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**How Criminal Organisations Exert Secret Power over Communities: An  
Intracultural Appropriation Theory of Cultural Values and Norms**

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## **How Criminal Organisations Exert Secret Power over Communities: An Intracultural Appropriation Theory of Cultural Values and Norms**

### **Abstract**

A key feature of criminal organisations is their ability to exert secret power - governance over the community and inhibition of overt public opposition (*omertà*). Traditional theory has attributed *omertà* to fear or passivity. Here, an alternative model grounded in different premises, Intracultural Appropriation Theory (ICAT), stresses the central role of cultural factors in sustaining relations of domination between groups in society. Specifically, ICAT contends that non-state agents achieve legitimacy and influence among people by claiming to embody cultural values shared within the community. In the case of Italian organised crime, criminal organisations' strategic adherence to values of masculinity and honour bestows legitimacy on their actions, enabling them to exert and sustain secret power. We report empirical evidence in support of this proposition, and derive a new formulation of *omertà* which focuses on social emotions, social identity and the role of social change beliefs. We suggest that the theory contributes to a new perspective for the analysis of cultural values, political action, and cultural honour, and that it should generalise to account for secret power in a range of other contexts and countries.

### **Keywords:**

*omertà*, power, criminal organisations, honour values, collective action, intracultural appropriation theory, culture, ideology

The term 'criminal organisation' is used to refer to a broad range of groups that pursue illegal activities in a systematic, organised way. Generally, criminal organisations provide people with goods and services whose production or sale is criminalised or, in some way, limited by the laws of the state. The pursuit of profit is, therefore, an obvious goal of these groups. However, their activities extend well beyond the accumulation of money and illicit gains (Paoli, 2003). Indeed, a distinctive feature of these organisations is their ability to exert political power over other criminals (Toros & Mavelli, 2013; von Lampe, 2016). For instance, within their territories, they exert control over other criminals' illegal activities such as by requiring them to ask for permission, or pay a fee, before engaging in crimes. They may even be powerful enough to designate some targets or activities as off limits to other criminals.

### **Secret Power**

In the present article, we highlight a third, and in our view potentially even more important feature of criminal organisations: their ability to exert social, economic and political power over vast segments of the population of law-abiding citizens (Marshall, 2013). We refer to this general capacity as 'secret power'. Such power is not formally recognized or delimited by statutory authorities yet it is constituted and regulated through clearly structured social properties such as group memberships, social or geographical reach, systems of exchange and responsibility, forms of constraint, and culturally rooted rules, often backed by tradition and precedent. A key issue for social psychology is to understand the values and beliefs that enable agents like criminal organisations to achieve the legitimacy necessary to engage in this form of (extra-legal) *governance*.

We contend that analysis of the role of such values and beliefs in the context of criminal organisations is useful because it may help shed light on the psychological basis of secret power across multiple contexts and groups. Research in psychology has examined the processes underpinning individuals' legitimisation of social and political institutions (e.g., Costa-Lopes, Dovidio, Pereira, & Jost, 2013; Jost, 2018; Jost, Federico, & Napier, 2009; Tyler, 2006). However, this research has mostly focused, implicitly or explicitly, on systems of governance rooted in the legal authority of the state (Tyler, 2006). However, the state and its institutions are not the only (or sometimes even the main) legitimate authorities in many societies (Strange, 1996). A number of other social agents can influence local communities and civil society. These agents can be outlaw or subversive organisations such as terrorists, bandits, street gangs, mafias, paramilitary groups and revolutionaries. They can also be large corporations and transnational NGOs, or religious institutions that transcend or behave orthogonally to the jurisdiction of a single state (Strange, 1996). These agents are often unable or unwilling to rely on legal procedures and rules to sustain their legitimacy (cf. Weber, 1978). The question is, what are the bases of their secret power?

To examine this question, in this article we focus on a prototypical – but by no means unique – example of extra-legal governance, that of Italian organised crime. Italian criminal organisations originated and sustain power in southern Italian regions but operate on a transnational scale. In their Southern Italian heartlands, they have infiltrated numerous aspects of public and political life and play an important role in regulating local economic activities, imposing norms, and even administering justice (Allum, 2006; Paoli, 2003; Ruggiero, 1997; Schneider & Schneider, 2003; Skaperdas & Syropoulos, 1995). Their presence in Southern Italy is associated with increased

violence, substantial economic losses and reduced confidence in public life (Daniele & Marani, 2011; Lavezzi, 2014; Pinotti, 2012; Schneider, 2018; Sciarrone & Storti, 2014). Yet, despite suffering significantly from the predatory presence of criminal organisations, local communities rarely question, challenge or oppose them, a phenomenon known as *omertà*.

To understand the psychology of *omertà*, we propose a new theoretical framework, Intracultural Appropriation Theory (ICAT). ICAT highlights the importance of context-dependent and group-specific cultural values in sustaining relationships of domination among groups in society. According to ICAT, non-state agents such as criminal organisations cannot establish their authority within a legal framework of official rules and institutions (Tyler, 2006; cf. Weber, 1978). Their legitimacy, instead, depends on their ability to embody *cultural values* and traditions shared within the community.

From this theoretical framework, we derive a new model to explain the social and cultural psychological underpinnings of *omertà* and we systematically review and analyse available evidence in support of this model, using Italian criminal organisations as a prototypical case study. Our central contention is that the readily available and dominant cultural values of masculine honour provide a normative basis for, and bestow legitimacy on, criminal organisations dominant position in society. After considering empirical evidence and building the case for ICAT, we broaden our discussion to other contexts and theories, and consider the generalisability of our findings.

Thus, the first half of this paper provides an integrative review of the extant literature, whilst in the second part we present the empirical evidence underpinning the development of our theoretical position. More specifically, the first section sets

out our new theoretical framework, Intracultural Appropriation Theory (ICAT). In the second section we derive a model of *omertà* in the context of previous sociological and anthropological work on Italian organised crime, and building also on psychological theories of honour, collective action and social identity. ICAT and the model both provide a set of organising hypotheses and parameters for understanding recent evidence about the conditions in which individuals are less likely to oppose, and in fact are more likely to legitimise, organised crime groups, thereby sustaining their secret power. In the third section, we consider the generalisability of the model to other geographical areas. We also discuss implications for the understanding of the relationship between communities and other types of criminal and illegal groups, and we suggest central questions for future research.

### **Culture as Ideology: Towards a Theory of Intracultural Appropriation**

What enables subversive, illegal or extra-legal agents to express governance over the community? No system of governance can rely exclusively on 'raw' coercion. Rather, it needs the legitimisation of those who are governed in order to operate effectively and over a sustained length of time (Tyler, 2006).

Turner (2005, p. 12) defines *coercion* as "the attempt to control a target against their will and self-interest through the deployment of human and material resources". Coercion is a dramatic but ineffective form of power because it is inherently conflictual and makes targets acutely aware that their freedom is being curtailed. Thus, coercion fuels resistance and rejection of the coercive agent. Distinct from coercion, *authority* is the ability to control people "because they are persuaded it is right for a certain person [or group] to control them in certain matters" (Turner, 2005, p. 11). Authority is a much more effective form of power because it is based on

the claim that the authority's dictates are 'proper' and 'ought to' be followed (Zelditch, 2001).

Rule creation and bureaucratic rationalisation are the sources of legitimacy of what the sociologist Weber (1978) defined as 'legal authority'. Relatedly, research in psychology indicates that legitimate authority is conferred to an agent to the extent that they are perceived as adopting fair procedures to exercise their authority (e.g., Tyler, 2000; see Tyler, 2006, for a review). For example, leaders in organisations are seen as more legitimate if they adopt fairer procedures for decision-making (e.g., Tyler & Blader, 2000). Confidence in the capacity of authorities to engage in impartial governance can mitigate the negative impact of poor economic performance on electoral support (Magalhaes & Aguiar-Conraria, 2018). However, the legitimacy of illegal, extra-legal or subversive groups cannot – by definition – be based on legal rules and fair procedures. Other sources must, therefore, underwrite these agent's secret power.

### **The Legitimisation of Unequal Social Arrangements in Society**

Inequality is a widespread feature of societies and cultures. Relationships based on unequal distribution of resources among groups and individuals are one of the four elementary forms of sociality, according to Fiske (1992)'s Relational Model Theory. The perpetuation of inequality in social arrangements depends on the acquiescence of and tacit legitimisation by those who are part of these arrangements (Costa-Lopes et al., 2013). A vast body of research in psychology has examined the psychological underpinning of individuals' willingness to legitimise unequal arrangements in society.

At the group level, Social Dominance Theory contends that hierarchical relationships among groups are sustained by institutional discriminatory practices.



Such practices are made possible by so-called 'legitimising myths' or 'ideologies' (Pratto et al., 2006; Sidanius, Pratto, van Laar, & Levin, 2004; Sidanius, Cotterill, Sheehy-Skeffington, Kteily, & Carvacho, 2017). For example, widespread endorsement of the meritocratic ideology means that individuals tend to attribute structural inequalities among groups to alleged lack of personal capacity among lower-ranked individuals. Social dominance theory posits that individuals vary in the extent to which they accept or reject legitimising ideologies (i.e., social dominance orientation; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994).

At the societal level, System Justification Theory posits that individuals have a basic psychological motivation to justify the status quo and its social and political institutions (Jost, 2018; Jost & Banaji, 1994). Justifying the system enables individuals to satisfy epistemic, relational and existential needs (Hennes, Nam, Stern, & Jost, 2012; Jost, Ledgerwood, & Hardin, 2007). Importantly, research conducted in system justification theory shows that when individuals feel dependent on, or powerless vis-à-vis, an agent (e.g., the police force, the government) they also perceive that agent as more legitimate in the exercise of its authority (van der Toorn, et al., 2015; van der Toorn, Tyler, & Jost, 2010).

Taken together, these theoretical frameworks support the idea that, under some circumstances, members of subordinate groups may accept the legitimacy of unequal social arrangements and the institutional authorities overseeing or promoting them. Nonetheless, an issue not addressed by these theories is that, in many societies, individuals often have to deal with complex nets of power relations that include competing agents who make opposing claims to legitimate authority. Even more importantly, these agents may be (or at least may appear to be) a threat to the status

quo and may call the state's political monopoly and authority into question, rather than sustaining it (Stranges, 1996).

There are many examples of non-state agents playing a key political role within the community. Terrorist networks and violent organisations may offer welfare services to communities and other social services, undermining state legitimacy and gaining wider acceptance (Grynkewich, 2008). For instance, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in Northern Ireland challenged the rule of law, while policing local communities (Burton, 1978). Criminal organisations in southern Italy may substitute local governments while being supported by local populations (Travaglino, Abrams, & Randsley de Moura, 2014). Some communities in the US may express more sympathy for gangs than for the police (Akerlof & Yellen, 1994), and hacker groups on the internet may receive more support than state authorities (cf. Travaglino, 2017). In these circumstances, individuals must choose whom to pledge their allegiance to, whom to obey, and which of the competing systems of authority should be sustained and regarded as legitimate.

**Intracultural appropriation theory.** ICAT proposes that cultural values and beliefs play a pivotal role in granting legitimacy to non-state agents, enabling them to embed themselves in society and exert influence over the community via secret power. The legitimisation process posited by ICAT maps onto another basis of legitimacy conceptualised by Weber (1978) as 'traditional authority'. Specifically, ICAT proposes that non-state agents strategically exploit existing cultural values shared within the population (hence '*intra*' cultural appropriation) to gain consensus and sustain their power (cf. Schneider & Schneider, 2003). 'Strategic exploitation' means that such agents appropriate these values while also engaging in the production of symbols, employing communicative practices, and social action to reinforce the

importance and centrality of the values in society. ICAT's constitutive propositions are schematically illustrated in Figure 1.

According to ICAT, cultural values may become an ideological device that establishes and sustains relations of domination in society (cf. Thompson, 1990, pp. 60-62; see also Geertz, 1964). They do so by providing meaning and legitimacy to the actions of a dominant group, demonstrating that they are appropriate and proper in relation to shared values and standards, and by grounding the dominant group's activities in shared traditions and identities (Poppi, Travaglino, & Di Piazza, 2018; Thompson, 1990; Travaglino, 2017).

In psychology, studies of cultural values and of ideology have hitherto had little cross-fertilisation (see Wolf, 1999, for a discussion in anthropology). On the one hand, the study of ideology, defined broadly as 'systems of shared beliefs', is in practice often narrowed down to that of 'political attitudes', whether using a single 'left-right' dimension or more complex multidimensional models (see Jost, Federico, & Napier, 2009, for a review). The ideological function of other systems of shared values and beliefs, including cultural values, that do not reside in the institutionalised power of the state is largely unexplored (for exceptions, see Heidt, Graham, & Joseph, 2009; Uhlmann, Poehlman, & Bargh, 2009).

