RESEARCH ARTICLE

Criminal humanitarianism.
A visual exploration of criminal legitimisation, between alternative moralities and the political vacuum.

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ABSTRACT

This article pledges to pursue three different, but closely correlated, lines of investigation related to the processes of legitimising contemporary criminal organizations. Starting from the analysis of visuals related to two regional contexts, Mexico and southern Italy, it explores how criminals engage in moral self-promotion, philanthropy, and other social practices through which criminal groups seek their own humanisation, mythicisation and sanctification. Observing two fields of criminal practices and symbolic production, with their capabilities of cultural sedimentation and social structuring, it explores the fil rouge weaving together the logic of promoting the internal cohesion of group with the mechanisms of external recognition. A more general reflection about the role of criminal organizations at the margins of neoliberal economies will be conducted by reviewing and analysing episodes of narco-charity, controversial connections between mafia bosses and local priests, business initiatives sponsored by criminals, visuals representing 'bad' non-state actors (outlaws) doing 'good' things.

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1. Living the margins. A criminal reconstruction of sociality

Criminal practices in the context of modern states are generally understood as acts against government, society and morality. The organizational structure of criminal institutions appears not only to be concealed from the state and from recognised civil society, but it is by its nature against any legal code or public concept of good. Legalistic discourse considers outlaws as the most striking expression of incompatibility with the state, and therefore it represents them not in the way they are actually rooted in communities and in society: criminals work outside any social and political framework, and especially outside value-driven motivations. If this perspective aims to confine the criminal to the role of reproducer of social marginality from one side, from the other it implicitly recognises the criminal as product of this social marginality. Outlaws gain their official visibility as pure agents of destruction only through the antagonism and security policies the state implements against them (Cohen 1993; Ferrel 1995; Dal Lago 2010). This misjudgement is not due to the lack of importance these organizations have in shaping various forms of governance, but because they do this in spite of and beyond the state, in socio-economical and geographical spaces where the state does not operate organically (Edelbacher et al. 2015). This is particularly clear in areas where state governance is strikingly absent or conniving, dramatically fostering the direct emergence of alternative monopolies based on violence. Here often redefined through the construct of 'terrorism', these criminal organizations become para-institutions explicitly recognised as political organisms, with a juridical system, a social organization and economic network, alternative to the formal authority and economy.

On the other hand, the legalistic discourse often implicitly continues to label formal activities legitimate without questioning this label, even if such activities can be perceived by local populations as illicit and immoral. The same narrative al-

lows for example some companies, which are institutionally based in the realm of the legitimate global economy and complex governance, to create exploitative structures far from the perceived public interest and equally grounded on the monopoly of violence; for instance, by hiring private military services or by corrupting public authorities (Bayart et al. 1999; Avant 2005; Pearce 2012). Even where the authority of the state is undisputed or barely criticized, the erosion of resources and governability, in addition to the rushing of uncontrolled global flows of capital, goods, technology, and people, has created forms of 'disordered legality' in which multiple ideas of legitimacy, besides the one made legitimate, may reign in the gaps (Palidda 2000; Comaroff & Comaroff 2006; Ong 2006).

As we have suggested already, the neoliberal pattern has in this sense a role. The increasing flexibility of capitals as well as the emerging of market-regulated forms of social reproduction where state is no more accountable generates radical forms of social fragmentation and segments of subaltern or rejected population. Their devaluation in terms of labour force and ability to enter the circuits of capital enhancement matches with the erosion of their legal identity of citizens to whom safety, rights and political representation are granted (Stenson 2000; Harvey 2005; Greenhouse 2010). These political vacuums are therefore open to become operative grey zones, where illegal activities can be some of the main sources of subsistence and criminals can take advantage of a favourable business environment (González de la Rocha 2006; Pratesi et al. 2014). In this way, neoliberism blurs the lines between legal and illegal, opening doors to the proliferation of shadow economies, but also shadow legality and moralities; alternative social construction and cultural models whose growth and importance do not allow a simplistic condemnation. Criminals become active actors within a complex system in which informality, criminality and social needs cooperate, and even the explicitly illegal world, theoretically antagonistic with the public sphere, enjoys – at least for macrostructural, but usually also operative reasons – areas of tolerance, connivance and collusion.

This overlapping of different sovereignties changes the meaning of the concept of criminal justice. Even criminals, leaders of an alternative virtue, have

room in the everyday practice to define their own concept of justice and to build public channels of self-representation and self-promotion. In the area of Naples, in the early 80s, the New Organized Camorra (NCO) emerged as a new and powerful criminal organization (after the slaughter of its opponents) by the management of an environmental disaster, the earthquake in Irpinia. Its charismatic leader was Raffaele Cutolo, also named '*O Professore* [the Professor] or '*O Vangelo* [the Gospel], able to direct and reproduce the organization from prison. Within the NCO, groups of *guappi di rione colla molletta* [knife-armed local thugs], namely 'men of honour' engaged in smuggling and control of farmers markets, became a para-military group which controlled the local economy, branched like a holding and linked to the most important financial and political Italian lobbies of that time (Di Fiore 2005; Barbagallo 2011). In 1982, his sister and assistant Rosalina Cutolo invited a state television journalist in the lavish Medici Castle of their property. She let him wander around to ask locals what they thought of her brother, bragging about his power and claiming he had always done many good deeds and always thought about the common well-being; for instance, by having the city mayor find a job for an unfortunate family man. 2

2. Visions of power and legitimising rhetoric. Criminal morality as a collective representation

While not underestimating the cultural variations in treating image and codifying its deep meanings, we will tap into some visuals drawn from two different contexts where organized crime has notoriously been in the spotlight, to the point that both contexts are stereotypically associated worldwide with the criminal world, also in the form of related visual stereotypes. One is the Mexican context of drug-trafficking cartels and urban crime, the other that of Southern Italy, with a differentiated panorama of regional mafias which, although less visible than it was at the time of kidnappings and civil murders, are still ingrained not only in collective imag-

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2 'Rosalina and Raffaele Cutolo', video extracted from G. Marazzo's reportages (RAI, Italy, 1974–1981), Vimeo, 05/06/2017, viewed 15/07/2018, www.vimeo.com/220302166 [Video 1].

ination, but also in national and transnational, legal and illegal, economies. In both contexts, criminal organizations are engaged in supporting an alternative morality that lowers the cultural barriers to the contamination with illegal and criminal activities and makes them able to affect social interactions on different levels.

To inquire into criminal consent-building mechanisms we will draw on techniques stemming from visual anthropology. As a transmission process of shared codes between the observed, the represented and those that are interpreting its symbolic content, images are a powerful tool for representing the collective imaginary, and at the same time for constructing its social and cultural attributes (Belting 2016; Ricœur & Castoriadis 2016). Far from being the mere art of mystification and ornaments, rhetorical procedures form part of the logic in production of meaning, deeply affecting and reflecting the construction of social relations. We can therefore observe how the media circulation of criminal images takes part in this representational negotiation (Hayward & Presdee 2010) and in the struggle for a cultural hegemony, conveying and legitimating power relations, values and sense of belonging. The perspective adopted puts together the discursive regimes and the social practices that make their construction possible, being at the same time oriented by them. Rhetoric appears through these lenses as a precious instrument for observing cultural products in relation to the emerging, organizing and naturalising of social patterns and subjectivities.

