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Petter Gottschalk

BI Norwegian Business School, petter.gottschalk@bi.no

Vesna Markovic

University of New Haven, VMarkovic@NewHaven.edu

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Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs): The Case of Combating Criminal Biker Gangs

Petter Gottschalk¹

BI Norwegian Business School, Oslo, Norway

Vesna Markovic²

University of New Haven, Connecticut, United States of America

Abstract

Transnational crime organizations (TCOs) represent a challenge to societies all over the world. This article explores combating criminal biker gangs, where stakeholders in the community and governments vary in their responses. These stakeholders include the government, law enforcers, courts, and the communities. The variation in responses is conceptualized in terms of a four stage of growth model. This model includes criminal biker gang members being treated as movie stars, individual criminals, organized criminals, and finally, enemies of the state. A stage model is a theoretical approach to understanding different levels of maturity in combating criminal biker gangs. Due to the great presence and threat from biker gangs, Norway and Australia are used as examples to illustrate the model. Further research should involve developing existing and new criteria for determination of maturity level in combating biker gangs, as well as applying such criteria to other countries with large biker gang populations.

Keywords: Organized Crime, Stage Model, Hells Angels, Transnational Organized Crime, Biker Gangs, Law Enforcement.

Introduction

Transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) have a profound impact on countries around the world. Transnational crime encompasses illegal activities that are carried out across national borders; this includes the planning or execution of the illegal activities. Over the last several decades, TCOs represent an increasing threat to societies all over the world (Markovic, 2013) in terms of drug trafficking and other kinds of crime (Markovic, 2014). Globalization has quickly facilitated the spread of these criminal activities. There are many TCOs operating worldwide including outlaw motorcycle gangs, or biker gangs. The Hells Angels Motorcycle Gang (HAMG) themselves are present in nearly 60

¹ Professor, Department of Leadership and Organizational Behavior, BI Norwegian Business School, 0486 Oslo, Norway. Email: petter.gottschalk@bi.no

² Assistant Professor and Assistant Dean, Department of Criminal Justice, Henry C. Lee College of Criminal Justice and Forensic Science, University of New Haven, West Haven, CT 06516 United States of America. Email: vmarkovic@newhaven.edu

countries worldwide and pose a serious threat globally. Although there is a large worldwide presence of these outlaw motorcycle gangs, they are faced with varying degrees of public skepticism, legal regulations, and law enforcement across the globe. In Australia in 2014, for example, the High Court rejected a challenge by bikers to a law aimed at preventing biker gang members from associating with each other. The law was introduced in 2012 following a wave of gun violence involving criminal biker gangs and other organized crime groups (Berkovic, 2014).

Biker gangs such as the HAMC, Bandidos, Coffin Cheaters, and Outlaws operate on a transnational basis in their legal, as well as, illegal activities. Barker (2011) suggests that many American-based motorcycle clubs have evolved into biker gangs involved in organized crime nationally and internationally. Depending on social and political perceptions of these gangs by community stakeholders, laws and regulations to combat them vary among countries. While some countries have made it illegal to be a member, other countries are struggling to define boundaries for club activities as well as defining who are affiliated to clubs.

The focus of this paper is local responses to global challenges from transnational criminal organizations. The paper will examine how various countries combat outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMGs), and how stakeholders in the community and government respond to these TCOs. The extent of combating criminal Motor cycle (MC) gangs globally is conceptualized in terms of a stage model (Ditlev-Simonsen & Gottschalk, 2011) as a theorizing procedure (Michailova et. al., 2014; Weick, 1995, 1999). The purpose of this model is to illustrate criteria and magnitude of community stakeholders' interests including legislation, law enforcement efforts, and community perceptions applied in different countries. By using the model for a specific country, that country can identify its own level of law enforcement as such and as compared to other countries. Furthermore, the model can illustrate how difficult it is to police TCOs such as biker gangs, since perceptions and attitudes towards gang members vary globally (Barker, 2011; Gottschalk, 2013; Lavigne, 1996; Quinn & Koch, 2003; Shields, 2012).