On the other hand, cultural values are rarely examined in relation to the power dimension (i.e., inequality) of intergroup relations in society. Culture can be defined as a system of shared values, beliefs, and practices that influence how individuals perceive their environment (Triandis, 2001). According to Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov's (2010) metaphor, culture is the *software of the mind* because it provides individuals with a shared script for thinking, feeling and acting. Culture emerges from the institutional, symbolic and collective arrangements of a society (e.g., Kitayama,

2002). It is, therefore, as much inside the individual's mind (i.e., the differences in the extent to which individuals endorse shared cultural values), as outside the mind, embodied in institutions, practices and artefacts (Kitayama, 2002; Leung & Cohen, 2011; Moon, Travaglino & Uskul, 2018; Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 2002).

It may be in the interest of those who shape such institutions and practices to make them appear to be 'the nature of things' (Wolf, 2001, p. 398), eternal and natural social arrangements that exclude other forms of social order. They are, in fact, human-made. Dominant agents have better access to the resources and other economic means needed to shape institutions and practices. Thus, such agents are also able to impose their own cultural meanings over other (subordinate) groups (Wolf, 1999). The software of the mind – to stay with Hofstede et al.'s (2010) metaphor – does have a programmer.

In line with this idea, Miyamoto et al. (2018) recently examined the interplay between culture, socioeconomic status (SES) and self- (vs. other-) orientation, across societies. Using representative samples from both eastern and western contexts, they found that SES was positively associated with stronger self-orientation both in cultures that promoted an independent self-concept, and in those that promoted an interdependent self-concept. However, in cultures promoting an interdependent self-concept, higher SES was also associated with a stronger other-orientation.

In other words, higher status individuals not only enjoy fewer social constraints as a result of having more resources (i.e., higher self-orientation). They also engage in, and show attributes in line with, their context's dominant cultural practices. Miyamoto et al. (2018) used this evidence to propose a mutually constitutive process between culture and SES. Specifically, individuals in dominant positions find it easier to pursue their goals while also engaging in culturally

sanctioned activities. Their ability to mirror shared cultural values legitimises their position and higher status. Simultaneously, through their higher status, they reinforce the desirability of those cultural values. This process is in line with ICAT's idea of strategic exploitation employed by non-state agents to gain legitimacy and exert governance (Travaglino, 2017; Travaglino et al., 2017).

ICAT contends that to the extent that individuals endorse a specific set of cultural values, they are more likely to sustain and legitimise groups that present themselves as the embodiment of such values. We define this process as 'social embedding'. For instance, Travaglino (2017) demonstrated that individuals who endorse values of horizontal individualism (a cultural orientation emphasising both the autonomy of the self and social equality; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998) were more likely to support and legitimise the actions of the groups of hackers 'Anonymous'. This is because Anonymous presents itself as the embodiment of values of individualism and equality, mirroring the values of horizontal individualism. By appropriating such values, it is able to exert influence over the (e-)community and acquire legitimacy and influence. At the same time, through its actions, it is also in position to highlight the importance of these values.

Moreover, consonant with the process of social embedding, individuals are more likely to support leaders and authority figures who are able to match cultural values shared within a given context (Chen, Jing, Lee, & Bai, 2016), and to embody and propagate identities and values shared within a group (Haslam, Reicher & Platow, 2011; Hogg, 2001; Steffens, et al., 2014). For instance, in highly hierarchical and paternalistic contexts, leaders who are able to embody paternalistic ideals elicit positive responses from subordinates, especially when those subordinates endorse cultural values promoting the acceptance of such hierarchies (Cheng, Chou, Wu,

Huang, & Farh, 2004). In addition, research shows that leaders use rhetoric and social discourse to present themselves as the embodiment of values and beliefs shared by the group, and to indicate future courses of actions that are consonant with 'who we are' (e.g., Haslam, et al., 2011; Reicher & Hopkins, 1996). This ability to embody shared values may even contribute to the process of giving authorities licence to act in illegal, illicit or otherwise deviant ways (Abrams, Randsley de Moura & Travaglino, 2013; Abrams, Travaglino, Marques, Pinto, & Levine, 2018; Travaglino, Abrams, Randsley de Moura, & Yetkili, 2015).

In the next section, we apply this novel theoretical framework to the context of criminal organisations. Specifically, we use ICAT to derive a model explaining individuals' acceptance and legitimisation of criminal organisations (*omertà*). We thus provide an example of ICAT's explanatory and heuristic reach in accounting for the presence of secret power in a context of high social relevance.

### **Criminal Organisations in the Italian context: Governance and Power**

At present there is no single consensual social scientific definition of criminal organisations (cf. Finckenauer, 2005). Social scientific portrayals are often burdened by the weight of myths and misconceptions. In addition, the different definitions are often shaped by legal and political necessities (Varese, 2010; von Lampe, 2001; Wheatley, 2011). According to Paoli (2003), two different paradigms have been used to define Italian criminal organisations. Early sociologists (e.g., Hess, 1973) regarded them as originating from the 'attitudes' and 'behaviours' embedded in the cultural fabric of some southern Italian regions. According to this 'characterological perspective', there existed no formal mafia groups, but only individuals who behaved as *mafiosi*<sup>1</sup> (Blok, 1988), namely those who exercised power outside the legal constraints of the State. This approach assigned minimal formal organisation to

mafia-like groups, and emphasised the importance of cultural, symbolic and communicative factors such as the ability of *mafiosi* to exert violence, their emphasis on revenge and ritual murders, and their standing within the community.

In stark contrast, more recent research has conceptualised Italian criminal organisations as a special form of economic enterprise (e.g., Gambetta, 1993), sharing corporation-like features. This latter approach, which could be labelled the 'economic structure' perspective, reduces the role of cultural elements that might underpin criminal organisations. However, it recognises the importance of a formal structure of governance within the group, and of formalised or quasi-formalised hierarchical relationships between members of criminal organisations.

Both approaches have made important contributions to the understanding of Italian criminal organisations and other mafia-like groups around the world. However, an important limitation of both approaches is that they tend to emphasise a single core feature of mafia groups, to the detriment of other important characteristics (Paoli, 2003). In line with Paoli's (2003) analysis, we contend that criminal organisations are best defined as entities characterised by a multiplicity of functions. Although these groups undoubtedly operate on the basis of a formal structure, their goals clearly go beyond the mere accumulation of resources and profits (Paoli, 2003; see also Allum & Sands, 2004; Toros & Mavelli, 2013). In particular, central to criminal organisations' activities are the acquisition of status and the exercise of power over the communities they inhabit and the territories where they reside. In such territories, criminal organisations may replace the state and provide an alternative form of *governance*.

Here, we follow Fukuyama in defining the most basic tenet of governance as the "ability to make and enforce rules, and to deliver services", regardless of the

political framework in which such ability is exerted (Fukuyama, 2013, p. 350; cf. Strange, 1996). In line with this definition, criminal organisations provide governance because they are able to regulate economic and social activities that take place within the community, producing and distributing legal and illegal goods and services (Skaperdas, 2001). They enforce sanctions and mediate in disputes among citizens and may even invest in and contribute to the creation of local infrastructures (Paoli, 2003).

### ***Omertà***

Criminal organisations are directly or indirectly involved in corruption and predatory crimes, including robbery, theft and fraud (Sung, 2004; von Lampe, 2016). Such crimes affect the community by increasing levels of fear and violence, and decreasing trust and well-being (Giordano, Cannizzaro, Tosto, Pavia & Di Blasi, 2017; cf. Ciziceno & Travaglino, 2018). In addition, their presence is associated with greater corruption and lower economic growth (Van Dijk, 2007).

Despite these strongly negative consequences of criminal organisations' presence, direct opposition to criminal organisations is rare. Local communities allegedly display a form of collective passivity towards these groups, a phenomenon known as "omertà" (Travaglino et al., 2014). *Omertà* – or 'law of silence' – is a cultural code that prescribes indifference to others' illegal activity. This code involves the categorical prohibition of cooperation with law enforcement agencies, regardless of whether one participates in (internal *omertà*), merely observes, or even is victim of a crime (external *omertà*; Paoli, 2003). Criminal organisations use *omertà* to reduce dissent, perpetuate their control and avoid prosecution. *Omertà* is therefore one of the core social features that enables criminal organisations to sustain secret power through which to engage in extra-legal governance. A critical element of



understanding why criminal organisations can persist therefore requires the examination of the social and cultural psychological underpinnings of *omertà*. This was the primary objective of our programme of research.

***Omertà: The Generalised Passivity and Fear Accounts.*** Different accounts have been proposed to explain *omertà*. In line with the characterological perspective, some of these explanations have focused on Southern Italians' cultural or personological characteristics. Political scientists and sociologists have often argued that Southern Italians are culturally unable to engage in collective actions for the common good. Such inability to act collectively would in turn decrease these populations' capacity to organise an effective resistance against criminal organisations.

For instance, Banfield (1958, p. 83) contended that Southern Italians' behaviour could be explained as adherence to the following law: 'maximise the material, short-run advantage of the nuclear family; assume that all others will do likewise'. As a corollary of this ethos of generalised passivity – which Banfield termed *amoral familism* – Southern Italians would show a disregard for public affairs, and a profound distrust for institutional authorities (see Foschi & Lauriola, 2016, for a recent critique and analysis; see also Schneider & Schneider, 1994). Putnam (1993) attributed Southern Italian's ethos of passivity to *lack of civic capacity*, arguing that a sequence of autocratic and absolutist regimes dating back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century means that Southern Italians never developed the social capital necessary for civic engagement. Similarly, Gambetta (1988; 1993) conceptualised the mafia as emanating from a society permeated by low levels of trust due to past regimes. According to Gambetta, in a low-trust society such as the Southern Italian one, groups like the

mafia may emerge to guarantee – thanks to their reputation for violence – transactions among individuals and offer protection.

An alternative account of *omertà* equates this phenomenon with fear of retaliation. Mafia-type groups appropriate the state's monopoly of violence (Marshall, 2013; Skaperdas & Syropoulos, 1995). They employ intimidation and violence to achieve their objectives. For instance, they may decide to punish, even with death, those who disobey their commands. The resulting fear provides such groups with a powerful means of social control because fear precludes individuals from rebelling and reporting criminal organisations' crimes to the authorities (cf. Giordano, Cannizzaro, Tosto, Pavia & Di Blasi, 2017; Roberti, 2008).

**Shortcomings of Previous Accounts of *Omertà*.** Accounts of *omertà* based on assumptions of generalised passivity and fear are problematic in several respects (see Schneider & Schneider, 2003; Silverman, 1968; Tarrow, 1996). Notably, they tend to overlook important elements of the ideological, social, and cultural context in which criminal organisations operate. Instead, they are based upon essentialised – and largely untested – assumptions about the ethos (or character) of Southern Italian people (Travaglino et al., 2014). By locating the origin of this ethos in the distant past, passivity accounts imply collective stagnation and ignore important variation within the regional population in its response to criminal organisations (Travaglino et al., 2017). In addition, by emphasising goals such as (family-exclusive) gains, or the avoidance of punishment, these accounts reveal deep assumptions that mechanistic and simplistic instrumentality drives the social behaviour of this 'other', non-Northern American, non-Northern European population (see Schneider, 1998).

We argue that a major shortcoming of these accounts is their implicit conceptualisation of criminal organisations' social power as grounded in *coercion*.

This conceptualisation limits the community's role to that of passive spectators of criminal organisations' actions. At the core of the passivity account lies the simple idea that criminal organisations' control of the means of violence enables these criminal groups to seize control of the community (Skaperdas, 2001, p. 180). For instance, according to Skaperdas (2001; Skaperdas & Syropoulos, 1995), factors such as arduous geographies, sudden political change, legal prohibition of goods, and the social distance of some subgroups in society weaken the state's capability to monopolise violence within its territories. This creates a vacuum which is then filled by organised (criminal) groups that possess the resources and skills to exercise violence, offer protection and terrorise people. The community either lacks the ethos, or thinks it is not in its interest, to coordinate an effective response to reinforce the state's authority and ensure its own security (Skaperdas, 2001). Similarly, according to Gambetta, the fear that criminal organisations instil provides them with the capacity to control and regulate social and economic transactions within the community. The community's inability to cooperate and the generalised lack of trust that permeates society prevent its members from self-organising in an effective manner.

However, the assumed power of criminal organisations' coercion is inconsistent with evidence of multiple instances in which civil society *has* shown resistance to and rebellion against criminal organisations (Schneider & Schneider, 2003). Recent evidence suggests that collective action in repressive contexts is fuelled, rather than inhibited, by perceived risk (Ayanian & Tausch, 2016).

