



# Kent Academic Repository

Ridda, Maria (2020) *Capitalism, criminality and the state: the origins of illegal urban modernity*. *Postcolonial Studies* . ISSN 1368-8790.

## Downloaded from

<https://kar.kent.ac.uk/81291/> The University of Kent's Academic Repository KAR

## The version of record is available from

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2020.1751911>

## This document version

Author's Accepted Manuscript

## DOI for this version

## Licence for this version

UNSPECIFIED

## Additional information

## Versions of research works

### Versions of Record

If this version is the version of record, it is the same as the published version available on the publisher's web site. Cite as the published version.

### Author Accepted Manuscripts

If this document is identified as the Author Accepted Manuscript it is the version after peer review but before type setting, copy editing or publisher branding. Cite as Surname, Initial. (Year) 'Title of article'. To be published in *Title of Journal* , Volume and issue numbers [peer-reviewed accepted version]. Available at: DOI or URL (Accessed: date).

## Enquiries

If you have questions about this document contact [ResearchSupport@kent.ac.uk](mailto:ResearchSupport@kent.ac.uk). Please include the URL of the record in KAR. If you believe that your, or a third party's rights have been compromised through this document please see our [Take Down policy](https://www.kent.ac.uk/guides/kar-the-kent-academic-repository#policies) (available from <https://www.kent.ac.uk/guides/kar-the-kent-academic-repository#policies>).

Maria Ridda

**Capitalism, Criminality and the State: The Origins of Illegal Urban Modernity**

M.Ridda@kent.ac.uk

## **Capitalism, Criminality and the State: The Origins of Illegal Urban Modernity**

Maria Ridida

School of English, University of Kent

**Abstract:** This essay argues that criminality provides a critical magnifying lens to understand the network of subversive disconnections and disjunctures in postcolonial cities. By connecting the postcolonial city to the discourse on crime, it investigates the specific relations between exploitation, colonisation and the underworld. As crossroads of the different intersections of power determined by colonialism, decolonisation and globalisation (Varma, 2011), postcolonial cities expose the many and varied entanglements between the informal economies in the Global North and South, between the legal and the unofficial. Starting with the assumption that colonialism is predicated upon the principles of Western modernity, this essay frames criminal organisations as forces acting in opposition to and in concurrence with the state. Whereas the discourses on criminality are conventionally employed to reinforce processes of ‘Othering’ and racialisation in fringe locations, they also have the potential to unveil the ‘hidden truths’ of Western urban modernity. To this end, this essay employs *Christ Stopped at Eboli* (1946), a novel that unveils the links between exploitation and illegality. The society portrayed in the text shows the manifestations of an ‘unauthorised modernity’; an alternative view of development that refashions the meaning of what is conventionally regarded as legal and accepted.

**Key words:** criminality, Global South, postcolonial city, neoliberalism, modernity

This essay argues that criminality provides a critical magnifying lens to understand the network of subversive disconnections and disjunctures in postcolonial cities. By connecting the postcolonial city to the discourse on crime, I want to reflect on the specific relations between exploitation, colonisation and the underworld. Whereas the discourses on criminality are employed to reinforce processes of ‘Othering’ and racialisation in fringe locations,<sup>1</sup> I argue that they have the potential to unveil the ‘hidden truths’ of Western

modernity. As John Hagedorn puts it, crime represents a lens to understand ‘the processes of globalisation - the redivision of space, the strengthening of traditional identities, and the underground economy’.<sup>2</sup>

As crossroads of the different intersections of power determined by colonialism, decolonisation and globalisation,<sup>3</sup> postcolonial urban spaces are constantly affected by a number of variables that defer to the re-enactment of colonialist practices in different locations. They expose the many and varied entanglements between the informal economies in the Global North and South, between the legal and the unofficial. As with Rita Segato’s argument, I posit that the ‘grid of exclusive modernity’ is challenged by certain discourses, which highlight the unsustainability of Western dualities.<sup>4</sup>

If Western modernity retraces what Annibal Quijano calls ‘the basic experience of colonial domination’,<sup>5</sup> the central question is whether it is possible to establish clear demarcations between those forces acting outside and within the state. Starting with the assumption that colonialism is predicated upon the principles of Western modernity, I argue that criminality situates itself in the interstices between visible and invisible power. This positioning blurs the lines between differential paradigms of modernity: the official and the unofficial, legality and illegality, Centre and Periphery.

In order to demonstrate how the ambiguous grey areas generated by criminal organisations subvert the official taxonomies of power, this essay employs *Christ Stopped at Eboli* (1946) by Carlo Levi;<sup>6</sup> a novel which highlights the connections between subalternity and alternative paradigms of conventional notions of progression and teleological development. The society portrayed in the novel shows what Iain Chambers calls an ‘unauthorised modernity’,<sup>7</sup> an alternative view of development which refashions the meaning of what is conventionally regarded as legal and accepted.

Section one explains the connections between criminality and state-power, and explores and defines the ambiguous spaces that criminal organisations occupy in the interstices of the unofficial economy. Section two focuses on how criminal discourses re-shape the reconfigurations of the postcolonial city by unveiling the hidden truths of capitalism. As culturally produced, such discourses retrace a link between globalisation and the re-enactment of colonialist practices. The third section offers a reading of *Christ Stopped at Eboli* that demonstrates how the notion of illegality unveils the link between subjugation, represented by the coercive process of Italian unification,<sup>8</sup> and the development of subaltern geographies of power.