Criminal Biker Gangs

Transnational criminal organizations represent a threat to security and economy both domestically and internationally. TCOs are organizations that conduct and carry out criminal operations across international borders (Markovic, 2013). TCOs may plan a crime in one country, carry it out in another, escape to a third, and keep the proceeds in a fourth country. Transnational crime has three broad objectives: provision of illicit goods, provision of illicit services, and the infiltration of business and government operations (Albanese, 2012). TCOs include groups such as La Cosa Nostra based in Italy, Los Zetas based in Mexico, and HAMC based in the United States. TCOs vary in their structure, culture, and fields of activity (Paraschiv, 2013).

Criminal biker gangs such as HAMC are especially relevant in a transnational perspective, as they have an established presence all over the world. Barker (2011) argues that criminal biker gangs in the United States have exported organized crime to the world. While global leaders tend to monitor activities of HAMC from the United States, local activities in Europe, for example, are monitored from their hub in the Netherlands. HAMC has registered their trademarks globally, and they launch lawsuits to prevent copyright infringement. They have successfully sued Disney Pictures to change a movie

script, and legally forced an author who used HAMC winged death head on the cover of his book to remove it (Fleischhaker, 2011).

Over the years, studies of HAMC have repeatedly shown that running an outlaw club is costly and that the funds required are earned by organized crime (Quinn & Koch, 2003). Outlaw biker gangs are involved in a number of criminal enterprises, such as, drug trafficking and human trafficking, extortion, corruption, murder, tax evasion, and money laundering. Drug trafficking involves the worldwide illicit trade of narcotics, which includes the cultivation, manufacturing, distribution, and eventual sale of these prohibited substances (Markovic, 2014). HAMC is present in many countries where they are heavily involved in illicit activities. Each national HAMC is involved in transnational crime as they are monitored by the global headquarter as well as regional headquarters.

A gang we define as a group of people who regularly associate together. They have an identifiable leadership and internal organization. A gang typically defines itself in opposition to mainstream norms (Richardson & Kennedy, 2012). A distinction must be made, however, between non-criminalized and criminalized bikers. The latter, outlaw bikers, are typically motorcycle club members referring to themselves as '1 percenters.' Among the criminal biker clubs, we find groups such as the HAMC, Outlaws, Bandidos, Pagans, Black Pistons, Mongols, and Coffin Cheaters, to name a few. The most well-known group is HAMC, which is in charge of many criminal business enterprises all over the world, such as drug dealing, weapons, trafficking and money laundering.

Lavigne (1996) described criminal bikers in this way: 'The darkness of crime lies not in its villainy or horror, but in the souls of those who choose to live their lives in the abyss' (p. 1). According to Quinn and Koch (2003), motorcycle gangs are characterized by their general rebellious attitudes and refusal to adopt most mainstream values, with the exception of a desire to appear powerful. HAMC is an example of such a TCO that explores and exploits the legal system and embraces its moral weakness in many democratic countries where rule of law and transparency are fundamentals of the criminal justice system, and where governments make every effort to avoid justice miscarriage. Although the underground nature of TCOs such as HAMC does not allow for complete accurate statistics, in 2009 the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimated that profits from criminal proceeds exceeded \$2 trillion annually across the globe.

Responding to Biker Gangs

Countries vary on their responses to criminal activities. This also includes how outlaw motorcycle gangs are treated as well. When members of a criminal biker gang commit a crime, and the criminal is detected, then they are prosecuted in almost all jurisdictions in the world. Exceptions include places where bikers are associated with the elite in society. There is initially no difference between him and any other citizen of that country. One issue examined in this article is whether and to what extent individual criminals are perceived and treated differently because they are members of a 1 percent outlaw biker club. It is important to assess the treatment of members of criminal biker gangs by the stakeholders. In the case of criminal activity stakeholders include members of the government, law enforcement agencies, courts, and the community. To further explore this topic, we need to develop some criteria that may distinguish normal criminals from outlaw bikers at the individual and organizational level.

