrate reveals how the mayor of Palermo, Salvatore Lima, who was born into a mafia family, governed the city:

Magistrate: What do you remember in that period, and, for example, to place it a little in time, whether you are able to say if Lima had already been elected to be Mayor of Palermo or we are even ...

Siino: It seems to me that before being elected the Mayor of Palermo, he was, I don't know, in a party post, so clearly he was already working as a city councillor, or it was precisely on the occasion of his election as a city councillor. However, there were still a lot of people who were interested in the Conca d'Oro (the area of destruction), and they were spread out all over the place.

Magistrate: Here, we'd like to express these circumstances in which you find yourself. Do you remember who Lima met with during these meetings?

Siino: I recall that there were more people, not only Lima, that I cannot recall precisely, but they were pseudo-political figures. Rather than that, I remember that Nino Ricco and Nino Sorce were present. There was another named Lo Verde. There were residents in the Cirafo region; in short, there were a lot of people. After it, there was the Cottone family. I'm referring to Cottone, who is originally from Villabate. and there were several people with whom Lima had a close relationship, and they held him in high esteem. A great deal of this is also true.

Magistrate: What does it mean that they thought highly of him?

Siino: That is, in fact, how I feel ... Lima was supposed to be the son of a *Omu d'onuri*³ from a central Palermo family at the time. belonging to the family of central Palermo,⁴ for which he was practically considered a member of Cosa Nostra. That is, they said that he was a smart boy, and they said that he was going to be more powerful, that he would have done it and things like that. In fact, he always acted together with a number of people and cooperated with them ... both political and nonpolitical ones, who were practically mafiosi or had close links to the mafia, such as Brandaleone⁵; and other mafiosi from the Corso dei Mille area, including Guttadauro, who was the boss that time...and the doctor of Giuseppe Guttadauro,⁶ Carlo Guttadauro and one of his brothers, whose name that I don't know. Nevertheless, he formed an alliance with each of these individuals.

Siino's discussion with the magistrate highlighted how deeply entrenched the mafia had become in state institutions, and how the connection between these two had fashioned a political-criminal alliance. The influence of the mafia had become so strong that it overshadowed the coercive power of public and municipal organizations in creating deprived neighbourhoods. Venturing northeast from the bustling city centre of Palermo, one stumbles upon Mondello and its infamous Pizzo Sella. An eyesore to many Palermitans, this hill is bedecked with illegally constructed buildings they refer to as '*la montagna di vergogna*' (the hill of shame). This blight stands as a bitter reminder of the political-criminal nexus that has irreparably wounded the city, an affront to all who are critical of this morally reprehensible act. The mafia's power relationships provided opportunities for the mafiosi to construct dozens of buildings on this hill. During the Sack of Palermo, a construction firm with close ties to Cosa Nostra boss Michele Greco obtained permission to build the villas on Pizzo Sella. Between 1978 and 1983, a total of 174 villas were built.⁷ Hundreds of licenses were issued to two people: Rosa Greco, the sister of mafia boss Michele Greco, and Andrea Notaro, the wife of the builder. Shortly after the villas were completed, the judiciary and police intervened, which became public due to an anonymous report.⁸ Following a lengthy trial, the state confiscated over a hundred buildings in 2001, whereas in 2012, the Court of Cassation concluded that the people who purchased the villas at the time were innocent because they were unaware of the mafia connection, so 59 villas were recognized by the court as legally habitable.⁹ A view of the city and sea shows the locations of the 174 villas (see Figure 8).



FIGURE 8 Pizzo Sella in Capo Gallo. The mafia constructed abandoned buildings with views of the city and sea on Pizzo Sella in Capo Gallo, a rugged nature reserve. *Source:* Baris Cayli Messina.