### **Postcolonialism, Criminality and the State**

John and Jean Comaroff and Comaroff argue that crime is most visible in postcolonies or nation-states governed ‘from elsewhere’, where the rule of law has always identified them as ‘underdeveloped’, and where their modern history began with the onset of neoliberalism.<sup>9</sup> The term ‘neo’ here refers to both the classic eighteenth-century notion of market liberalism as the pursuit of common good and the power to exercise free will among competing agents.<sup>10</sup> Both definitions conform to American-driven notions of democracy and liberty.

These specific orientations have been imposed on postcolonies with disastrous effects on their already fragile economies, making them vulnerable to criminal organisations. As sources of raw materials, postcolonies have always been exploited. The extractive and exploitative nature of colonial projects originates in the grey area between state power and economic exploitation. Mancur Olson’s famous metaphor likened the origins of the state to a ‘stationary bandit’ which found it more productive to exploit a stable population.<sup>11</sup> Predation and semi-legalised violence shaped these projects, and, in their aftermath, the mixture of

deregulation and atomisation created a fertile terrain for parallel economies and ‘racketeers’.<sup>12</sup> These dynamics are particularly evident in the postcolonies bearing the historical traces of overrule of colonialism that, in the past, justified predation and legalised violence.<sup>13</sup> Criminality is inextricably linked to a long history of colonial exploitation that continues today in the aggressive interventions of the neoliberal economy.

Comaroff and Comaroff argue that the criminalisation of a number of states in Africa or in Latin America as the epitomes of lawlessness and disorder has constituted a frequent strategy of economic intervention on behalf of the Western world, especially in the 1990s.<sup>14</sup> Such strategies disguise the deep connivances between legality and criminality in the West; the entanglement, as Achille Mbembe puts it, between pariah economies in the Global South with countries in the North.<sup>15</sup> Colin McFarlane argues these links exist between cities across the globe.<sup>16</sup> I use the terms Global South and North to discuss the interconnections between colonial and neo-colonialist practices, the exploitative entanglements of power linking crime to subalternity across the globe. As Comaroff and Comaroff put it, the Global South ‘describes a polythetic category, its members sharing one or more...of a diverse set of features...the closest thing to a common denominator among them is that many but not all were once colonies, protectorates, or overseas ‘possessions’<sup>17</sup>. However, it is a term that ‘obscures as much as it describes’, especially in relation to the division between centrality and marginality, given the economic entanglements of power that Mbembe mentions.<sup>18</sup> As Saskia Sassen puts it, cities across the world such as New York, Tokyo, Paris, London and Los Angeles represent ‘a worldwide grid of strategic places’ that cut across national boundaries and the old North-South divide.<sup>19</sup> Metropolises in the North are closely connected to several urban centres in the South such as Sao Paulo, Buenos Aires, Bangkok, Taipei and Mexico City. The intensity of concentration of strategic resources is what creates increasing dynamics of inequalities in these cities. These differences generate hierarchies of power

within the grid ‘of strategic places’ where capital circulates. It is in the nodal conjunctures of capital circulation that criminality flourishes.

The relationship between criminality and the uneven distribution of wealth connects the economy to dynamics of subalternity in a similar way to the geographies of dispossession generated by colonialism. Antonio Gramsci’s definition of subalternity in relation to class illustrates exactly how this comparison works. The exploited sectors of the population are identified with subaltern groups outside the conventional institutions of the state, and they are geographically, historically and economically displaced.<sup>20</sup> Their role is unilaterally defined by the place that they occupy in the economic production and their potential to become part of the state. Gramsci clarifies that their potential to unify with the state must be taken into account on a global scale.<sup>21</sup> Gramsci’s contextualisation of the idea of subalternity within the North-South divide in Italy at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century can be extended to several other contexts to open up productive interrogations on the role that criminal organisations play within the geographies of marginality previously mentioned. Paradoxically, these areas, extending Gramsci’s definition, aspire to become part of the official urban geography.

The Global South, as the exemplary space of the geographies of marginality, retraces the connection between unofficial work, the mobilisation of capital and the lack of a centralised state. These factors have constituted the perfect terrain for the development of transnational criminal organisations. Mike Davies argues that the economic policies of non-intervention in a number of cities have generated a polycentric system without boundaries between Centre and Periphery.<sup>22</sup> Metropolises as varied as such as Mexico City, Sao Paulo, Santiago and Buenos Aires present ‘penumbra’ areas created by the unobstructed circulation of commodities and the dislocation of manufacturing work.<sup>23</sup> These grey zones have assumed peculiar connotations in the industrial cities of the South and account for the deep entanglements of the official and unofficial economy. My contention is that they can be

employed as magnifying lenses to understand what Segato has referred to as the ‘grid of exclusive modernity’ revealing the hidden truths of capitalist accumulation.<sup>24</sup>

It is exactly in these ambiguous areas that I want to locate the urban trajectories delineated by transnational criminal organisations. Establishing a connection between subaltern geographies of power and the darkest recesses of capitalism, the underworld retraces the path of the neoliberal economy, while simultaneously providing a lens to understand the complex articulations of power that defy the conventional binaries of postcolonialism.

### **Criminality and the City: Mapping the ‘Grey Areas’**

Criminality unveils the complex network of connections and disjunctures that characterise the postcolonial city. Neither completely polar to nor synecdochic with the state, the city constitutes the privileged terrain of the entanglements of power where criminal organisations operate. This section explores the nature of the grey areas within the postcolonial city, and ends with a brief examination of the ways in which literary and cultural representations of the underworld have the potential to unveil hidden truths.