We define the following criteria:

1. *Legislative clarity.* To the best of our knowledge, Canada is the only country that has made it illegal to be a member of HAMC. Even though the member did not commit a regular crime, it is considered a crime to be a member. Some countries have laws where organized crime is a more serious crime. In those countries, if governments prosecute the HAMC defendant as member of an organized crime group, then he will face more serious charges in court. We suggest a scale from legal obscurity to legal grounding in penal code for this variable.
2. *Police efforts.* Not all countries have a police force recognizing that it is a problem [some have no funding, or have other more pressing criminal activities], while other countries are having special organized crime combating units to target HAMC clubs and members. In some countries, focus is on violence, guns, and drugs. In other countries, law enforcement goes after the money as well, thereby reducing the financial capacity of criminal biker gangs. The idea is that crime is not to be profitable, and there should be no assets waiting outside for an imprisoned gang member. We suggest a scale from random policing to targeted policing for this variable.
3. *Prosecution focus.* Some countries have prosecutors who prioritize organized crime cases and put a lot of effort into presenting them in court based on substantial knowledge of criminal organizations. Prosecutors in other countries choose the simple cases of street crime rather than putting evidence into the context of organized crime and criminal organizations. We suggest a scale from random prosecution to priority prosecution for this variable.
4. *Court decision.* Courts in some countries are able to handle HAMC cases as serious and passing severe sentences when evidence is present. The extent to which supporters and followers, such as 81 members (where number 8 stands for letter H and 1=A), are considered affiliates, which is the case in Australia, varies across the globe. We suggest a scale of intensification of punishment for this variable.
5. *Politicians' action.* Where there is weak government, criminal groups like to establish their activities and take over the roles of government. Criminal groups protect inhabitants and provide them with other services. Corrupt and unstable regimes make it attractive for criminal groups to settle down and gain control over territories and criminal markets. Stable regimes with professional politicians limit available space for criminal biker gangs. For example, a criminal gang may be prevented from acquiring a new clubhouse since local politicians can regulate the property to other purposes. We suggest a scale from unstable government to stable government.
6. *Citizens' perception.* Citizens in some countries are morally outraged and frightened by criminal biker gangs, and they pressure politicians to take actions. Citizens in other countries admire bikers who live their lives according to own rules. We suggest a scale from admiration to contempt for this variable.
7. *Business reaction.* In some countries, legal businesses help criminal biker gangs to set up front-end companies. In other countries, banks do not lend money to HAMC members and their clubs. We suggest a scale from participation to seclusion for this variable.