The unkempt and unsightly urban site on this hill serves as a poignant reminder of how politicians, and city bureaucrats who collaborated with the mafia destroyed the city's cultural heritage and unique urban environment. This hill and different Palermo quarters, which are home to nearly half of the city's population, represent deprived neighbourhoods where a new form of violence is unleashed on its residents by the political-criminal alliance. The mafia's collaboration with the political class resulted in the formation of a formidable political network that fomented explicit violence of the mafia and the implicit violence of political authorities, enlisting the cooperation of a variety of actors seeking to profit from this political-criminal nexus. The control-centric factors strengthened the political-criminal alliance and marginalised urban space, resulting in increased social stratification in Palermo's neighbourhoods and making it even harder to defy the mafia's authority. The sack of Palermo would not have occurred in such a reckless manner without the control-centric factors that resulted from the mafia's infiltration of the city council and parliament, as well as the consolidation of these networks through mutual benefits to consolidate their social control over the city. *L'Ora*, the local newspaper at the time, covered the sack of Palermo extensively, which drew a lot of attention from Palermitans (Dovizio, 2021). Through the reports of local people, it became evident that political-criminal alliance caused the creation of deprived neighbourhoods. The Hill of Shame is an example of this, as it displays how violence is experienced by locals when they become aware of the widespread and pervasive corrupt practices that have transformed their city. As such, the inhabitants had to give these places new names due to the desolation they had seen.

6 | HOW JUSTICE-BASED POWER VACUUMS CREATE DEPRIVED NEIGHBOURHOODS

Authoritarian governance of extra-legal actors in urban space is based on the use of intimidation and violence, which is most obvious in gang-dominated or mafia-controlled neighbourhoods (Catino, 2019; Cayli, 2019; von Lampe, 2016). The involvement of extra-legal authorities in the governance of an urban space produced a multi-layered social context that contributed to the surge in the magnitude of different forms of violence in both cases. In the Five Points neighbourhood of New York City, racial and religious factors, which are identity-centric factors, escalated politico-cultural conflicts between competing gangs that used direct violence and were compounded by spatial injustice and poverty. Due to clashes between rival gangs and the state's failure to address

poverty and spatial injustice in the neighbourhood, social problems aggravated the marginalisation of residents. In the case of Palermo, the use of structural violence manifested itself through the political-criminal nexus as the primary driver for expanding the mafia's and political authorities' power, enabling them to use a variety of instruments, from corruption to vote exchange, leading to the dramatic destruction of Palermo's distinctive urban landscape.

I sought to demonstrate how the urban spaces of New York City's Five Points neighbourhood and Palermo are representative examples of deprived neighbourhoods where the magnitude of different forms of violence increased with the implicit role of political authorities (state institutions) in creating justice-based power vacuums. The form of violence operated differently in the two cities' urban social spaces, as direct violence was evident in New York City whereas structural violence was prevalent in Palermo; however, both had similar severe consequences due to inadequate state authorities that ignored the well-being of citizens and did not treat them equally. Hence, this elucidates why certain neighbourhoods across different social geographies and historical epochs spawned justice-based power vacuums that facilitated the emergence of deprived communities. Simultaneously, in the presence of violence and extra-legal authorities, the implicit role of political authorities becomes obscured (see Table 2).

The presence of 'justice-based power vacuums', created by the trifecta of the coercive power of authorities, the surge of conflict, and the form of relationships, has allowed extra-legal authorities to capitalize on these conditions, resulting in deprived neighbourhoods. The opposition between gangs stemming from identity-centric factors or the collaboration between state authorities and mafia groups based on control-centric factors illustrates the incapability of political authorities to protect citizens' well-being and safety, which enables the explicit coercive power of extra-legal entities and the implicit coercive power of state institutions in generating justice-based power vacuums. Extra-legal actors' competition for power expanded the impact of direct violence and structural violence in the Five Points and Palermo, respectively, by relying on the same critical factor: the accumulation of power in deprived neighbourhoods through either identity-centric or control-centric factors. Thus, extra-legal authorities view the absence of 'justice-oriented political authority' as an opportunity to achieve their objectives, while state institutions either cooperate with those players or ignore the underlying reasons that lead to conflict and violence, which collectively contribute to the formation of deprived neighbourhoods. In the broader context of addressing the issues in deprived neighbourhoods, Zimring's (2011) perspective on New York City's crime decline adds a layer of clarity, as it is revealed that New York City's crime decline cannot be attributed solely to aggressive policing, emphasizing the importance of multiple contributing factors. This contradicts traditional notions regarding crime prevention and emphasizes the efficacy of harm reduction approaches in tackling the root causes of problems that

