

Demobilising by Legitimising: Masculine Honour, Positive and Negative Contact, and  
Social Activism against Criminal Organisations

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### Abstract

Italian mafia-type groups exert governance over the community. To do so, they must engage in contact with community members. Previous research indicates that individuals' endorsement of masculine honour values is associated to more frequent contact with members of criminal organisations (COs). The present research examines the relationship between masculine honour and both positive and negative contact, as well the potential implications of such contact. Structural equation modelling of survey data ( $N = 327$ ) revealed that masculine honour was associated to positive but not negative contact with COs' members. Positive contact was, in turn, associated with a stronger tendency to see COs as matching the ideals of honour (romanticisation), and lower perceived threat. In contrast, negative contact was associated with stronger perceived threat from COs' presence. Finally, romanticisation and lower perceived threat were associated with lower intentions to engage in social activism against COs. Results support the idea that cultural values of masculine honour make the presence of COs in society more acceptable and are an important predictor of contact with these types groups.

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In many societies and contexts, non-state agents display the ability to engage in governance over the community (Travaglino & Abrams, under review; von Lampe, 2016). A prototypical example are Italian criminal organisations (COs). COs have a strong hold over their territories where they have arrogated some of the most basic attributes of the state, including the ability to exert violence, regulate conflicts among citizens, and manage economic investments. For instance, a key and defining characteristic of the modern state is its “monopoly of violence” (Weber, 1919). That is, the state is the only actor that can control and use violence legitimately in society. However, the presence of COs and other criminal groups in a territory often means that the state lose such monopoly, as these groups acquire the ability to implement social mechanisms of violent control or offer ‘protection’ (Correa-Cabrera, Keck, & Nava, 2015; Skaperdas & Syropoulos, 1995). A very important question is how these groups succeed in gaining the legitimacy necessary to exert governance.

According to Intracultural Appropriation Theory (ICAT), COs’ presence in society is legitimated by cultural values of masculine honour (Travaglino & Abrams, under review; Travaglino, Abrams, & Russo, 2017). These values are an ideology that promote the use of private male violence to regulate social relationships, resolve conflicts and respond to insults (Barnes, Brown, & Osterman, 2012; Rodriguez Mosquera, 2016). Recent evidence indicates that when individuals endorse such values, they are more likely to report positive attitudes towards, and express lower intentions to oppose, COs (Travaglino, Abrams, & Randsley de Moura, 2014).

COs’ traditional form of governance relies on a dense network of relationships and is grounded in interpersonal contact with community members (Travaglino & Abrams, under review; Travaglino & Drury, 2018; cf. Schneider & Schneider, 2003; Weber, 1978).

Recently, Travaglino and Drury (2018) examined directly the association between individuals' endorsement of masculine honour ideology and individuals' contact with COs' members. They found that individuals who endorsed masculine honour values were also more likely to report more frequent contact with COs' members after five months.

In this article, we extend this research in two important ways. First, we investigate for the first time the relationship between individuals' endorsement of masculine honour and the frequency of both positive and negative contact with COs' members. Research on intergroup contact indicates that both the prevalence and implications of contact can vary greatly depending on whether contact is negative or positive (Graf, Paolini, & Rubin, 2014). Thus, it is important to clarify how the masculine honour ideology is associated with these different types of contact. In addition, we examine the implications of contact with COs' members, focusing on individuals' tendency to perceive COs as fitting the norms of honour (i.e., romanticisation; Travaglino & Drury, 2018), perceived threat from COs, and the role these variables play in predicting individuals' mobilisation against COs.

### **Cultural Honour, Masculinity and Violence**

The cultural code of honour emphasises the importance of individuals' reputation and public image. Individuals' honour is not only a private matter but depends on other people's judgements and determinations (Pitt-Rivers, 1966; see Rodriguez Mosquera, 2016; Uskul, Cross, Gunsoy, & Gul, in press). Such determinations vary depending on the gender of the individual. To be judged as honourable, a woman must conform to ideals of chastity and sexual purity (Barnes, Brown, Lenes, Bosson, & Carvallo, 2014). In contrast, masculine honour consists of ideals of strength, toughness and respect. For instance, according to honour's dictates, a man must be able to use violence to defend himself, his family and 'his women' from insults and other threats to reputation (Barnes et al., 2012).

Demonstrating such a capacity for private violence is extremely important in societies where the honour code is prevalent. Historically, honour developed in lawless environments where a nomadic lifestyle made it difficult to establish a central authority devoted to the resolution of conflicts and the administration of justice. In such circumstances, an individual's or group's reputation for violence functioned as a deterrent against theft and attacks from others. Quick retaliation against others' attempts of encroachment and insults signalled that an individual was not someone to be taken lightly.