Reversing the simplistic association of crime with the sense of ‘lawlessness’ typical of colonial and postcolonial societies, discourses on the underworld are instrumentalised to hide the possibility of such re-examination.<sup>25</sup> Newspapers’ headlines reiterate the narrative of cities in the Global South (primarily in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean) as representing a nightmare of suspended law and disorder. Such places have become the ‘epitome of post/colonial misrule in European eyes, metaphors of malfeasance-kleptocracy, neopatrimonialism, clientelism.[They] have long been the accepted forms, popular and scholarly alike, for indigenous modes of governance’.<sup>26</sup> These countries stand metonymically



as vehicles to think about the nightmares that threaten any idea of order in the respectable West. As with Edward Said's argument in *Orientalism* (1978), criminal discourses have been equally appropriated by hegemonic narratives of disorder to denote those 'barbaric' locations that do not conform to a Western-centric idea of modernity. Comaroff and Comaroff point to the cultural and political resonance of the discourse on criminality that unveils several hidden truths, and stands metonymically for the fear of the Other:

[This narrative ] seeks to plumb the meaning of criminality and the sorts of social truths to which it gives rise; to interrogate the larger, more or less visible conditions that spawn phenomenologies of fear, the metaphysics of disorder in which they are embedded, and the forms of law-enforcement that they mandate; and to situate the practical epistemology of crime-and-policing in the changing lineaments of the history of the present.<sup>27</sup>

Such narratives sit alongside traditional ideas of the Western nation, such as Max Weber's notion that states are defined by holding 'the monopoly of the legitimate use of violence within a given territory'.<sup>28</sup> The solid definitions that characterise postcolonial states as 'failed' overlook a whole range of problems that undermine this simplistic notion. Violence is one way in which the idea of criminality has been employed to disseminate 'phenomenologies of fear'. As part of the wider discourse on processes of racialisation, criminality is often cast as the exemplary condition of the metaphysics of disorder that typifies stereotypical representations of the postcolonies. Yet, as with Comaroff's and Comaroff's contention on the use of the underworld to interrogate 'social truths', criminal narratives as tools of oppression allow us to understand the dynamics that have generated conditions of subalternity. In understanding them, we can reformulate an alternative version of history that questions Western-centric modernity.

Laurent Fouchard discusses specifically the official and unofficial entanglements of power in a number of African countries where the discourses on criminality are directly connected to the feral forces of the neoliberal economy.<sup>29</sup> It is urban space that constitutes the privileged terrain where ‘multiple authorities compete over state functions’.<sup>30</sup> Recent studies have shown that a number of African cities have been increasingly managed by self-regulatory systems working outside state institutions and, as a result, large parts of their population are forced to live in ‘quasi-slum’ spaces.<sup>31</sup>

The direct link between economic development and the city allows for an investigation of the synergies between the official and the unofficial intersections of power. African cities, as emblems of the ‘new assemblages of capital and labour’, demonstrate how neoliberal state interventions have created a series of economic disjunctures increasing the number of non-state actors able to offer direct protection. While such practices have undermined the centralised authority of the state, they have empowered what Fouchard terms ‘non-institutions’ or those informal sectors of the population located on the margins<sup>32</sup>

The same dynamics apply to another city of the Global South: Port Moresby.<sup>33</sup> Again growth has created a number of grey areas where ‘the poor and the beggars are condemned to an extra-civic fate’.<sup>34</sup> John Connell traces a direct connection between a past history of colonial exploitation, a weak narrow economic base in the present, and the development of criminality in the context of postcolonialism and globalisation. Whilst the state has welcomed neoliberal foreign investment, criminality represents an outlet of hope for some parts of the population condemned to an ‘extra-civic fate’.<sup>35</sup>

These examples show how discourses on crime, associated superficially with the state of lawlessness typical of colonial and postcolonial societies, unveil the ‘forgotten corners of the city’,<sup>36</sup> itself deeply tied to a wider web of economic interconnections between North and South. Whilst traditional representations of criminality are believed to reinforce the status

quo by restoring the idea of justice to its order,<sup>37</sup> indigenous ‘underworld’ narratives leave open a number of productive interrogations by engaging with structures of knowledge that are rooted in the specificities of the contexts in which they have been produced.

Functioning as disruptive forces on ‘the inner workings of the state’, as Cunneen (2011) puts it, criminal narratives reshape ‘the meaning of evidence’ and provide alternative truths<sup>38</sup>. As criminalization is dependent on historical, political amnesia and on processes of ‘othering’ and racialization, Cunneen believes there is a strong connection between the discourse on crime and nation-building typical of colonial societies.<sup>39</sup> He writes that a ‘postcolonial perspective’ takes into ‘consideration art and performance in indigenous societies to reinstate the voices of the colonized within criminological discourse...Art unhinges colonial law as an abstract expression of power and grounds it firmly in the lived experiences’ of the oppressed.<sup>40</sup> Responding to Cunneen, I argue that indigenous cultural discourses on criminality put on the postcolonial map those places that are characterised by a present and past history of colonial and neo-colonial subjugation, while creating a differential narrative of the city itself.

