

# VIOLENCE, ORGANIZED CRIME, AND ILLICIT DRUG MARKETS

## A Canadian case study

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### Introduction

Violence has been cited as one of the defining characteristics of organized crime (OC). In a review of the definitions of OC provided by 17 different scholars and other writers, Albanese found that 12 had included "the use of force or threat" in the definition (Albanese, 2005: 9). In his textbook on organized crime, Abadinsky (2007: 4) lists the "willingness to use violence" as a fundamental trait of organized crime. As such, violence is a "readily available and routinely accepted resource" for criminal organizations. The Commission of the European Communities and Europol (2001: 42) identify 11 fundamental traits of a criminal organization, including "Using violence or other means suitable for intimidation" as well as "Using some form of discipline and control" (which is often exercised through violence and the threat of violence). In its 1986 report, the President's Commission on Organized Crime (1986: 28) states,

Violence and the threat of violence are an integral part of the criminal group. Both are used as a means to control and protection against both members of the group who violate their commitment and those outside the group to protect it and maximize its power. Members are expected to commit, condone, or authorize violent acts.

Violence is also "commonly viewed as one of the defining features of illicit markets that differentiate them from licit markets" (Andreas and Wallman, 2009b: 225). Lethal and sublethal violence appears to be particularly endemic to illegal drug trafficking and illicit drug markets. Whether this is true, or simply based on perceptions generated from the saturated reporting of drug-related violence by the media, government reports and scholarly research, Reuter (2009: 276) acknowledges that many illicit markets, and some drug markets in particular "are clearly very violent; many participants are at risk of being killed or seriously wounded by others in the same business, either as buyers or sellers, and there are shootings of innocent bystanders". According to Lum (2008: 179), "Street-level drug activity and violence are two of the most pervasive crime-related social problems that plague large urban cities in the United States today... Additionally, a popular view exists among both law enforcement and citizens that connects drug activity to violence as well as to general notions of danger."

Evidence of the use of violence in the context of organized crime and illicit markets is borne out through the tens of thousands of murders of organized criminal offenders and the numerous violent conflicts that are fought between competing criminal entities around the world every year. In its 2011 *World Drug Report*, the

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime claims the world is “witnessing more and more acts of violence, conflicts and terrorist activities fuelled by drug trafficking and organized crime” (UNODC, 2011: 8). The epidemic of violence that currently engulfs Mexico has, at least symptomatically, been linked to the drug trade (Ríos and Shirk, 2011). In Latin America, according to the same United Nations report, “more than 25 per cent of homicides are related to organized crime and the activities of criminal gangs” and this violence has had a political and social destabilizing effect, not only on Mexico but other countries in the Americas (UNODC, 2011: 10-11).

Homicides and other forms of violence stemming from organized crime and illicit markets have emerged as a significant criminal justice issue in Canada in recent years. The frequency of lethal and sub-lethal violence at the hands of organized criminal offenders appears to have increased during a period where the national crime rate, violent crime rate, and homicide rate has precipitously declined. Data on gang- and OC-related homicides have been collected from police agencies on a national level in Canada since 1991, which is around the same time that the country’s murder rate began to drop. According to the police-reported data, between 1991 and 2008 the rate of gang- and OC-related homicides has increased. While there were only 13 homicides classified as gang- or OC-related in 1993, in 2008 there were 138 such murders reported by police. In 2010, there were 94 homicides that police considered to be gang- or OC-related, which accounted for 17% of all homicides in Canada. Like the homicide rate overall, there was a decline in the rate of gang- and OC-related homicides between 2009 and 2010. While the 2010 rate is lower than the peak of 2008, homicides relating to gangs and organized crime were still much higher in 2010 compared to when the data was first collected in the early 1990s (Hotton Mahony, 2011: 8-9).

Despite the significance of OC-related homicides worldwide and the correlation between OC, illicit markets, and violence there is surprisingly little scholarly attention paid to this issue (Geis, 1966; Andreas and Wallman, 2009a). Even the leading textbooks on OC (Abadinsky, 2012; Lyman and Potter, 2011) pay scant attention to violence, which is curious given the comparatively more in-depth coverage of other organized crime “tactics” (i.e., corruption and money laundering).

There is a small body of theoretical literature on violence in illicit markets (Geis, 1966; Black, 1976; Dintino and Martens, 1981; Lattimore et al., 1997; Miron, 1999; Brownstein, Crimmins and Spunt, 2000; Ousey and Lee, 2004; Reuter, 2009; Andreas and Wallman, 2009b; Friman, 2009), although there is a paucity of research that empirically tests these theories through case studies. Empirical research examining violence in illicit drug markets has disproportionately been dedicated to crack cocaine in the US during the late 1980s and early 1990s (Fagan and Chin, 1990; Blumstein, 1995; Venkatesh, 1996; Ousey and Lee, 2004). Considerable attention has also been paid to the issue of violence related to gangs in the US (Moore, 1990; Klein, Maxson and Cunningham, 1991; Decker and Van Winkle, 1994; 1996; Decker, 1996; Venkatesh, 1996; Howell and Decker, 1999; Decker and Curry, 2002). Youth and street gangs, however, are conceptually and qualitatively different from criminal organizations (despite some overlap) and the theories and research applied to the former are not always applicable to the latter.

