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Contents

Special Issue: *Bandits, Brigands, and Militants: The Historical Sociology of Outlaws*
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Research Articles

- Bandits, Brigands and Militants: The Historical Sociology of Outlaws
 BARIS CAYLI MESSINA 402
- The Global History of Social Dissent: Deconstructing Outlaws within the Conundrum
 of Crime, Conflict, and Violence BARIS CAYLI MESSINA 406
- "Palestine's Robin Hood": Abu-Jildeh and the Making of a Social Bandit
 SHLOMI CHETRIT 423
- The Black Sheep of the Land: Bandits in the Polish Borderlands, 1918–1925
 ALEKSANDRA POMIECKO 439
- Bandits, Militants, and Martyrs: Sub-state Violence as Claim to Authority in Late
 Antique North Africa GREGORY J. GOALWIN 452
- Reluctant Militants: Colonialism, Territory, and Sanusi Resistance on the Ottoman-
 Saharan Frontier JONATHAN M. LOHNES 466
- Eustace the Monk: Banditry, Piracy and the Limits of State Authority in the High
 Middle Ages PETER LEHR 479
- Myth of the Eternal State: Armenian Outlaws, American Outsiders, and the Ottoman
 Search for Order EMRAH SAHIN 491
- Trouble with the Outlaws: Bandits, the State, and Political Legitimacy in Greece over
 the Longue Durée SAPPHO XENAKIS 504
- National Robin Hoods and Local Avengers: On Two Shifts in the Criminal Myth of
 Rayyā and Sakīna in Present Day Egypt ELENA CHITI 517
- 'The Captain of the Band is *un Galant Uomo*': The Good Bandit from Boccaccio to
 Washington Irving ALESSANDRO CETERONI & SIMONE MARIA PULEO 535

Bandits, Brigands and Militants: The Historical Sociology of Outlaws

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Abstract

Outlaws have been prominent actors in a social context which is characterized by collective dissent, conflict, and violence. Bandits, brigands, and militants emerged in societies with the decline of social justice, political stability, and economic prosperity. Their emergence and social networks with different actors and agencies provide us principal motives to deconstruct the social identity of outlaws and determine the factors that fostered collective dissent, conflict, and violence in different societies. This special issue covers a vast geography and different time periods to theoretically and methodologically advance our knowledge in the historical sociology of outlaws. In doing so, we address complex social, political, and cultural issues that rendered outlaws inextricable part of social problems. Exploring the power and activities of outlaws in different social geographies offers us new perspectives to tackle the origins and outcomes of social, political, and cultural dissent across the world.

INTRODUCTION

The activities of bandits and brigands have rendered them formidable members of a dissident society. Poverty, social conflict, violence, and perceived injustice canalized different members of communities across the world to rebel against the more powerful authority across the world in different time periods (Barkey, 1994; Blok, 1972; Bracewell, 1992; Brown, 1990; Cayli, 2019; D'Alessandro, 1959; Frazer, 2006; Hobsbawm, 1959; 1969; Koliopoulos, 1987; Molfese, 1966; Seal, 2011; Wilson, 1988). The rebellion of outlaws marginalized them which fostered state authorities outlawing them. More powerful authorities, whether state forces or local elites, sought to suppress outlaws to gain a complete social control or used their power by cooperating with outlaws to consolidate their authority. Studying outlaws, we have the opportunity of exploring the motives that lead to resentment through which we can unveil collective anger, power hierarchies, and the tension between the state and non-state forces. As a result, researching outlaws through comparative lenses offer us a rich social laboratory to empirically analyze and delineate the roots of perceived injustice in different social geographies and historical periods. The

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objective of this special issue is to empirically examine different outlaw groups in a vast geography by covering a long historical period from the pre-Christian era to the contemporary history.

In the article of Alexandra Pomiecko, *The Black Sheep of the Land: Bandits in the Polish Borderlands, 1918–1925*, we contextualize why bandits are not always misfits, but they are ordinary people who emerged from their local communities. Pomiecko extensively documents the role played by the bandits in the north-eastern provinces of the Second Polish Republic after the First World War. Their relationships with multiple actors and agencies demonstrate that how bandits were entrenched strongly in the local community, but they also held independent power at the same time engaging with different local and foreign actors.