For example, the publication of the non-fictional text *Gomorra* by the Neapolitan author Roberto Saviano in 2006 sparked a global debate on Naples and its connection to an intricate global web of illegal organizations and illicit transactions. Relating an unnamed narrator’s experience of the Neapolitan underworld in the early 2000s, *Gomorra* presents a telling image of the city that, through its criminal organizations, retraces the parallel contours of a wider space encompassing, extending and stretching far beyond the state. The text brings into the foreground a map of the city that traces a number of connections with a past of indirect history of colonial subjugation.<sup>41</sup>

*Gomorra* directed the attention towards a rich stream of crime literature and music that, until then, had been considered as part of a low-brow culture undeserving of critical attention.

Some genres such as the Neapolitan ‘sceneggiata’, a filmic and theatrical representation of life in the poor quarters of the city, and *partenopop*, a stream of music that focuses on the social and civic abandonment of the periphery, have put Naples on the broader map of Italy as a city neglected by state policies and actions.<sup>42</sup> Despite bringing into the spotlight the city of Naples and its association with criminality, such cultural discourses generate a number of questions on the ambiguous areas mapped by the activities of criminal organisations. Part of a wider debate that positions Naples at the forefront of the Italian Southern Question<sup>43</sup> and as a paradigmatic example of dynamics of subalternity affecting the Global South, in these texts the city’s development goes hand in hand with the consolidation of its criminal organisation, the Camorra.

Such a trajectory positions criminality as a phenomenon that has dismantled the traditional binaries between Centre and Periphery, central and marginal areas, oppressor and oppressed.<sup>44</sup> Criminality in Naples becomes the vehicle of a number of transactions and movements across the dividing lines of North and South, legality and illegality. When conventional urban paradigms collapse, there is a need to reconceptualise the grey areas generated by criminal organisations. As outlined above, the connection between subaltern geographies of power and the development of criminal organisations demonstrates that the underworld acts both in concurrence with and against formally constituted institutions of power. As both victims of the lack of state intervention and enablers of the processes that constitute Western modernity itself, criminal organisations challenge the dominant narrative of space as a site simply contested by the ‘oppressed’ or determined by the hegemonic power of the ‘oppressor’.<sup>45</sup>

Indigenous discourses on criminality, rooted in colonialism, neo-colonialism and state absence, have the potential to dismantle processes of ‘othering’ and racialisation associated

with the postcolonial city. Unveiling these ‘forgotten corners’, they provide a new theorisation of the postcolonial city that goes beyond traditional binaries of power.

### **The Roots of Illegal Modernity in *Christ Stopped at Eboli***

As expressions of an ‘ongoing coloniality of power’, the grey areas both encompass and go beyond official paradigms of Western-centric modernity.<sup>46</sup> In so doing, they function as magnifying lenses, and reveal an ‘unauthorized modernity’ not conforming to the official trajectory indicated by colonialist practices.<sup>47</sup> What follows is an investigation of the roots of the relationship between subaltern geographies of colonialism and the development of an ‘illegal modernity’ in *Christ Stopped at Eboli*; a text that, dealing with oxymoronic concepts of development from a Southern perspective, counter-poses and challenges established notions of statehood that lie at heart of the colonial project.

Although the topic of reconceptualization of the South as a crossroads of several cultural intersections has been previously addressed by several critics,<sup>48</sup> the concept of ‘unauthorised’ or uncanonical modernity has been overlooked. Iain Chambers’ view of the Mediterranean as a template to think about modernity from outside conventional hierarchies of power offers a useful insight. Focussing specifically on urban space as an example of dissonant modernity, Chambers points out how the constitution of the modern European nation is constantly re-enacted through the performative interactions of vague colonialist practices. Processes of othering that counter-pose the notion of foreignness to Western urban space as a symbol of the nation have traditionally been deployed to objectify notions of essentialist national belonging. Chambers argues that the modern city reminds us of the inhabitations of ‘colonial histories’ and postcolonial proximities.<sup>49</sup> The idea of postcolonial proximities challenging established notions of Western urbanity becomes the emblem of a

migrating modernity that unravels ‘the existing political and historical script’...to include other possible narrations of the present and the past.<sup>50</sup> These narratives revisit the silences of the past while uncovering the effects of postcolonial proximities and dwellings. For example, the complex inhabitations and trajectories delineated by criminal organisations reveal both the colonialist enactments that are at the base of Western notions of nationhood and of the formations of postcolonial proximities constantly threatening established binaries of modernity. They represent the ‘Otherness’ that Chambers mentions without implying a definite demarcation of hierarchies of power.

The lack of an established taxonomy of belonging is, I argue, key to understanding the challenges and alternatives to established notions of Western urban modernity. These intricate articulations require to be understood in a broad framework of analysis that takes into account ‘unauthorised’ and ‘illegal’ entanglements of power. Here the term ‘illegal’ entails a number of connotations that do not necessarily imply the trespassing of an established legal code; rather it encompasses a number of processes of signification that go beyond their understanding in relation to formally constituted institutions of power. The histories of marginality, which characterise ‘otherness’, can be seen as illegal or unauthorised in that they provide an alternative insight into Western-centric modernity allowing ‘the subaltern to interrupt the frame’.<sup>51</sup> The discourses on criminality trace a link between marginality and location that foregrounds situated historicities as magnifying lenses to understand a different process of modernity; they have the potential to provide an ontological re-examination of the possible relationships of power embedded onto city space. In so doing, literary and cultural representations of crime foreground an ‘illegal modernity’ that authorises the insertion of the hidden truths of capitalism and progress.