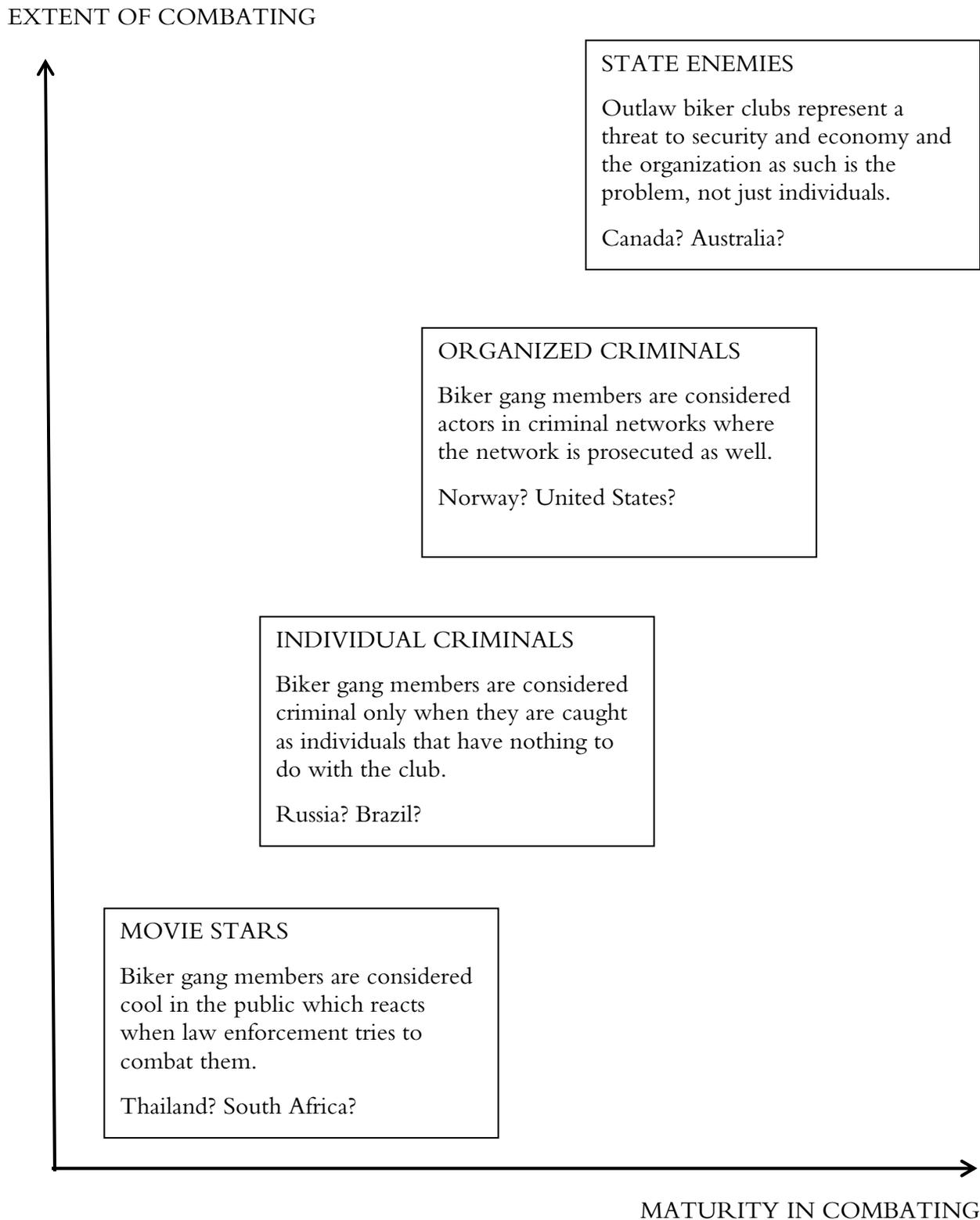
Stage Model for Combating Biker Gangs

A stage model is a theoretical approach to a phenomenon where stages are (1) sequential in nature, (2) occur as a hierarchical progression that is not easily reversed, and (3) involve a broad range of law enforcement activities and structures. Benchmark variables such as membership, affiliates, and behavior are used to indicate characteristics in each stage of growth. A one-dimensional continuum is established for each benchmark variable. Stages can be driven by the lack of success to combat existing criminal biker gangs or a response to new biker gangs emerging (Ditlev-Simonsen & Gottschalk, 2011).

The unit of analysis in our model is the society in a nation that perceives and reacts to individuals in criminal biker gangs. The following four stages are illustrated in Figure 1:

- *Stage 1. Movie Stars.* We suggest that initially, outlaw biker gang members are perceived as cool guys, almost like movie stars. They are understood as a fascinating brotherhood built around the love of motorcycles (Barker, 2011). They enjoy riding bikes as a hobby (Shields, 2012). The police have a hard time investigating them, because the public does not consider gang members as criminals. The police can only do what is found acceptable among the majority and influential inhabitants. Since inhabitants do not object to the bikers' behavior but rather admire them, there is little combating that is done, and bikers have nothing to fear.
- *Stage 2. Individual Criminals.* Biker gang members are considered criminals only to the extent they commit crime and they are detected and investigated. They are treated just as any other citizen who commits a crime. Club spokesmen vigorously and successfully deny that clubs are criminal organizations or gangs. These same spokesmen readily admit that some members commit or have committed criminal acts, however, they insist that there are a few bad apples in every organization, and the organization is not responsible or to be blamed for their behavior (Barker, 2011). There is no link to the biker club when a member is prosecuted for crime. It is perceived that the member who committed a crime did so independently of his membership in the club. While the club is considered a law-abiding social arena, some members may be violating the law. Society treats the individual as a criminal and makes no attempt to link the crime to the club.
- *Stage 3. Organized Criminals.* Inhabitants, law enforcement, and society at large have identified a link between criminal members and their crime as members of the biker gang. Law enforcement officials formally tally crimes that are committed by HAMC members (Shields, 2012).
- *Stage 4. State Enemies.* Members have a desire to keep out of the public eye (Shields, 2012). Motorcycle clubs are considered criminal gangs whose members happen to ride motorcycles. Members are career criminals and violent psychopaths selected and recruited because of their known reputation for criminal behavior (Barker, 2011). They are perceived as the mafia on wheels (Shields, 2012). Everything imaginable seems to be done to get rid of criminal biker clubs. It is made illegal to be a member; they are not allowed to buy property to settle down; their permits are withdrawn; their parties are disturbed; and they are prevented from associating with each other (Berkovic, 2014).