TABLE 2 Indicators in the emergence of deprived neighbourhoods with the presence of justice-based power vacuums.

Indicators in the emergence of deprived neighbourhoods	The Five Points in New York City	Palermo
The coercive power of authorities	Inadequate state authorities in the defence of citizen's well-being empowered the explicit coercive power of gangs and the implicit role of state institutions in the creation of justice-based power vacuums	Inadequate state authorities in the defence of citizens' well-being empowered the explicit coercive power of mafias and the implicit role of state institutions in the creation of justice-based power vacuums
The surge of conflict	The inclusion of extra-legal authorities—gangs—in using direct violence	The inclusion of multiple powerful actors—the mafia and politicians—in using structural violence
The form of relationships	Identity-centric factors leading to the form of conflictual relationship between different gangs	Control-centric factors leading to symbiosis relationship between political authorities and the mafia

contribute to crime and violence, as well as comprehensive strategies that hold political authorities accountable for making sound decisions.

Jacobs and Peters (2003) reveal that labour racketeering has served as a significant source of power and wealth for Cosa Nostra crime families dating back to the 1930s. However, it was not until Jimmy Hoffa's assassination in 1975 that combating labour racketeering became a federal law enforcement priority, highlighting a concerning delay in addressing the issue. This delay also underscores the severe consequences of a slow response by political organizations, raising concerns about the complicity of political actors in the problem. Similarly, Jacobs and Hortis (1998) highlight that organized crime faced occasional law enforcement actions until the 1980s when the U.S. Department of Justice finally initiated a focused anti-organized crime campaign. This period also witnessed criminal prosecutions weakening Cosa Nostra's structure, while effective regulation began dismantling one of its central power bases.

The precarious nature of justice-based power vacuums becomes apparent when examining the roles of political authorities and state institutions in addressing urban deprivation and marginalisation. The trajectory of these challenges is heavily influenced by the efficacy of governance and law enforcement, highlighting the critical need for comprehensive and timely strategies to avert their exacerbation. However, in the presence of crime, conflict, and violence perpetrated by extra-legal authorities, such as gangs and mafias, political authorities often fade into the background, despite their shared responsibility in fostering deprived neighbourhoods and exacerbating marginalisation.

Schneider and Schneider (2003, pp. 280–284) illustrated that post-war migration to Palermo from rural areas had a detrimental impact on the city's physical and social fabric, as it facilitated an alliance between contractors, politicians, and the mafia. Similar, albeit less conspicuous, effects of the mafia's infiltration into the city have been observed in New York City as well. By means of a clandestine power centre, which is supported by lawful enterprises such as construction companies and restaurants, local mafia families have conspired with multiple mafia organizations to increase their illicit earnings (Albenese, 2014). A prompt response is imperative due to the swift infiltration of organized crime groups, particularly Cosa Nostra, into both legal and illegal domains; failure to do so would result in the swift expansion of these groups' illicit activities (Jacobs & Gouldin, 1999). Jacobs et al. (2001) emphasizes the continual necessity for persistent endeavours to eliminate mob influence from these industries, placing particular emphasis on the significance of novel regulatory methodologies.