Dealing with notions of marginality, location and ‘unauthorised’ entanglements of power, *Christ Stopped at Eboli* retraces exactly this logic. This text provides a key example

of a counter-modernity that challenges the colonialist practices shaping canonical narratives of development. Even if it is not set in a major urban centre, the novel offers a significant contribution to the idea of criminal discourses reshaping ‘the meaning of evidence’ and providing alternative truths.<sup>52</sup> Framed within the larger context of the Italian Southern Question, the text’s setting becomes exemplary of the link between exploitation and the development of an ‘illegal modernity’; an alternative trajectory of progression that, despite its exclusion from the recent entanglements of economic power outlined above, presents an interesting case for the argument of criminal discourses acting in concurrence and against the state. As a fictionalised account of the empirical author’s experience of exile in Lucania between 1935-1936, the text sketches the portrait of a remote village of Basilicata, Gagliano, by defining it, problematically, as ‘primitive’.<sup>53</sup> The daily activities of the village are measured by the rhythms of the peasants’ rural activities and by the communal sharing of the gossip in the local square. As the narrator puts it, Gagliano is ‘cut off from History and the State’;<sup>54</sup> ‘nobody goes to Church’.<sup>55</sup> Questioning the ideological significance of established hierarchies of power, the narrator argues that the peasants

...were not Fascists, just as they would never have been Conservatives or Socialists, or anything else. Such matters had nothing to do with them; they belonged to another world and they saw no sense in them. What had the peasants to do with Power, Government, and the state? The state, whatever form it might take, meant ‘the fellows in Rome’. ‘Everyone knows’, they said, ‘the fellows in Rome don’t want us to live like human beings’...To the peasants the state is more distant than heaven and far more of a scourge’, because it is always against them. Its political tags and platforms and, indeed, the whole structure of it do not matter. The peasants do not understand them because they are couched in a different language from their own, and there is no reason why they should ever care to understand them.<sup>56</sup>

The peasants do not belong to any established political party; they have no faith or interest in engaging with the Government and the state. Even the denotations of the term Power are obscure to them. As all these terms are equated to the teleological narrative of progress of the overall nation, they become empty signifiers. With the implicit assumption that the state and the peasants do not share a 'common language', Levi is also deferring an explanatory story to the dynamics of internal colonisation that have forced the South of Italy in a position of subalternity. The condition of abandonment in which Gagliano is coerced to live refers to the lack of historical and political integration of these regions into a coherent national project. The numerous references to the 'brigands', those people who fought against national unification, testify to this logic and replace the very rationale of established understanding of power and agency.

Where the *carabinieri* (local police) do not have any authority, justice is symbolised by forces acting outside the state that mimic and re-appropriate its power. As with Eric Hobsbawn's argument, banditry is closely intertwined with the idea of a 'stateless' society where those who kill are not considered as outlaws but 'belligerents', and they only become 'punishable' when they are judged by a legal code that does not belong to them.<sup>57</sup> In Hobsbawn's argument, resentment towards the exclusion of the benefits of economic modernisation is what underlies banditry. As a result, this sense of abandonment is the primary cause for the development of mechanisms of common identification that exclude the established institutions of power symbolised by the state. As the narrator puts it:

The peasants with a few exceptions, were all on the side of the brigands and, with the passing of time, the deeds which so struck their fancy became bound up with the familiar sites of the village ... The brigands unreasonably and hopelessly stood up for the life and liberty of the peasants against the encroachments of the state.<sup>58</sup>



Here the brigands represent the peasants' resentment towards the state that does not care about the existence of what the narrator terms the 'other Italy'.<sup>59</sup> Whereas the absence of centralised interventions is the primary cause of poverty and the spread of malaria, the narrator stresses how the peasants' lives are not 'rooted in history'.<sup>60</sup> Yet the term 'history' does not refer to a universal narrative of national development. It is equated to the process of digging and retrieving memories that have been arbitrarily buried by a coercive project of national unification:

The ground was littered with calcified bleached bones, flowering out of the graves and worn away by wind and sun. To the old man these bones, the dead, animals, and spirits were all familiar things, bound up, as indeed they were to everyone in these parts, with simple everyday life. 'The village is built of the bones of the dead.'... The old man was quite right, whether he meant these words literally or symbolically, as a figure of speech.<sup>61</sup>

The bones of the dead keep emerging from underground to remind the visitors of a colonial past and present that have debased the lives of the villagers. Gagliano itself is demarcated by an extensive ditch called 'Fossa del Bersagliere', 'because in earlier days a captured *bersagliere*<sup>62</sup> from Piedmont had been thrown down into the ditch by brigands'.<sup>63</sup> The topography of the place itself constantly defers to a history of colonial occupation that has turned its inhabitants into 'beasts'.<sup>64</sup> Objects that are unfamiliar to visitors and to the narrator, who is an outsider because he comes from the North but has been exiled because of his opposition to Fascism, are instead considered by the villagers as part of their 'simple everyday life'. Both 'literally [and] symbolically', Gagliano's history needs to be restored, as it does not share the same ground of a national modernity following the teleological narrative of Western progression. As the narrator puts it succinctly: 'None of the pioneers of Western civilisation brought here his sense of the passage of time, his deification of the State... No

one has ever come to this land except as an enemy, a conqueror, or a visitor devoid of understanding'.<sup>65</sup> Here the lack of Western civilisation and a missing sense of state deification find a correlative object in the condition of Gagliano as a forgotten place. While the reference to the 'pioneers of Western civilisation' refers to a history of colonial occupation, it also points to an alternative understanding of the passage of time and to a 'justificatory' morale that considers forces acting outside established hierarchies of power as agents of an 'illegal' modernity. Hence brigands but not carabinieri tried to restore justice in the past. The passage of time is primarily portrayed as an inverse process of retrieval of history in which the powers of the state are ignored. Such indicators of a differential narrative of development are based on the oxymoronic understanding of modernity itself.