The dearth of literature on violence relating to organized crime and illicit markets in Canada is particularly pronounced. Much of the coverage has come from journalistic accounts and while there is at least one book dedicated to “mafia murders” in Canada (Edwards and Nicaso, 1993), most of the publications discusses violence only within a broader context of organized crime and are primarily descriptive (Charbonneau, 1976; Dubro, 1985; 1992; Lavigne, 1999; Sher and Marsden, 2003; Schneider, 2009; Cedilot and Noël, 2011). Few, if any, studies have been published that apply theories of violence in illicit markets to Canadian cases.

In short, there is a need to examine in more depth the nature, scope, causes, and impact of violence in the context of organized crime and illicit markets, in both theoretical and empirical terms. This analysis can contribute, not only to a greater understanding of violence relating to OC and illicit markets, but can benefit the literature on lethal and sub-lethal criminal violence generally. More rigorous and extensive research and theorizing may also have considerable public policy implications in efforts to prevent and control violence stemming from organized crime and illicit markets.

The goal of this article is to make a modest contribution to the literature on violence relating to organized crime and illicit markets by summarizing selective theories on the situational causes of violence in illicit markets through a review of the extant literature. These theories will then be applied to a particular case in Canada, with a view to better understanding the sources of violence in this case study and to test and refine the theories.

The case study to be examined is considered one of the worst periodic outbreaks of violence related to organized crime and illicit markets in Canadian history: the so-called “biker war” that was fought between the Hell’s Angels and its rivals over dominance in Quebec’s lucrative wholesale cocaine market between the years 1994 and 2001. More than 150 murders were linked to this conflict, including the death of innocent bystanders and criminal justice officials.

The inter-related theories used to help locate the source of violence in this conflict are twofold: (i) illegal markets that are unstable are more prone to violence as a means to resolve conflict compared to more stable illicit markets where conflict is prevented or controlled through other non-violent means (Lattimore et al., 1997; Miron, 1999; Brownstein, Crimmins and Spunt, 2000; Ousey and Lee, 2004; Friman, 2009; Reuter, 2009) and (ii) instability in illegal markets generally result from conflict between competing criminal entities, and, as such, there is a higher risk of violence in illicit markets characterized by numerous entrepreneurial or free-lance enterprises, especially when these enterprises work outside the market’s norms, informal social controls, and established roles, responsibilities and hierarchies (Brownstein, Crimmins and Spunt, 2000).

### **Theoretical framework**

The degree of stability in an illicit market has been conceptualized as a significant variable to explain the scope of violence in illicit markets. According to Dintino and

Martens (1981: 30), “we might deduce that stable marketplaces enjoy less violence and tend to attract individuals who employ ‘conventional,’ ‘accepted’ methods to resolve conflict. Conversely, an unstable marketplace relies to a greater extent upon violence as a means of resolving conflict, and consequently attracts those who are most likely to resort to physical sanctions.” A formidable challenge in developing theories and conducting research that explore the causal relationship between market stability and the extent of violence is conceptualizing what is a stable market and what is an unstable market.

Brownstein, Crimmins and Spunt (2000) propose a conceptual framework for understanding drug market stability as a means to help explain violence. To begin with, they assert the need to view this stability/instability hypothesis in complex terms: in particular, they argue that “any definition of drug market stability must consider both structural and interactional measures”. The authors build upon the work of Lattimore et al. (1997) who emphasize the importance of interaction (i.e., competition) and downplay structure (i.e., specific market types) in determining the level of stability in an illicit drug market. However, as Brownstein, Crimmins, and Spunt (2000: 869) argue, “the problem is not one of focus, but rather one of integration. That is, to study systemic drug-related violence in the context of drug market stability, it is better to combine measures of both interaction and structure than to emphasize one or the other.”

The difference between the structural and interactional aspects of drug market stability is that the former “emphasizes form and organization” while the latter “emphasizes social relationships” (id., *ibid.*: 875). Focusing mostly on social interactions, which they define as an “active and meaningful relationship between two or more people”, the authors conceptualize stable illegal drug markets “as those that have dealing operations adhering to a business model of organization and emphasizing social interactions that occur within the market, such as those between sellers and buyers or dealers and workers”. They view unstable markets “as those that have dealing operations run by freelance entrepreneurs who commonly relate to others with whom they are in competition for customers and for the resources of the market” (*ibid.*: 885-886). In other words, stable drug markets are characterized by market participants who focus on their main internal functions (marketing, buying, selling) while unstable markets are characterized by participants who are more focused on their competition and increasing their market share.

Moreover, stable illegal drug markets adhere to the “business model”; that is, market participants are more businesslike in their operations. Transactions “are conducted according to established routines and relationships, territorial lines are clearly drawn, and order is maintained through a hierarchy of authority”. In unstable drug markets, especially those in their infancy, “lines of authority and territory are not clearly drawn, and the roles of dealers and buyers are not well established. Given the lack of established order and the uncertainty of working relationships, markets organized in this way are likely to be less stable. This form of market organization is what is called the ‘free-lance model’” (*ibid.*: 871).