In the absence of effective state intervention, civil society organizations can assume a pivotal role in combating the mafia and its activities while simultaneously fostering a culture of lawfulness. Civil society's opposition to the mafia implies that collective resistance networks may be critical for challenging the coercive power of political and non-political actors and their use of different forms of violence (Cayli, 2012, 2017; Cayli et al., 2018). The mafia



FIGURE 9 The number of shops that don't pay extortion in the neighbourhoods of Palermo. The data driven from the NoMa project and illustrated by the author shows on the map the number of shops in each neighbourhood in the historical centre of Palermo in 2023. Source: Baris Cayli Messina.

maintained its urban authority by requiring small businesses to pay extortion (pizzo) to the mafia group controlling different neighbourhoods in Palermo. However, in the early 1990s, local initiatives launched an unyielding fight against the mafia, urging them not to pay extortion money. Hundreds of shopkeepers in the city centre of Palermo have joined this solidarity against the mafia by affiliating with Addiopizzo, the civil society group leading this urban campaign against the mafia (Cayli, 2013a, 2013b) (see Figure 9).

The role of political authority may not be as apparent when direct violence has a dominant and immediate effect with the contribution of extra-legal authorities. This is why it is important to highlight the role of state institutions in understanding justice-based power vacuums. Extra-legal organizations, whether gangs or mafias, profit from the high-risk ventures generated by the state's absence or inadequate interventions, its social harms, and the collaboration of extra-legal authorities with corrupt politicians. As a result, they wield power, establish their authority, and maintain social control over urban spaces through direct or structural violence.

7 | CONCLUDING REMARKS

Comparing the urban social histories of the two cities, I endeavoured to demonstrate the role of justice-based power vacuums in diverse urban contexts and different time periods that resulted in deprived neighbourhoods and trapped communities on the margins of society. Justice-based power vacuums enable extra-legal actors to consolidate their authority in socially diverse places and different time periods. Consequently, this study points out that the impact of authoritarian power wielded by state actors and extra-legal actors (gangs and mafias) is independent of place and time, as they result in similar forms deprivation of neighbourhoods and marginalisation of vulnerable residents. The comparative analysis of urban social histories in New York City and Palermo reveals a profound and often overlooked phenomenon: the emergence and sustenance of deprived neighbourhoods through the lens of justice-based power vacuums. These vacuums, characterized by the absence or ineffective exercise of legitimate authority, allow extra-legal actors such as gangs and mafias to wield disproportionate influence, perpetuating social inequality and marginalization. By examining diverse social contexts and historical periods, this study underscores the universality of the impact of justice-based power vacuums, transcending geographical and temporal boundaries. Whether in the early industrialization of Lower Manhattan or the political-criminal alliances in Palermo, similar patterns of deprivation and marginalization emerge, highlighting the insidious nature of these power vacuums. The erosion of state authority in the face of extra-legal actors, coupled with the proliferation of direct and structural violence, highlights the need to reconceptualize traditional power dynamics. Through the elucidation of justice-based power vacuums, this research offers a novel theoretical framework to comprehend complex hierarchical power structures and their detrimental effects on society. The two cases on New York City and Palermo illustrate how deprived neighbourhoods emerged and sustained similarly across diverse social geographies and historical periods. This clarification also facilitates the examination of justice-based power vacuums that have accelerated the magnitude of violence and deterioration of social conditions for the residents. Despite the fact that the two case studies had different social, political, and cultural contexts, justice-based power vacuums contributed very similarly to the formation of deprived neighbourhoods. This is evidenced in the case studies of this research by socio-political patterns of ethnic/religious-based conflict in urban space during early industrialization in Lower Manhattan or by political-criminal alliances dominating Palermo's urban landscape.

The oppressive forces of extra-legal actors like gangs and mafias, as well as the increasing use of direct and structural violence, stifle the role of state institutions. This comparative historical social research uncovers a novel theoretical concept—justice-based power vacuums—to shed light on convoluted hierarchical power systems and the need to consider power vacuums within the context of multiple violent authorities. This study is limited to the two case studies, and the main focus was to understand the role of coercive power and its exercise by political and non-political actors in the creation of deprived neighbourhoods. Yet the present research falls short of fully explaining the role of other key variables in the creation of deprived neighbourhoods. Future research projects

considering other factors ranging from policing neighbourhoods to education and employment opportunities may clarify more effectively the micro and macro elements in the formation of deprived neighbourhoods. Furthermore, in light of this study's limitations, future studies may benefit from using oral history methods to convey the perspectives of people who have been victims of oppression and different forms of violence in deprived neighbourhoods.