The present paper was developed with the objective of providing a formal and functional description of these rhetorical procedures in two regional contexts. Visuals here included have been selected as exemplary from a collection of around 300 images and 100 videos (musical videoclips included), collected from previous journalistic, documentary and academic works, and from a survey of the presence of these visuals in blogs, websites and social media pages. The research of visuals was thus mainly conducted online, but has been enriched and expanded through some informal interviews carried out in the attempt to evaluate the presence of these cultural products in the local mediascapes. The observation is based on visuals related to criminal organizations or directly performed by criminals. Both in terms

of their number and selection criteria, and consistently with the aims of this work, they do not constitute a sample. Especially for the second category, visuals are intended to be a means for allowing a partial view of a molecular and informal circulation on which we lack any statistical affordable data. The paper does not have the aim of developing a punctual comparative research on two areas that, even without mentioning their respective historical and cultural peculiarities, have two extremely complex and plural criminal scenarios, both largely debated in academia. Nonetheless, the criminal organizations to which visuals refer have some similarities in their local political contexts, entered the global market as business partners and occupy, from the structural point of view, comparable social fields. These organizations emerged from different but comparable social asymmetries and are reinforced by a marginality of subaltern groups that, in both cases, we can observe reflected in the distribution of what Hannertz (1992) defined as 'social organization of meaning'. Furthermore, they move within two democratic institutional systems which, while maintaining their political hegemony, leave to the underworld of informality, included the illicit one, relevant occasions for political importance (Toranzo Roca 1997; Rey et al. 2017).

Observing criminal rhetoric through the circulation of visuals could make them a possible contact point between approaches encouraged by the theory of social fields and those encouraged by the theory of political discourse (Bourdieu 1997; Laclau 2014). Visuals are indeed repulsive to an ontological distinction between practice and signification. The power and immediacy of images are not separated from codes and procedures that build their multiple levels of significance, and their operational value relies precisely on being a rhetorical device able to define an in-action model of reality. As soon as they become visible, their symbolic content becomes an instrument for establishing relationships and identities (Barthes 1964; Freedberg 1989; Augé 1997).

In Mexican history, images, especially religious ones, have been essential in absorbing and reshaping different cultural traditions throughout the centuries, building a new moral and political social dimension (Gruzinzki 1988). For current

criminal groups, iconic representation thus remains an essential practice of power legitimisation, to the point of using it in explicit advertisement strategies (Campbell 2003; Voeten 2012). The same applies to Italian criminal organizations that – more or less devoted to exposing themselves publicly – still need a social context that may acknowledge their power in order to operate effectively (Zagnoli 1984; Armao 2000). We will try to categorise some iconographic examples drawn from these contexts along the lines of three different rhetorical procedures: the legitimisation of outlawed power through criminal humanisation, through his mythologisation and sanctification.

3. The rhetoric of Humanisation

Common visual representations of organized crime are images of killings, violence and fear, reasonably acts of 'inhumanity'. The first ideological challenge for criminals along their process of legitimisation is therefore to challenge the cultural paradigms that define what is 'human'. It is possible to identify two different procedures, as much antagonistic as complementary: the first one consists of taking over the culturally accepted definition of humanity and linking criminality to it; the second is defining a different kind of humanity, a criminal humanity made legitimate.

Figure 1. Commemorating Emanuele Sibillo.

Source: www.youtube.com

In the first movement, criminals aim to associate themselves with a code of common morality that is widespread and rooted in the reference society. They aim to be recognised as men of honour, where honour is in this case to be interpreted in connection to local traditions, to shared and sedimented values. Criminals seek to look like 'one of us' and, even better, they present themselves as the men who make 'us' possible. Among many others, we choose as an example of the first case a commemorative video spread online in 2015, dedicated to a young Camorra boss killed by his competitors. In this photo collection, opened by the message of his brother and successor, Emanuele Sibillo is represented surrounded by his family, wife and friends: fragments of a daily familiar life in Naples (Fig. 1).[3] Furthermore, people who are behind cruel intimidation, murders and resource exploitation, may be the same people who offer employment opportunities to disgraced segments of the population. For instance, Camorra is known for having set up a system of subsidies for families of inmates, to whom is guaranteed not only a salary, but also study grants to worthy sons (especially for those who would become lawyers). The same applies to the Calabrian 'Ndrangheta, although it generally operates off the radar, structured by family clans already founded on close blood ties.

Both organizations are not only part of the global world of legal jobs – managing recruitments and enterprises – but also of the local cultural politics, funding popular festivals, cultural and religious events and, for exemple in the case of Naples, supporting young singers from working-class neighbourhoods. Crime fighting is then reinterpreted as an antagonism to local society, its normality and stability. For example, on the occasion of the visit to Locri of the Italian President Mattarella (March 2017), the city was filled with graffiti against authorities. One of these, located near the bishop's residence and directed against a priest engaged in anti-mafia associations, invoked 'more work less cops' (Fig. 2).[4]

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[3] 'Emanuele Sibillo E.S. 17 – È PER TE', YouTube page 'Io fake', 09/11/2015, viewed 15/07/2018, https://youtu.be/LWWHXyLlxWc [Video 2].

[4] Candito A, 'Mafie, a Locri scritte contro don Ciotti e gli "sbirri"', *La Repubblica,* 20/03/2017.

Figure 2. Graffiti against Don Ciotti in Locri.

Source: www.larepubblica.it

Many Mexican cartels are devoted to sensationalized acts of philanthropy. Narco-charity supports a humanising propaganda among those who are generally ignored by the government, hence providing a legitimating frame for their main form of upward social mobility: outlawed practices. During a recent Three Kings' Day (January 6) in Oaxaca, shrines filled with toys mysteriously appeared among some of the poorest communities of the region, with signs explaining that they were left 'so that people can see that the last letter, Z, supports noble people' (Fig. 3).[5] On the other side of the country, in Tamaulipas, the Cártel del Golfo sent presents for children, each toy tagged with a sticker: 'Perseverance, discipline and effort are the basis for success. Keep studying to be a great example. Happy Children's Day. With all my warmth for tomorrow's triumphant one. Your friend'.[6] The moral lesson was signed by the already imprisoned Osiel Cárdenas Guillén, known as *El Mata Amigos* [The Friend-Killer] because he became a drug lord by killing a strict partner, other than recruiting members of the Mexican Army Special Forces.

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[5] 'Presuntos Zetas regalan juguetes por Día de Reyes', *SDP Noticias*, 06/01/2014, www.sdpnoticias.com.

[6] Cohen R, 'Trends in Narco-Charity', 15/01/2014, www.nonprofitquarterly.org.

Figure 3. Gifts by the Los Zetas cartel in Oaxaca.

Source: Twitter profile, available on www.sdpnoticias.com

In addition to actions themselves, a highly effective form of moral promotion is the media spreading of these acts through visuals, also when they reach the population in an apparently involuntary and informal way. Again, from Taumalipas, a video spread through social networks showed the drug dealers visiting schools, hospitals, nursing homes, and poor neighbourhoods, offering money and the traditional Epiphany cake (with the national flag on the top) to children.[7]

The dissemination of videos, photos, and messages is usually launched by social network profiles linked to narco-trafficking or by the population itself, but they can also appear on press reports and televised news. The system of narco-charity, despite the bloodthirsty regime the cartels have established in Mexico, allows them to stimulate sympathy and foster the recruitment of new criminals, especially in urban ghettos and among the rural population.