In short, emphasizing the convergence between structural and interactional determinants, stable illegal drug markets are (i) structurally characterized by

manufacturing, distribution, and trade that is “organized around socially controlled relationships between producers and distributors, employers and employees, and merchants and consumers” and (ii) are “more likely to be oriented toward interactions within established businesses, with dealers, workers, and customers involved largely in transactions with one another for the purpose of doing business”. In contrast, less stable markets are (i) structurally “more likely to involve entrepreneurial or free-lance enterprises, with business operators, workers and customers operating outside of both the law and the social controls of any established drug business hierarchies” while (ii) “they are more likely to be oriented toward interactions external to individual established businesses, with dealers competing with one another over access to customers and resources” (ibid.: 876).

To substantiate their conceptual model, Brownstein, Crimmins and Spunt cite the violence that characterized the crack cocaine markets in American cities during the 1980s. They argue that “the level of violent crime in particular cities increased as crack markets emerged in those cities, and then it decreased as the local market became more stable”. As such, “violence was a less likely outcome when a local drug market was populated by buyers and sellers with standardized and established roles and relationships” (ibid.: 869). In these stable, organized drug markets, social relations were “ordered by role specialization and hierarchy” and there was more likely to be present “considerable interaction internal to established businesses. That is, relations would mostly involve customary exchanges between dealers and their workers or sellers and their customers in the course of routine commercial transactions” (ibid.: 875-876). In contrast, violence was at the highest level when the crack cocaine markets were unstable, which entailed “considerable interaction external to individual businesses. That is, different suppliers, distributors, and entrepreneurs would regularly interact in competition with each other in an environment where market shares are still available and market order has yet to be established” (ibid.: 875).

In sum, these authors conclude that “systemic drug-related violence is more likely to be found in drug markets that are unstable” (ibid.: 886). These unstable markets are often emergent and characterized by what economists call “pure competition”. In such illicit markets, producers or sellers are more pre-occupied with their competitors and gaining (or retaining) market share, which then contributes to instability and hence introduces a greater risk of violence as a means to regulate the conflict that emerges from this competition. In contrast, illicit markets characterized by an oligopolistic or monopolistic environment may be more stable due to less competition (and hence fewer disputes). In the context of illegal drug markets, Lattimore et al. (1997: 72) write: “Many interpret stability to mean the presence or absence of market competition that promotes conflict among drug dealers.” Friman (2009: 287) agrees, viewing unstable illegal markets as highly competitive and, as such, more prone to violence. In particular, he writes:

... the use of violence between drug organizations is more likely during disputes over the control of lucrative distribution networks and market share. Once markets are consolidated in the hands of organized networks, however, the levels of large-scale

violence tend to decrease. A subsequent erosion of consolidation — due to factors including shifting power balances within or between contending organizations, the impact of state enforcement efforts, and the erosion of accommodations due to market saturation or broader economic pressures — can unleash new waves of consolidation efforts and associated violence.

As emphasized throughout the extant literature, much of the conflict that has arisen between crime groups has been the results of competition over a particular territory and/or a share of an illicit market (Geis, 1966; Black, 1976; Dintino and Martens, 1981; Miron, 1999; Brownstein, Crimmins and Spunt, 2000; Ousey and Lee, 2004; Andreas and Wallman, 2009b; Friman, 2009; Reuter, 2009). As such, the level of competition is one variable used to measure the stability of, and hence the level of conflict and violence in, an illicit market.

The implication is that once a particular criminal group has achieved a monopoly (or participates in a network or a cartel arrangement with other market participants), there is greater market stability and hence less violence. Reuter (2009) argues that because violence is generally used less internally within criminal organizations (compared to the more frequent use of externally-oriented violence among competing entities), a large criminal group that monopolizes a particular market or territory will engender relatively less violence compared to “atomistic” markets characterized by a number of competing groups. “Thus the violence in atomistic markets has a narrower set of sources (competition and transactions) than that in markets serviced by larger selling organizations (which also include disciplinary and successional acts). Transactions within an organization rather than between independent agents may have lower probability of generating violence because they are part of longer-term relationships, which, through development of trust, allow for other modes of resolution.” (Reuter, 2009: 277)

### **Case study: the Quebec biker war of the 1990s**

The Canadian case study used to test the afore-mentioned theories is the so-called “biker war” that was fought between the Hell’s Angels motorcycle club and its rivals — in particular the Rock Machine — over dominance in Quebec’s wholesale cocaine market. This section will briefly describe, in chronological order, some of the pertinent violent milestones that took place during this conflict. An analysis of the sources of this conflict, as viewed through the lens of the previously discussed theories, will follow.

The first salvo in the war is believed to have been launched by the Rock Machine when, on July 13, 1994, Pierre Daoust was fatally shot at the Harley-Davidson repair shop he owned in a Montreal suburb. Daoust was linked to a Hell’s Angels’ affiliate club, the Death Riders. The next day police arrested five members of the Rock Machine in Montreal as they were preparing for an attack on the Evil Ones, another outlaw biker club affiliated with the Hell’s Angels. During the arrest, police seized three radio-detonated bombs, twelve pounds of dynamite, and a silencer-equipped pistol (*Montreal Gazette*, November 8, 1995; Lavigne, 1999: 19).

