

Hells Angels Nevertheless: Understanding the Resilience of a Reputed Criminal Organization

Over the past four decades, the Hells Angels have grown into the most notorious and targeted groups in Quebec. However, regardless of this intense public focus and law-enforcement attention, members of this organization continue to be recruited and active in various illegal markets in the province. What does it mean to be a Hells Angels biker in Quebec and, throughout its evolution, how has the organization remained resilient to law enforcement and internal conflicts in the criminal underworld. Although various financial and organizational strengths help the members of this organization overcome such difficulties, the main argument in this study places a central focus on the Hells Angels reputation as the key element accounting for their continuity. In that sense, I embrace the Gambetta's thesis (2009) which states that the persistence of belief in the immortality of the criminal group or organization (e.g., *mafia*) generates a self-fulfilling prophecy that renders the organization increasingly resilient. This thesis is extended to the Hells Angels context and applied to interviews conducted with Hells Angels members, non-biker inmates and staff members in Quebec penitentiaries. Findings support the main thesis in that the organization's reputation for being dangerous offers that group a powerful and effective economic and symbolic value. However, there is also a drawback of this reputation that has to be considered. The Hells Angels mystique in Quebec also generates negative aspects for individuals who endorse it. It is interesting to understand the impact of such a labelling phenomenon, through different phases of their collective criminal career.