More importantly, the emphasis on coercion also misrepresents the very nature of criminal organisations' power (Clark, 2005). Our contention is that criminal organisations are able to displace the state and exercise some of the state's functions

(e.g., punishment, dispute mediation, regulation of economic activities) because they are able to claim *legitimate authority* over some segments of the population. There is little doubt that violence is a central feature of Italian criminal organisations.

However, violence and the resulting fear are not – by themselves – the key elements that bestow power on these organisations or ensure obedience from the community.

Rather, using ICAT, we argue that criminal organisations' violence only becomes effective within an *ideological* and *normative* framework that construes such violence as an acceptable way of regulating social relationships in society. Our contention is that the framework that does this is that of honour cultures, specifically that of masculine honour-related values.

### **Cultural Honour**

Honour is defined as the 'value of a person in his [sic] own eyes, but also in the eyes of his society' (Pitt-Rivers, 1965, p. 21). Honour is an important cultural code in many societies around the globe, including Mediterranean countries (Rodriguez Mosquera, Manstead, & Fischer, 2002; Schneider, 1971), southern regions of the United States (Cohen & Nisbett, 1997) and Middle-Eastern countries (Uskul, Cross, Sunbay, Gercek-Swing, & Ataca, 2012). In these cultures, individuals must be able to respond promptly to insults, as well as kindness, from other people (Leung & Cohen, 2011; Rodriguez Mosquera, Fischer, Manstead, & Zaalberg, 2008; Rodriguez Mosquera, 2016, 2018; Uskul & Cross, 2019; Uskul, Cross, Gunsoy, & Pelin, in press).

To be honourable, individuals must carefully manage their reputation and conform to a set of social expectations (Pitt-Rivers, 1966; Rodriguez Mosquera, et al., 2002; Rodriguez Mosquera et al., 2008). Such expectations vary according to different factors, the most relevant being the gender of the individual. For example, to

preserve their social worth, women must respect norms of purity and sexual chastity. Men must instead acquire a tough reputation, demonstrating their ability to respond to insults and to use violence to defend their property, 'their' women and their family (Barnes, Brown, & Osterman, 2012; Barnes, Brown, & Tamborski, 2012; Brown, Imura & Mayeux, 2014; Brown, Osterman, & Barnes, 2009).

Cultural honour may be conceptualised as a complex system of ideas, beliefs, practices and values aimed at *regulating* relationships and interactions in society. An important function of honour is to define what forms of violence are legitimate (Fiske & Rai, 2014). For example, cultural values of honour promote the private use of (male) violence and emphasise the importance of strength and revenge when one's reputation is threatened. Importantly, such an emphasis on private violence implies a distance from, and even a rejection of, the centralised agencies of the state (cf. Blok, 1981). Indeed, it has been hypothesised that cultures of honour have developed most fully in lawless environments, characterised by the lack of a central authority that is able to mediate and resolve disputes (Nisbett & Cohen, 1996) or guarantee contracts. Under these conditions, one's reputation (i.e., one's value in the eyes of society) functions as an important deterrent to theft and violence.

Empirical research has demonstrated that men's endorsement of masculine honour-related values has important implications at the *interpersonal level*. For instance, men's endorsement of values of honour and masculinity has been associated with a tendency to react more violently to insults (Cohen, Nisbett, Bowdle, & Schwarz, 1996). Masculine honour is also implied in the justification of violence against women in situations of infidelity (Gill, Strange & Roberts, 2014; Vandello & Cohen, 2003, 2008) because female infidelity threatens the reputation of the whole family. In honour cultures, violence used to defend one's honour is perceived and

judged differently from mere interpersonal aggression (cf. Mulders-Jones, 2013), although the latter can still be construed as a display of manliness and toughness.

Here, we argue that these beliefs about violence embedded in honour cultures are not mere precursors of *interindividual* retaliation. Rather, one of the key unexamined functions of masculine honour is to regulate *intergroup* relationships by signalling who may use violence against whom, and when and how (cf. Fiske & Rai, 2014), and by defining and legitimising hierarchical relationships between those who 'possess honour' and those who do not. For instance, Barnes et al. (2012) demonstrated that both male and female individuals' endorsement of masculine honour-related values is associated with more extreme reactions against terrorists who threaten their nation. Moreover, in line with ICAT we contend that, at the societal level, masculine honour-related values may be exploited ideologically by dominant groups such as criminal organisations to sustain power relationships within communities.

**Intracultural Appropriation Theory: Masculine Honour and Criminal Organisations.** We contend that criminal organisations appropriate and use values of masculinity and honour to gain legitimacy within the community. Thus, in the context of criminal organisations, masculine honour-related values function as a cultural ideology that sustains relations of domination between groups in society. To the extent that criminal organisations strategically exploit those values, their actions gain meaning and legitimacy, and may be deemed appropriate by individuals in relation to standards of masculinity and honour.

Importantly, ICAT's emphasis on the processes of strategic exploitation and social embedding eschews the cultural essentialism and the passivity inherent in previous conceptualisations of the relationship between criminal organisations and

southern Italian communities. ICAT assigns an important role to cultural values in stimulating support for criminal organisations. However, it does not claim that these values per se lead individuals to condone criminal organisations' actions. Rather, it posits that criminal organisations' appropriation and strategic use of masculine honour-related values enable them to gain consent. Moreover, ICAT does not consider the community to be a passive agent, only motivated by fear. Instead, it emphasises that both criminal organisations and the community actively negotiate their relationship within a framework of shared (and contestable) meanings and symbols.

There is some evidence for the processes of appropriation and representation postulated by ICAT in the context of criminal organisations. Anthropological accounts demonstrate that criminal organisations portray themselves as the embodiment of shared ideals of manhood and honour. *Mafiosi* purportedly kill only in order to punish deviations from the traditional codes of honour. They show intolerance of challenges and insults, and celebrate self-reliance, loyalty and reciprocity (Schneider & Schneider, 2003). Criminal organisations put forward heroic 'origin myths' about their group that emphasise male potency and self-reliance (Schneider & Schneider, 1994). For example, the Sicilian mafia traces its origins to the 'Blessed Paulists', a mythical secret group of heroic outlaws who corrected wrongs without the help of the state.

In addition, criminal organisations propagate their values within civil society using different media and strategies. For instance, the so-called *neomelodici* singers, local singers often directly linked to organised crime, use their performances to highlight the importance of values linked to *omertà* (Toros & Mavelli, 2013). Recently, newspaper articles have reported on the phenomenon of camorra (i.e., the

Neapolitan mafia) bosses' using social media such as Facebook to represent themselves publicly as 'men of honour', displaying pictures with weapons and posting about how they defy police forces and the state (e.g., Russo, 2016).

Recently, we analysed a TV interview with Giuseppe Riina, the son of the mafia boss Toto' Riina (Poppi et al., 2018). We showed how Giuseppe Riina used a vast array of discursive strategies to highlight the importance of values such as 'minding one's own businesses', or justifying, denying and legitimising mafia's practices. In a similar vein, Saviano (2009, cited in Toros & Mavelli, 2013) has demonstrated how local (rather than national) press participate in the propagation of criminal organisations' norms and languages, by using nicknames to refer to criminal organisations' members, or labelling repentants (snitchers) as '*infami*', i.e., shameful individuals.

Those are all powerful channels through which criminal organisations engage in the processes of appropriation of cultural values and self-representation in the wider society. To the extent that such deeds and stories resonate with the values of some segment of the population, criminal organisations are able to gain consensus and promote codes such as *omertà*, thereby consolidating their secret power. We now review the empirical evidence for such a process.

### **Empirical Evidence: Masculine Honour-related Values and Opposition to Criminal Organisations**

Previous approaches to understanding the relationship between communities and organised crime identified violence and intimidation as the bases of criminal organisations' control over the territory and – by extension – of people's *omertà* vis-à-vis criminal organisations. In contrast, here we propose the novel idea that violence sustains secret power only to the extent that such violence is appropriate within the



cultural framework of masculine honour. Masculine honour-related values promote male violence and intimidation as legitimate tools to regulate relationships and interactions. Thus, endorsement of these values should be associated with a more positive view of criminal organisations and lower intentions to oppose these groups.

To test these proposals, we (Travaglino et al., 2014), conducted two studies to examine the association between individuals' perceptions of masculine honour-related values and the central features of the notion of *omertà*. Specifically, we invited two samples of young people (age range 16-24) from a northern Italian ( $N = 121$ ; 34 males, 89 females and 1 unreported,  $M_{age} = 20.42$ ; Study 1) and a southern Italian ( $N = 301$ ; 152 males, 141 females and 8 unreported,  $M_{age} = 17.50$ ; Study 2) region to take part in a survey measuring their endorsement of cultural values and their perception of organised crime groups. To measure masculine honour-related values, we adapted the Honor Ideology for Manhood scale developed by Barnes et al. (2012). This scale includes sixteen items measuring two important aspects of masculine honour-related values. Specifically, eight items measure the perception that male violence is a legitimate tool to defend one's persona from insults and from attacks on one's property and women (e.g., 'A man has the right to act with physical aggression toward another man who flirts with wife', 'A man has the right to act with physical aggression toward another man who calls him an insulting name') and eight items measuring the characteristics that define what a real man is (e.g., 'A real man will never back down from a fight', 'A real man never lets himself be a "doormat" to other people').

This scale has two important features. First, it measures individuals' generic approval of masculine honour-related violence in the abstract, rather than with respect to personal use of violence. This is in line with our proposition that what matters in

shaping individuals' perceptions of, and opposition to, criminal organisations is their view of the suitability of violence as a tool to regulate social relationships. Second, and relatedly, this generic focus of the scale means that it can be answered by both male and female participants. Although female participants are less likely to endorse a masculine honour ideology, they still play an important role in transmission of such values to future generations (Wyatt-Brown, 1982) and may hold ideas about the appropriateness of male violence in specific circumstances (Vandello, Cohen, et al., 2008).

In line with this reasoning, we (Travaglino et al., 2014) found a positive association between masculine honour-related values and individuals' attitudes toward criminal organisations. The latter variable included two items and was operationalised as perceived legitimacy of criminal organisations' actions and approval of their outcomes. Specifically, the more that individuals (male and female) endorsed values concerning the acceptability of male violence, and embraced beliefs concerning male toughness, the more likely they were to respond positively to items such as 'Some aspects of mafia activity are legitimate', and 'Some actions of mafias may have positive direct or indirect consequences for the area where you live' (Study 1:  $\beta = .23$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $p = .01$ ; Study 2:  $\beta = .49$ ,  $SE = .06$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In turn, these more positive attitudes towards criminal organisations were associated with weaker intentions to engage in collective action to oppose criminal organisations (Study 1:  $\beta = -.21$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $p = .02$ ; Study 2:  $\beta = -.27$ ,  $SE = .05$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This created a negative indirect effect of masculine honour values on individuals' intentions to

engage in collective action to oppose criminal organisations. Figure 2 illustrates the basic process of *omertà* hypothesised in Travaglino et al. (2014).

This association lies at the very heart of the idea of *omertà* and supports the idea that masculine honour-related values are implicated in the legitimisation of criminal organisations. In fact, we found that this association remained significant when we controlled for demographic variables such as age and gender (Travaglino et al., 2014), and social orientations such as the System Justification Scale (Jost & Hunyady, 2003; Study 2), or political orientation (Study 1).

Across both studies, we also measured individuals' perceptions of the risk entailed by opposing criminal organisations, to control for the potential role of this construct in individuals' intentions to oppose these groups. Supporting our tenet that legitimisation rather than fear is the main reason for individuals' lack of opposition against criminal organisations, we found no relationship between perceived risk and individuals' intentions to oppose criminal organisations.

The indirect effect of masculine honour-related values on individuals' intentions to oppose criminal organisations has been replicated in several studies (Travaglino et al., 2014; Travaglino, Abrams, Randsley de Moura & Russo, 2015; Travaglino, Abrams & Russo, 2017; see Table 1) and samples. The fact that this indirect effect was also found in a Northern Italian sample of university students (Travaglino et al., 2014, Study 1) suggests that this process also generalises to contexts which are not generally seen as honour cultures (Knight & Nisbett, 2007). Specifically, results from Travaglino et al. (2014, Study 1) suggest that even in circumstances where those values are not dominant at the collective level, their endorsement at the individual level may function as a legitimising ideology. This is

because there is a match between the agent's self-presentation and individuals' values.

An important subsequent question is whether masculine honour-related values play a specific and unique role vis-à-vis legitimisation of criminal organisations or, whether other sub-codes pertaining to this cultural syndrome also play a role in individuals' legitimisation of criminal organisations. Honour is a complex cultural syndrome that encompasses beliefs about how both men and women should act in social settings (Rodriguez Mosquera, 2016; Uskul et al., in press). Prescriptions about male and female behaviour are likely to be shared, regardless of individuals' gender. Thus, adherence to these prescriptions indicates adherence to shared rules and norms regulating individuals' behaviours and their interaction. In addition to these prescriptions, individuals also have subjective beliefs about the personal importance of reputation and honour. Unlike normative prescriptions, these subjective beliefs about honour are likely to be gender-specific and to conform to the behavioural ideals related to the particular gender (Travaglino et al., 2017).