As demonstrated throughout the text, the concept of modernity is considered alongside notions of state, national belonging and geographical positionality in the context of colonialist practices. There is an assumption that traditional narratives of Western development are inevitably shaped by the social and geographical construct of the state. Albert Camus argues that differential narratives of modernity reject *tout court* the validity of the modern state as the emblem of Northern imperialistic power.<sup>66</sup> Camus' antitheses inherent in the concept of rebellion as the seed of life and development can clarify this concept. Without 'organised' rebellion, society cannot change; yet the organisational principles of revolutionary thought have to face the contradictions that politics always calls into question: 'the opposition between violence and non-violence...and the opposition between justice and freedom'<sup>67</sup> Whereas violence leads to what Camus refers to as absolute forms of individualism, without its threat, rebellion would not take place; at the same time, justice implies freedom; yet the power of 'pure freedom', which according to Camus, extends beyond the arbitrary desire to kill people, is extremely dangerous. The question results in a dialectical aporia that does not necessarily need to be resolved because it leaves the

possibility to generate a number of open-ended discourses. It is these open narratives that underlie the very concept of moderation characterising certain Mediterranean or Southern locations.

In Camus' terms, the oxymoron characterises a different concept of modernity. Hence antithetical discourses need to be incorporated into a different narrative of development reconstructed from the South where the normative categories and specificities of legality and illegality, state and anti-state, colonial past and postcolonial proximity constantly entangle and subvert established epistemologies of thought. 'Postcolonial proximities' stretch an invisible line that connects the re-enactment of colonialist practices with the disjunctures of neo-imperialism and neoliberalism, undermining the very concept of Western-centric modernity.<sup>68</sup> Despite it being set in the South of Italy during the Fascist era when the mobilisations of the neoliberal economy were absent, *Christ Stopped at Eboli* brings into the spotlight the process of internal colonisation that located the Southern regions of the country in a position of subalternity. The trope of colonialism appears both indirectly through the notion of a fractured state where justice is identified with the justificatory morale of brigandism, and indirectly through the expansionist intervention in Abyssinia in 1935-1936 which feels very remote from the world of the peasants. Opposition to colonialism takes the shape of an 'illegal modernity' that is equally founded upon a rejection of the state itself.

## **Conclusion**

An examination of the cultural representations of the 'underworld' demonstrates how criminality is strictly connected to those subaltern geographies of power shaped by colonialism and the broader re-enactment of colonialist practices perpetuated by Western-centric modernity. As Cunneen has pointed out, a postcolonial perspective on criminality

reshapes 'the meaning of evidence' and provides alternative truths<sup>69</sup>. It re-instates the subaltern's voice into the 'exclusive grid of modernity'<sup>70</sup>.

Rather than asserting the exclusivity of criminal discourses within the peripheries, I argue that they provide an ontological re-examination of the possibilities that have generated them, and an understanding of differential processes of Western modernity. As with the argument presented in the second section of this essay, transnational criminal organisations trace a long connecting line between the incursions of neoliberalism and a universal narrative of progress that, in Arif Dirlik's terms, perpetuates the inequalities of colonialism.<sup>71</sup> Hence, there is a connection between the development of criminal organisations in places that have been subjected to direct, indirect colonial subjugation and to the more encompassing forces of an 'ongoing coloniality of power'.<sup>72</sup> It is primarily in the situated historicities of public space that criminal organisations unveil a number of grey areas simultaneously supporting and rejecting conventional dichotomies between state and anti-state, legal and illegal.

These areas offer a very different vision of modernity, as *Christ Stopped at Eboli* shows, rooted in a place outside of the state in an 'extra civic fate'. The text has demonstrated the existence of what I have called an 'illegal' modernity characterised by the existence of non-institutions standing at a distance from time and history. It has provided an example of how history, the state and religion as the classic parameters of modernity, do not constitute the sole lenses of progress. On the contrary, they become empty signifiers pointing to the existence of subversive and unauthorised dynamics of power. These interconnections between legality and illegality State and anti-state undermine the very foundations of the 'coloniality of power'.<sup>73</sup> While unveiling the connections between colonialism, neoliberalism and the re-enactment of colonialist practices, the discourses on criminality also provide a different map of modernity conceptualised from the South. As the real and imaginary crossroads of colonialism, postcolonialism and globalisation, the postcolonial city becomes

the key arena for important processes of cultural signification nuancing and extending the spatial dyads of power between Centre and Periphery, the oppressor and the oppressed.

### Note on Contributor

Maria Ridda is Lecturer in Postcolonial Literature at the University of Kent. She has published extensively on postcolonial theory, South Asian writing, and on the Mediterranean. Her first monograph *Imagining Bombay, London, New York and Beyond* (Peter Lang, 2015) explored how urban representations of the three cities are shaped by colonialism, postcolonialism and globalisation. Her second monograph, *Criminality and Power in the Postcolonial City*, is under contract with the series Routledge Research in Postcolonial Literatures. Through a comparison of Mumbai and Naples, it investigates how the recent rise of transnational criminal organisations challenges conventional representations and imaginings of the postcolonial and world city.