Shalomi Chetrit traces the criminal activities of Abu-Jildeh who was Palestine's most wanted and notorious criminal in the 1930s in his article, *Palestine's "Robin Hood": Abu-Jildeh and the Making of a Social Bandit*. As provided evidence by the cases in the previous sections of this paper, outlaws gain prestige and credibility in the eyes of local people when state forces are incapable of arresting them, even though this is not always a positive perception. Similarly, the failure of the British-led Palestine Police Force's to arrest Abu-Jildeh also contributed to the recognition of his public image and rendered him an Arab hero resisting against the authority of the British Mandate government in Palestine. In the documentation of his activities, we see three different form of Abu-Jildeh: (i) as an outlaw whose fame exceeds his own individual identity; (ii) a criminal according to police who needs to be put behind bars as soon as possible; and (iii) the local press that glorifies him in the Arab political climax in the 1930s Palestine. All these different perceptions on the same bandit character offers us the necessary context to distinguish the position of actors in their approach to the same subject based on priorities and competing interests.

Alessandro Ceteroni and Simone Maria Puleo provide a very detailed portrait of Ghino di Tacco, who was a notorious bandit in the 13th century Florence, in their article entitled: *The Captain of the Band is Un Galant Uomo: The Good Bandit from Boccaccio to Washington Irving*. Consulting the works of Boccaccio's *Decameron* (1353?) and Irving's *Tales of a Traveller* (1824), Ceteroni and Puleo make an original contribution claiming that categorizing Ghino di Tacco either as a criminal or a revolutionary might be misleading because his social portrait invokes "a symbol of reconciliation and social reintegration". The reciprocal relationship between the activities of Ghino di Tacco and the narrative of these activities in the following centuries illuminates how micro historical sociology can offer us a multi-layered analysis to uncover the salient negotiation of individual stories within the macro dynamics of social life.

Emrah Sahin's article, *The Myth of the Eternal State: Armenian Outlaws, American Outsiders, and the Ottoman Search for Order*, posits out why the state position is imperative to shed new light on society and bandits at the same time. Sahin examines an overlooked subject by concentrating on the local outlaws and their relationship with evangelical outsiders such as George Knapp, George White, and Ellen Stone in the late Ottoman century. Sahin scrutinizes the efforts of state to mitigate the risks posed by outlaws and secure the safety of its internal and external borders. Sahin's analytical chart is both innovative and original which assists us to visualize the Ottoman state authority's multiple reactions to outlaws that are categorized under the sections of rhetoric, outlook, legislation, and execution. The Ottoman state developed both a double standard in its approach to criminal activities and aimed at seizing opportunities by doing so in the age of nationalism and rebellions attempted by diverse ethnic minorities against its authority.

Pirates at sea are subject to similar conditions of bandits on the terrain. Yet what distinguishes pirates from bandits lies in their talents to control assets and rule their bands effectively at sea which requires a more strategic capacity than maintaining power on the land. In this respect, Peter Lehr's article, *Eustace the Monk: Banditry, Piracy and the Limits of State Authority in the High Middle Ages*, is an excellent example demonstrating dependency of supreme state authorities to pirates in the middle ages through exploring the case of Eustace the Monk. Yet, different from a traditional bandit, Eustace the Monk was also the seneschal of Boulogne and then became naval mercenary for King John of England and later for King Philip Augustus of France. The mutual relationship between state authorities and pirates is an evidence of the adaptable character of outlaws and push them into the grey zones of social life, so it might be misleading to categorize them superficially "good" or "bad". As many outlaws fought against

the state authority; a large number of them cooperated with the state elites. Peter Lehr remarkably deciphers the political shifts that enforced Eustace the Monks to behave strategically. The case of Eustace the Monks tersely summarizes the contentious and combative life of a pirate.