Travaglino et al. (2017) examined the role of these different components of honour vis-à-vis individuals' attitudes towards criminal organisations, and their intentions to oppose these groups. We used the Honour Ideology for Manhood scale (Barnes et al., 2012) to measure individuals' endorsement of masculine honour-related values, as above. In addition, we measured individuals' endorsement of prescriptive values about women's behaviour, using the Honor Ideology for Womanhood scale (Barnes et al., 2014). This includes items such as 'A respectable woman never betrays her husband' and 'A good woman teaches her children the importance of family traditions'. Similar to the Honor Ideology for Manhood scale, it can be answered by both male and female participants. Finally, we measured

individuals' subjective beliefs about the importance of honour-related values using Rodriguez Mosquera et al.'s (2008) Honour Values Scale. The Honour Values Scale includes items tapping participants' concern for their own and their family's reputation, such as, 'It is important to me that others see me as someone who deserves respect' and 'Caring about the implications of my actions for my family's social image is important to me'.

Travaglino et al., (2017) invited 1,173 participants from three high schools in Campania (a southern Italian region) to complete questionnaires ( $M_{\text{age}} = 16.69$ ; 643 males and 514 females). Results from this sample demonstrated that, across genders, stronger masculine honour-related values had a unique role in predicting positive attitudes towards criminal organisations ( $\beta = .31$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and weaker intentions to oppose criminal organisations collectively ( $\beta = -.16$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ ,  $p < .001$ ). These associations remained significant when also controlling for the other features of honour, system justification beliefs and social dominance orientation. In contrast, both the Honour Ideology for Womanhood and the Honour Values scales had no significant association with the other variables ( $p > .80$ ), supporting the idea that criminal organisations draw legitimacy from honour-related beliefs about manhood, in particular, rather than honour codes in general.

Interestingly, only the Honour Values Scale's scores predicted individuals' intentions to oppose criminal organisations differently as a function of gender. Specifically, only among male participants was the Honour Values Scale significantly associated with lower intention to oppose criminal organisations ( $b = -.18$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ ,  $p = .002$ ). This relationship was not significant among female participants ( $b = -.03$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ ,  $p = .70$ ). Moreover, separate analyses regressing intentions to oppose criminal organisations on the Honor Values Scale indicated that the relationship was

significantly stronger for male ( $\beta = -.14$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ) than for female ( $\beta = -.02$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ) participants,  $z_{diff} = -2.11$ ,  $p = .035$ . We speculated that this was because the personal importance assigned to honour-related values per se (as measured by Honor Values Scale) was closer to masculine honour-related values (Honor Ideology for Manhood Scale) for male participants, whereas it matched more closely the feminine honour-related values (Honor Ideology for Womanhood) for female participants. Thus, this finding provides further support for the idea that masculine honour values play a unique role in granting legitimacy to criminal organisations.

**Masculine Honour and *Omertà*.** In Travaglino et al. (2014, Study 2), we investigated additional central features of the notion of *omertà*. We drew on different research traditions in psychology and theoretical frameworks to operationalise the two major elements of the notion of *omertà*: i) the prescription of indifference towards others' illegal activities; and ii) the prohibition of cooperation with law enforcement agencies (Paoli, 2003).

According to Klandermans (1984), individuals' engagement in collective action, such as opposing criminal organisations, is motivated by different factors. An important motive concerns the extent to which individuals grant value to the goal of collective mobilisation. This 'collective motive' is grounded in the value-expectancy framework (Klandermans, 1984; see Feather, 1982). It is defined as the interaction between the value individuals attach to achieving the goal of collective mobilisation (e.g., defeating criminal organisations) and their expectation of being able to achieve such a goal through a collective effort. The interactive term means that an individual must not only value a specific goal to engage in collective action, but also expect to be able to achieve it through joint effort. This construct therefore seems to fit well as a proxy for *omertà*'s dictate of apathy towards others' illegal activities.

To operationalise the prohibition of collaboration with law enforcement agencies, Travaglino et al. (2014) measured individuals' perceived anxiety in situations of contact with the police (Viki, Culmer, Eller, & Abrams, 2006). Drawing on the work of Eller and colleagues (Eller et al., 2007; Viki et al., 2006), and Bowman's (2006) analysis of honour in modern society, we reasoned that in a context characterised by cultural honour, contact with the police would contravene shared norms of masculinity and self-reliance. In addition, in such a context, anticipated contact with the police may generate distrust and threat in people. This is because the police are representatives of a central authority that is distrusted and questioned. Thus, we hypothesised, in line with the notion of *omertà*, that people who more strongly endorse masculine honour-related values are likely to perceive greater threat in relation to the police.

Results from Travaglino et al. (2014, Study 2) supported the importance of individuals' endorsement of masculine honour-related values in predicting the basic components of *omertà*. In addition to holding more favourable attitudes towards criminal organisations, individuals who endorsed masculine honour-related values perceived more threat from possible interaction with the police ( $\beta = .17, SE = .07, p = .002$ ), and were more indifferent towards criminal organisations' illegal activities ( $\beta = -.18, SE = .64, p = .002$ ).

Thus, these findings support our empirical map of the potential psychological processes involved in the notion of *omertà*. In particular, they are consistent with a central tenet of ICAT, that masculine honour-related values generate distance from institutional authorities while at the same time legitimising criminal organisations.

**Moral Emotions.** Travaglino, Abrams, Randsley de Moura and Russo (2014) provided further supportive evidence concerning the role of masculine honour-related values in the legitimisation of criminal organisations. We examined the emotional process involved in the perception of these groups in the form of vicarious shame. Shame is an important social emotion that signals a negative appraisal of an event or action (Iyer & Leach, 2009). Individuals feel ashamed of their actions when they feel that they are unworthy or fail to meet important moral standards (Giner-Sorolla, 2012; Smith, Webster, Parrott, & Eyre, 2002). Shame can motivate actions aimed at restoring one's group's moral worth (Leach, Iyer, & Pedersen, 2006) and can be experienced vicariously, on behalf of the wrongdoing of another relevant individual or group (Lickel, Schmader, Curtis, Scarnier, & Ames, 2005).

Travaglino, Abrams, Randsley de Moura and Russo (2014) asked a sample of 170 participants ( $M_{\text{age}} = 16.17$ ; 79 males and 84 females, 13 unreported) from a southern Italian high school in Campania to report how ashamed they would feel in response to the wrongdoings of local criminal organisations. Specifically, in order to highlight the public dimension of criminal organisations' actions, participants were asked to think of instances in which they 'learned of news concerning Camorra's wrongdoing on the local, national, or international media' (p. 7). The authors also measured individuals' endorsement of masculine honour-related values, attitudes towards criminal organisations, feelings of vicarious guilt, system justification beliefs, and perceived risk. These variables were used as predictors of collective intentions to oppose criminal organisations.

The more that individuals embraced masculine honour-related values, the less likely they were to feel ashamed in response to criminal organisations' actions ( $b = -.24$ ,  $SE = .12$ ,  $p = .04$ ). This finding remained significant after controlling for all the



other predictors mentioned above. In turn, lower vicarious shame was associated with lower intentions to oppose criminal organisations ( $b = .22, SE = .08, p = .009$ ). The indirect effect of masculine honour-related values on collective intentions via vicarious shame was significant after controlling for attitudes towards criminal organisations ( $b = -.05, SE = .03, 95\% CI = -.13, -.003$ ).

These results provide further support for the idea that masculine honour-related values legitimise the actions of criminal organisations. Individuals who endorse these values are also less likely to perceive criminal organisations' wrongdoings as immoral. They subsequently report less motivation to oppose this group.

#### **Social Identity, Regional Membership and Opposition to Criminal**

**Organisations.** In both studies reported by Travaglino et al. (2014), we also explored the association between regional identification and masculine honour-related values. According to social identity theory (SIT), individuals' membership in social groups is associated with specific clusters of cultural values, norms and attitudes (Halloran & Kashima, 2006; Tajfel, 1978). Due to the specific history of the country, regional identities are particularly relevant in the Italian context (Levy, 1996). These identities may carry different values and norms due to different historical patterns, geographies and access to resources (Schneider, 1971). Thus, in Italy, honour-related values may be salient and important for certain regional identities, but not others.

There is some initial evidence for this proposition. In the northern Italian sample (Study 1), there was no significant association between a regional identification and individuals' endorsement of masculine honour-related values ( $\beta = .15, SE = .06, p = .09$ ). However, in the southern Italian sample (Study 2) this

association was positive and significant,  $\beta = .33$ ,  $SE = .05$ ,  $p < .001$ . Individuals who identified more strongly with the regional identity of Campania (the southern region where the study was carried out) were more likely to endorse masculine honour-related values, which in turn legitimise organised crime. These differences in findings between northern and southern regions must be interpreted with caution. The samples were different in many respects, including age. In addition, the provenance of the northern Italian sample included different regions. Nonetheless, the evidence is suggestive of the idea that southern Italian social identities are more strongly associated with values and beliefs of masculinity and honour. Yet, regardless of the regional group membership, across geographical areas, the extent to which individuals endorse these values predicts their attitudes towards, and intentions to oppose criminal organisations.

The linkage between individuals' regional identity, masculine honour-related values and criminal organisations is often emphasised by *mafiosi* themselves in Southern Italy. In line with ICAT, they accentuate this connection in order to acquire social influence and present themselves as the prototypical representations of traditional local values of masculinity (see also Reicher & Hopkins, 1996). For instance, in their article's epigraph, Travaglino et al. (2015) quoted the following words from the *mafioso* Vizzini. When asked if he was indeed a *mafioso*, Vizzini answered, "As you see, I am a mafioso in our way, in the Sicilian way, giving what I can to those in need, respecting and making myself respected, not tolerating bullying against the weak, respecting the honour of others, and ensuring my own [honour] is respected" (translated in Paoli, 2003, p. 184). In this answer, Vizzini establishes a linkage between Sicilian regional identity (a southern Italian regional identity) and the *mafioso* identity through the notions of respect, toughness and masculinity. These

traditional values are often propagated by mafia members and described as being the cornerstone of the mafia group (Poppi et al., 2018).

The association between group identity and *omertà* was further examined by Travaglino et al. (2015). We reasoned that individuals may simultaneously belong to different groups that may, in turn, propagate different social norms. Travaglino et al.'s (2014) findings suggested that honour is an important concern in southern Italy. Yet, those same cultural values and norms may become less relevant vis-à-vis other groups to which individuals also belong (Maitner, Mackie, Pauketat, & Smith, 2017; Rodriguez Mosquera, 2016).

A very interesting group membership to examine in the context of criminal organisations is national group membership and identification with the nation. Identification with a group or category is generally associated with a sense of attachment to the group and loyalty, whereas weaker identification with the category is linked to disloyalty and intentions to exit (Abrams & Travaglino, 2018; Travaglino, Abrams, Randsley de Moura, Marques, & Pinto, 2014). Stronger national identification may imply stronger trust in the government and in the other central administrative agencies that regulate institutional life (Huddy & Khatib, 2007). These observations suggest that higher identification with the nation may mean less tolerance for alternative powerful agents that displace the state and enact governance in its place. More importantly, identification with the nation may mean that individuals are less prone to espouse an ideology of male self-reliance originating from a lawless environment where a reputation for violence and toughness plays a central role in conflict resolution.

To test this idea, Travaglino et al. (2015) measured both individuals' national (Italy) and regional (Campania) identification in a sample of 170 (88 males, 81

females and 2 unreported,  $M_{age} = 16.46$ ) participants from a southern Italian high school. They found a positive association between the two levels of identification ( $r = .35$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This is not surprising in view of the fact that regional identity is nested within national identity. Nevertheless, these two levels of identification had different associations with masculine honour-related values and, indirectly, with individuals' intentions to collectively oppose criminal organisations. Specifically, replicating the previous study (Travaglino, et al., 2014), individuals' regional identification was *positively* associated with their endorsement of masculine honour-related values in southern Italy ( $\beta = .28$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ ,  $p = .001$ ). These values are normative for this specific group membership. There was a negative indirect effect of regional identification, via masculine honour-related values, on intentions to oppose criminal organisations ( $\beta = -.06$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $95\% CI = 0.15$  to  $0.02$ ). In contrast, national identification was negatively associated with the masculine honour ideology ( $\beta = -.25$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In line with our theorising, this in turn created a positive indirect effect of national identification on individuals' intentions to oppose criminal organisations ( $\beta = .06$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $95\% CI = 0.005$  to  $0.12$ ). Thus, these distinctive levels of group membership had different associations with cultural norms of masculine honour. Cultural norms are central to the legitimation of criminal organisations, but the relative salience of different group memberships (regional vs. national) has implications for the weight that individuals lend to these norms, and consequently for their intentions to oppose these groups.