Nowadays, despite the fact that the original conditions that gave rise to honour cultures have mostly ceased to exist, norms tolerating or even prescribing male violence persist (Cohen & Nisbett, 1997). For instance, research indicates that in places where cultural honour is a prevalent code, men are more likely to respond to insults using violence (Cohen, Nisbett, Bowdle, & Schwarz, 1996). In addition, violence against women following infidelity is more justified in cultures of honour because infidelity has a more damaging impact on a man's reputation in such areas (Vandello & Cohen, 2003). At the intergroup level, individuals who endorse a masculine honour ideology are more likely to endorse violence to protect the ingroup (Barnes et al., 2012; Levin, Roccas, Sidanius, & Pratto, 2015)

Importantly, evidence indicates individuals in honour cultures do not endorse violence indiscriminately (Cohen & Nisbett, 1994; Harinck, Shafa, Ellemers, & Beersma, 2013). Violence is deemed as legitimate in circumstances in which a person's honour is at stake, for instance following an insult (Shafa, Harinck, Ellemers, & Beersma, 2015). In other situations, individuals in honour cultures may even have stronger negative attitudes towards aggression compared to people from other cultures (Cohen & Nisbett, 1994). Honour, therefore, can be broadly conceptualised as a set of ideas, values and beliefs that regulates relationships in society by indicating when violence is legitimate, and who can employ violence against whom (Fiske & Rai, 2014).

### **Criminal Organisations and Culture**

Italian COs are illegal bodies characterised by a variety of different functions, including the accumulation of economic profit and the management of illegal trades. One of COs' key objectives concerns the acquisition of status and political power in the territories where they operate (Toros & Mavelli, 2013; Travaglino & Abrams, under review). In these territories, COs are able to implement some of the state's most basic functions, including providing investments, negotiating disputes among citizens, and implementing norms (Paoli, 2003; von Lampe, 2016;). COs also subtract the monopoly of violence from the state, 'policing' the territory, allowing (or forbidding) certain types of crimes and enforcing sanctions against citizens or other criminals.

A central question is how these groups are able to exert such influence over the population. Previous scientific attempts to tackle this issue, have generally emphasised COs' coercive potential (e.g., Roberti, 2008), or communities' pervasive cultural ethos of passivity (Banfield, 1958). In contrast to these approaches, Travaglino and Abrams (under review) conceptualised the relationship between COs and communities as a special case of dominant-subordinate intergroup relationship. Specifically, these authors proposed an Intracultural Appropriation Theory (ICAT) to explain how COs use an ideological framework grounded in specific cultural values to legitimise their place in society, and gain influence and power (see also Travaglino, Abrams, & Russo, 2017).

Specifically, COs appropriate, reinforce and present themselves as the embodiment of values of masculinity and honour shared by segments of the local community. COs' strict adherence to such values grant them influence, reducing public opposition. In addition, because this ideology promotes the importance of private revenge to gain respect and be seen as a 'real man', it foments a distance between members of the population and the state authorities. These processes encourage the emergence of the code of *omertà* (Travaglino et

al., 2014). Omertà condemns interaction between individuals and law enforcement agencies, irrespective of whether one is the collaborator, witness or victim of a crime (Paoli, 2013).

In line with ICAT, research indicates that individuals' endorsement of masculine honour values is associated with lower collective intentions to oppose COs (Travaglino, et al., 2014; Travaglino, Abrams, Randsley de Moura & Russo, 2015). In line with the idea that COs' legitimacy derives specifically from *masculine* honour values, research shows that individuals' endorsement of female honour values or individuals' subjective concerns about reputation are not associated with perception of and opposition to COs (Travaglino et al., 2017). In addition, the linkage between masculine honour values and collective opposition is not moderated by participant gender, in line with the argument that although women endorse male-honour related values to a lesser extent than men, they still participate in this ideology and play an important part in its social transmission (e.g., Barnes et al., 2012).

Importantly, COs would be unable to engage in governance and assert authority without making contact with members of the community. In this study, we address the question of the interplay between the values conducive to omertà and individuals' experiences of positive and negative contact with COs' members (Travaglino & Drury, 2018).

### **Intergroup Contact and Culture**

Contact with outgroup members promotes more positive views of the outgroup (Allport, 1954, Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Specifically, more frequent and more positive contact between ingroup and outgroup members is associated with more positive intergroup attitudes. Thus, intergroup contact theory is an important situational framework for examining changes in intergroup relationships, as well as attitudes between groups (Jackson & Poulsen, 2005).

Recently, research in a variety of domains has highlighted that individuals with particular personality traits or who advocate certain social attitudes, are more (or less) likely to engage in intergroup contact (Boccatto, Capozza, Trifiletti, & Di Bernardo, 2015; Dhont & Van Hiel, 2009; Hodson & Dhont, 2015; Jackson & Poulsen, 2005; Turner, Dhont, Hewstone, Prestwich, & Vonofakou, 2014; Vezzali, Turner, Capozza, & Trifiletti, 2018). For example, good quality contact is positively predicted by the Big Five Personality dimensions (McCrae & Costa, 1999) of agreeableness and openness to experience, and negatively by right wing authoritarianism (Dhont & Van Hiel, 2009; Vezzali et al., 2018).

Taken as a whole, this research demonstrates that *individual differences* may play a role in the types of contact experiences individuals are more likely to seek out, as well as how individuals experience this contact. We contribute to this line of the literature by examining how individual differences in the endorsement of cultural values are associated to positive and negative instances of contact. Specifically, we examine the role of masculine honour in predicting contact in the context of COs (Travaglino & Drury, 2018). But why might individuals' endorsement of cultural values play a role in the context of contact?