On October 19 of the same year, a cocaine trafficker named Maurice Lavoie was murdered as he was getting out of his car at home. Lavoie had recently begun buying cocaine from the Hell's Angels, which infuriated his long time suppliers, the Pelletier brothers, who wholesaled cocaine to street dealers in Montreal. Police viewed Lavoie's murder as a warning from the Pelletiers to their other retail dealers. A little more than a week later, Sylvain Pelletier was killed when a bomb planted in his jeep exploded. Pelletier had allegedly been marked for execution by the Hell's Angels in retaliation for the death of Lavoie and for his refusal to be absorbed by the motorcycle gang's cocaine distribution network. The death of a free-lance cocaine wholesaler like Pelletier escalated the nascent conflict to another level (Lavigne, 1999: 20). By the end of 1994, at least seven other men were killed, all of whom were members or associates of the Rock Machine.

The second half of 1995 would be a pivotal period in the biker war. Although it was long from over, a single violent act would spark public outrage when, on August 9, 1995, the war claimed its first innocent victim. A remote-controlled bomb believed to be planted by the Hell's Angels in a car parked across from a school in Montreal was detonated, critically wounding 11-year old Daniel Desrochers. He died a few days later.

On September 15 of that year, Richard (Crow) Émond was shot dead in the parking of a Montreal shopping centre. Émond had recently become president of the Trois Rivières chapter of the Hell's Angels in Quebec. Later that night, three men were killed when a bomb they were attempting to plant outside the clubhouse of the Jokers, a biker club controlled by Émond, exploded prematurely. By the end of November 1995, four more deaths were attributed to the biker war. Among those victims was Michel Boyer, an associate of the Rock Machine who was caught by police a year earlier with dynamite that was to be used to kill Maurice (Mom) Boucher, a full patch member of the Quebec Hell's Angels and the head of its most powerful chapter: The Nomads (RCMP, 2002, 7; *Montreal Gazette*, September 22, 1995).

By 1996, the war expanded from Montreal to Quebec City when the Rock Machine chapter in that city joined forces with the Roberge brothers, an independent drug trafficking group, to wage what the Criminal Intelligence Service Canada (CISC) called "a ferocious struggle with the Hell's Angels for control of bars and drinking establishments involved in the distribution and sale of drugs" (CISC, 1997: 13). The surge of violence in Quebec City began that year with the January death of Hell's Angels' associate Glenn Cormier. In March, a Rock Machine-affiliated drug dealer named Roland Lebrasseur was murdered by a member of the Rockers, a puppet club of the Hell's Angels' Nomads chapter (*Montreal Gazette*, May 22, 2002; Sher and Marsden, 2003: 64). In July, the rivals traded two more deaths of low-level drug dealers. In October, two senior members of the Montreal chapter of the Rock Machine were gunned down in a Chinese restaurant in Verdun, a borough of Montreal. In December, Bruno Van Lerberghe, a member of the Quebec City Hell's Angels chapter was murdered when a gunman walked into a restaurant and fired six shots at him (*Canadian Press*, December 23, 1996). Before the end of the year, police attributed the murders of three more men to the biker war.

For Criminal Intelligence Service Canada analyst Jean-Pierre Levesque, 1997 proved to be “the year outlaw bikers went from waging a turf war to a total war” (*Canadian Press*, December 17, 1997). At least 28 more deaths were attributed to the biker war, which meant by year’s end, the conflict had claimed at least 86 lives since it began. In addition, there were “71 attempted murders, 81 bombings, and 93 cases of arson against gang-related businesses and bars, for a total of 313 violent incidents” since the conflict began (CISC, 1998, 13). One high profile murder victim in 1997 was Scott Steinert, a member of the Montreal Hell’s Angels chapter who was bludgeoned to death on November 4. Steinert supervised a team that was responsible for manufacturing and planting bombs and participated in the assassination of rivals. His bodyguard Donald Magnusen was killed at the same time (*Montreal Gazette*, June 7, 1997; April 24, 1999). While police logically deduced the two were killed by the enemies of the Hell’s Angels, information provided to police by an informant working inside the Hell’s Angels indicated that both had in fact been purged by their own club. Steinert’s violent ouster was because he was blamed for the bomb that killed Daniel Desrochers, and, along with Magnusen, was becoming too undisciplined (Cherry, 2005: 90-93; Sher and Marsden, 2003: 62-63).

On February 20, 1998, Rock Machine member Denis Belleau was murdered at a restaurant in Quebec City. The killing was the third attack stemming from the violent conflict in the region over the past ten days (*Canadian Press*, February 21, 1998). A week later, a charred, fingerless corpse was discovered in a wooded area in Quebec’s Eastern townships, but it wasn’t until a month later that the deceased was identified as André Tousignant, a prospect with the Hell’s Angels Nomads chapter. Tousignant was killed on the orders of Maurice Boucher, the president of the Nomads chapter, who was worried that he was a Crown witness (Sher and Marsden, 2003: 141). Over the remainder of 1998, at least 20 more people were murdered as part of the war, most of who were allied with the Rock Machine.

Among the murders attributed to the conflict in 1999 were Richard Relative, the brother-in-law of Salvatore and Giovanni Cazzetta, founders of the Rock Machine, and Tony Plescio, another Rock Machine member, who was shot six times outside a McDonald’s restaurant after dropping his children off for a party (*Montreal Gazette*, July 24, 1999; Cherry, 2005: 133-134).