In these examples, criminal agents do not challenge the dominant paradigm of humanity, but represent themselves in actions that are perceived positively

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[7] 'Cártel del Golfo y Los Zetas reparten roscas de Reyes en Tamaulipas'; original video deleted, partially visible as tv news on YouTube, available on Vimeo, 05/06/2017, viewed 15/07/2018, www.vimeo.com/220397234 [Video 3].

according to the dominant paradigm, like welfare provisions. On the other hand, criminal organizations can use visuals not to blend themselves with people, but as elements for distinction. Outlaws can create and promote a different human model, usually supported by an alternative strong set of codes, rites and myths. In the malleable context of a fragmented society, this model builds a strong organic community and promotes an alternative social order in which criminals recognise themselves. The new moral values can even be subject to juridical codification, as in the case of the decalogue of *Rights and duties* written by the mafia boss Salvatore Lo Piccolo.[8] Furthermore, these values promote the external recognition of criminal distinctiveness. The picture of a secret society led by an esoteric sense of justice gives a big contribution to the social acceptance of criminal organizations (Grattieri & Nicaso 2009; Parini 2009). A central role in the construction of the group is often played by an extreme but regulated use of violence. The liminality between de-humanisation and re-humanisation of criminals is often managed through radical rituals of redefinition, up to the extreme example of cannibalism in some Mexican cartel.[9]

Besides the group solidity, a rhetoric of distinction also allows a phenomenological redefinition of each criminal experience, a new identity and subjectivity. Recruitments for example pass from initiation rituals with a strong aesthetic dimension. Visual elements and body postures work as a rhetorical device on subject's predisposition, empowerment and transformation (Csordas 1984). For example, a complex performance is the ritual baptism of the 'Ndrangheta, an organization whose name comes probably from the Greek *andraghatos*, 'valiant man'. During the oath for making a *giovane d'onore* [honourable boy] a *picciotto* – the first level of the criminal hierarchy – the 'Ndrangheta members make use of ritually prepared spaces, religious formulas, blood exchanges, the half-burning of a St Michael the Archangel's image and the declaiming by the boss of parabolas about mythological knight-

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[8] 'Il decalogo mafioso di Lo Piccolo', *LaRepubblica Immagini*, 09/11/2007, www.repubblica.it/2006/05/gallerie.

[9] 'Denuncian canibalismo narco: sicarios mexicanos prepararían platos típicos con la carne de sus víctimas', *Publimetro*, 19/07/2017, www.publimetro.cl.

ed ancestors (Faeta & Lombardi Satriani 1983; Grattieri & Nicaso 2009). Tattooing among criminals is an off-the-book historical practice spread across several parts of the world; through tattoos criminal humanity is directly drawn on the body. The body – the first ruled space in which the symbols and their effect on reality are embodied – is a perfect medium for images that mark an identity, a public image, an alternative humanness in act. In Italian criminal organizations, in particular between low-level affiliates, tattoos are called *devozione* [devotion]. According to tradition, they should be raw or self-made tattoos done in prison and they should indicate through symbols the outlaw's condition, his status and affiliation. Examples include the aforementioned Saint protector or logos, like a crown, a red rose, the Ace of clubs of the Neapolitan playing cards (mainly among local leaders) (Fig. 4, 5, 6).[10]

Figure 4. The call by St. Michael the Archangel.   **Figure 5. Ace of clubs.**

Source: OMICRON –
Osservatorio milanese sulla criminalità organizzata al Nord,
'I tatuaggi rituali della 'ndrangheta nel racconto
del collaboratore emiliano', 28/12/2015,
<www.omicronweb.it>

Source: Informal circulation

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[10] *Capobastone* is also the name of Andrangheta's local bosses.

Figure 6. Sacred crown.

Source: Carbonara, C. 2014, 'Rapine ai tir, 14 persone arrestate', *Corriere del Mezzogiorno*, 23 October, www.corrieredelmezzogiorno.corriere.it

Symbolism shapes the forms of display of power and criminal ability. The secret meaning of these conventional signals (Gambetta 2009) is acquired as much as the human and social capital necessary to be coherent with a collective identity and competitive in the criminal labour market. The rhetoric of distinction follows the structural reconfigurations of today's criminality even on body inscriptions. The Camorra after Cutolo, for example, from a pseudo-monopolistic organization entangled with politics has turned into a 'Camorra dust', a multipolar criminal reality composed by more than 20 clans, fighting for the territorial control and adapted to the fluidity of the new local-global political context (Ciconte 2008). Tattoos become therefore a branding phenomenon, in which employers' bodies directly show – besides some stereotypes of ghetto culture and other elements of moral legitimisation, like honour or familial love – the names of bosses and the aesthetic of the clan (Fig. 7, 8). The same happens among Mexican cartels, with different tattoos indicating affiliation and religious devotion (Fig. 9). Some tattoos are also associated with political symbols, like Pancho Villa the revolutionary on the back of *El Cholo*, one of the main hitmen of Los Zetas, to clearly define the political role he attributes to himself (Fig. 10). The
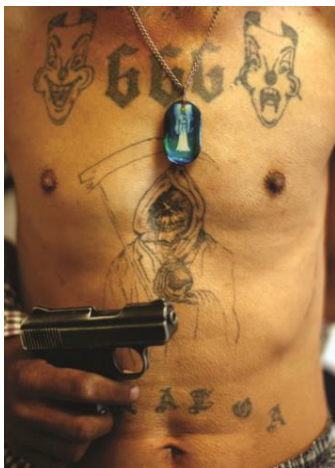
maras, the criminal urban gangs all over Central America, use tattoos pervasively, which not only permanently defines their individual outlaw status, but also transforms them into a group of 'signalling bodies', street diaries which help to delineate affiliations and territories (Zúñiga 2008) (Fig. 11).

Figure 7-8. Criminal tattoos in Naples.

Source: Corriere del Mezzogiorno 2016, 'Tatuaggi con i morti e armi nella cintola, la faida infinita delle micro-gang di Napoli', 06 September, <www.corrieredelmezzogiorno.corriere.it>.

Figure 9. 'Guadalupe Vàzquez'.

Figure 10. The arrest of El Cholo (2007).

Figure 11. 'El Recio' [M13 former leader].

Source: Photo by Arias G. In Hernandez (2016)

Source: Narcotic News, www.narcoticnews.com

Photo by Garrido E (2007). *Source:* www.reuters.com

Practices of distinction also emerge in the wider social context, where they become part of the foundation, promotion and attempted sedimentation of a new alternative value system. The strongest naturalization of the criminal social figure here takes place through the legitimisation of his illegality and even of violence. One of the group of narcos more involved in narco-charity, Los Zetas, is also known for being the most cold-blooded. They use violence in equally spectacular-ized forms, with executions, murders and tortures exposed to the public and fiercely shown on the media. The murders intentionally promoted are meant to set an example, in which the fundamental correctness of the punishment is claimed. In some cases, they even explicitly award themselves the title of enactors of Divine Justice, like in the case of a suspected rapist's torture and crucifixion in Michoacan, which happened in 2012 after his kidnapping from a police car.[11] A radical de-humanising violence is applied also in killings among criminal competitors, in which the need to promote themselves as the successful brand – the good criminals – is associated with the extreme repudiation of competitors (Fig. 12, 13).
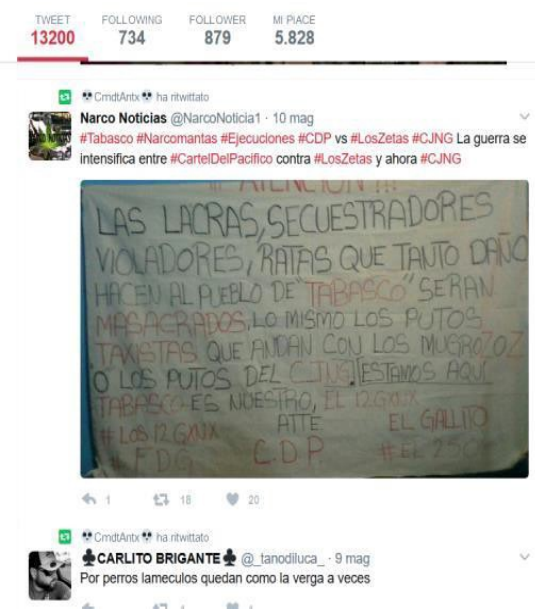
Figure 12. Execution.
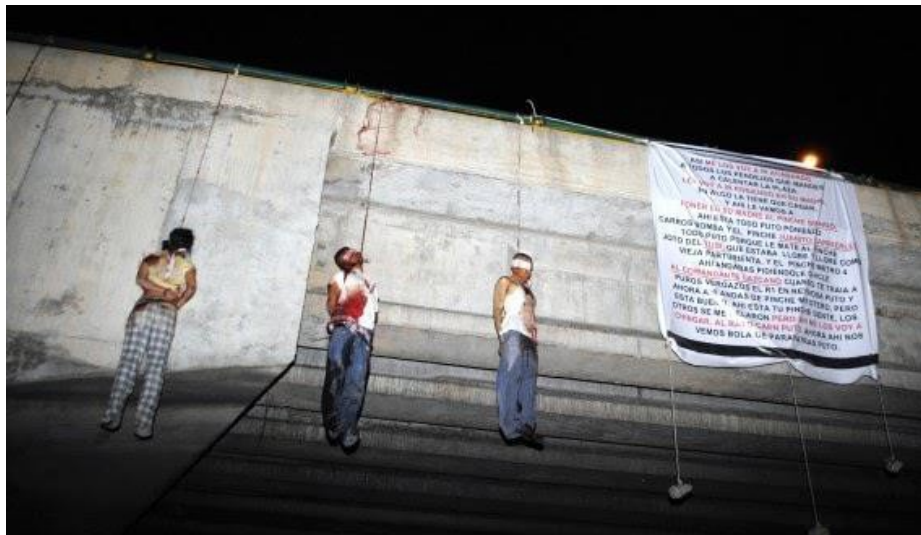
Source: Sinembargo Magazine, www.sinembargo.mx