Culture equips individuals with a set of beliefs and assumptions related to the world, norms indicating the appropriate types of behaviour, and shared meanings (Triandis, 2001). Cultural values in particular, provide individuals with a way to organise information about reality, and to distinguish what is appropriate from what should be avoided (Brewer & Yuki, 2014). Specific geographical contexts or groups may be characterised by a dominant (i.e., prevalent) set of cultural values. However, there are important differences in the extent to which these values are endorsed by individuals (Moon, Travaglino, & Uskul, 2018; Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 2002). Thus, here we contend that individuals' endorsement of cultural values may be implicated in decisions concerning the suitability of contact with members from relevant outgroups.



### **Positive and Negative Contact and Masculine Honour in the Context of Criminal Organisations**

Travaglino and Drury (2018) examined the role played by masculine honour in contact with criminal organisations in Campania, in Southern Italy. ICAT contends that cultural values play a key role in influencing individuals' perception of the legitimacy of non-state agents such as COs. In line with this conceptualisation, longitudinal analyses demonstrated that individuals' endorsement of masculine honour values predicted more frequent contact with members of the local CO, Camorra, five months later (Travaglino & Drury, 2018, Study 1). Importantly, the inverse longitudinal relationship was not significant, suggesting that endorsement of these values was not subsequently shaped by contact with COs.

Moreover, a subsequent study revealed a positive indirect association between individuals' endorsement of masculine honour and the tendency to romanticise the Camorra *via* more frequent contact with Camorra's members (Travaglino & Drury, 2018; Study 2). Specifically, contact with COs' members was related to beliefs that the Camorra symbolizes honour, respect and important historical regional values. Thus, this research suggests that individuals who endorse masculine honour values are more likely to orbit closer to COs' members and engage in contact with them. Contact, in turn, promotes romantic ideas about the nature of COs, which may enable COs to gain influence in society.

An important limitation of these findings was that the authors used an unvalenced measure contact frequency, which did not differentiate between instances of positive and negative contact. Thus, in this paper, we extend this line of research by examining for the first time the association between masculine honour values and both positive and negative contact with COs' members, as well as the potential implications of both types of contact for individuals' intentions to oppose COs collectively.

Recent studies suggest that positive and negative contact are independent constructs, rather than opposite ends of a quality continuum (Barlow et al., 2012; Paolini, Harwood, & Rubin, 2010; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011). In a similar vein, considering COs' use of violence, negative contact with members of COs is likely to be a more complex and multi-faceted experience than merely the absence of good quality contact (as would be indicated by low scores on a contact quality continuum variable). Therefore, an issue we address in this research is the articulation of both positive and negative instances of contact with COs' members.

According to ICAT, COs portray themselves as the embodiment of masculine values of honour and respect. To the extent that individuals endorse this same set of values, they perceive COs more positively (Travaglino et al., 2014). This theoretical perspective suggests that masculine honour values should be associated only with positive, but not negative, instances of contact with COs' members. In line with prior research, it can be expected that positive contact is related to positive intergroup evaluations (Dhont, Cornelis, & Van Hiel, 2010; Wolfer et al., 2017), whilst any experiences of negative contact are related to negative intergroup evaluations (Aberson, 2015; Drury, Abrams, Swift, Lamont, & Gerocova, 2016; Wölfer, Jaspers, Blaylock, Wigoder, Hughes, & Hewstone, 2017). Therefore, individuals' endorsement of masculine honour values may predict positive contact with COs, which in turn leads to positive evaluation of COs. However, the association between negative contact with COs and subsequent negative evaluation of COs should not be rooted in the same values of masculine honour that legitimise these groups.

Interestingly, Travaglino and Drury (2018) found that the unvalenced frequency of contact predicted by individuals' endorsement of masculine honour values, was subsequently positively associated to individuals' tendency to romanticise COs. They also speculated that individuals may have interpreted contact as referring to positive instances and that male-

honour related values should play no role in predicting negative contact. We test this speculation empirically in this article.

### **Tendency to Romanticise COs and Threat**

In this article, we also examine, for the first time, two important implications of both positive and negative contact with COs' members, namely the tendency to romanticise COs and perceived threat. COs' authority in society is not grounded merely in brute force and coercion (cf. Tyler, 2006). Instead, it depends on their ability to gain legitimacy within the population by mirroring shared cultural values (Travaglino & Abrams, under review). This form of 'traditional authority' (Weber, 1978) is facilitated by contact between subordinates and those who govern them because it depends on personal loyalties rather than formal rules and bureaucratic procedures. It is, thus, important to examine both the conditions in which such contact may reinforce COs' social stance (romanticisation) and when, instead, it may be associated to stronger perceived threat from this group.

Individuals' tendency to romanticise COs refers to individuals' inclination to perceive COs' members as 'men of honour', who are able to live up to ideals of masculinity and respect (Travaglino & Drury, 2018). Therefore, romanticisation of the group can be conceptualised as a form of positive intergroup attitude reflecting individuals' perception that COs embody cherished ideals of masculinity and honour. Based on intergroup contact research (Dhont et al., 2010; Wölfer et al., 2017), romanticisation of COs should be positively predicted by instances of positive contact with COs and negatively predicted by instances of negative contact.

Perceived threat is, instead, a construct grounded in intergroup threat theory (W.G. Stephan & Stephan, 2000). It includes two different forms of threat. Symbolic threat refers to the perception that an outgroup undermines the ingroup's morals, values and way of life. Realistic threat refers to the perception that an outgroup undermines the ingroup's economic

or political power and well-being. Previous research indicates that both positive and negative experiences of contact are associated to such forms of threat (Aberson, 2015; Kanas, Scheepers, & Sterkens, 2017; Mähönen & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2016). Additionally, a recent meta-analysis demonstrates that intergroup threat is a consistent mediator of the relationships between both positive and negative contact and subsequent outgroup evaluations (Aberson, in press).