The use of violence by extra-legal authorities fosters a malevolent proclivity to devastate the already vulnerable social environment of neglected neighbourhoods. Similarly, the use of violence in deprived neighbourhoods epitomizes the locus of social deprivation by more powerful actors, whether political or non-political. The emerging pattern in the deprivation of neighbourhoods is linked to the lack of justice-based political authority and the *modus operandi* of extra-legal actors, which explains how more powerful agencies shape urban life in all of its facets by benefiting from existing social stratification and violence in distant geographies in similar ways. This eventually forces residents in those areas to confront the perils of higher crime rates, unemployment, social immobility, and spatial injustice. However, the root causes of conflict and deprivation are not easily identified in a social policy priority to address those primary causes. As a result, deprived neighbourhoods emerge and persist until the underlying causes are addressed by designing justice-based policies and creating a culture of lawfulness. Delving into the controversies associated with expert interventions can provide profound insights regarding the restrictions on expert authority in political and governmental realms (Machold, 2020). Hence, the shift may be directed towards policies that address the origins of injustice and marginalisation.

Social deprivation wreaks havoc on urban communities through direct and structural violence. We can untangle the complexities of deprived neighbourhoods at the global level from a comparative perspective by focusing on justice-based power vacuums. There is a need to delve deeper into the complex mechanisms of the relationship between society and governance in order to understand how they interact and influence each other across multiple time periods and geographical spaces. By the same token, we can stimulate new ways of thinking about the ontological and epistemological boundaries of the form of authority, especially when social deprivation and violence profoundly shape everyday life, urban space, and institutions in similar ways across different places and historical periods. This study has sought to provide a response to this challenging task by centralizing justice-based power vacuums. Yet the scholarly journey will be difficult, as we have yet to uncover many of the answers that lie beneath the surface of these complex questions.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Indicating the mafia of Corleone, which is a town close to Palermo, and the Corleonese mafia consolidated its power in Palermo starting from the 1950s and later became one of the most powerful mafia groups dominating Sicily's Cosa Nostra.
- ² http://legislature.camera.it/_bicamerale/antimafia/sportello/dossier/dossier1_4.html, accessed 10 April 2021, La Commissione Parlamentare Antimafia. (Translated by Baris Cayli Messina.)
- ³ *Omu d'onuri* in Sicilian dialect or *uomo d'onore* in Italian, which literally means 'man of honour' indicates mafia members and is mostly used by mafia members to refer to themselves. Here, Angelo Siino refers to Vincenzo Lima, the father of Salvatore Lima.
- ⁴ This indicates *the cosca* (clan—mafia family) of central Palermo. Each mafia family governs neighbourhood(s)/territories or participates in its governance with other mafia families.

- ⁵ Brandaleone family was part of the Porta Nuova family of Palermo. See Tribunale Palermo. Procedimento Pagine N. 505/95 R.G.T. contro Andreotti Giulio, Udienza del 09/01/96.
- ⁶ He directed Brancaccio's mafia after the arrest and subsequent incarceration of mafia boss Gaspare Spatuzza in 1998. His arrest in 2002 also revealed his close links with the Sicilian regional governor, Salvatore Cuffore, who were convicted for mafia collusion for 7 years in 2011 and banned from public office.
- ⁷ <https://www.domusweb.it/en/speciali/manifesta/2018/palermo-re-interpreting-pizzo-sella-for-a-different-present.html>, accessed 5 February 2021.
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ <http://m12.manifesta.org/monte-gallo/>, accessed 7 March 2020.

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