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[11] Bunker R, 'Mexican Cartel Tactical Note #13: Man Crucified in Michoacán, Mexico', *Small Wars Journal,* 09/10/2012, www.smallwarsjournal.com.

Possibly more than in narco-charity, sensationalistic murders and criminal messages are diffused by the official media, with an ambiguous combination of reporting duty and media support for criminal propaganda. Javier Valdez (2016), murdered in May 2017, is among the last to denounce this phenomenon, together with the widespread collusion between narco-traffic and state departments. Another example of a murder turned into a show is that of an activist in Taumalipas, where the killers hacked the Twitter profile of the victim by publishing a picture of her corpse along with intimidating messages (Fig. 14).

Figure 13. Narcos on Twitter.

Source: www.twitter.com

Suffering bodies thus play an active role in the construction of a societal narrative opposed to legalistic discourse, and in the elaboration of a criminal necroculture and necropolitics (Artaud 1970; Reiner 2002; Fuentes Diaz 2012). As several studies show (Sontag 2003; Farmer 2005), violent images hardly bring a thoughtful consideration to the observed act; on the contrary, suffering bodies do not make the structural aspect of violence visible, paradoxically obscuring moral responsibilities and naturalizing the message violence seeks to legitimate. The executions appear as playful ceremonies, celebratory even when bloodthirsty, and the show is seductive, making the observer ambiguously repulsed by something in which he remains involved (Debord 1967; Cavarero 2007).

Figure 14. Narcos on Twitter.

Source: www.twitter.com

Not only does the legitimation of criminals take place through violence and fear – direct manifestation of their power – but the messages associated with executions also frame the act in terms of justice, appealing to the observer's moral support. Far from being a problem for legitimacy, the media diffusion of inhuman images can be considered the endpoint in the rhetorical process of criminal humanisation. On the Mexican social networks, it is not particularly surprising to see a peculiar Mannequin challenge circulating amongst the viral videos. Instead of portraying ordinary people remaining frozen in some social life moment, it offers the scene – it is not clear if real or a simulacrum (Baudrillard 1981) – of an execution; the soundtrack is the polka rhythm of a *narco-corrido* (Fig. 15).[12]

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[12] 'Mannequin challenge de Tamaulipas', online videoclip from a Twitter profile; available on Vimeo, 05/06/2017, viewed 15/07/2018, www.vimeo.com/220299631 [Video 4].

Figure 15. Mannequin challenge

Source: www.twitter.com [see: Video 4]

This alternative morality becomes a new cultural reference framework, whose elements (dress codes, languages, systems of belief, aesthetic expressions and so on) start to appear – not only among lower classes – folkloric, pop and attractive, representative and effective in the real social contexts of living and surviving. But especially – here the two rhetorical movements complement each other – no longer very far from normal. Outlaws are ready to become idols.

4. The rhetoric of Mythologization

Myth structures foundational beliefs of social groups through a narrative frame in which the acts of de-historicized figures make them culturally recognised (Ries 1978). For criminals that strive to become an efficient and legitimate – both internally and externally – power, these tales about reality may become a fundamental device, than we can observe in deep in visual productions.

Figure 16-17. Aesthetics of power on Twitter.

Source: www.twitter.com

A first mythological process taps directly into the reality of violence and the condition of risk, and associates criminals with models of success. In contexts of insecurity the criminal's aesthetic is that of the winner, and the outlaw becomes an attractive figure by simply representing himself through the symbols of his criminal capabilities, richness and power (Fig. 16, 17). The rhetoric of distinction does not hinder representations of this suitability. The hero can expose his criminal features while represented as harmonically merged within the local environment. In the recent videoclip *Mafia* by the Algerian-German rapper Eazy Padrino, the ex-con Gianfranco Prencipe plays with the gun with his village in Puglia as a background.[13]

The outlaw's mythology is nevertheless connected to heroic behaviour and positive attitudes, like temerity, bravery, loyalty, manliness, honourability. Honour is often representing in this case the adherence to the criminal culture's values, in opposition to those of the official institutions (Gratteri & Nicaso 2008). In criminal tales, the latter are seen as an hypocritical or corrupt power, often tied to the figures of the colonist, the exploiter or the privileged owner, both in the Mexican case – where the outlaw is usully opposed to the *gringo* – and in the Italian case – where the

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[13] '*Mafia*', song by Eazy Padrino (2018), Youtube, 07/06/2018, viewed 15/07/2018, www.youtu.be/1HZduDCm8sk [Video 5].

mafioso presents himself both as member of the *onorata società* [honoured society] and as a revolutionary son of the People.

The legitimising idiom of Italian organizations has stimulated, for instance, an identity-making intimacy between the criminals' anti-statism and the historical phenomena of lower classes' resilience in Southern Italy. The Camorra members refer to a rose-tinted image of the *guappo*, which for example has been presented in the cathartic s*ceneggiata* of Mario Merola, a Neapolitan singer and actor (Fig. 20). In these dramas, notoriously beloved for example by the former Camorra boss Michele Zaza, the *guappo* is more an informal lawgiver than a local racketeer. He uses violence as a chivalric masculine act of justice, which helps to re-establish an equilibrium in a community formerly challenged by infamy or betrayal (Ravveduto & Amato 2007; Marmo 2011). 'Ndrangheta usually refers to the banditry of the late nineteenth century, even if the folkloric image of the *brigante* is here used to denote a parasitic economy in which, unlike the image of the hidden bandit, violence is usually not directed towards dominant political antagonists. The criminal project thus attracts local acceptance because it seems to intercept a promise of emancipation culturally rooted among populations which have seen themselves as exploited or excluded from the economic development and modernization (Mangiameli 1989; Parini 2009). These types of narratives can change reference points and centrality, according to the social role criminal organizations are assuming and which approach, from connivance to conflict, is mutually adopted in the relation with governmental actors and relevant exponents of the formal economy.