We argued earlier that negative contact does not take place in the framework of legitimacy granted to COs by the masculine honour ideology. This implies that individuals who experience negative contact with COs' members have a stronger likelihood of being exposed to COs' hostile behaviour. In addition, they may reframe COs' behaviour as more likely to undermine the community, and be less likely to perceive the groups as embodying ideals of masculine honour. Thus, we expect negative contact to be negatively associated to romanticisation and positively associated to perceived threat.

### **Intergroup Contact and Collective Action: Demobilising-by-Legitimising**

Collective action against COs in Southern Italy is an important way to raise awareness about the legal and social changes needed to tackle the presence of organised crime within the community. Such actions often take the form of public demonstrations whose objective is to erode the wall of *omertà* that protect COs, and question COs' public authority (Travaglino et al., 2014). Protest actions against COs are often organised by antimafia social movements, groups contrasting COs existence. In this article we extend previous research by examining directly the role of contact in individuals' intentions to oppose COs collectively (Travaglino & Drury, 2018; Travaglino et al., 2014).

An emerging body of literature examines the different ways in which both positive and negative instances of contact may influence individuals' intentions to engage in collective action (Cakal, Hewstone, Schwar, & Heath, 2011; Dixon, Levine, Reicher, &

Durrheim, 2012; Reimer et al., 2017; Tausch, Saguy, & Bryson, 2015; Tropp, Hawi, Van Laar, & Levin, 2012). For example, positive intergroup contact between advantaged and disadvantaged group members encourages advantaged group members to engage collectively to defend the rights of disadvantaged groups (Cakal et al., 2011).

Yet, there is evidence that positive contact may also discourage disadvantaged group members from seeking social change; referred to as the demobilising effect of positive contact (Dixon et al., 2012; Tausch et al., 2015; Tropp et al., 2012; Reimer et al., 2017). This demobilising effect is rooted in evidence that disadvantaged group members are more inclined to have positive attitudes towards advantaged groups following instances of positive contact (Tausch et al., 2015), what has been termed a '*demobilisation-by-liking*' effect (Reimer et al., 2017). Similarly, research has shown that positive relations between disadvantaged indigenous groups and advantaged majority groups increased the indigenous group's opposition to policies defending their own group's rights (Sengupta & Sibley, 2013).

To the best of our knowledge, only few studies have examined the effects of negative contact on collective action (Reimer et al., 2017; see also Selvanathan, Techakesari, Tropp, & Barlow, 2017). Longitudinal analyses of contact between LGBT and heterosexual students (Reimer et al., 2017, Study 2) revealed that negative contact uniquely predicted LGBT students' intentions to engage in collective action to defend LGBT rights. In contrast, positive contact uniquely predicted heterosexual students' intentions to engage in collective action on behalf of LGBT activism.

COs can be conceptualised as a dominant group in society, wielding power over communities. Thus, in line with previous research, instances of positive contact should contribute to demobilise individuals, lowering their intentions to oppose COs collectively. In line with ICAT, such demobilisation may be explained by a stronger tendency to romanticise this group and lower perceived threat from COs, which we label a *demobilising-by-*

*legitimising* effect. In contrast, negative instances of contact may be associated with higher perceived threat and lower romanticisation of the group, which should in turn predict stronger intentions to engage in collective action against COs. We test these paths in the following study.

### **Overview of the Study**

In this study, we examine the association between masculine honour, valence of contact and individuals' intentions to engage collectively against COs. In line with previous research (e.g., Travaglino et al., 2017), we expect that individuals who endorse masculine honour values should be more likely to report more frequent positive (but not negative) contact with COs' members. Moreover, we expect positive contact to be associated to a stronger tendency to romanticise the group, as well as perceiving lower threat from COs. In contrast, negative contact should be associated with lower romanticisation and stronger perceived threat.

Finally, romanticisation and threat should be associated with individuals' intentions to engage in collective action to oppose COs. Specifically, the more individuals perceive COs as matching the ideal of honour (romanticisation), the less likely they should be to express the intentions to oppose the group. Conversely, the stronger the threat individuals perceive from COs, the more likely they should be to express the intentions to oppose this group.

In this study, we test our hypotheses in a sample of adolescents from Southern Italy. Adolescents are a key target group for this research because they may perceive COs as an alternative social order to that of the state. Admiration for these groups, therefore, may be a way to signal their rejection of institutional authorities, while providing them with a way to embrace a different governance system. In addition, contact with COs' members may provide adolescents with an opportunity to build a reputation for toughness in front of their peers.

These are all salient needs during adolescence, especially for those individuals from a disadvantaged social background (cf. Emler & Reicher, 1995).

## Methods

### Participants and Procedure

Participants were 327 individuals from a school in Southern Italy ( $M_{age} = 17.40$ ,  $SD = 1.50$ ; 129 males, 126 females, 72 unreported). The school was situated in an area which has a high density of Camorra, the Neapolitan mafia. Data were collected via paper-and-pencil questionnaires which participants completed in their classrooms. After obtaining permission from the head of school, researchers (a male and a female) approached each classroom teacher to request permission to distribute surveys. Participants were informed that they were free to withdraw at any time and that participation was voluntary. Participants were fully debriefed about the nature of study following completion of the questionnaires.