---

<sup>1</sup> Jean Comaroff, and John L. Comaroff, eds, *Law and Disorder in the Postcolony*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008, p. 66.

<sup>2</sup> John Hagedorn, ed, 'Introduction', *Gangs in the Global City: Alternatives to Traditional Criminology*, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2007, pp. 1-11 (3).

<sup>3</sup> Rashmi Varma, *The Postcolonial City and its Subjects: London, Nairobi, Bombay*, London, Routledge, 2011. Maria Ridda, *Imagining Bombay, London, New York and beyond: South Asian Diasporic Writing from 1990 to the Present*, Oxford: Peter Lang, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Rita Segato in Melville, Gert, and Carlos Ruta, eds. *Thinking the Body as a Basis, Provocation and Burden of Life: Studies in Intercultural and Historical Contexts*, Vol. 2. Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 2015, p. 227.

<sup>5</sup> Anibal Quijano, 'Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America', in *Nepantla: Views from the South* 1, No 3 (2000): 533-580, p. 533.

<sup>6</sup> Carlo Levi, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, London: Penguin, 1947.

<sup>7</sup> Iain Chambers, *Postcolonial Interruptions: Unauthorized Modernity*, London and New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017.

<sup>8</sup> A revisionist thread of Italian history argues that the South of Italy was subject to internal colonisation by the Piedmontese Government in 1860. For further details, see Valeria Deplano and Alessandro Pes, *Quel che resta dell'impero: la cultura coloniale degli italiani*, Florence: Mimesis, 2016, pp. 149-167; Maria Ridda, 'The Siren's Children: Rethinking Postcolonial Naples', *Interventions*, 27 January 2017, 467-486, DOI: 10.1080/1369801X.2016.1277153.

<sup>9</sup> Jean Comaroff, and John L. Comaroff, *The Truth About Crime: Sovereignty, Knowledge, Social Order*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016, pp. 2-3.

<sup>10</sup> Jean Comaroff, and John L. Comaroff, *The Truth About Crime: Sovereignty, Knowledge, Social Order*, p. 3.

- 
- <sup>11</sup> Olson, Mancur, 'Dictatorship, democracy, and development', *American political science review* 87.3 (1993): 567-576.
- <sup>12</sup> Jean Comaroff, and John L. Comaroff, *The Truth About Crime: Sovereignty, Knowledge, Social Order*, p. 5.
- <sup>13</sup> Jean Comaroff, and John L. Comaroff, eds, *Law and Disorder in the Postcolony*, p. 11.
- <sup>14</sup> Jean Comaroff, and John L. Comaroff, eds, *Law and Disorder in the Postcolony*, p. 66.
- <sup>15</sup> Achille Mbembe, 'On Politics as a form of expenditure', in Jean Comaroff, and John L. Comaroff, eds, *Law and Disorder in the Postcolony*, pp. 299-335.
- <sup>16</sup> Colin McFarlane, 'Metabolic inequalities in Mumbai: Beyond telescopic urbanism', *City* 17.4 (2013): 498-503, p. 503.
- <sup>17</sup> Comaroff, Jean, and John L. Comaroff, *Theory from the South: Or, how Euro-America is Evolving Toward Africa*, London and New York: Routledge, 2015, p. 45.
- <sup>18</sup> Comaroff, Jean, and John L. Comaroff. *Theory from the South: Or, how Euro-America is Evolving Toward Africa*, p. 45.
- <sup>19</sup> Saskia Sassen, 'The Global City: One Setting for New Types of Gang Work and Political Culture?', in John Hagedorn, ed., *Gangs in the Global City: Alternatives to traditional criminology*, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2007, pp. 97-119 (101)
- <sup>20</sup> Antonio Gramsci, in Quentin Hoare, and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, eds, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, New York: International Publishers, 1987, p. 52.
- <sup>21</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, p. 53.
- <sup>22</sup> Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums*, London and New York: Verso, 2006, p. 10.
- <sup>23</sup> Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums*, p. 11.
- <sup>24</sup> Rita Segato in Melville Gert, and Carlos Ruta, eds. *Thinking the Body as a Basis, Provocation and Burden of Life: Studies in Intercultural and Historical Contexts*, p. 227.
- <sup>25</sup> Jean Comaroff, and John L. Comaroff, eds, *Law and Disorder in the Postcolony*, p. 66.
- <sup>26</sup> Jean Comaroff, and John L. Comaroff, *The Truth About Crime: Sovereignty, Knowledge, Social Order*, pp. 6-7.
- <sup>27</sup> Jean Comaroff, and John L. Comaroff, *The Truth About Crime: Sovereignty, Knowledge, Social Order*, p. 14.
- <sup>28</sup> Max Weber, 'Politik als Beruf' in H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1946, pp. 77-128
- <sup>29</sup> Laurent Fouchar, 'Between World History and State Formation', *The Journal of African History*, 52:2 pp. 123-248, p. 240.
- <sup>30</sup> Laurent Fouchar, 'Between World History and State Formation', p. 240.
- <sup>31</sup> Laurent Fouchar, 'Between World History and State Formation', p. 227
- <sup>32</sup> Laurent Fouchar, 'Between World History and State Formation', p. 244.
- <sup>33</sup> John Connel, 'Regulation of Space in the contemporary postcolonial Pacific City: Port Moresby and Suva', *Asia Pacific View Point*, 15 December 2003, pp. 243-257.
- <sup>34</sup> John Connell, 'Regulation of Space in the contemporary postcolonial Pacific City: Port Moresby and Suva', p. 252.
- <sup>35</sup> John Connell, 'Regulation of Space in the contemporary postcolonial Pacific City: Port Moresby and Suva', p. 252.
- <sup>36</sup> Francesco Palmieri, *Il libro napoletano dei morti*, Milano: Mondadori, 2012, p. 89.
- <sup>37</sup> Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders: On the Sociology of Literary Forms*, London: Verso, 1983.
- <sup>38</sup> Chris Cunneen, 'Postcolonial Perspectives for Criminology', in Bosworth, and C. Hoyle, eds, *What Is Criminology?*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 257.
- <sup>39</sup> Chris Cunneen, 'Postcolonial Perspectives for Criminology', p. 257.
- <sup>40</sup> Chris Cunneen, 'Postcolonial Perspectives for Criminology', p. 258.
- <sup>41</sup> As the capital of the Kingdom of the two Sicilies, Naples was occupied by the Piedmontese Government in 1860. Valeria Deplano and Alessandro Pes, *Quel che resta dell'impero: la cultura coloniale degli italiani*, Florence: Mimesis, 2016, pp. 149-167; Maria Ridda, 'The Siren's Children: Rethinking Postcolonial Naples', *Interventions*, 27 January 2017, 467-486, DOI: 10.1080/1369801X.2016.1277153
- <sup>42</sup> See for example the film *Napoli, Palermo, New York: il triangolo della Camorra*, Dir: Afonso Brescia, 1981. All the songs by the Neapolitan singer Nino D'Angelo can be assembled under the rubric of partenopop.
- <sup>43</sup> The Italian Southern Question was framed by Antonio Gramsci in 1924 as the economic and social disparity that characterized the regions of the South of Italy exploited by the North. See Antonio Gramsci, 'Some aspects of the southern question', *Selection from Politics Writings (1921-1926)* (1978).
- <sup>44</sup> Isaia Sales, *Le strade della violenza: malviventi e bande di camorra a Napoli, Napoli*, L'ancora del mediterraneo, 2006, p. 24.
- <sup>45</sup> See Maria Ridda, 'The Siren's Children'.
- <sup>46</sup> Anibal Quijano, 'Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America', p. 533.
- <sup>47</sup> Iain Chambers, *Postcolonial Interruptions: Unauthorized Modernity*, p. 13.