Figure 1. Stages model for combating criminal biker gangs as transnational crime organizations



In a stage model, later stages represent greater consideration and higher maturity in reflecting and acting upon outlaw motorcycle gang threats. Stages do not represent phases over time. Rather, they represent alternative levels of assessment of a phenomenon (Röglinger et al., 2012).

Canada may serve as an example of a stage 4 nation, since being a member of a criminal biker gang can lead to arrest. When some Norwegians sailed through the Northwest Passage along the Canadian coast in a 48-foot boat named 'Berserk,' a crewmember in charge of the engine was arrested by Canadian authorities because he is a member of HAMC in Norway.

Australia may serve as another example of a level 4 nation, since a law was introduced aimed at preventing criminal biker club members from associating with each other. Although the law restricts freedom of communication, it is considered an appropriate measure to prevent crime (Berkovic, 2014). Four states in Australia have adopted OMCG legislation, but it differs from place to place, although the courts appear to have settled the parameters of acceptable legislation.

A strategy targets motorcycle gangs in Canada as part of a joint approach in targeting gangs, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police have developed a strategy to bolster their presence. As part of the strategy, the police are educating the community and front-line members about who the targets are. "They've received much more information about what the reality is, and they're now on the board and want to assist us so we don't let them get a stronger foothold than what they already have," says Sgt. Pat Roche of the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary (Proconier, 2014).

Characteristics of each stage are summarized in Table 1. The first criterion is concerned with legislation. The next four criteria represent the criminal justice system: police, prosecution, courts, and corrections. Next is how the society at large reacts in terms of politicians' decisions in government and parliament. Citizen's perceptions influence what the criminal justice system can do. Regular business enterprises do not want to be associated with the clubs when they are negatively perceived in society. If they are considered state enemies, then businesses will help law enforcement.

For example, after a bomb exploded in the city of Drammen in Norway a decade ago, police investigators concluded that the bomb was placed outside the Bandidos clubhouse by members of HAMC Norway. Several HAMC members were convicted and sentenced to prison. Furthermore, Gjensidige Insurance Company, a business enterprise, which had insured the destroyed buildings, cooperated with the police by successfully claiming a majority pledge in a HAMC club house based on debts of these members. While there is little money to be retrieved for the insurance firm, the police appreciate the firm's involvement, which makes it harder for club members to use and expand club facilities (Gottschalk, 2013).

Table 1. Characteristics of each stage by selected criteria

	MOVIE STARS	INDIVIDUAL CRIMINALS	ORGANIZED CRIMINALS	STATE ENEMIES
1 LEGISLATIVE CLARITY	No general legislation	No specific legislation	Legislation targeting organized crime	Legislation targeting criminal organizations
2 POLICE EFFORTS	Reactive when obvious crime incidents occur	Reactive when crime incidents occur	Recognizing it is a problem and proactive towards individuals, have special crime units	Proactive towards clubs and targeting gang members in enforcement
3 PROSECUTION FOCUS	Requiring convincing evidence	Preparing a regular trial	Prosecuting for organized crime	Adding elements of national security
4 COURT DECISION	Dismissed if any doubt at all	As any other court case	More severe sentence	Handing out severe sentences
5 POLITICIANS' ACTION	Like to be associated	Regular laws	Special laws	More resources to the police
6 CITIZENS' PERCEPTION	Heroes on bikes and rock stars	Nothing special	Threat to the community and pressure politicians for laws and enforcement	Morally outright about activities and considered threat to the nation
7 BUSINESS REACTION	Love to cooperate and help them set up front companies	Regular customers and business partners	Unwanted customers	Participate in combating efforts

The Case of Norway

The dominant 1 percent biker gang in Norway is Hells Angels (Gottschalk, 2013). While there are only one hundred members, their supporters count several hundred in terms of 81-members that are individuals in the roles of prospects or hang arounds. In a country with not more than six million inhabitants, the presence of HAMC is notable both in the media and in the court rooms. Seventy out of a hundred members have been convicted and sent to prison in the last few decades. Some are convicted individually, while others are convicted as an organized crime group, which implies that they get a

more severe and thus longer sentence. The penalties for organized crime are not linked to membership in HAMC, but to the fact that prosecutors can present evidence suggesting that the same individuals have cooperated in criminal activities previously and thereby representing a criminal group.