**Regional Identity, Social Change and the Role of Culture.** The research described so far suggests that individuals' identification with a southern regional identity is indirectly associated with individuals' support for, or at least lack of opposition to, criminal organisations. This proposition may initially appear congruent

with the characterological perspective, and specifically with early social scientists' claims that mafia-type groups were an expression of local attitudes and characteristics (e.g., Blok, 1988; Hess, 1973). Indeed, the findings seem to lend support to Banfield's (1958) or Putnam's (1994) idea that southern Italians share a set of attitudes and beliefs that make them unable to act collectively for the common good (i.e., getting rid of the mafia). Specifically, masculine honour-related values which are important to a regional southern Italian identity, but not to a regional northern Italian or national group memberships, are key predictors of more positive attitudes towards criminal organisations, and lower intentions to engage in collective action against criminal organisations.

However, we propose a more nuanced interpretation of these findings, rooted in the theoretical idea, and recent empirical evidence, that social identities are characterised by different types of 'content', that is they are imbued with different meanings, values and norms (Livingstone & Haslam, 2008; Turner-Zwinkels, van Zomeren, & Postmes, 2015). The same group membership may motivate very different behaviours, depending on which type of content is mobilised. Thus, the relationship between a southern Italian group membership and lack of collective mobilisation against criminal organisations is not unequivocal or deterministic but is more likely to depend on the type of belief structure and ideology that is activated within the group.

To substantiate this interpretation, Travaglino et al. (2017) also examined an alternative set of beliefs that play an important role in mobilising groups towards collective action, namely social change beliefs. Social change beliefs are part of the broader social identity account of collective action (see Abrams, 1990; Tajfel, 1978). They form a belief structure indicating that "when the current social system is under

the control of a dominant outgroup, the ingroup's illegitimately low, but stable, status can only be improved if there is a major societal change" (Abrams & Grant, 2012, p. 676). In other words, they refer to individuals' beliefs that drastic structural change is needed to improve the group's negative status in the intergroup context (Travaglino et al., 2017).

The importance of this belief structure was first hypothesised in Tajfel's (1978) account of collective action. However, the empirical examination and measurement of these beliefs is considerably more recent (Abrams & Grant, 2012; Grant, Bennett & Abrams, 2017). For instance, in previous research in the context of Scottish nationalism, Abrams and Grant (2012) demonstrated that these beliefs were predicted by individuals' strength of identification with the ingroup. In turn, they were an important mediator of the relationship between identification and the group's involvement in political action (i.e., voting). Stronger group identification means that group-level problems acquire more personal importance because the group becomes a more relevant part of the self. Individuals are thus more likely to seek opportunities for collective radical change and improvement.

In the context of criminal organisations, this means that individuals who identify more strongly with their regional group membership should also place more importance on the need for radical change vis-à-vis criminal organisations' damaging presence in the region. This should in turn translate into stronger intentions to collectively oppose criminal organisations. On the other hand, as discussed earlier, stronger identification with a southern regional group is linked to values of masculinity and honour, which play an important role in legitimising the presence of criminal organisations in the region, and their social power.

Travaglino et al. (2017) examined the articulation between identity, masculine honour-related values, and intentions to oppose criminal organisations in a sample of 1,173 individuals from Campania in southern Italy. They hypothesised a dual route from social identity to collective opposition to criminal organisations, according to which regional identity has simultaneous but countervailing associations with individuals' intentions to oppose criminal organisations, depending on the specific set of beliefs taken into consideration. The Honour Ideology for Manhood scale (Barnes et al., 2012) was used to measure individuals' endorsement of masculine honour. To measure the social change belief structure, we adapted items from Abrams and Grant (2012) and asked individuals to rate their agreement with statements such as 'The situation in Campania can improve only if the Camorra is defeated completely', 'People in Campania will only improve their situation if the Camorra is completely eliminated' and 'Without the presence of the Camorra, things in Campania would be worse' (reverse scored).

In line with ICAT's central contention that cultural values may be used by a dominant group to acquire legitimacy at the expense of a subordinate group, Travaglino et al. (2017) found that masculine honour values were negatively associated with individuals' social change beliefs ( $\beta = -.17$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The more that individuals embraced values of honour and masculinity, the less likely they were to believe in the necessity for radical change to improve the group's standing. More importantly, we also found support for our dual route hypothesis.

Specifically, individuals' regional identification had opposing indirect effects on their intentions to collectively oppose criminal organisations, depending on the specific set of beliefs considered (see Figure 3). In line with previous research, this social identity was positively associated with individuals' endorsement of masculine

honour values ( $\beta = .15$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and there was a significant negative indirect effect of identity on individuals' collective intentions to oppose criminal organisations via masculine honour values ( $\beta = -.024$ ,  $SE = 0.01$ , 95% CI =  $-0.046$ ,  $-0.008$ ). In line with Abrams and Grant's (2012; see also Grant et al., 2017) theorising, regional identity was also positively associated with social change beliefs ( $\beta = .09$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ ,  $p = .02$ ), and there was a positive indirect effect of identification on collective intentions to oppose criminal organisations via social change beliefs ( $\beta = .04$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ , 95% CI =  $0.006$ ,  $0.072$ ).

These findings are important because they demonstrate that southern Italian regional identification has no inherent and deterministic 'feature', or 'ethos' that renders it unable to engage collectively against criminal organisations. More prosaically, and in line with the way in which other dominant groups achieve and maintain their hegemonic status in society (Leach & Livingstone, 2015; Reicher, 2004), this group membership is linked to various sets of values and belief structures. Such values and beliefs may be more or less functional for the maintenance of the status quo. In line with ICAT, they may also be appropriated by groups to legitimise their secret power.

**Contact with criminal organisations' members.** Thus far, we have discussed evidence pertaining to the cognitive and emotional correlates of the masculine honour ideology vis-à-vis criminal organisations, as well as the implications of such ideology for individuals' intentions to oppose organised crime groups collectively. Recently, Travaglino and Drury (2018) analysed other measures from the studies by Travaglino et al. (2014) and Travaglino et al. (2015) to investigate an additional implication of masculine honour-related ideology. Specifically, they



tested the role that this ideology plays in motivating young people to have contact with members of criminal organisations.

Unlike the Japanese Yakuza (i.e., the Japanese mafia), for instance, membership in mafia-type groups such as the camorra and mafia is a crime under Italian law (Hill, 2003). Organised crime groups in Italy are therefore secret, concealed societies (Paoli, 2003). Members of criminal organisations have to hide the fact that they belong to these groups or risk surveillance and prosecution by the state.

Yet, at the same time, members of criminal organisations must be recognised within the community in order to use the organisation's resources, exert their political power and gain respect. Indeed, an important feature of the form of 'traditional authority' described by Weber (1978) is how the authority exercises governance. Rather than the impersonal bond of the 'duty of office', traditional authority is based on personal loyalties and obedience. The absence of formal principles of command requires direct contact between authorities and the followers.

In line with this account, anthropologists who have studied the mafia (e.g., Schneider & Schneider, 2003) have noted the remarkable way in which members of these groups establish an intricate set of reciprocal relationships at different levels of society. Members of criminal organisations interact with politicians, business leaders and other members of the community, exchanging favours and creating obligations. In addition, young boys are attracted by the status that membership in these groups could afford and are sometimes tempted to offer their services to members of criminal organisations or simply strive to spend time in their company (Travaglino et al., 2014).

A robust finding in social psychology is that positive contact with outgroup members is associated with more positive attitudes towards the outgroup (Brown &

Hewstone, 2005; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). This 'contact framework' is generally used to improve intergroup relations in the context of immigration or between majority and minority members (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). This framework emphasises the importance of situational encounters for improving intergroup attitudes. Nonetheless, recent research has demonstrated that individual difference factors, such as individuals' social attitudes or personality traits, also play a key role, facilitating or inhibiting the type of contact in which individuals engage (Hodson & Dhont, 2015; Jackson & Poulsen, 2005; Turner, Dhont, Hewstone, Prestwich, & Vonofakou, 2014). Contact, in turn, may also have an impact on individuals' traits and social attitudes (Vezzali, Turner, Capozza & Trifiletti, 2017).

Travaglino and Drury (2019) drew on this evidence to reason that cultural values may also play an important role in shaping individuals' experience of contact. ICAT contends that cultural values are instrumental in organising individuals' social reality, signalling what is appropriate and distinguishing it from what should be avoided (see also Brewer & Yuki, 2014). Like other social values, cultural values can be shaped by the encounters experienced by an individual.

Thus, Travaglino and Drury (2019, Study 1) drew on samples from Travaglino et al. (2014; Time 1) and Travaglino et al. (2015; Time 2) and performed longitudinal analyses of 176 participants ( $N_{T1} = 176$ ,  $N_{T2} = 170$ ) to examine two hypotheses. Specifically, they tested whether cultural values of honour and masculinity are antecedents of individuals' frequency of contact with members of criminal organisations. They derived this hypothesis from ICAT, which states that values of honour and masculinity play a pivotal role in legitimising these groups, making them more acceptable. They also tested the alternative hypothesis that contact with these groups predicts changes in individuals' endorsement of masculine honour values. This

hypothesis was derived from the observations by criminologists such as Sutherland (1937) suggesting that encounters with individuals with criminogenic attitudes results in a diffusion of these attitudes.

Results from this study provided support for the former, but not the latter, hypothesis. Specifically, individuals who endorsed masculine honour-related values were more likely to report frequent contact with members of criminal organisations five months later. On the other hand, frequency of contact with members of criminal organisations at Time 1 did not predict changes in masculine honour-related values at Time 2. The findings were therefore consistent with ICAT (see Figure 4).

Criminal organisations present themselves as the embodiment of masculinity and honour and they strategically emphasise behaviours that conform to those ideals. Thus, contact with their members could result in a heightened perception that these people are worthy of respect and have a high sense of honour, or that they belong to the history of the region. In a second cross-sectional study involving a sample of  $N = 314$  (152 males, 154 females, 8 unreported) from a different southern Italian school, Travaglino and Drury (2019) started exploring some implications of contact with members of criminal organisations. Specifically, they examined whether contact with members predicted individuals' perceptions that criminal organisations match the ideals of honour and respect (the 'romanticisation' of the group). A cross-sectional structural equation model supported this contention. Individuals' endorsement of masculine honour-related values predicted more frequent contact with members of criminal organisations ( $\beta = .26, SE = .010, p < .001$ ), which in turn predicted a stronger romanticisation of these groups ( $\beta = .28, SE = .05, p < .001$ ). The indirect effect of masculine honour-related values on romanticisation of the group via was significant,  $\beta = .07, SE = .03, 95\% CI = .02$  to  $.13$ .

### **Theoretical Implications, Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

We have described a novel theoretical framework, ICAT, aimed at explaining how illegal and extra-legal non-state agents acquire secret power over a community (see Figure 1). We used the theory to derive an empirical model of *omertà*, specifying that masculine honour-related values have important implications for the way in which communities perceive and engage with organised crime groups (Figure 5 presents a conceptual summary of the model). We used the southern Italian context as a prototypical case study, and below we will consider both our conclusions from that case and our contention that these are likely to generalise to other contexts.

First, our evidence contradicts some prevailing assumptions about criminal organisations. Criminal organisations' relationships with communities in the southern Italian context are unlikely to be grounded solely in fear or coercion. Indeed, fear and coercion are ill-suited to securing a stable relationship of domination over the population and are likely to evoke reactance and resistance (Turner, 2005; Tyler, 2006). There is also no evidence for the proposition that southern Italians are characterised by an ethos that makes them inherently unable to act collectively for the common good. Such a view could be seen as overly pessimistic and also unjustifiably demeaning whilst also entertaining no real options for social change.

Therefore, we argue that it is useful to reconceptualise the relationship between criminal organisations and the community as a relationship of domination and subjugation. Criminal organisations aim to exert political and economic power over the population. They do so by appropriating, emphasising and propagating an ideology of masculinity and violence. The masculine honour ideology prescribes male violence as a legitimate tool for resolving social conflicts between individuals and groups in society. This ideology is linked to a spirit of self-reliance and distance from

the state and its agencies (Bowman, 2006). It therefore creates a space where criminal organisations' use of violence and intimidation becomes appropriate, legitimate and even commendable.