In 2000, more than 30 people with suspected ties to either side of the conflict were murdered, including 11 Hell’s Angels associates. In addition, on April 17, Norman Hamel, a full patch member of the Hell’s Angels and one of the founders of the Nomads, was killed with two gun shots while being chased through a parking lot in Laval, a suburb of Montreal (*Globe and Mail*, July 24, 2000). By the end of 2000, while sporadic violence continued, the worst of the conflict appeared to be over. On September 26, Maurice Boucher, along with other senior members of the Quebec Hell’s Angels, met with the new Rock Machine leader Frédéric Faucher and three of his lieutenants to negotiate a truce. While it is conceivable that the two sides were anxious to end the bloodshed — especially the Rock Machine, which was losing the battle of attrition — speculation mounted that the leaders of the two sides were under tremendous pressure by Vito Rizzuto, the head of Montreal’s mafia family, to negotiate a truce because the war had brought too much attention and disruption

to the city's criminal underworld. On October 8, at a restaurant in downtown Montreal, Boucher and Faucher announced that a ceasefire had been reached (*Globe and Mail*, October 10, 2000; *Canadian Press*, October 10, 2000).

In addition to this tenuous armistice, other developments intervened to help put an end to the bloodshed. The first was the arrest of Maurice Boucher on murder charges. The second was a massive police operation launched against the Hell's Angels in Quebec that culminated on March 28, 2001, when more than 2,000 police officers raided the clubhouses, homes, and businesses of the Hell's Angels and its affiliates in the province. Dubbed Operation Springtime, it involved 288 police searches in 27 locations and targeted for arrest 142 individuals, including 80 of Quebec's 106 full-patch Hell's Angels members, the entire Nomad chapter, as well as every member in the Hell's Angels affiliate clubs, the Rockers and the Evil Ones. In the end, 42 members of the Hell's Angels (including all the Nomads) and the Rockers were each charged with 13 counts of first-degree murder, three counts of attempted murder, various drug trafficking offences, and a new offence of participating in a criminal organization (RCMP, 2002; Sher and Marsden, 2003: 255; Cherry, 2005).

Perhaps the most fitting symbol of the war's end occurred on May 6, 2002, when Maurice Boucher was found guilty of first degree murder in the death of two prison guards and was sentenced to life imprisonment, with no chance of parole for at least 25 years. A year earlier, on May 11, 2001, Frédéric Faucher pleaded guilty to 28 criminal charges and was sentenced to 12 years in prison. As part of his plea agreement, Faucher admitted to being involved in seven bombings that killed two rival gang members between 1996 and 1997 (*Montreal Gazette*, December 7, 2000; March 3, 2001; May 1, 2001; *National Post*, May 12, 2001).

By June of 2004, the majority of the Hell's Angels charged as part of Operation Springtime was found guilty. Most were convicted of or pleaded guilty to charges of drug trafficking, conspiracy to murder, and participation in a criminal organization. At least eight members of the Nomads ended up serving sentences of 20 years or more in addition to the life sentence imposed on their leader, Maurice Boucher.

## Discussion

Relying on the "unstable market" theory to pinpoint the origins of violence in this or any case study is precarious due to the inherent challenges in determining the extent to which an illegal market is stable, let alone establishing the sources of market instability. In addition, there is the related difficulty of rigorously collecting empirical data that can reliably measure the level of stability in an illicit market. These methodological and analytical challenges arise from the secretive nature of illegal underground markets and the lack of reliable quantitative or qualitative data that can be collected from particular case studies, including the case studied here.

Notwithstanding these caveats, the starting point when analyzing the issue of drug market stability is to employ both structural and interactional measures (in an integrative fashion). For Brownstein, Crimmins and Spunt (2000) unstable illicit

markets are characterized by two over-arching traits: (i) “structurally, less-stable markets are more likely to involve entrepreneurial or free-lance enterprises, with business operators, workers and customers operating outside of both the law and the social controls of any established drug business hierarchies” and (ii) these enterprises “are more likely to be oriented toward interactions external to individual established businesses, with dealers competing with one another over access to customers and resources” (id., *ibid.*: 876). Unstable markets that are characterized by these traits tend to be in their infancy.

Applying this theoretical framework to the case study, it can be argued that the Quebec cocaine market was characterized by some semblance of instability immediately before and during the conflict. This instability, however, did not emanate from the lack of maturity of Quebec’s wholesale cocaine market; cocaine had been imported and distributed in the province since at least the turn of the century (Schneider, 2009). The importation and distribution of cocaine in the province began to dramatically escalate in the 1970s and was sustained throughout the 1980s and early 1990s (Charbonneau, 1976; Appleton and Clarke, 1990; de Champlain, 1990; Edwards, 1991; RCMP, 1991; Lafrenière and Spicer, 2002; Schneider, 2009).

In addition, the instability did not derive from pure market competition among numerous free-lance operators. This argument can be made for at least two intersecting reasons. First, the wholesale cocaine market in Montreal during the 1980s and early 1990s was more of an oligopoly dominated by four main criminal groups. Second, during this period the free lance cocaine wholesalers and retailers operated in a relative peaceful coexistence in the province. Violence was minimized in the Quebec cocaine market in the 1980s and early 1990s because it was, to use the terminology of Brownstein, Crimmins and Spunt (2000: 869, 875), a stable, organized drug market “populated by buyers and sellers with standardized and established roles and relationships” wherein these social relations were “ordered by role specialization and hierarchy”.