### Measures

**Honour ideology for manhood (HIM).** In line with prior research (Travaglino & Drury, 2018) endorsement of masculine honour values was measured with 10 items drawn from the 16 item HIM scale (Barnes et al., 2012). Ten items were used because of the time available in the classrooms. Items asked respondents to indicate (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) the degree to which they agreed with statements endorsing male physical violence in honour-threatening situations (e.g., “A man has the right to act with physical aggression toward another man who slanders his family.”) and perception of qualities that should define a real man (e.g., “A real man can always take care of himself.”). The scale had high internal consistency ( $\alpha = .91$ ).

**Intergroup contact.** Positive and negative contact were measured using three items per construct (see Reimer et al., 2017). Positive contact ( $\alpha = .92$ ) was measured by asking participants how frequently they experienced contact with members of the Camorra in which

they were made to feel welcome, helped and relaxed. Negative contact ( $\alpha = .83$ ) was measured by asking participants how often they experienced being verbally abused, intimidated and threatened with harm (1 = *never*, 7 = *very often*).

**Threat.** Intergroup threat ( $\alpha = .83$ ) was measured by five items adapted from Pettigrew and Tropp (2011) and Van Assche, Roets, Dhont, and Van Hiel (2016). These items measured threat to *liberty* and *security* ('Members of the Camorra threaten our freedom and rights' and 'Members of the Camorra threaten our security'), *economy* ('In our region, members of the Camorra have more economic power than they deserve' and 'The presence of members of the Camorra in our country has a negative impact on the economy'), and *reputation* ('Members of the Camorra have a bad effect on the reputation of local people') (1 = *completely disagree*, 7 = *completely agree*).

**Tendency to romanticise criminal organisations.** The tendency to romanticise COs ( $\alpha = .74$ ) was measured using four items (1 = *completely disagree*, 7 = *completely agree*). Three items were drawn from Travaglino and Drury's (2018) research, 'In general, men who belong to the Camorra have a high sense of honour', 'Camorra is an important part of the region's history', 'Camorra is highly respected by people who live in Campania'. One item was created for this study 'Camorra is fascinating group'.

**Collective action intentions.** To measure collective action ( $\alpha = .91$ ), participants were asked to indicate how likely they would be (1 = *very unlikely*, 7 = *very likely*) to engage in four types of actions, such as 'take part to a demonstration against Camorra' (see Travaglino et al., 2014).

## Results

### Preliminary Analyses

Table 1 shows correlations between variables, means and standard deviations. Masculine honour was positively related to positive contact and romanticisation, suggesting



that individuals who endorse male-honour related values experience more positive contact with, and have a higher tendency to romanticise, members of COs. These correlations are in line with predictions derived from ICAT and indicates that individuals who endorse male-honour related values are also less likely to experience negative contact with members of COs, feel less threatened by them and are less inclined to engage in collective action to oppose these groups.

### **Structural Equation Model**

We tested the articulation between masculine honour, quality of contact and opposition against COs via threat and romanticisation using a structural equation model (SEM) with latent variables. Structural equation modelling was used as it can estimate relationships between multiple variables simultaneously, as well as model measurement error. To improve the reliability of the model, we parcelled the ten masculine honour items into two parcels consisting of five items each (Little, Cunningham, Shahar, & Widaman, 2002). Balanced parcels were created using the item-to-construct balance method (Little et al., 2002). Specifically, we first specified a single construct model and then averaged across items with the highest and lowest item-to-construct loadings for each of the two parcels.

Participant's age and gender were included as covariates in the model to control for their effects. Analyses were performed using R and the Lavaan package (Rosseel, 2012). Robust standard errors were used to conduct the analyses to account for the fact that some of the variables were not normally distributed. To test our model we used the Full Information Maximum Likelihood Approach (FIML), which uses all information available in the dataset to estimate parameters (Enders, 2010). We decided to use this approach to handle missing data given the quantity of missing cases on the demographic variables. Nonetheless, results reported below are virtually the same if other approaches (e.g., listwise deletion) are used, or

the two covariates (which have the highest number of missing data) are not included in the model.

To investigate our hypotheses, we estimated a model in which masculine honour predicted positive and negative contact. Both forms of contact, in turn, predicted individuals' tendency to romanticise COs, and perceived threat. Finally, we modelled paths from romanticisation and threat to individuals' intention to engage in collective action against COs. We also estimated the direct paths from masculine honour to the tendency to romanticise COs and threat, and to collective action intentions, as well as the direct path from both positive and negative contact to collective action intentions. The residuals of the mediators (positive and negative contact, and perceived threat and romanticisation) were allowed to covary, as recommended by Preacher and Hayes (2008). This is because covariance among mediators is unlikely to be fully explained by the variables measured in this study. Thus, modeling this covariance enable us to take into account the potential effect of omitted variables. Relevant indirect paths were estimated using bootstrap analyses (5000 boothstraps). A simplified version of the model is represented in Figure 1.