In line with this reasoning, individuals who embrace this ideology are more likely to report positive attitudes towards criminal organisations, lower emotional reactions of shame about criminal organisations' wrongdoings, and weaker beliefs about the necessity for radical change vis-à-vis the presence of criminal organisations within the region. In addition, the evidence suggests that masculine honour-related values may be an important set of norms associated with a specific southern Italian regional identity (Campania). These values play a key role in motivating young people to engage in more frequent contact with CO members.

Nonetheless, these conclusions must be interpreted in the context of the limitations of this research. Most notably, with the exception of Travaglino and Drury's (2019; study 1) longitudinal analyses, the studies described in this article are correlational and cross-sectional. Thus, we are unable to make causal claims concerning the order of the variables in the models.

Future research should use longitudinal and experimental methodologies to examine empirically some of the causal links hypothesised in this research. For instance, future work could manipulate the salience and relevance for individuals of masculine honour-related values. Alternatively, it could manipulate the extent to which the behaviour of members of criminal organisations adhere to such values. These manipulations would enable us to draw stronger causal conclusions regarding how individuals' endorsement of, and criminal organisations' adherence to, values of masculine honour affects individuals' appraisals of these groups, as well as the collective intentions to oppose them.

Below, we discuss future directions for this programme of research. In so doing, we also highlight additional limitations of the current work and clarify some important aspects of Intracultural Appropriation Theory (ICAT). We also discuss the generalisability of the model to other contexts and situations in which secret power may take root. Specifically, we focus our attention on four key issues, namely how criminal organisations disseminate their values in the social context; the implications of the model for theories of political action; the importance of broadening social scientific perspectives on masculine honour; and the generalisability of the model to different contexts and types of groups.

### **Criminal Organisations and the Propagation of Cultural Values**

ICAT contends that cultural values play a central role in providing non-state agents with the ability to exert secret power (in the forms of social influence, extra-legal governance and control). In line with this idea, cultural values of masculine honour bestow criminal organisations with legitimacy and, ultimately, social influence and power. However, it is important to state that the existence of mafia-like groups is not *caused* by such values. Many societies around the world that are characterised by values of honour have not produced groups like the mafia. Moreover, mafia-like organisations (or gangs with similar features) have emerged in contexts where masculine honour is not a dominant cultural syndrome (e.g., the Yakuza or the Triads in the 'face cultures' of Japan and Southern China, respectively). Unlike the characterological perspective, we do not contend that criminal organisations originate from culture. The origins of Italian criminal organisations are traceable to the formation of the Italian nation state, and to the struggle among powerful groups in that period (Schneider & Schneider, 2003).

Thus, according to ICAT, culture does not cause the *existence* of non-state agents, such as criminal organisations, terrorist groups or gangs. Rather, cultural values provide a vehicle for such groups to acquire and sustain power. Specifically, ICAT posits two processes. First, groups such as criminal organisations must actively appropriate, amplify and reinforce local cultural values to achieve their objectives. Second, they must successfully portray themselves as the embodiment of such values to the community. For instance, criminal organisations portray themselves as the embodiment of values of respect, masculinity and honour, while magnifying the importance and relevance of such values to their local context. In so doing, they play an active role in the dissemination of these values in society.

The channels and modalities through which criminal organisations disseminate these values and propagate their ideas are an important and under-investigated topic that is ripe for future research. Research is needed to examine the different ways mafia-type groups communicate with the community, the types of narratives and discourses they advance to amplify values of masculinity and honour, and how criminal organisations' symbolic use of violence and their display of strength facilitate their stance as men of honour (Campbell, 2012; Schneider & Schneider, 2008).

This is undoubtedly a very challenging area of research, bearing in mind the risks associated with closely scrutinising criminal organisations' discourses, as well as the difficulties in finding sufficient materials. Nonetheless, there are some promising avenues for empirical investigation. For example, Campbell (2012) points out that cartels in Mexico engage in narco-propaganda to maximise their political power and gain legitimacy. Acts of propaganda may include the symbolic display of violence,

the dissemination of written statements through graffiti and 'street art', use of social media, control and censorship of mass-media, and the use music and lyrics.

Above we discussed some similar devices used by organised criminal groups in Italy to strategically exploit cultural values of masculinity and honour. In addition, young people's engagement and contact with members of criminal organisations may result in the dissemination of norms and ideas that emphasise criminal organisations' adherence to values of honour, and the romanticisation of this group (Travaglino & Drury, 2019). Nonetheless, the social norms that are established through exposure to members of criminal organisations and their discourses and actions need further investigation, using longitudinal studies and experimental approaches. In addition, research should examine the extent and limits of criminal organisations' reach (regional, social and ethnolinguistic) in representing themselves as the embodiment of honour and masculinity.

### **Culture and Political Action**

The current programme of research has wider implications for conceptualising the role of cultural values in theories of political behaviour and collective action. In social psychology, the study of culture and the investigation of the dynamics of oppression and resistance have been separate endeavours (see Wolf, 1999; cf. also van Zomeren & Louis, 2017). Similarly, our understanding of the interplay between culture, ideology and legitimisation is still very limited (see Travaglino, 2017; Travaglino et al., 2014). Theories such as system justification theory or social dominance theory have mainly directed their efforts at the general (arguably universal) psychological processes that shape relations of domination among groups, whereas cultural psychology tends to endorse the importance of local values and beliefs for understanding how groups interact with each other.



ICAT underlines the importance of culture in shaping individuals' action (or inaction) in relation to a dominant group. Moreover, ICAT provides a framework for investigating the role of culture in the dynamics of legitimisation and subversion of the status quo. ICAT contends that culture provides individuals with a template for appraising reality and deciding what is appropriate, what is wrong and what should be avoided in social affairs (Brewer & Yuki, 2014).

Therefore, specific cultural values may motivate individuals to support and legitimise the claims on power made by certain groups. This depends on such groups' ability to appropriate and successfully represent themselves as the embodiment of shared cultural values (Travaglino, 2017). Alternatively, they may inform individuals about what types of action are appropriate or needed to pursue change, or which groups are illegitimate. Further research should explore the ideological function of cultural values, and their role in sustaining or overturning relations of dominations, across contexts, situations and groups.

**Social Banditry and Mafias.** Another intriguing avenue of research is criminal organisations' function as 'social bandits' (Travaglino, 2017). ICAT is concerned with the question of how extra-legal or illegal non-state agents are able to exert political power and governance over communities. These groups sometimes present a direct threat to the status quo. For instance, terrorist or insurgent groups may explicitly advocate changes in current systems. However, groups such as mafia and gangs also seem likely to erode the state's authority, through their secret power to influence behaviour, exchange of goods, monopolise violence or provide important services.

Recently, we introduced a new 'social banditry framework' to examine vicarious expression of dissent (Travaglino, 2017). Based on Hobsbawm's (2000)

analysis of social banditry, we argued that individuals may express their anger against an unjust system by supporting other agents or iconic individuals who disrupt or challenge that system. Vicarious dissent is more likely when those agents are legitimised by cultural values, and when individuals perceive direct engagement in political action as ineffective or difficult (Travaglino, 2017).

Mafia-type groups in Italy displace the state in the contexts in which they operate. They present themselves as champions of the poor, redistributing resources, and rectifying social wrongs (Schneider & Schneider, 1994; see also Vizzini's words quoted above). They may therefore come to symbolise individuals' anger about unjust economic and political arrangements in Italy, which tend to result in the exploitation of southern regions in favour of northern ones. Thus, criminal organisations may enable individuals to express their dissent and desire for vicarious revenge (Travaglino, 2017). This social banditry function of mafia-type groups (including gangs and other smaller criminal groups) should be further investigated across contexts and geographical areas.

Note that we are not concerned here with whether mafia-like groups are authentic social bandits (i.e., defenders of the wronged against an unjust system; Blok, 1972; Hobsbawm, 1972). They are most certainly not (Schneider & Schneider, 2003, 2005). These groups often thrive thanks to the support of corrupt sections of the state (Campbell, 2012), rather than being genuinely in opposition to it. Nonetheless, the phenomenon of banditry itself is different from the more psychologically-oriented question of how these social bandits are represented and perceived in society (see Travaglino, 2017). More research is needed in this area, to further our understanding of different ways in which individuals express political dissent in society (Allen & Leach, 2018; Leach & Livingstone, 2015).

### **Implications for the Understanding of Masculine Honour**

Our research also has implications for the way in which cultural values of honour, and specifically of masculine honour, are conceptualised in social psychology. Research to date has mainly focused on the interpersonal implications of such values – such as the promotion of male anger and violence in response to insults, or perceived female infidelity (Rodriguez Mosquera, 2018; Rodriguez Mosquera, 2016; Rodriguez Mosquera et al., 2008; see Uskul et al., in press for a review). In a similar vein, research has demonstrated that insults to the family or to important social categories such as the nation (Barnes et al., 2012, 2014) generate intentions to engage in aggressive actions against the offender.

In the current programme of research, in line with ICAT, we have proposed and provided initial empirical evidence for an additional key feature of masculine honour values. Specifically, we emphasise their *ideological* function of *sustaining* unequal relationships between groups. We contend that such values provide individuals with information about the appropriate and legitimate use of violence, while also informing them about when aggressive responses and opposition are acceptable ways to express dissent.

We have argued that it is in the context of the masculine honour framework that the violent and predatory behaviour of criminal organisations is given legitimacy and criminal organisations are granted secret power. Importantly, in the specific setting under examination in our research programme, individuals' endorsement of masculine honour values is linked not to more aggressive responses (as in previous research), or to more violent opposition (cf. Barnes et al., 2012, 2014), but instead is a predictor of inaction that results in alleged 'passivity' and even an acceptance of criminal organisations' dominance.

The violence of criminal organisations has limits, however. In line with the idea that masculine honour values set boundaries for appropriate behaviour, anecdotal evidence indicates that stronger use of force, or attacks on beloved individuals (for instance, the use of dynamite against the Sicilian judges Falcone and Borsellino), generated opposition from and public protest by the local population, and perhaps accelerated the decline of the Sicilian mafia. This suggests that exaggerated, almost military-level use of violence goes beyond what is deemed acceptable within the masculine code of honour. A priority for future research is to investigate this novel, and important ideological property of masculine honour in different contexts.

Although honour values are currently important within the southern Italian context, we do not assume that their importance will persist or that these values are consensually accepted by the population. We found that different identities (e.g., regional and national) predict stronger or weaker endorsement of the masculine honour-related ideology. Moreover, even within the same social identity, a competing system of beliefs may arise that leads individuals to question or reject these values. Future research should use longitudinal and experimental methods, as well as investigating different subgroups within the population, to understand what can promote and accelerate social change in the context of organised crime.

### **Generalisability of *Omertà* to Other Contexts and Factors**

Using ICAT, we derived a model of *omertà* to explain criminal organisations' social influence in the Italian context. An important question to consider is the extent to which our findings and our model of *omertà* are generalisable. Do they apply beyond the southern Italian context and beyond our particular groups of participants?

The research reviewed above mainly involved samples of adolescents from a region of southern Italy. Adolescents are a key group because their adherence to

values of honour and masculinity can perhaps more easily be altered compared to older groups (cf. Sears, 1986). Moreover, adolescents are more at risk of being attracted by criminal organisations because these organisations can provide them with a way to reject and question the institutional order (Travaglino & Drury, 2019; see Emler & Reicher, 1995, for a discussion). Criminal organisations also offer young people alluring images of easy access to status and resources to which they could hardly aspire otherwise.

The generalisability of this model of *omertà* to different age groups is an important avenue for future research. This research should focus on understanding which features of the model summarised in Figure 4 are generalisable across age groups, and which factors are specific to adolescents' or adults' perceptions of mafia-type organisations. For instance, whereas considerations about reputation and honour may be particularly important during adolescence, factors such as perceptions of state corruption and the economic situation of southern Italian regions may play a stronger role later on in life.

Similarly, it is important to test the role of masculine honour in bestowing legitimacy to groups such as gangs (see Travaglino et al., 2015, for a discussion), terrorists and other paramilitary organisations. These groups tend to thrive in contexts where the weakness of the state creates space for other entities to make a claim to power and social influence. In these contexts, values of self-reliance and reputation may become more relevant and help to promote the rise of these groups.

Finally, the model of *omertà* proposed here focuses specifically on the factors that promote the legitimisation of criminal organisations. However, the model has only partly explicated factors that promote social change, and more research is needed to expand this part of the model (Figure 4, lower part). Relevant factors are likely to

include different ideologies and belief structures, alternative social identities, and features of the context (e.g., perceived economic development and opportunities) that may highlight the need for change. Importantly, researchers are increasingly highlighting the dynamic and temporal relationships between variables involved in social change (cf. Abrams & Eller, 2017), and we believe it will be essential to consider how these factors play a role at different stages of the model. For instance, alternative social identities are likely to intervene at the level of the ideology of honour, gradually decreasing its relevance and endorsement among subgroups in the population. Other factors such as alternative ideologies may have a more direct impact on individuals' intentions to engage in action.