Specifically, Quebec’s wholesale cocaine industry just prior to the eruption of violence in the mid-1990s was not characterized by pure competition made up of numerous free lance suppliers, but more resembled an oligopoly made up of four major players who dominated both importing and high-level wholesaling functions. These four entities were the Hell’s Angels, the West End Gang, the Rizzuto “mafia” family, and the Colombian cocaine “cartels” (the Medellin cartel in the 1980s and the Cali cartel in the early 1990s). While cocaine importing and wholesaling in Quebec was controlled by three of the most powerful (transnational) organized crime genres that existed in North America (outlaw motorcycle gangs, La Cosa Nostra and the Colombian cartels) during the 1990s, Montreal’s West End gang may have been the single largest importer of cocaine in the province (Sher and Marsden, 2003; Cherry, 2005; Schneider, 2009). The West End Gang prospered among these well-established and powerful transnational criminal groups for at least three reasons: (1) it had a “role specialization” in that it focused primarily on importing drugs (cocaine and hashish), which was made possible through the influence it had at the Port of Montreal where a number of corrupt dock workers and supervisors were on its payroll and (2) as an importer, the West

End Gang counted as some of its key customer the Hell's Angels and the Rizzuto crime family (although both also coordinated large shipments of cocaine and hashish into Canada).

What may have helped to limit violence in Quebec's wholesale cocaine market in the 1980s and early 1990s was a level of cooperation, coordination and peaceful coexistence between these four groups. The Hell's Angels were customers of both the Colombian cartels in the 1980s and the West End Gang in the 1990s; the West End Gang and the Rizzuto crime group purchased cocaine directly from Colombian cartels, while Maurice Boucher collaborated with the Rizzuto family to import cocaine into Canada (Edwards, 1991; Lavigne, 1999; Sher and Marsden, 2003; Cherry, 2005; Lamothe and Humphreys, 2006; Schneider, 2009). The groups also co-existed peacefully because the West End Gang and the Colombian cocaine cartels largely focused on importing drugs, leaving mid-level wholesaling (in Montreal) to the Hell's Angels and the Rizzuto mafia group. There is also evidence suggesting that the Hell's Angels and the Italian mafia divided up Montreal's cocaine market between themselves and even negotiated what the price of a kilo would sell for in the city (Cherry, 2005: 105, 153; Sher and Marsden, 2003: 227).

The limited conflict between these powerful groups can be explained by other factors, including a common aura of respect for and deference to Vito Rizzuto, the head of the Italian mafia group in Montreal in the 1980s and 1990s, who was viewed as the most powerful criminal offender in Quebec (and all of Canada). Rizzuto has been depicted as a major force in forging cooperation and peaceful relations among these four criminal groups as well as between these groups and independent cocaine wholesalers and retailers (Cherry, 2005; Schneider, 2009; Lamothe and Humphreys, 2006).

In addition to this oligopoly of cocaine importers and wholesalers, there were a number of other independent cocaine wholesalers in Montreal and throughout Quebec, many of whom were already purchasing drugs from these four dominant groups, while others imported and wholesaled autonomously. However, the level of conflict and violence in the cocaine markets in Montreal and throughout Quebec was generally low in the 1980s and 1990s. This was because both wholesalers and retailers (including the owners of bars in Montreal where cocaine was sold) were free to buy and sell cocaine on the open market. As Lavigne (1999: 23) states, "Montreal gangs have traditionally shared the lucrative drug market". This *laissez faire* environment and the tolerance for independent wholesalers was a deliberate way to keep the peace in Montreal's illicit markets, a defining hallmark of Vito Rizzuto's leadership.

In sum, key assumptions underlying the theories on violence in illicit markets cannot be applied unequivocally to this case study. First, to argue that the violent biker war in Quebec resulted from the instability of the wholesale cocaine market in the early 1990s, which in turn was due to conditions of pure competition or extensive free-lancing would be inaccurate. Despite the existence of free lance wholesalers and retailers, the cocaine market in Quebec was characterized by a hierarchy and at the top was an oligopoly of four dominant groups, which operated as a cartel due to the level of cooperation and price-fixing that existed between them. In other

words, the Quebec cocaine market in the 1980s and early 1990s was a stable, organized drug market due to a well established and respected hierarchy that was controlled by a cartel arrangement of four dominant groups. Not only did these powerful groups co-exist peacefully, but they also maintained a semblance of peace in a relatively open drug market by reinforcing social relations through this hierarchy and through established relationships and role specialization among drug importers, wholesalers, and retailers. As such, cocaine wholesalers and retailers did not, generally speaking, operate outside of the social controls established through this hierarchy and the market was characterized by “considerable interaction internal to established businesses” (i.e., “customary exchanges between dealers and their workers or sellers and their customers in the course of routine commercial transactions”) (Brownstein, Crimmins and Spunt, 2000: 875-876).

The relative market stability and peaceful coexistence was irreparably disrupted when the Hell’s Angels began a drive in the mid-1990s to consolidate all high-level cocaine wholesaling in Montreal and, ultimately, throughout Quebec. The specific factors that contributed to the instability of the wholesale cocaine market and the violence that ensued can be categorized as such: (i) the Hell’s Angels’ drive to monopolize all cocaine wholesaling and establish overall hegemony in Quebec’s criminal underworld, which is backed by its long-standing penchant for monopolies in illicit markets and its use of violence (in part to support territorially-based monopolies), (ii) the introduction of certain dominant personalities in leadership capacities in the Hell’s Angels that exacerbated the monopolistic and violent tendencies of the group, and (iii) the entry and/or aggressive expansion of free lance wholesalers and retailers that directly challenged the Hell’s Angels’ market share and its quest for hegemonic control over Quebec’s cocaine market.