Bandits played great roles in the times of revolutions with their rebellions against the superior state authority or imperial rule particularly in modern history. Both Greek and Ottoman bandits fought fiercely to claim territories in the 19th and the 20th century. Sappho Xenakis' article, *Trouble with the Outlaws: Nationalist Romancing of Bandits' Past and its Jeopardy for the Modern Greek State*, takes the reader on a journey to explore how Greek bandits' contribution to gain independence from the Ottoman Empire reverberated in the following decades and in the contemporary history of Greece. Xenakis traces different chapters of history intriguingly and establishes a necessary connection between them. In so doing, she demonstrates how the widely acknowledged contribution of Greek outlaws to the independence of country also imposed serious risks in the emergence of different forms of actors in contemporary politics of the country as they aimed at benefiting from the legacy of klephts (anti-Ottoman insurgents) in the 19th century to realize their own political agenda. The legacy of klephts and the seizing attempts of this legacy also reveal the cultural power of political insurgency against the Ottoman Empire. The cultural power of insurgency against the foreign invasion was enriched and consolidated through poems, ballads, and plays which altogether formed the collective memory of Greek people. The same collective memory is now being used as a source of inspiration by current political actors.

If banditry and militant activities share a common ground, violence might be the most appropriate force shaping that common ground whether it is political or non-political. The article of Greg Goalwin focuses on the use of violence by bandit and militant groups for an extreme interpretation of Christian philosophy and practice in the fourth century North Africa in his article, entitled: *Bandits, Militants, and Martyrs: Sub-state Violence as Claim to Authority in Late Antique North Africa*. The sectarian violence with the surge of Donatism movement in the fourth century explicates how militant activities under the influence of a radical ideology would pose existential risks for both of the conflicting actors. Banditry and militant activities revolving around schism created by Donatism challenged state power which later enforced Constantine I to repress them harshly. The instrumental role of violence manifested through banditry activities reveals the dimension of social conflict in the political and theological polarization of the fourth century North Africa.

Rayyā and Sakīna were two Egyptian serial killers who created a great public attention and security concern as they committed heinous crimes with their husbands in the early 20th century. Elena Chiti unveils the social and cultural resonance of these two siblings and their legacy in her article, *National Robin Hoods and Local Avengers: On Two Shifts in the Criminal Myth of Rayyā and Sakīna in Present-Day Egypt*. This case study illustrates how gendered roles as well as non-political banditry activities might be perceived positively and after decades might be an obstructive source of pride for the local people and local culture. Chiti deciphers meticulously the two important shifts in the approach of people towards Rayyā and Sakīna. As demonstrated in the example of John Sheppard, a similar reaction was posed by the English people to their own local outlaw in the 18th and the 19th century. These similarities shed new light on our understanding how collective public reaction to the stories of outlaws are so similar in different geographies and socio-cultural spaces. Outlaws, who come from a lower social class but challenge a greater state authority, take the attention of public independent of time and space.

The resistance of bandits who are unified around a political ideology or fraternity made them formidable local authorities. In addition, if they have international networks that may sustain both their activities and yet may foster new risks at the same time. The article of Jonathan Lohnes, *Reluctant Militants: Colonialism, Territory, and Sanusi Resistance on the Ottoman Saharan Frontier*, examines the Sanusi brotherhood that emerged in Ottoman Cyrenaica in the mid nineteenth century. The "reluctant militants" concept innovatively coined by Lohnes responds to the vexed question; how militants react when they are subject to imposed circumstances that they are not able to control. Lohnes rigorously documents how the Sanusi found themselves in such a challenging social context as they engaged in fights in different fronts. Their fight against the French and Italian aggression and their cooperation with the Ottoman forces in Anatolia challenged them in many ways. The militant activities of the Sanusi aiming to defend

their lands against European colonialism and their utopian fraternity under the auspices of Ottoman rule geared to the Sanusi towards playing the role of reluctant militants who strove as a subaltern movement and carried a heavy burden of multiple aspirations.

Bringing together 10 articles of this special issue, we would like to reinvigorate the role of bandits, brigands, and outlaws in society. Shifting our focus towards the roots of injustice, state violence, social conflict, power competition, cultural impact of outlaws, and power hierarchy society, the special issue enriches our theoretical knowledge on the historical and sociological analyses of outlaws by providing new archival evidence. In doing so, all authors endeavored to shed new light on the motives that led to the emergence and rise of outlaws in diverse social and political geographies in different time periods. The intellectual labor of authors offers us new lenses to unveil the principal motives that created collective violence, shaped social structure, determined political response, and brought a cultural impact.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no new data were generated or analysed during the current study

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