More generally, ICAT highlights the way in which non-state agents in society justify their actions by resorting to cultural values, traditions or shared beliefs. These values vary depending on the context or type of group. For instance, non-state agents in the Northern American context may use values associated with the protestant work ethic to justify processes of social exclusion and legitimise their advantages (cf. Furnham, 1984). Similarly, values of individualism and collectivism may also be used to justify a group's claim to legitimacy (cf. Travaglino, 2017).

As Travaglino's (2017) study indicates, ICAT has important heuristic value for understanding the importance of cultural values in shaping individuals' perception of, opposition to, or support for a social group. ICAT draws on disciplines such as anthropology, sociology and political science to derive testable hypotheses about which clusters of values and beliefs are important for the group under examination. This theoretical framework therefore promotes an interdisciplinary approach.

We also suggest that the phenomenon and concept of secret power is worthy of further investigation in different settings. For example, rapidly formed interest

groups and communities may emerge through social media connections and it is not known how quickly they may also develop a capacity to establish secret power. Less localised and specific forms of secret power might arise in certain organisations, or in particular echelons of hierarchies (e.g., in education systems, in the military, or in commerce and industry). In all these contexts it seems feasible that aspects of the group's wider culture can be appropriated to justify or reinforce extra-legal forms of control and decision making, perhaps only coming to light as publicly exposed instances of corruption or excess (Abrams, 2011; Abrams et al., 2018).

### **Practical Implications and Conclusions**

In the current research programme, we used Intracultural Appropriation Theory to derive a model of *omertà* with the aim of providing a novel perspective on how communities relate to criminal organisations. We highlighted the important role of masculine honour in bestowing legitimacy to these groups. In addition, we discussed key avenues for future research, as well as the generalisability of the model to different contexts and groups.

Italian criminal organisations and organised crime more generally are recognised fields of study in disciplines such as anthropology (Schneider & Schneider), sociology and political science (Allum, 2006; Toros & Mavelli, 2013) and criminology (Paoli, 2003; von Lampe, 2016). Contributions from clinically-oriented psychology have taken into account specific and important aspects of the impact of the presence of criminal organisations in the community (Giordano et al., 2017). However, currently there exist no specific contributions adopting a perspective derived from both social and political-psychology.

In the present contribution we have focused on what we consider to be the central aspect of Italian organised crime, namely its capacity to exert governance over

the community (cf. von Lampe, 2016). We have reconceptualised criminal organisations as a dominant group in society and analysed the ideological basis of their power. Rather than grounding this power in fear, or the community's alleged passivity, as argued in previous approaches, we contended that criminal organisations' strategic use of violence and display of masculinity provide them with legitimacy and social influence. According to ICAT, groups such as criminal organisations both *appropriate* existing values and *exaggerate* their relevance in society. As well as offering a novel perspective on an important social phenomenon, this research has more general implications for our understanding of political behaviour, culture in general, and masculine honour in particular.

It is perhaps too early to draw prescriptions for practical implications because this field is still in its infancy and more research is needed to examine the directionality of many of the relationships described in this review. Moreover, further research is needed to understand the specific factors that promote social change (i.e., resistance to criminal organisations) and that may influence deeply ingrained cultural frameworks such as that of honour. Research also needs to address how secret power is expressed (and how it can be tackled) across groups, contexts and societies.

Nonetheless, we envision two different but complementary levels of intervention. First, interventions could seek to promote changes at the cultural level by providing individuals with the opportunity to question the ideology that underpins secret power (in the present case, masculine honour-related ideology). For example, an intervention here could also address the role of the state (or lack thereof), in facilitating or inhibiting cultures of honour. If the hypothesis that criminal organisations' power derives from their use of the masculine honour-related ideology is supported empirically, then reductions in the diffusion of this ideology should



translate into lower legitimisation and perhaps stronger intentions to actively oppose criminal organisations.

Second, interventions could question criminal organisations' representation of their embodiment of the relevant cultural value, in this case, as 'men of honour'. Italian criminal organisations appropriate these values and tend to portray themselves as the embodiment of honour and respect. However, in reality their actions seldom live up to the expectations set up by this ideology. Attempts to sever the link between criminal organisations and the ideology of honour have been made by journalists like Saviano, or judges like Falcone and Borsellino, among others, whose actions or books have demonstrated that there is little that is honourable in the actions of criminal organisations. The violent response of criminal organisations (the judges Falcone and Borsellino were murdered and Saviano has been living under police protection for more than 10 years) demonstrate that they take the actions of such people very seriously, presumably because of their potential to undermine one of the key bases of criminal organisations' legitimacy.

None of what has been offered here is intended to undermine the importance of interventions to tackle secret power at different levels. Indeed, in many instances, the potential for social change might well be facilitated by a redistribution of resources to disadvantaged or disenfranchised populations and groups. In the case of Italy, the economic imbalance in favour of the north is as relevant now as it was more than 40 years ago (see for instance Eckaus, 1961, and Lagravinese, 2015). While structural interventions at the macro-social and political levels are likely to be necessary, we advocate an interdisciplinary effort that integrates knowledge from different approaches and levels of analysis. Because individuals will act according to a socially mediated understanding of their personal and collective circumstances, a

complete account will require a social-psychological perspective such as the one we have offered here.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Mafiosi' is the Italian term to indicate 'members of the mafia'. It is the plural of the term 'mafioso'.

<sup>2</sup> The Yakuza refers to a transnational criminal organisation that originates and sustain power in Japan (Hill, 2003).

Figure 1: Intracultural Appropriation Theory of Non-state Agent's Secret Power

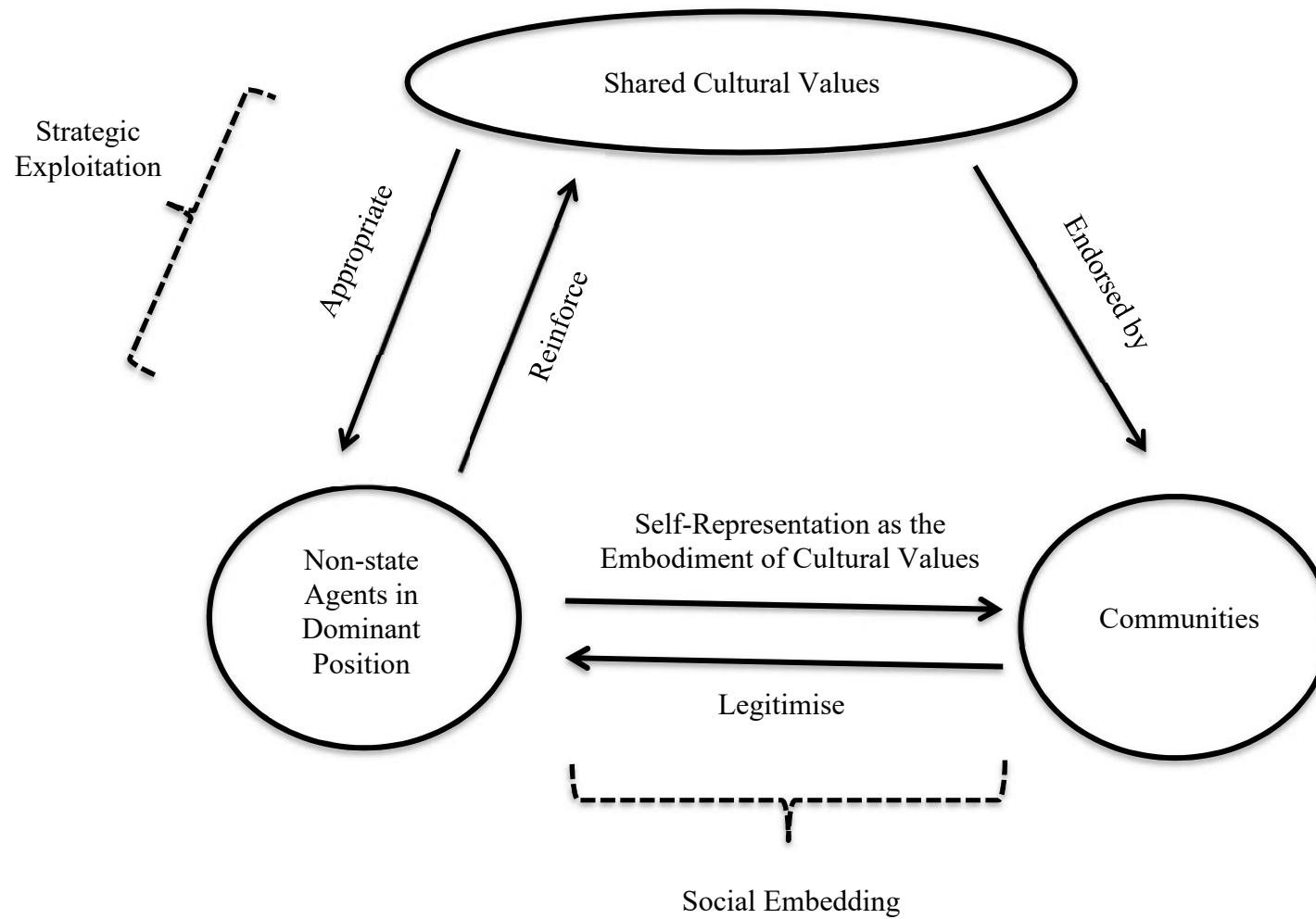


Figure 2: Basic Model of Omertà, adapted from Travaglino, Abrams and Randsley de Moura (2014)

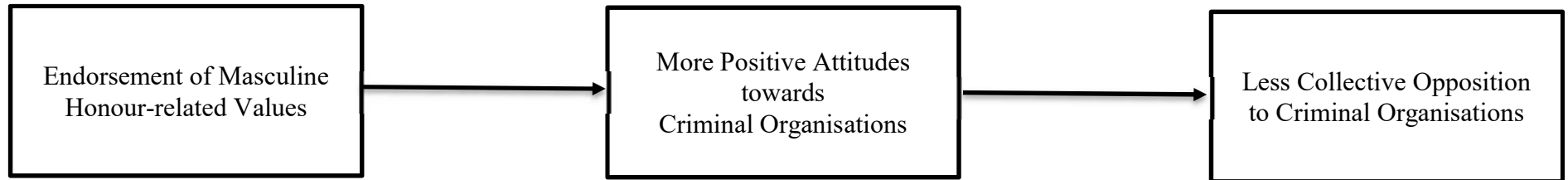
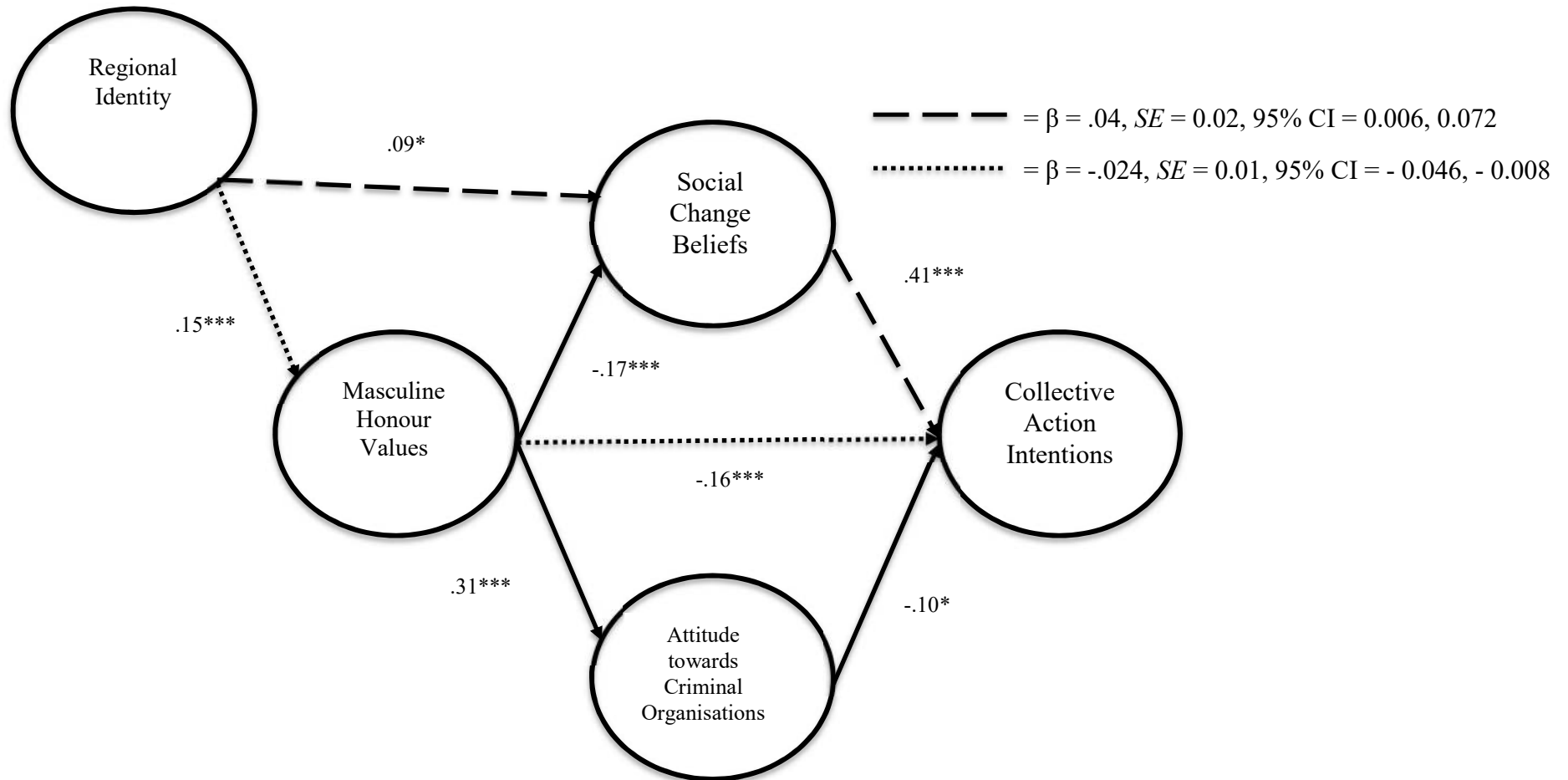