These three factors coalesced to create considerable instability and conflict in Quebec’s cocaine market. The Hell’s Angels — and especially its leader in Quebec, Maurice Boucher — was the prime source of this instability through its expansionist policies and its disruption of the established hierarchy and relatively peaceful social relations, which resulted from its efforts to put an end to the open cocaine market where independent wholesalers and retailers were free to purchase and sell cocaine. Their attempts at consolidating cocaine wholesaling in Montreal were particularly unsettling in that they undermined standardized roles and relationships (the independence and economic livelihood of free lance wholesalers and retailers). As such, the environment in the cocaine market went from peaceful coexistence (characterized by “considerable interaction internal to established businesses”) to conflict and externally-oriented violence (“considerable interaction external to individual businesses”) (id., *ibid.*: 875, 876). The sources of conflict and violence were not intrinsic to an environment of pure competition involving many free lance entrepreneurs. Instead, it appears to have stemmed from the oligopoly that the Hell’s Angels were successful in establishing in Montreal’s cocaine market and the complete monopoly towards which they were ultimately striving.

## Conclusion

Much of the violence in the Quebec biker war resulted from conflict over competition in the wholesale distribution of cocaine in that province, and Montreal in particular. But it was also a battle over whether a particular criminal group (the Hell's Angels) would exercise a monopoly in that illegal market and, by extension, the efforts by free lance wholesalers and retailers to remain independent.

The theory that violence stems from instability within an illicit market is applicable to this case study. Much of the instability in Montreal's wholesale cocaine market at the time stemmed from the oligopoly that the Hell's Angels maintained in Montreal and its aggressive goal of establishing an outright monopoly. Prior to the Maurice Boucher's drive to monopolize the cocaine market in that city, it was relatively stable and free from excessive violence because, according to the theoretical model of Brownstein, Crimmins and Spunt (2000: 871), Montreal's cocaine market was populated by buyers and sellers with standardized and established roles and relationships, transactions were conducted according to these established roles, routines and relationships, territorial lines were clearly drawn, and order was maintained through a hierarchy of authority. At the top of this hierarchy of authority in Montreal's wholesale cocaine market were the Hell's Angels and the Italian Mafia, and the established roles, routines, and relationships were characterized by a tolerance for independent wholesalers in Montreal, as long as they did not encroach on the territories or customers of the Hell's Angels or the Italian mafia clan.

Conversely, according to Brownstein, Crimmins and Spunt (2000: 871), in unstable drug markets "lines of authority and territory are not clearly drawn, and the roles of dealers and buyers are not well established". This argument can also be applied to the more dangerous and volatile environment created by the aggressive monopolistic drive of the Hell's Angels in Montreal as they attempted to impose new, more strict lines of authority, re-draw territorial boundaries (to favour themselves), and create new roles and relationships among the Hell's Angels and independent cocaine wholesalers and retailers in the city and the province.

The aspect of this theory that cannot be applied to this case study is the argument that the conditions of instability in illicit drug markets result from an environment of pure competition whereby "different suppliers, distributors, and entrepreneurs would regularly interact in competition with each other in an environment where market shares are still available and market order has yet to be established" (Brownstein, Crimmins and Spunt, 2000: 869). Notwithstanding the authority of the Hell's Angels and the Italian mafia in Montreal's cocaine wholesale market during the 1980s and early 1990s, the market appeared to be more stable when there was greater competition among a number of freelance wholesalers. During the Hell's Angels' monopolistic drive, and even after they achieved hegemony in Montreal's cocaine market, instability and violence persisted, due to the unrelenting aggressive expansion of the Hell's Angels, its determination to eliminate or co-opt competitors and independent market wholesalers, and the resistance to this monopoly by the Hell's Angels' galvanized enemies.

This conclusion echoes the argument that violent conflict in illicit markets ensues as organized criminal groups endeavour to monopolize market share or a particular geographic territory. As Abadinsky (2007: 4) writes: "An OC group eschews competition. It strives for hegemony over a particular geographic area (a metropolitan area or section of a city) a particular 'industry', legitimate or illegitimate (for example gambling, trucking, loansharking), or a combination of both (for example, loansharking in a particular area or the wholesale cocaine market in a city)." These groups try to gain and maintain monopolies through violence, the threat of violence, or by corrupt relationships with government, businesses, or union officials.

Thus, based on this case study, it can be argued that illicit markets characterized by oligopolistic or monopolistic conditions may experience conflict and violence because these conditions inhibit the type of pure competition that is more natural for illicit drug markets due to the relative ease of entry of participants (wholesalers and retailers) into such markets (Smith, 1975; Reuter, 1983: 185).

This case study also highlights the significant influence that dominant individual actors in illicit markets can play in fostering instability, conflict and violence. Just like in wars and other international conflicts that are singularly attributed to powerful individuals who seek dominance (e.g., Hitler, Napoleon, etc.), conflicts in illicit markets driven by a desire for hegemony can be attributed to powerful individual actors (in this case, Maurice Boucher). The role that hegemonic quests by organized criminal entities play in causing instability and violence in illicit markets may be supported by another Montreal-based case study: during the 1970s, the Dubois Brothers were behind a similar attempt to monopolize the city's illicit drug markets, and this was also accompanied by a significant level of violence (Schneider, 2009: 270-274).