The mythologizing processes directly promoted by organizations and oriented to an external audience generally combine criminal's self-representations with a wide circulation of – formal, informal and illegal – cultural products. If in the neo-traditionalist invention of *corridos* the deeds and the wars amongst Mexican drug lords are sung, the songs about lowlife in Naples paint a reality in which the criminal is in some cases a hero 'cursed by life', the individual warrior fighting for the good of the common people, in others a 'one of us' character included in dramas with a traditional flavor: love stories and heartbreaking betrayals, set in poor

urban communities buttressed by customs and neighbourhood solidarity (Ravveduto & Amato 2007; Giletti Benso 2014). The good sentiments of petty criminals, here often represented, create a bridging culture where illegality is allowed for surviving, to help families or allowing the wellbeing of the community to prevail.[14] This cultural production and its audience are often short-range. Local musical managers, sometimes connected to criminal organizations, nurture local stars which, besides selling their music on the official and more often pirated music market (both now in transformation), play at parties, weddings, and write songs more or less directly celebrating criminal leaders, even on commission; the same holds for Mexican *corridos*. In some cases, as the one of Tommy Parisi, the singer himself is a member of criminal organization, actually the son of one of the most important local bosses of Bari (Fig. 18).

Figure 18. Tommy Parisi.

Source: www.tommyparisi.fan-club.it, TV screenshot

Figure 19. Vite perdute.

Source: www.youtube.com

Figure 20. Mario Merola interpreting don Salvatore Savastano in a polizziottesco.

Source: Napoli... serenata calibro 9', Brescia (dir) 1978, movie poster.

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[14] *'O' Scippo'* [The mugging], song by Nino D'angelo (1976), YouTube, 12/10/2012, viewed 15/07/2018, https://youtu.be/m4idmuqainY [Video 6].

Especially in the most recent videoclip, both the sung stories and the singers' performances underline their character of individual celebrities. For the under-employed Neapolitans that inhabit the wide 'contact zone' with the criminal economy, musical career means redemption from anonymity and poverty. Honour became in this sense synonymic with success: the main model of honour neomelodic stars represent is the success of gaining 'a personal sovereignty achieved in the entrepreneurial art of making do' (Pine 2008, p. 207). For their fans, singers create an imagined community; the fragile belonging to a political citizenship is replaced by a cultural belonging through forms of neoliberal identification: being an audience linked to the consumption of cultural products (Giusto & Russo 2017). Furthermore, neomelodic songs offer a device of mutual and tolerant recognition of a field of shared informal/illicit practices. They build what Jason Pine called 'affective community', giving emotional sense to the contradiction of living thanks to a criminal network that is at the same time a resource and a source of terror. If the local artistic production allows for ex- tremely effective forms of identification, nonetheless the criminal imaginary enters mass culture and non-criminal production (Fig. 21, 22). Both the Italian mafias and the Mexican cartels have become an attractive commercial brand, a source of artistic inspiration and profits at several levels (Gratteri & Nicaso 2008; Campbell 2014). The criminals themselves become the audience of these more or less plausible products, triggering a continuous game of mirrors. The picture of the new Camorra made in the successful series *Gomorra* in recent years, for instance, has also influenced criminal productions. The videoclip *Onore e dignità* [Honour and dignity] by the young singer Vincenzo Mosca clearly reflects the aesthetics of *Gomorra*; the song probably has also a privileged recipient, sending a coded warning to someone recently arrested.[15]

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[15] *'Onore e dignità'* [Honour and dignity], song by Vincenzo Mosca (2016), YouTube, 13/12/2016, viewed 15/07/2018, https://youtu.be/iXQVikkXpbI [Video 7].

Figure 21. Gomorra's personality test. **Figure 22. El Chapo T-shirt.**

Source: www.facebook.com

Source: www.amazon.com

The single identity of criminal and the recurrent aspects of a mythic 'criminalness' are often tied in criminal biographies. This can be observed, for example, from their forms of self-representation on social networks. A Sicilian boss highlights his tough apprenticeship in life sharing on Facebook some images from the pages *Il Bandito Imprigionato* [The imprisoned Bandit] and *La Legge della Strada* [The Street Law] (Fig. 23). Another well-known exponent of the of Cosa Nostra, Franco Mormina – a.k.a. *Monello* [Cheeky] – whilst not forgetting to reaffirm the ideal of *omertà*, in a reversal of roles uses a well-known brand of 'Italian- ness' – Nutella – in order to define politicians as the real criminals (Fig. 24). The so-called 'victims of justice' are also usually mythologized, like inmates or old-fashioned criminals, as in the case of '*Il mitico Mastro Ciccio*' [Master Ciccio the mythical], a video extracted from the documentary *Uomini d'onore* [Men of honour] by Francesco Sbano.[16]

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[16] 'Il Mitico "Mastro Ciccio", affiliato della ndrangheta', from the movie '*Uomini d'onore'* (Sbano 2009), YouTube, 19/07/2012, viewed 15/07/2018, https://youtu.be/39j5n5vFN-c [Video 8].

Figure 23 (a,b) – 24 (a,b). Cosa Nostra on Facebook.

Source: Borrometi, P 2015, 'I nuovi boss 2.0', blog post, *La spia*, 21 April, viewed 15/07/2018, <www.laspia.it>

The supreme law of honour remains the main moralising element of criminal behaviour, and betrayal of honour is a constant negative presence in criminal parables. The repentant – which is for the State the symbol of a reconnection with legal order – is for criminal ideology the perfect antagonist. He is not only the supreme representation of injustice and immorality, but the responsible of a general crumbling of social bonds. Among many others, a very explicit example is the song *Vite Perdute* [Lost lives] by Gianni Celeste. The videoclip tells the story of the destruction of a family devoted to racket, awakened in the midst of the night by a police raid: the father is a mafia boss, personified by Gianni Celeste himself, and his

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Sbano is known also as the successful producer of '*La musica della mafia*' (2000), a music compilation of Calabria's criminal songs.

arrest has been made possible by his brother's betrayal (Fig. 19).[17] Even if some signals point out that the new criminal generations have not the same appreciation towards the semitonal melisma, the same topic is still up-to-date outside the local mediascapes and in the really recent news. An elderly boss of the Sacra Corona Unita in Mesagne (Puglia) for example, invited his own son, a repentant, to kill himself for having dishonoured the family. Published on Youtube, the video gains the approval of several users, who acknowledge credit to the boss and show respect for the old-school mafias.[18] This invitation was then confirmed by the violent ostracism of his two other sons, doomed to shame after 'decades of honourable resistance' in jail.[19]

A recurring mythologisation concerns charismatic criminal leaders. The criminal leaders mythologise themselves, when not engaged in denying their role and keeping a low profile, linking their rise to legendary victories and murders of powerful enemies and betrayers. Particularly well known is the public profile of *El Chapo* [The Shorty], one of the most famous leaders of the multi-billion-dollar Mexican cocaine-smuggling industry, El Cartel de Sinaloa. His audacity, his sensational jailbreaks, and his meetings with important show-biz people regularly show up in videos, songs and television series (a script which the leader, currently in jail, declared that he would have preferred to amend).[20] Amongst the Italian characters, besides the mythological abscondence of Totò 'the Beast' Riina, Raffaele Cutolo presented himself and was recognised nowadays as the symbol of a 'right Camorra', even if his organization was overthrown by a violent feud at the end of the 80s (Cutolo 1980; Rossi 1983; Di Fiore 2005). A successful house-music medley inspired by a movie by Tornatore features some of Cutolo's better known statements

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[17] '*Vite Perdute*' song by Gianni Celeste and Massimo (2011), *Canzoni 'e mala - Vol. 2 - Compilation*, CD, Seamusica; available on Youtube, 05/07/2011, viewed 15/07/2018, https://youtu.be/Epg6V5gc-gs [Video 9].

[18] '*I fratelli del pentito: ha disonorato la famiglia*', YouTube page 'Senza Colonne', 31/03/2014, viewed 15/07/2018, www.youtu.be/qf9zejp8O0k [Video 10].

[19] '*Mesagne e la SCU, 2 parte*', YouTube page 'Telerama News', 16/07/2012, viewed 15/07/2018, www.youtu.be/krxkFa3Cfzg [Video 11].