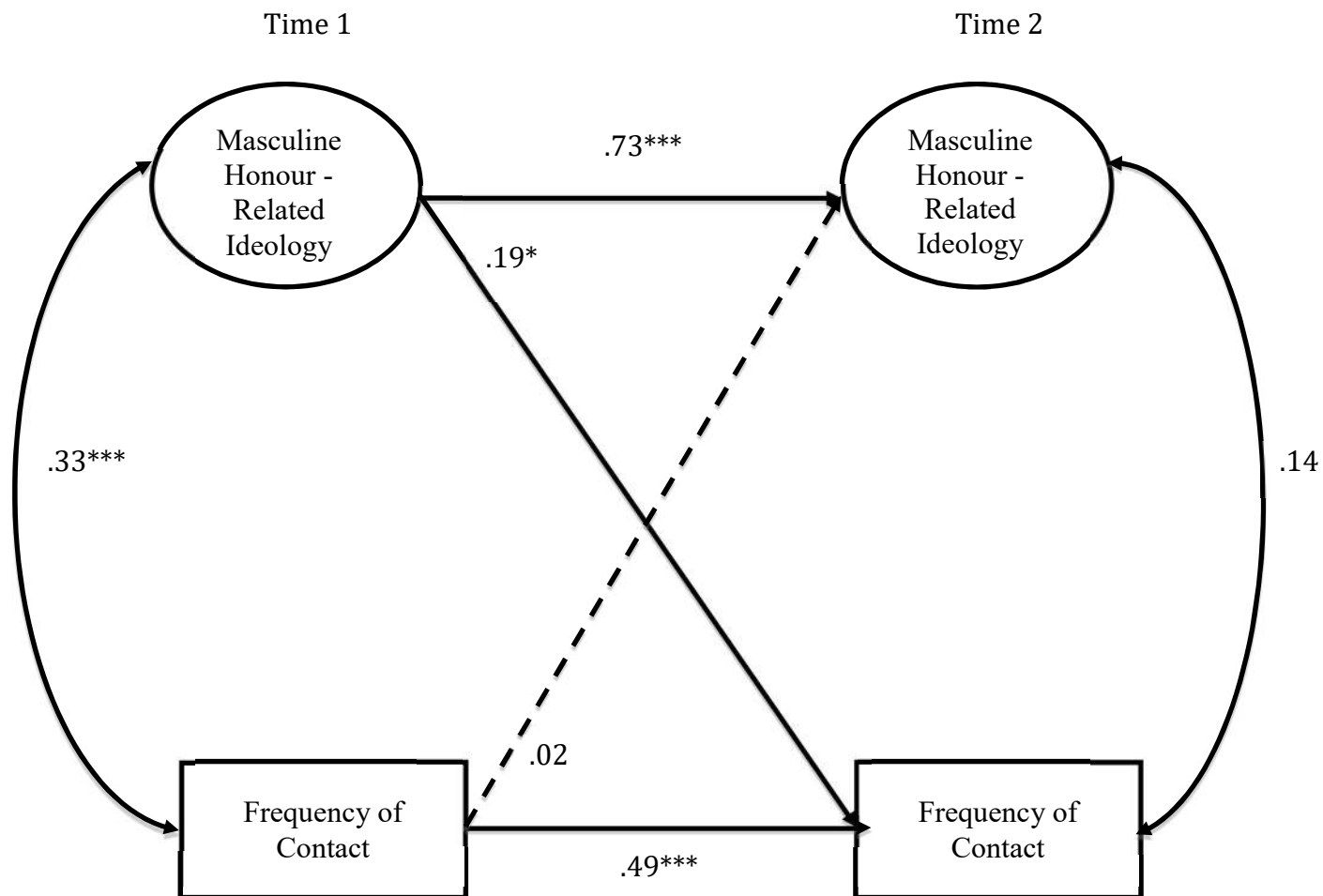


Figure 3: Simplified Structural Equation Model testing the associations between Regional Identification, Masculine Honour, Social Change Beliefs and Collective Intentions to Oppose Criminal Organisations. The Figure is adapted from Travaglino, Abrams and Russo (2017)



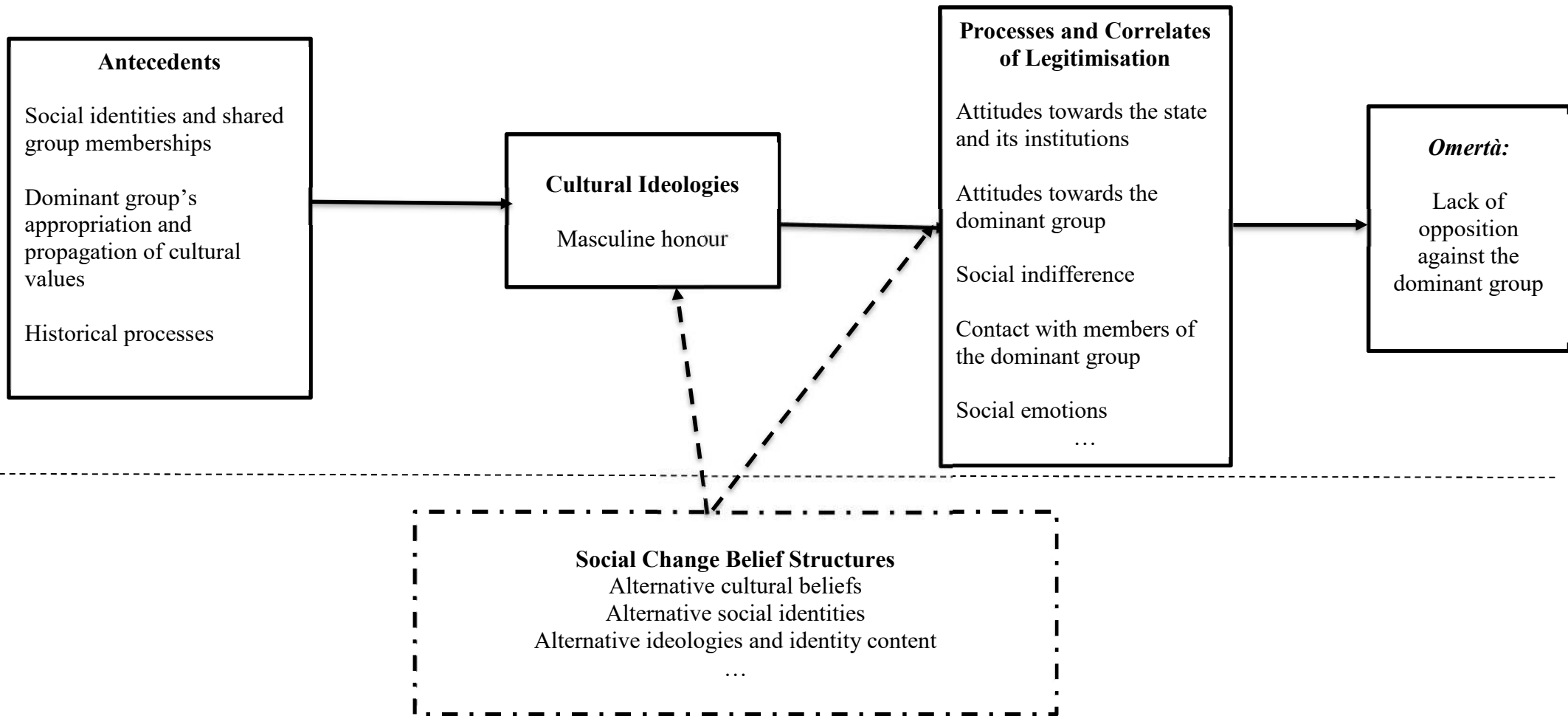
Notes:  $*p \leq .05, **p \leq .01, ***p \leq .001$ . Dashed lines are the indirect effect of Regional Identity on Collective Action Intentions via Social Change Beliefs. Dotted Lines are the indirect effect of Regional Identity on Collective Action Intentions via Masculine Honour Values. Attitudes towards Criminal Organisations was an additional mediator in the model. Honour Values Scale, Honour Ideology for Womanhood Scale, Social Dominance Orientation, System Justification Scale, Gender, and Age are covariates in the model.

Figure 4: Simplified Longitudinal Panel Model testing the relationship between Masculine Honour-related Ideology and Contact with Criminal Organisations' members adapted from Travaglino and Drury (2019).



Notes:  $*p \leq .05$ ,  $**p \leq .01$ ,  $***p \leq .001$ . Dashed lines are non-significant path. Gender and Age are covariates in the model. Latent variables' indicators are four parcel of four items each. Parcels were built using the item-to-construct balance method.

Figure 5: Model of Omertà derived by Intracultural Appropriation Theory



Note: The lower part of the model refers to factors that promote social change. Dashed arrows refer therefore to negative paths, whereas non-dashed arrows refer to positive paths. The model is incomplete and additional variables are to be investigated in future research as represented by the suspension points in the boxes.

Table 1: Summary of the Basic Model of Omertà across Studies

Study	Masculine Honour → Attitudes towards Criminal Organisations	Attitudes towards Criminal Organisations → Collective Intentions to Oppose Criminal Organisations	Indirect Effects
<i>Travaglino, Abrams, and Randsley de Moura (2014; Study 1)</i> <sup>*</sup>	$\beta = .23, SE = .09, p = .01$	$\beta = -.21, SE = .09, p = .02$	$\beta = -.05, SE = .03, 95\% CI = -.13 \text{ to } -.01$
<i>Travaglino, Abrams, and Randsley de Moura (2014; Study 2)</i> <sup>**</sup>	$\beta = .49, SE = .06, p < .001$	$\beta = -.27, SE = .05, p < .001$	$\beta = -.167, SE = .04, 95\% CI = -.25 \text{ to } -.095$
<i>Travaglino, Abrams, Randsley de Moura and Russo (2014)</i> <sup>†</sup>	$b = .25, SE = .09, p < .01$	$b = -.26, SE = .10, p = .01$	$b = -.06, SE = .04, 95\% CI = -.16, -.01$
<i>Travaglino, Abrams, Randsley de Moura and Russo (2015)</i> <sup>‡</sup>	$\beta = .32, SE = 0.09, p < .001$	$\beta = -.18, SE = .09, p = .02$	$\beta = -.06, SE = 0.04, 95\% CI = -.15 \text{ to } -.001$
<i>Travaglino, Abrams &amp; Russo (2017)</i> <sup>#</sup>	$\beta = .31, SE = 0.04, p < .001$	$\beta = -.10, SE = 0.05, p = .03$	$\beta = -.03, SE = 0.02, 95\% CI [-0.062, -0.002]$

Notes: Covariates in the model and additional mediators of the relationship between masculine honour and collective intentions were: <sup>\*</sup> System Justification Scale; <sup>\*\*</sup> Collective Motives and Anxiety about Police; <sup>†</sup> System Justification Scale, Perceived Risk of Interacting with Criminal Organisations, Vicarious Guilt and Shame; <sup>‡</sup> Social Dominance Orientation, System Justification Scale, Perceived Risk of Interacting with criminal organisations, Collective Motives; <sup>#</sup> Social Dominance Orientation, System Justification Scale, Honour Ideology for Womanhood, Honour Values Scale, Age, Gender, Social Change Beliefs