In sum, the sources of the Quebec biker war can be viewed through the broad theoretical framework that locates the sources of violence in conflicts among competing participants in unstable illicit markets. Yet, this theoretical framework must be flexible enough to recognize that instability, conflict, and violence does not exclusively emanate from pure competition, but may also result from oligopolistic and even monopolistic conditions (especially when these conditions limit the organically competitive nature of illicit markets). This conclusion, however, is limited to this one case study. More empirical research, involving other case studies, is needed to explore the causal relationship between competitive conditions in illicit markets and the scope of violence in such markets and, more specifically, the type of market conditions that pose the greatest risk to stability and amity in illicit markets: pure competition, oligopoly or monopoly.

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### **Resumo/abstract/résumé/resumen**

*Violência, crime organizado e mercados de drogas ilícitas: um estudo de caso canadiano*

Este artigo testa duas teorias inter-relacionadas sobre as causas situacionais de violência nos mercados de drogas ilícitas: (i) os mercados de drogas que são instáveis são mais propensos à violência e (ii) existe um maior risco de instabilidade e, portanto, de conflito e violência, em mercados de drogas caracterizados por pura concorrência. Estas teorias aplicam-se à violência que ocorreu entre os Hell's Angels e os seus rivais pela posição dominante no mercado lucrativo de cocaína no Quebec durante a década de 1990. A teoria de que a violência decorre da instabilidade num mercado ilícito é aplicável a este estudo de caso. No entanto, o mercado de cocaína no Quebec foi caracterizado por condições oligopolísticas e a violência que se seguiu resultou dos esforços dos Hell's Angels para manterem a hegemonia no mercado. Este artigo argumenta que as condições de oligopólio e monopólio em mercados de drogas ilícitas podem aumentar o risco de conflito e violência, porque inibem a concorrência.

Palavras-chave crime organizado, mercados ilícitos, violência.

*Violence, organized crime, and illicit drug markets: a Canadian case study*

This article tests two inter-related theories on the situational causes of violence in illicit drug markets: (i) drug markets that are unstable are more prone to violence and (ii) there is a higher risk of instability, and hence conflict and violence, in drug markets characterized by pure competition. These theories are applied to the violence that occurred between the Hell's Angels and its rivals over dominance in Quebec's lucrative cocaine market during the 1990s. The theory that violence stems from instability in an illicit market is applicable to this case study. However, Quebec's cocaine market was characterized by oligopolistic conditions and the ensuing violence stemmed from the Hell's Angels' efforts to maintain hegemony in that market. This paper argues that oligopolistic and monopolistic conditions in illicit drug markets may heighten the risk of conflict and violence because such conditions inhibit competition.

Keywords organized crime, illicit markets, violence.

*Violence, crime organisé et marchés des drogues illicites : une étude de cas canadienne*

Cet article teste deux théories liées entre elles concernant les causes situationnelles de la violence sur les marchés des drogues illicites : (i) les marchés des drogues qui sont instables sont plus enclins à la violence, (ii) il y a un plus grand risque d'instabilité et, par conséquent, de conflit et de violence, sur les marchés des drogues caractérisés par la pure concurrence. Ces théories sont appliquées à la violence qui s'est produite entre les Hell's Angels et leurs rivaux pour occuper une position dominante sur le marché lucratif de la cocaïne au Québec dans les années 1990. La théorie selon laquelle la violence découle de l'instabilité sur un marché illicite est applicable à cette étude de cas. Cependant, le marché de la cocaïne au Québec était caractérisé par des conditions oligopolistiques et la violence qui a suivi était le fruit des efforts des Hell's Angels pour maintenir l'hégémonie sur le marché. Cet article soutient que les conditions oligopolistiques et monopolistiques sur les marchés des drogues illicites peuvent accroître le risque de conflit et de violence, car ces conditions freinent la concurrence.

Mots-clés crime organisé, marchés illicites, violence.

*Violencia, crimen organizado y mercados de drogas ilícitas: un estudio de caso canadiense*

Este artículo prueba dos teorías inter-relacionadas sobre las causas situacionales de violencia en los mercados de drogas ilícitas: (i) los mercados de drogas que son inestables son más propensos a la violencia y (ii) existe un mayor riesgo de inestabilidad, y, por lo tanto, de conflicto y violencia, en mercados de drogas caracterizados por pura competencia. Estas teorías se aplican a la violencia que ocurrió entre los Hell's Angels y sus rivales por la posición dominante en el mercado lucrativo de cocaína en Quebec durante la década de 1990. La teoría de que la violencia resulta de la inestabilidad en un mercado ilícito es aplicable a este estudio de caso. Sin embargo, el mercado de cocaína en Quebec fue caracterizado por condiciones oligopolistas y la violencia consecuente de los esfuerzos de los Hell's Angels para mantener la hegemonía en el mercado. Este artículo argumenta que las condiciones oligopolistas y monopolistas en mercados de drogas ilícitas pueden aumentar el riesgo de conflicto y violencia, porque tales condiciones inhiben la competencia.

Palabras-clave crimen organizado, mercados ilícitos, violencia.