[20] 'El "Chapo" quiere negociar con Netflix y Univisión serie sobre su vida', *La Prensa*, 26/05/2016, www.laprensa.hn.

and circulates among the discos of Campania. *Ritmo de omertad* contains the ritualistic speech for the initiation to the NCO's adept, which many people sing by heart (Ravveduto & Amato 2007). A recurring leitmotif is, as we have already seen, that of the 'Robin Hood mythology'. Although leaders of associations born as forms of self-enrichment and exploitation, these leaders present themselves as heroes of the most marginalised community, which they nurture and help. Cutolo defined himself as Robin Hood in a famous interview during one of his trials.[21] He often claimed this intention and confirmed it in 2015, affirming that he 'tried to re-establish the Reign of Naples, an independent social state where everybody would have had food'.[22] El Chapo is also known for enjoying widespread popular support and nowadays there are frequent demonstrations for his release (Fig. 25). Narcos in Sinaloa (Fig. 26) are known for contributing to the construction of schools, roads, cemetery walls, churches, and for the distribution of scholarships. In different interviews the local population accuses the judicial intervention of having disrupted criminal good deeds, saying that 'before, when things were quieter, the Cartel had more time for philanthropy' (Sanchez & Jorge 2009; Sejias 2009). In the peripheries of Naples, recently, many riots took place during the arrests of some criminals.[23] Therefore, the problem is not the presence of criminals but that of the State, which does not allow the criminals to act in a good way.

Despite this cultivation of a moral and symbolic level, through which the outlaws claim their rightness and their social role, an efficient mythologizing process lies in the way criminal organizations link themselves to capitalist development, un-

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[21] 'Raffaele Cutolo Evasion', video extracted from G. Marazzo's reportages (RAI, 1981), available on Vimeo, 05/06/2017, viewed 15/07/2018, www.vimeo.com/220302166 [Video 12].

[22] Berizzi P, 'Raffaele Cutolo: "Io, sepolto vivo in una cella. Se esco io crolla il Parlamento"', *La Repubblica*, 02/03/2015.

[23] Piedimonte S, 'Boss in fuga chiede l'aiuto del quartiere. In cento contro i carabinieri con calci e sputi', *Corriere del Mezzogiorno*, 29/08/2008.

derlying their capabilities as the most successful local enterprise. The boss Michele Zaza was used to affirm that he was called 'the Gianni Agnelli of Naples', because he created the bigger cigarette smuggling network of the 1970s, transforming contraband for Naples in what Fiat was to Turin at that time. In line with an attitude

Figure 25. People protest in Culiacan.

Source: Brito F. 2014, 'Protesters detained during pro-Joaquin 'El Chapo' Guzman rally in northern Mexico', *Independent UK*, 03 March, <www.independent.co.uk>

Figure 26. #CDS.

Source: www.twitter.com

similar to that of the humanisation-moralisation of violence, even the most bloodthirsty 'Ndrangheta criminal activities have been mythologized as the basis of regional development. An example is the kidnappings during the 70s and 80s, when the 'Ndrangheta decided to collect through hundreds of ransoms the financial capital necessary to transform family clans of former peasants and shepherds into multi-national, multi-millionaire enterprises (Ciconte 2008). One of the biggest neighbourhoods in Bovalino, close to Reggio Calabria, is still informally called the 'Paul Getty quarter', from the name of the American billionaire's nephew whose ransom gave job and housing to hundreds of disenfranchised Calabrians.

It is interesting to observe that these two Italian vignettes are still generally well-known, but evoked as expressions of a 'golden age' in which criminal organizations would have been autocratic but stable, rooted and paternalistic – 'Keynesian', we would say – powers. Even in the more eulogistic talks, contemporary criminal organizations are more represented as successful competitors in the global market place. We can observe here a shift from the topic of solidarity to market concerns: their ability as businessmen and their efficient money-making endeavour would be enough to make new criminals legitimate. We have already shown it at the very be- ginning of this paragraph (Fig. 17). Matteo Messina Denaro, the invisible leader of Cosa Nostra in the last decades, cannot explicitly show himself as Michael Franzese does in the USA: a fascinating and successful motivational speaker, as well as a rich philanthropist and devoted Christian.[24] Despite that, many legends about his charac- ter as a charming seducer, lover of luxury and audacious businessman – quite dif- ferent from his Sicilian predecessors – still paint him as one of the richest and most famous fugitives in the world (Fig. 27).

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[24] 'Highest Paid Mafia Boss Tells the TRUTH About the Life', YouTube page 'Valutain-ment', 18/01/2018, viewed 15/07/2018, https://youtu.be/5U-yqm9H_Sg [Video 13].

Figure 27. Matteo Messina Denaro.

Source: Informal circulation. Portrait based on a police facial composite.

5. The rhetoric of Sanctification

Not only humanised and mythological, the legitimisation of criminal organization is also fielded on the realm of the sacred and transcendent. Sacred iconology is used to define, justify and signify a scenario in which criminals operate as protagonists and where a large part of the symbolic references – the secular and political ones in particular – have lost much of their credibility and effectiveness.

Religious images are for both criminals and for the rest of the population the protagonists in rituals for divine protection, in domestic shrines and religious processions. Besides conveying a feeling of belonging, the use of sacred images answers to a common feeling of insecurity and lack of control. In the process of criminal moralisation, religion is introduced through two parallel rhetorical movements we have already met, often convergent in practice. On the one hand, the organizations directly take over the religious code, declaring their compatibility and their role of sponsor. On the other hand, they bend religious and moral codes into shapes compatible with their social position, establishing new cults and founding new 'criminal religions'.

Figure 28. 'FotoReportaje: Malverde'
Portrait.

Figure 29. Church in
Tezontle.

Photo by Frias R (2017). *Source: Siempre! Revista*
www.siempre.mx

Source: Informal circulation

Both the Italian and the Mexican cases offer several examples of these two rhetorical processes. The whole 'Ndrangheta hierarchy rests on religiously inspired names, and the most important meetings among clans traditionally have taken place in the famous sanctuary of the Virgin Mary in Polsi, symbol of a long history of silence and connivance with religious ministers (Nicaso & Gratteri 2013). The criminal appropriation of religious symbolism sometimes encounters attempted resistance from Catholic institutions. For example, the bishop of Reggio Calabria recently suggested to the Pope a 10-year ban of godfathers during baptisms, as a way to hamper the use of this practice as a means for the bosses to spread their authority through the religious links with the newborn generation.[25] This intervention aims to put an end to the controversial accusation of connivance from the highest ranks of the Catholic Church. It implicitly declares that criminal institutions are no more accepted as part of the local ruling class, as Karol Józef Wojtyła did in 1993 toward Cosa Nostra in Sicily. In his well-known anathema, the Pope held a very different position to that held by, for example, Cardinal Ruffini during the Cold War, who

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[25] 'Italian archbishop calls for 10-year ban on godparents to thwart mafia', *The Guardian*, 01/07/2014, www.theguardian.com.

clearly affirmed that would be better to be mafiosi, 'if they even exist', than communists.

In the Mexican case, an explicit religious legitimisation falls within the already investigated frame of narco-philanthropy, for example through the funding of new Catholic churches. These churches stand out for their majesty and are attended not only by the criminals, who go there to be redeemed from their sins, but also by locals. Although the Catholic higher institutions fiercely deny condoning drug trafficking, on a local level some priests turn a blind eye for those who give important contributions, gaining in exchange forgiveness and public recognition. Among these churches there is one built by the former leader of the Z3 group of Las Zetas. Heriberto Lazcano, known for being deeply religious, will be murdered by Mexican soldiers in 2012; an armed command will later attack the morgue to take his body on a procession and give him the religious blessing. Outside the flashy facade of the church a plaque thanks the boss in the name of the priest and the community (Fig. 29).[26] During the anniversaries of his death many churches of the region celebrate him, and some *narcomanta* (messages left by a drug cartel) appear nears the cathedrals.[27]

In Italy, the Episcopal authority interrupted a particularly controversial public mass proposed on Christmas Eve by the priest of the small town of Grumo Appula in Puglia. The ceremony was in commemoration of Rocco Sollecito, a mafia underboss murdered in Canada some months before.[28] In many different Italian contexts, the infiltration of criminal organizations in the traditional religious festivities is well known (Dino 2008; Chirico 2012). For example, in 2016, in Valenzano (a

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[26] Cabrera A & Zavala M, 'La huella de El Lazca sigue en el Tezontle', *24 Horas*, 02/02/2015, http://www.24-horas.mx.