- 
- <sup>48</sup> See, for example, the Caribbean of Edouard Glissant, the Asia of Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha, or the Latin America of Walter D. Mignolo.
- <sup>49</sup> Iain Chambers, *Postcolonial Interruptions: Unauthorized Modernity*, p. 13.
- <sup>50</sup> Iain Chambers, *Postcolonial Interruptions: Unauthorized Modernity*, p. 80.
- <sup>51</sup> Paraphrased from Iain Chambers, *Postcolonial Interruptions: Unauthorized Modernity*, p. 70.
- <sup>52</sup> Chris Cunneen, 'Postcolonial Perspectives for Criminology', in Bosworth, and C. Hoyle, eds, *What Is Criminology?*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 249–261 (p. 257).
- <sup>53</sup> Carlo Levi, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, p. 70. Maria As Roberto Derobertis puts it, 'Although Levi recognized Lucania's capacity to oppose "paternal prevailing institutions", the region remained essentially shapeless ...' Roberto Derobertis, 'A Postcolonial Perspective on Carlo Levi's Cristo si è fermato a Eboli and Southern Italy Today' in Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo, eds, *Postcolonial Italy, Challenging National Homogeneity*, New York: Palgrave, 2012, p. 162 (pp. 157-170).
- <sup>54</sup> Carlo Levi, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, p. 11.
- <sup>55</sup> Carlo Levi, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, p. 49.
- <sup>56</sup> Carlo Levi, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, p. 78.
- <sup>57</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2000, p. 8.
- <sup>58</sup> Carlo Levi, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, pp. 136-137.
- <sup>59</sup> Carlo Levi, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, p. 137.
- <sup>60</sup> Carlo Levi, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, p. 36.
- <sup>61</sup> Carlo Levi, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, p. 71.
- <sup>62</sup> Élite soldier of the Royal Italian Army (my own translation).
- <sup>63</sup> Carlo Levi, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, p. 19.
- <sup>64</sup> Carlo Levi, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, p. 51.
- <sup>65</sup> Although Levi is generally aware of Gagliano's subalternity, he occasionally falls into the trap of distancing himself from the place's inhabitants. Carlo Levi, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, p. 11.
- <sup>66</sup> Albert Camus, *The Rebel*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984, p. 250.
- <sup>67</sup> Albert Camus, *The Rebel*, p. 250.
- <sup>68</sup> Iain Chambers, *Postcolonial Interruptions: Unauthorized Modernity*, p. 13.
- <sup>69</sup> Chris Cunneen, 'Postcolonial Perspectives for Criminology', in Bosworth, and C. Hoyle, eds, *What Is Criminology?*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 249–261 (p. 257).
- <sup>70</sup> Rita Segato in Melville, Gert, and Carlos Ruta, eds. *Thinking The Body as a Basis, Provocation and Burden of Life: Studies in Intercultural and Historical Contexts*, p. 22.
- <sup>71</sup> Arif Dirlik, 'The postcolonial aura: Third World criticism in the age of global capitalism', *Critical inquiry* 20.2 (1994), pp. 328-356.
- <sup>72</sup> Anibal Quijano, 'Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America', p. 533.
- <sup>73</sup> Anibal Quijano, 'Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America', p. 533.