Amongst Norwegian police officials there are varying opinions about the seriousness of HAMC versus other kinds of law enforcement challenges. After the 9/11 attacks in the U.S. and the local 2012 attack by a single terrorist in Norway, terrorism has become the top priority for Norwegian police. The National police Investigation Service (Kripos) consider criminal biker gangs as the most serious threat. However, several police districts disagree, as they found ethnic foreign groups to be more of a challenge. Thus, there is within the Norwegian police service – with 13,000 employees among which 9,000 officers – disagreements in terms of priorities. Also, there is disagreement in terms of law enforcement strategy. Kripos is concentrating on the organized crime aspect, which implies weapons, drugs, trafficked individuals, and other victims of criminal gang activities. The National Authority for Investigation and Prosecution of Economic Crime (Økokrim) is only interested in the proceeds of crime. They want to follow the money trail. But since Kripos is the national authority handling criminal biker gangs, Økokrim does not get involved and the money trail is neglected.

Police practice towards members varies among police districts as well. While the Chief of Police in the southern part of Norway always puts visiting bikers back on the plane, ferry, or train, the Chief of Police in Oslo lets them all in and asks them to behave. By that, it is meant that they can do as they like as long as they do not to make trouble in public places in terms of public disorder. Otherwise, they can do what they like in their own clubhouse and in a rented hotel nearby.

The attitude toward HAMC in Norway can be described in terms of special episodes and events. For example, when bikers from the club wanted to join a motorcycle parade in the city of Tromsø, the Chief of Police refused to support the parade and withdrew from organizing traffic during the parade. Another episode is related to colors, where some municipalities have asked local bars and restaurants to deny access to biker club members who are wearing their uniforms. Some establishments agree to this rule, but the overall enforcement of this rule varies. Examples exist where club members wearing colors have been let in through the back door.

The perception of criminal bikers is dependent on their reputation. Lately, many criminal biker clubs in Norway have emphasized their social responsibility to improve own image. They arrange Christmas parties for children, wine tasting for adults, and other social initiatives that help improve their image. Rather than being frightened, criminal bikers would like citizens to pay them respect.

Some municipalities supported by Kripos have tried to get rid of criminal biker clubs. They have made it difficult for clubs to change or move locations for their club houses and has withdrawn various buildings and alcohol permits. Other municipalities have been successful in preventing biker clubs to settle in their towns, for example by regulating real estate so that nobody is allowed to live in the building. Table 2 illustrates the average stage 3 in Norway, where some criteria are at a lower or higher stage.

Table 2. Situation in Norway

	MOVIE STARS	INDIVIDUAL CRIMINALS	ORGANIZED CRIMINALS	STATE ENEMIES
1 LEGISLATIVE CLARITY			Legislation targeting organized crime with more severe charges and longer sentences	
2 POLICE EFFORTS		Reactive when crime incidents occurs, although some general police intelligence in the HAMC community		
3 PROSECUTION FOCUS			Prosecuting for organized crime by collecting historical evidence beyond current crime incident	
4 COURT DECISION			More severe sentence if prosecution is successful in evidence presentation	
5 POLITICIANS' ACTION				More resources to the police for combating terror and organized crime
6 CITIZENS' PERCEPTION			Threat to the community and pressure politicians for laws and enforcement	
7 BUSINESS REACTION		Regular customers and business partners		Participate in combating efforts

The Case of Australia

According to the Australian Crime Commission (ACC), there are 44 OMGs operating across Australia. This includes a total of 179 chapters amongst the various OMGs with nearly 4,500 members (“Outlaw Motorcycle,” 2013). Since 2007, there has been a 48 percent increase in the number of new chapters in Australia (“Outlaw Motorcycle,” 2013). The groups are present in all Australian States and Territories, making them a major threat to Australia’s national security. These OMGs engage in a wide range of criminal activities which include the distribution and sale of illegal narcotics, firearms, blackmail, extortion, prostitution, money laundering, and of course violent activities. As other criminal groups have moved to form alliances with each other, OMGs have also formed partnerships with street gangs. They use them for high-risk criminal activities, thus shielding their members from law enforcement scrutiny and prosecutions (“Outlaw Motorcycle,” 2013).