[27] Poncho P, 'Zetas cuelgan narcomanta en honor a Heriberto Lazcano por su aniversario luctuoso', *Columna Tamaulipas*, 09/10/2015, www.columnatamaulipas.com.
A memorial *corrido* is for example '*Recordando Al Señor Lazcano*' by Los Cadetes De Linares*;* as a background the advice of a death commemoration in Tezontla; Youtube page 'Corridos de la raza', 22/10/2016, viewed 15/07/2018, www.youtu.be/YvRZuGp33rA [Video 14].

[28] Banti N, 'Grumo, polemica per la Messa in onore del boss. Il parroco: "Spiritualmente unito ai familiari"', *Il quotidiano italiano*, 25/12/2016, www.ilquotidianoitaliano.com.

Figure 30. Casamonica's funeral.

Source: www.larepubblica.it

village near Bari) the Buscemi family imprinted its own name on the hot-air balloon traditionally launched during the local Patron Saint celebrations.[29]

The practice of 'bowing' is a frequent phenomenon: during the procession for the Patron Saint, the statue of the Saint is stopped for a bow in front of the house of who usually offers generous donations. The local boss is usually one of them. Recent cases are those that have taken place in Oppido Mamertina in Calabria, in the Ballarò neighbourhood in Palermo, and in Paternà, where the music band accompanied the religious procession by playing the soundtrack of *The Godfather*. The soundtrack was also used in Rome during the funerals of the boss of Casamonica, a mafia family. They organized a funeral-show with luxury cars, golden coaches, helicopters dropping rose petals and posters at the entrance of the church defining him as the 'King of Rome' and honouring him with 'You conquered Rome, now you will conquer the Heavens' (Fig. 30).[30] Therefore, rather than a traditional religious context, in this example the ritual device of funeral (already influenced by Sinti traditions) not only blessed criminal acts, but has been rearticulated as a criminal ritual.

Even more impressive is the transfiguration of religious codes operated by Mexican organizations. On the bodies of murdered and arrested narcos we see images of Christ, of the Virgin of Guadalupe (the official national religious symbol) and other saints. Their objectification in image is a fundamental divine medium, in a complex form of worshipping that historically already belonged to the Latin Amer-

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[29] Russi F, 'Bari, il nome del clan sulla mongolfiera per il patrono. Ginefra (Pd): "Il Viminale intervenga"', *La Repubblica*, 17/08/2016, www.bari.repubblica.it.

[30] 'Funerale di Vittorio Casamonica', Youtube, 20/08/2015, viewed 17/07/2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=L-Dzw4CJvH8 [Video 15].

ican context (Gruzinski 1988). Some of the most important popular cults of saints in Mexico are recognised neither by the Church nor by the State, and have strong links with the criminal world (Dahlin & Morfot 2011).

Jesus Malverde, a *bandido social* of the late nineteenth century represented in in busts with whiskers and a white jacket, is a widespread cult derived from a popular tradition of northern Mexico. He corresponds to stereotype of the good thief already seen in processes of mythologization and criminals often dedicate a *novena* [prayer] to him before their endeavours. Considered the protector of those who live off activities on the edge of legality, he is the Patron of Narcos (Fig. 31).[31] That of Santa Muerte, portrayed as a skeleton in the guise of the Virgin Mary, is a popular cult that is seeing an expansion all over Mexico (Perdigòn 2008; Hernández 2016). Its deity is functional to the symbolic management of the relationship between death, life and violence, which in their sacred representations are intrinsically united as they are in the Mexican neighbour-

Figure 32. 'FotoReportaje: Malverde' Ofrendas.   Figure 33. Novena de Malverde.

Photo by Frias R (2017). *Source: Siempre! Revista,* www.siempre.mx
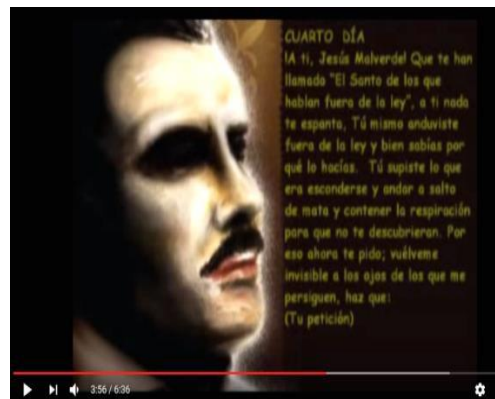
Source: www.youtube.com

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[31] 'Novena de Malverde', Youtube page 'Jesus Malverdee', 16/03/2009, viewed 15/07/2018, https://youtu.be/pZUqnAe2dPk [Video 16].

hoods (Gaytán Alcalá 2008; Lara Mireles 2008) (Fig. 32). These saints are carried in processions and they are often represented in urban and domestic shrines and in narco-altars, where they receive smoke offerings, food and beverages (Chesnut 2012); their presence in the virtualized religious space is no less strong (Lovheim & Linderman 2005; Gervasi et al. 2014) (Fig. 33, 34). Like every effective ritual object, their image can answer to different needs, invoked by both the criminals and by those seeking protection from them. The control over the local territory allows in some cases the presence of memorial altars for criminals in public spaces. In addition to several murals in some of the popular neighbourhoods in the centre of Naples, a courtyard hosts since 2015 a bust of Emanuele Sibillo, surrounded by flowers and sacred images.

The Mexican case offers an even clearer example of criminal canonization: the direct sanctification of a murdered narcotrafficker. In the case of Nazario Moreno Gonzàles, called *El Loco* or *El Chayo*, it is the criminal himself who be-

Figure 31. 'Santa Muerte'.

Figure 34. Invoking the White Lady's protection.

Photo by Schwarz S (2009). *Source: Animal Politico,* <www.animalpolitico.com>

Source: www.twitter.com

comes an object of devotion. When in 2010 the Familia Michoacana organization ended in carnage, their successors Los Caballeros Templarios [The Templars] gave themselves a strict moral code and linked their rise to the devotion seems capable of resurrections and miracles. This new cult soon extended to the local population and keeps expanding further (Sullivan & Bunker 2012). Today *El Loco*, represented in the guise of a Templar knight, has entered the Pantheon of the folk-saints, and his main oracle hosts a statue covered in gold and gems (Fig. 35).[32] Some elements suggest soon it could be the same, for example, for Heriberto Lazcano.[33]

Figure 35. San Naza.

Source: Calderon V 2014, 'El capo que "murió" dos veces', *El Pais*, 03 November, <www.elpais.com>

6. Criminal humanitarianism and political responsibility. Intersecting vision and praxis

The visual repertoire analysed here cannot be exhaustive about the possible rhetorical devices and about the heterogeneities between regional contexts and

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[32] Castellanos FJ, 'El Chayo, santo patrono de la Tierra Caliente', *Proceso*, 04/08/2012, www.proceso.mx.