The model fit was acceptable,  $\chi^2(327) = 484.47, p < .001$ , CFI = .93, RMSEA = .065, SRMR = .06. As hypothesised, there was a positive relationship between masculine honour and positive contact,  $\beta = .25, SE = .07, p < .001$ , but no significant relationship between masculine honour and negative contact,  $\beta = -.11, SE = .04, p = .11$ . Positive contact was associated negatively with perceived threat,  $\beta = -.28, SE = .09, p < .001$  and positively related to individuals' tendency to romanticise COs,  $\beta = .33, SE = .07, p < .001$ . In contrast, negative contact was positively related to threat,  $\beta = .19, SE = .16, p = .006$ , but not associated to the tendency to romanticise COs,  $\beta = .08, SE = .13, p = .27$ . Finally, threat was positively associated with individuals' intentions to oppose COs collectively  $\beta = .31, SE = .05, p < .001$ ,

whereas individuals' tendency to romanticise COs was negatively related with collective action intentions,  $\beta = -.27$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $p = .001$ .

The direct effects of masculine honour on individuals' tendency to romanticise COs,  $\beta = .27$ ,  $SE = .07$ ,  $p < .001$ , and collective action intentions  $\beta = -.16$ ,  $SE = .07$ ,  $p = .017$ , remained significant. The direct effect of masculine honour on threat was instead not significant,  $\beta = -.06$ ,  $SE = .08$ ,  $p = .032$ . Neither positive contact  $\beta = -.10$ ,  $SE = .07$ ,  $p = .16$ , nor negative contact  $\beta = -.02$ ,  $SE = .07$ ,  $p = .64$ , were directly related to collective action intentions.

**Indirect paths.** We inspected the indirect effect of masculine honour on collective action intentions via positive contact (or negative contact) and tendency to romancise COs (or threat). There was a significant indirect effect of masculine honour on collective action intentions via positive contact and tendency to romanticise COs,  $\beta = -.02$ ,  $SE = .01$ ,  $p = .025$ , 95% *CI* [-.044, -.003], and threat,  $\beta = -.02$ ,  $SE = .01$ ,  $p = .009$ , 95% *CI* [-.043 -.006]. In contrast, the indirect effects of masculine honour on collective action intentions via negative contact, and tendency to romanticise COs and threat were not significant,  $\beta s < \pm .002$ ,  $ps > .17$ . The indirect effect of negative contact on collective action intentions via tendency to romancise COs was also non-significant,  $\beta = -.02$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $p = .29$ , 95% *CI* [-.12, .036]. However, the indirect effect of negative contact via threat on collective action intentions was significant and positive,  $\beta = .06$ ,  $SE = .05$ ,  $p = .01$ , 95% *CI* [.02, .22].

### Discussion

In this article, we drew on previous research concerning the association between masculine honour and contact with COs (Travaglino & Drury, 2018), Intracultural Appropriation Theory (Travaglino & Abrams, under review; Travaglino et al., 2017) and Intergroup Contact Theory (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), and hypothesised that individuals' endorsement of masculine honour values would be associated to more positive, but not

negative, contact with COs' members. Moreover, we contended that positive contact with COs' members would be associated with lower perceived threat and a stronger tendency to see COs as matching the ideals of honour (romanticisation). In contrast, negative contact would be associated with higher threat and a lower tendency to romanticise COs. In turn, romanticisation and threat would be associated with lower and higher (respectively) intentions to oppose COs collectively. Results from a study of a sample of 324 adolescents from Southern Italy provided evidence for some of these hypotheses.

Individuals who endorsed masculine honour were also more likely to report higher frequency of positive contact with COs' members. This finding is consistent with ICAT's central proposition that values of masculinity and honour provide COs with an ideological framework that legitimises these groups' presence in society (Travaglino et al., 2017). The finding is also consistent with anthropological observations indicating that COs' members skilfully cultivate relationships with members of the community, providing them with solutions to ordinary problems, even helping them and making them feel respected (e.g., Schneider & Schneider, 2003). Citizens may find these interactions with COs' members flattering and convenient, and may use them to increase their own status among their acquaintances.

Results from this study also indicated that the association between masculine honour and frequency of negative contact with COs' members was smaller and not statistically significant. Previous theorising and evidence indicate that positive and negative forms of contact are independent constructs, rather than different poles of the same spectrum (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011). In line with this argument, evidence from this study suggests that only positive (but not negative) contact takes place on the basis of a shared ideological framework of honour.

Importantly, this study demonstrates that the two forms of contact have also different implications. Individuals who have more positive contact with COs' members are more likely to perceive the group as adhering to the norms of honour and respect (romanticisation). Simultaneously, they are also more likely to perceive lower threat vis-à-vis COs' presence in society (cf. Travaglino et al., 2017). Stronger romanticisation and lower threat are in turn associated with lower intentions to oppose COs collectively. In contrast, individuals experiencing negative contact with COs' members are also more likely to feel more threatened by COs. Stronger threat is in turn associated with stronger intentions to engage collectively against the group.

Importantly, in this article, for the first time we demonstrate that threat forms an indirect path from both positive and negative contact, to collective action. These results underscore the importance of considering threat as a mediating variable within intergroup contact models (Aberson, in press). More research should examine the role of threat across different groups and contexts

However, contrary to our hypothesis, there was no statistically significant association between negative contact with COs' members and romanticisation. A potential explanation could be inferred from the evidence that negative contact with COs' members is not driven by masculine honour. Individuals who experience negative contact with COs' members may, thus, be less attuned towards assessing COs' compliance to, and conformity to ideals of honour and masculinity. In line with this explanation, the indirect effect of masculine honour on collective action intentions to oppose COs was significant only via positive, but not negative contact with COs' members. The finding is also consonant with the general argument that negative and positive forms of contact are qualitatively different (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011), and underlie the importance of investigating the impact of both forms of contact simultaneously across different domains and contexts.