Many of the 44 OMGs are domestic or local groups; however, there are a few that operate internationally. These OMGs represent the biggest threat from organized crime in the country. Although the Rebels Motorcycle Gang has the largest membership in Australia, the Hells Angels also have a large presence in Australia and abroad. The first offshoot chapters of HAMC in Australia were formed in 1967 but were ratified in Sydney and Melbourne in 1975. Now they have 16 chapters all around Australia (Hells Angels Website).

Historically, OMGs have been active for quite some time, but there have been several major incidents that have drawn particular attention to these groups. In 2008, for example, conflicts between the OMGs escalated and led to 13 shootings in a two-week period in Sydney (AUSPOL, 2012). Australia has made many strides to combat the OMGs, particularly in the past several years. The government formed the Attero Task Force, which operates under the Australian Crime Commission in 2012. The Attero is a joint task force comprised of state and territory law enforcers, as well as other agency partners to target specific OMGs and their members (“Outlaw Motorcycle,” 2013). In 2013 the government also formed a National Anti-Gang Task Force and the Australian Gang Intelligence Centre (AGICC). The AGICC, which was formed in 2013, is also housed in the Australian Crime Commission. They focus on all organized crime groups, but target efforts to OMGs.

In 2012, a set of new laws were introduced following a spate of violent incidents carried out by these groups. The new law was created to curtail the rights of OMGs to consort with other members of criminal groups. This law was challenged by the President of the Nomads OMG, Simon Tajjour, and went all the way to the Australian High Court (Berkovic, 2014). The challenge was based on the opinion that the law would infringe the right to freedom of association. The U.S. has a Bill of Rights because the Constitution was drafted in a revolutionary context, whereas Australia’s Constitution, which became law in 1900 and entered into force in 1901, does not have the same outward rights. They created a system that would protect the rights of individuals through the parliamentary process. Although the right is not stated in the Constitution, it was argued that the right is implied.

In October 2014, in a 6 to 1 opinion, the Australian High Court ruled that the law was in fact valid and there was no implied right to freedom of association (Berkovic, 2014). The laws would give police the necessary power to target outlaw gangs as well as other

criminal organizations. The law against repeatedly consorting with criminals and convicted offenders carries a maximum three year penalty (Berkovic, 2014). The Australian government has taken a stance against OMGs because of the nature and seriousness of their offenses. The Australian Crime Commission’s report “Organized Crime in Australia 2013” violent activities as one of the key enabler activities that allow organized crime to flourish. This concern particularly focuses on the willingness of OMGs to carry out violent attacks in public, threatening the safety of innocent bystanders (Organized Crime, 2013).

The situation in Australia is illustrated in Table 3 in terms of our suggested stage model for combating criminal biker gangs.

Table 3. Situation in Australia

	MOVIE STARS	INDIVIDUAL CRIMINALS	ORGANIZED CRIMINALS	STATE ENEMIES
1 LEGISLATIVE CLARITY				Legislation targeting OMGs
2 POLICE EFFORTS				Police conduct raids (some reactive, some proactive)
3 PROSECUTION FOCUS			Prosecuting for organized crime	
4 COURT DECISION			More severe sentence	
5 POLITICIANS’ ACTION				The government deems OMGs as the biggest domestic threat
6 CITIZENS’ PERCEPTION		In light of recent terror scares, more worried about terrorism than OMGs		
7 BUSINESS REACTION		Regular customers and business partners		

Discussion

As argued by Weick (1999), and expanded by Michailova et. al., (2014), theory cannot be improved until we improve the theorizing process, and we cannot improve the theorizing process until we describe it more explicitly. Theorizing involves a mixture of observing something, penetrating something, and finding something out, where there is not necessarily a linear process at all. Weick (1995) argued that the process of theorizing consists of activities like abstracting, generalizing, relating, selecting, explaining synthesizing and reviewing. These ongoing processes summarize progress, give direction, and serve as direction for future research. It is in this sense of theorizing as suggested by Weick (1995) that we have developed our stages of growth model in this article.