[33] Chávez A, 'Catedral de la Muerte suma a El Lazca a la veneración', *La Silla Rota*, 05/06/2017, www.lasillarota.com.

between criminal organizations. However, an examination of these constantly growing iconographic procedures provides – in a field in which social analysis suffers methodological impasses and lacks reliable data – some preliminary hypotheses on the cultural procedures criminal non-state actors in state contexts are using to legitimate themselves. The articulation of these discourses acts as a regulatory mechanism not just for criminals; the alternative morality spreads out from the criminal context and can become a cultural point of reference, redefining what is human, moral and sacred even for others. If crime is, as already stated by Durkheim in 1893, a deviant behaviour that goes against social norms, it is interesting to notice how crime can build through its representation new norms, permeating the community and its folklore to the point that it is often problematic to identify where one ends and the other begins. This onset of new collective representations makes the criminals less criminal and, as we have seen in the last examples, these organizations can even turn the institutional hierarchy upside-down, putting the criminal activity at the highest rank of a consecrated morality. This starts from the everyday practice of blurring the meaning of the word 'justice', not only into the attempt to make a living, but also into the attempt to legitimise that living to oneself and others (Garland 2001; Goldstein 2010). The contemporary social impact of these visuals changes, we argued, in relation to a political process that has two faces. From one side, the development of marginal grey zones, characterised by a deficit of institutional control and legitimacy. On the other side, the growing hybridity between criminal enterprises and ruling classes.

The visual examples here say a lot especially about the building of consent at the margins, while much remains to be said about criminal influence over the very centre of formal politics. This theoretical challenge would be as important as the one first mentioned, not only because it encompasses of a recent and more diffused phenomenon (Naim 2012), but for the specificity of the two regional contexts we chose. With different modalities, these criminal organizations have worked since decades (or centuries, in some cases) as states within the state, moving on the line between the 'upperworld' and the 'underworld'. The history of the Italian ma-

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fias and Mexican cartels is not only that of criminals as creators of disorder, but also of the creation of criminal forms of public order (Solís González 2012; Sales 2015); forms that are continuously adapted in order to fit new goals and changing political patterns.

Figure 36. '12D' series.

Photo by Gama F (2012). In Cubas 2013.

In the three rhetorical procedures analysed – three conceptual categories whose borders are in practices within a flux of continue dialectics – the common effect is that a traditional ultimate factor of social disintegration actually seems to be a means of socialisation. If these organizations relate to popular areas strategically managing an economy based on marginality – taking people 'with hats in their hand', using a mafia expression – in local imaginaries criminals provide jobs, do good deeds and, in short, look humanitarian, as a productive and reconstructive organ of society. In the pictures observed, criminals propose themselves as upholders of order. As we have seen, this mechanism can be effective and 'humanising' even when they promote an order explicitly built upon violence. In philanthropic representations we have two further and convergent images: criminal power as a pro-

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moter of social solidarity and the powerless subalterns ready for self-empowerment through integration in the criminal market. Through philanthropic performance, as well as through the violent one, criminal patterns – and now, indirectly, neoliberal ones – are accepted, devised for addressing the same problems criminality and violent economies are responsible for. Thus, we can look at these visuals ideologically, as informal devices to symbolise power relationships through a spectacularised morality – also relevant to the specific local cultures – that shows 'goodness' in different forms, leaving untouched the question of the perpetuation of suffering through a structural and systemic violence.

Beyond moral imperatives, the occultation of concrete social mechanisms is closely tied to a total disdain for the problem-solving ability of politics, that widens the proximity between criminality and population and leaves to criminal organizations space for being recognised as philanthropic, moral and saint. These rhetorical processes are particularly effective when the state is unable to oppose equally effective narratives, acting in forms that seem aimed at 'punishing the poor' and defending private interests (Waqcuant 2009). Unprecedented sympathies and 'logics of equivalence' (Laclau 2000) are created by the disdain for a political order considered to be responsible for poverty and hardship. It would be unsurprising, for example, to see an anti-globalist parade passing near the city's jail – during a G7 meeting in the city-centre of Bari, sealed off for the occasion – playing and singing for inmates the well-known neo-melodic song *D'int à sta cella* [Inside this cell]. The same state discourse can legitimate an exotic and culturalistic vision of criminality, replacing its strict liabilities with references to a presumed traditional attitude. It recently happened in Italy, when the very president of the anti-mafia's Parliamentary Commission Rosy Bindi described Camorra as a 'constitutive aspect of the Neapolitan city'.[34] On the other side, public speech that postulates the local populations as a silenced victim of criminal dominance risks to be simplistic and misleading too. As stated by Rakopoulos (2017) in his research on Cosa Nostra and the cooperatives in

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[34] 'La camorra è un dato costitutivo di Napoli. L'accusa della Bindi fa infuriare De Magistris', *La Stampa*, 15/09/2015, www.lastampa.it.

Sicily, criminal organizations can be able to form a 'centauric relation' with society, maintaining a liminal position between coercion and consent, practices of hierarchy and claims to equality. The moral code of criminal honour, for example, even if far from being realised as their violence is, spreads the message that they can afford sustenance, peace, model of success. The compliant subjects can adopt them in order to create wealth; although fatal for dissenters, criminals could build a new political economy.

In the rhetorical processes we have observed, criminals can both vindicate their peculiar – usually romanticised – outlaw's identity and nurture an 'one of us' narrative. From opposite starting points, criminal promotion can bring something legitimate closer to criminals, or make what is criminal more legitimate. Both these visual representations transfigure reality, developing spatial practices and cultural models that soon become part of a broader social phenomenon (Barthes 1964; De Certau 1980). The case in which these visuals are effective means of promotion suggests that we should not oversize the distance between criminals and its audience, nor undersize the political precondition of this proximity. Despite the dramatic hierarchies imposed by violence and intimidation, the rhetoric analysed can't be seen through a mechanical logic of persuasion. As we have seen, every legitimising process stems from forms of communication and cultural appropriation that, although asymmetrically, are based on a double movement which always foresees reciprocity. Cultural products seek to proliferate in a shared symbolic field, working towards the production of a recognised discourse about the social world that is meaningful – and therefore legitimate – for both.

Fear, violence and uncertainty of social interactions are abundant in the criminal word as in the broader world of who live in social contexts of politically planned insecurity every day. Despite any rhetorical, iconological and media sophistication in criminal representation, the most direct legitimating idiom thus resides – more than in charity, honour or sanctity – in this shared social experience of insecurity (Fig. 37, 38). The cultural management of insecurity moves from criminal social interactions to even worships, becoming a transcendental form of interpretation of

reality. Ready in turn to build new rhetorical devices, the embodiment of criminal culture is part of a broader process of cultural elaboration. The subjectivities of who lives at the margins are far from being just passive products of subjugating devices; they stem from the informal interstices of the political structure not only as a disenfranchised product of the society-building processes, but as a way of adapting to their political failure.

Figure 37. 'I due Cristi'.

Photo by Battaglia L (1982). In Tamburrino 2016

Figure 38. 'Historias en la piel' series.

Photo by Gama F (2011). In Gama & Mendoza 2011

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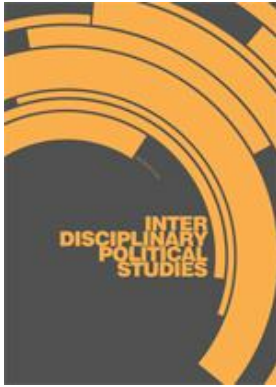
ERRATUM

Erratum to: Criminal humanitarianism.
A visual exploration of criminal legitimisation, between alternative moralities and the political vacuum.

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Due to an error in the production process of the article "Criminal humanitarianism. A visual exploration of criminal legitimisation, between alternative moralities and the political vacuum" (DOI: 10.1285/i20398573v4n2p79) the captions of Figure 37 and 38 have been inverted (pag. 118).
We apologize with the authors Letizia Battaglia and Federico Gama.

Figure 37. **'I due Cristi'**

Photo by Battaglia L (1982). In Tamburrino 2016.

38. 'Historias en la piel' series.

Photo by Gama F (2011). In Gama & Mendoza 2011.