**Contact with Criminal Groups: Demobilising-by-legitimising**

Intergroup contact theory is a key theory for understanding relationships among groups in society (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Recently, research has focussed on the implications of both negative and positive forms of contact among groups. Evidence indicates that whereas positive contact ameliorates intergroup relationships, instances of negative contact between groups may damage them, by confirming stereotypes and prejudices (Aberson, 2015).

An issue more rarely considered in the literature, is the potential for positive contact to have an undesirable social impact (cf. Dixon et al., 2012; Tausch et al., 2015; Tropp et al., 2012). For instance, research shows that members of disadvantaged groups who experience positive contact with members of advantaged groups may be less likely to engage in social activism to change the status quo (Tausch et al., 2015; Tropp et al., 2012). In those circumstances, contact may demobilise members of disadvantaged groups by increasing mutual liking between groups (Reimer et al., 2017).

In this article, we contribute to this line of research by examining the little investigated issue of contact in the context of criminal groups (Travaglino & Drury, 2018). We provide initial evidence that positive contact with COs' members may reduce opposition against criminal organisations. Consistent with a *demobilising-by-legitimising* hypothesis, this association is explained by individuals' romanticisation of COs and lower perceived threat vis-à-vis COs' presence.

Taken as a whole, this pattern of results provides support for ICAT's main proposition that masculine honour values play an important role in the social legitimisation of COs. Specifically, results support the idea that COs' social standing depends on their ability to represent themselves as being the embodiment of honour and masculinity. Individuals who experience positive contact with COs' members are more likely to perceive members of this

group as matching such values and feel less threatened by the group. These variables are in turn associated to lower intentions to mobilise against COs. Thus, this evidence suggests that instances of positive contact between members of the community and COs' members are a key part of COs' capacity to exert governance in the territory unopposed (cf. Weber, 1978).

### **Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

This study is affected by some limitations. First, the cross-sectional nature of the design does not enable us to draw causal conclusions. Future studies should test the indirect effects presented here using longitudinal designs. Nonetheless, it should be noted that the order of variables tested in this paper is based on previous theorising and longitudinal evidence concerning the role of cultural values, contact and collective action intentions (Travaglino & Drury, 2018; Reimer et al., 2017).

Another limitation of this study concerns the lack of a direct relationship between negative contact and collective action. In prior research, disadvantaged groups' negative contact with advantaged groups predicts greater collective action intentions by the disadvantaged group (Reimer et al., 2017). However, findings from the current study do not replicate this effect. Recent studies of positive and negative contact highlight the importance of examining the emotional intensity of the contact experienced (Graf & Paolini, 2017). For example, it is important to clarify whether negative contact is experienced as an uncomfortable misunderstanding or a physical assault. Contact's emotional ramifications could be especially relevant in the study of COs, given the potential implications of negative contact in this context (e.g., physical violence). For example, intense negative contact with COs, even if experienced infrequently, may be more strongly associated with collective action intentions. This is an important avenue for future research.

Future research should also examine other aspects of intergroup threat vis-à-vis COs' presence in society. According to ICAT, COs' ability to exert governance is grounded in the

legitimacy afforded by the ideological framework of masculine honour rather than mere fear (Travaglino & Abrams, under review). Commensurate with this proposition, stronger perceived threat from COs driven by experiences of negative contact was associated with stronger intentions to oppose this group collectively. Nonetheless, as in previous research (Aberson, 2015; Kanas et al., 2017), threat in this study was operationalised as collective threat to security, liberty and economy. Future research should examine threat resulting more directly from COs' use of physical violence and test its implications for individuals' intentions to engage collectively against this group. Similarly, it is important to investigate whether negative contact with COs' members is perceived as voluntary or involuntary (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011), as well as investigating different ways to oppose COs collectively, including reporting COs' members to the police.

A key direction for future research concerns the antecedents of negative contact with COs' members. In this study, we found that individuals' endorsement of masculine honour values was associated with positive but not negative contact. In addition, there was no evidence for the expected negative association between negative contact and romanticisation of COs. These results suggest that alternative ideologies, values or traits may drive individuals' negative contact with COs' members. Thus, future research should examine under what conditions individuals are more likely to experience negative contact with COs' members.

## **Conclusions**

COs are not merely criminal groups on the fringe of society. Rather, they are able to displace the state and exert governance over a subordinate population. To assert influence, COs need to establish links within the community. Thus, it is extremely important to understand both the antecedents and implications of different forms of contact with COs' members. Here, we have reported evidence showing that individuals' endorsement of cultural



values of masculine honour is associated with more positive experience of contact with COs' members. Instances of positive contact are in turn associated with lower intentions to mobilise against these groups. These results offer further support the proposition that masculine honour values provide these groups with an ideological framework that legitimise their presence in society.