The stages represent varying extent of local perceptions and associated law enforcement initiatives to combat transnational crime by criminal biker gangs. The nature, structure, and culture of the 1% biker subculture attracts bikers with criminal or potential criminal dispositions and facilitates and supports the criminal networks that arise in these clubs (Barker, 2011, p. 208):

The selection and socialization processes ensure the perpetuation of the deviant culture and values of crime and violence. Many clubs or club chapters only invite for membership prospects that demonstrate criminal propensities, some making the commission of crimes a prerequisite for membership. Given the selection and socialization practices, many clubs have evolved into social criminal organizations.

While the stage model illustrates how law enforcement may change over time in a country or region, from glorifying them as movie stars to fighting state enemies, criminal biker gangs change as well over time. In countries where law enforcement has attempted to reach stage four, club spokesmen have been eager to downplay criminal activities and violent behavior, sometimes resulting law enforcement never to reach the highest stage in our model. In Norway, where Kripos tried to define Hells Angels club members as state enemies, both local police and the general public disagreed, among others because the club spokesman was successful in portraying himself as a very pleasant and social figure. Unfortunately for law enforcement, in public opinion, the spokesman seemed to come across as a cool and nice individual representing an exciting milieu.

There are several possible avenues for future research based on this article. The most important is to evaluate the current seven criteria suggested in this article, both in terms of number and in terms of content. Some criteria may be missing. For example, it might be argued that correctional responses in terms of varying treatments of criminal bikers as inmates in prisons should be considered. Furthermore, criminals' access to defense quality in terms of the best attorneys might be included.

We have illustrated that the stage concept is a useful one, but it needs further development as it relates to OMCGs. To make the model more specific to OMCGs, it might be useful in future research to avoid the spread of looking at a whole host of OMCGs and instead focus only on Hells Angels. That way the model can be tightened, and if it works in the minds of other researchers, then these others can follow and adopt the typology in other settings.

Since the area of transnational criminal organizations is unique and under-researched, we have provided new insights in this paper by embracing a theoretical approach to combat illegal activities, carried out by criminal biker gangs at the international borders.

We have proposed a stage model, which offers a fine understanding of variations that arises in responses of stakeholders. The variation is conceptualized in terms of four stages of growth that are used to treat the criminal gangs as movie stars, individual criminals, organized criminals, and finally, enemies of the state. Furthermore, we have used the examples of two countries – Australia and Norway – to illustrate the model, since both countries are faced by great threats from criminal bikers.

The seven criteria defined by us to distinguish the normal criminals from outlaw biker criminals, bring to the fore the immediate issues and challenges that surround in tackling the problem of such biker clubs. We hope that this model can be explored by different countries in order to fight the problem of outlaw biker gangs. Although the seven criteria proposed require evaluation in terms of number and content, it may serve as a framework for different countries to identify their approaches (suitable to social structure) in tackling such organizations. Policy makers can be benefited, as this model suggests how they can gauge the level of control each country is utilizing in fighting such gangs. Furthermore, this study has potential to impact a change in the methods of policing – i.e., from random policing to targeted policing – in order to combat illegal transnational activities by criminal biker gangs.

Conclusion

We have provided a description of the state of transnational criminal organizations, especially as it relates to criminal biker gangs. In describing the extent and severity of the problem, we also suggest that a clearer understanding of the phenomenon – as well as a better understanding of official responses to these groups across countries – is necessary. We have presented a stage model, and we suggest how policy makers can use the model to gauge the level of control each country is utilizing in fighting such organizations. We also provided two case studies to demonstrate how nations can explore our model.

If law enforcement agencies internationally align themselves at a higher stage of policing, then they will be more successful in combating TCOs such as criminal biker gangs across the globe. The described stage model can help national and international organizations identify where different countries in the world are in their approaches to fighting criminal biker gangs. In this article, we have named some countries as examples at different stages of professionalism in law enforcement. A more methodologically sound allocation of nations to stages are needed in future research. This is in line with identification, which is a significant term in criminalistics that describes the classification process by which an entity is placed in a predefined, limited, or restricted class (Osterburg & Ward, 2014). A thorough classification of nations requires multiple raters so that inter-rater reliability can be calculated for each nation classification.

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