COs are just one of the many examples of non-state agents exerting governance within communities, across societies and geographical contexts. Insurgent and paramilitary groups, bandits, and terrorists all need to gain at least some degree of legitimacy, in order to secure influence, exert power and become able to carry out their objectives. The present research suggests that intergroup contact may play an important role in the legitimisation of such groups. Specifically, positive experience of contact may enable these groups to represent themselves as mirroring cherished values and to limit the perception they are a social threat. This, in turn, may contribute to demobilise opposition from the population. More research is needed to test these ideas, examining the interplay between different, environment-specific cultural ideologies and contact in the context of COs and other groups.

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Table 1.

*Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations between Variables.*

Measures	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. HIM	4.40	1.41	.21***	-.12*	-.14*	.28***	-.27**	-.14*	.23***
2. Positive Contact	2.00	1.59		.25***	-.23***	.40***	-.36***	.24***	-.16**
3. Negative Contact	1.28	0.80			.11†	.13*	-.05	.24***	.03
4. Threat	4.99	1.37				-.07	.38***	-.02	.06
5. Tendency to Romanticise COs	3.66	1.30					-.35***	.19**	-.19**
6. Collective Action Intentions	4.56	1.62						-.11†	.12†
7. Age	17.40	1.50							.03
8. Gender	1.49	0.50							

*Note.* † $p < .10$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ . All variables measured on 7-point scales. Gender male = 1, female = 2.

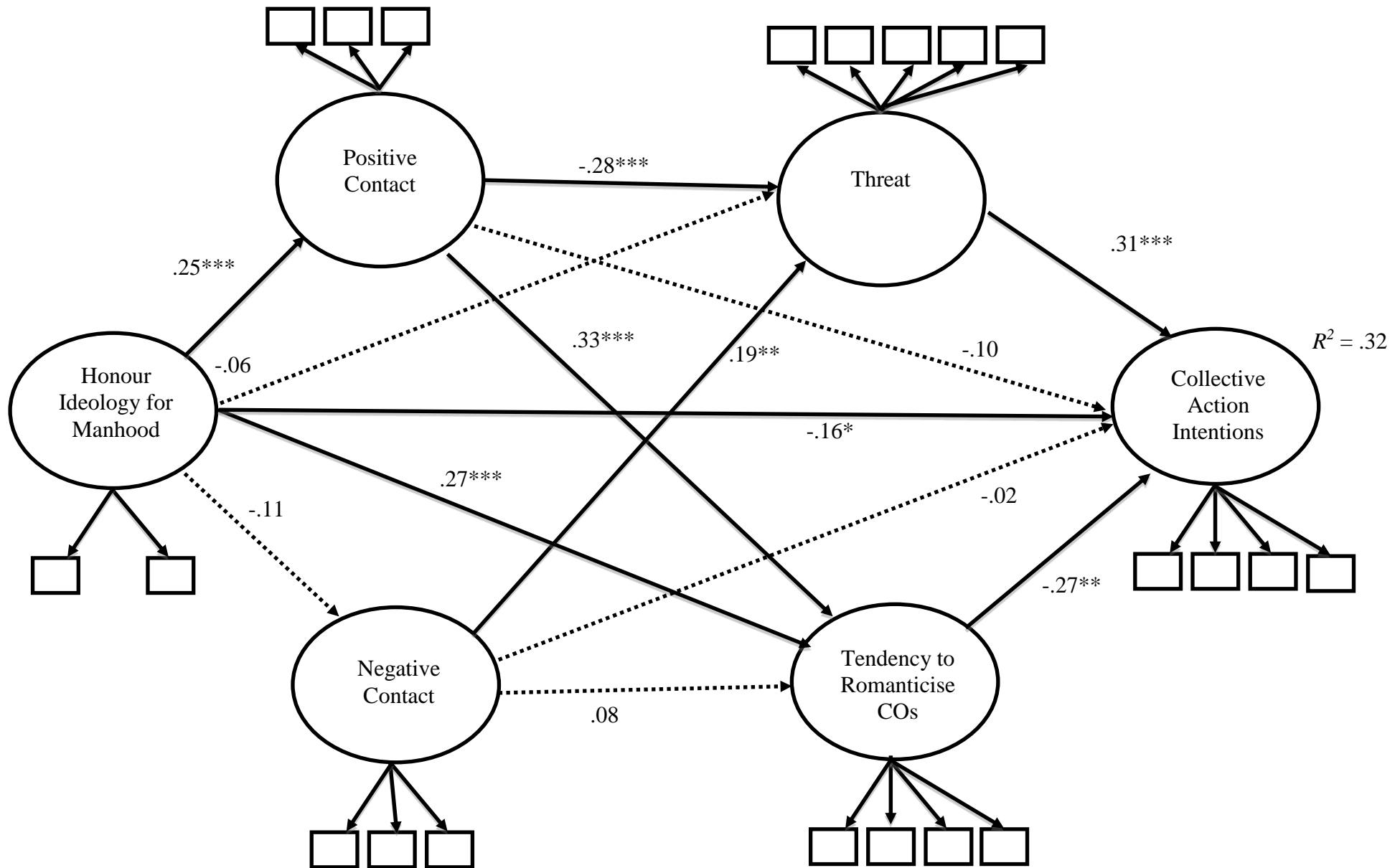


Figure 1. Simplified structural equation model of the effects of masculine honour on collective action intentions via contact, threat and tendency to romanticise COs. Age and gender are covariates in the model.