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Mediterranean Honor and beyond. The Social Management of Reputation in the Public Sphere (Viduržemio garbės samprata ir tai, kas už jos. Socialinis reputacijos valdymas viešojoje srityje)

Santrauka.* *Straipsnio tikslas – garbės logikos rekonstrukcija pasitelkiant klasikinio Viduržemio visuomenių modelio analizę. Viduržemio visuomenės kai kuriais atvejais – teisingai ar klaidingai – apibūdinamos kaip „garbės ir gėdos visuomenės“. Atsižvelgiant į tokį apibūdinimą, parodyta, kad garbė stiprina šių visuomenių hierarchinę tvarką ir klasių struktūrą. Dar svarbiau, kad atskleidžiama, jog garbė yra ne tiek moralinis kodas, kiek kalba ir racionalios socialinės strategijos, kurių tikslas – personalinės ir grupinės reputacijos, siekimas išvengti viešos diskreditacijos ir pažeminimo. Viduržemio visuomenėse savita „reputacijos politikos“ reikšmė, kaip racionalus apskaičiavimas, apimantis sumanų statuso, padėties ir garbės valdymą, individus bei grupes susieja su „fasado“ ir „kaukės“ problematika. Taigi kova už pripažinimą glaudžiai susijusi su „fasado“ ir „kaukės“ gynimu viešosios nuomonės srityje.*

Baigiamojoje straipsnio dalyje atskleidžiama, kad archainiai Viduržemio garbės požymiai šiandieną paradoksaliai aptinkami reputacijos valdymo strategijose. Taigi garbės logika apibrėžiama kaip transkultūrinis reiškiny, besiskverbiantis už istorinės, etnografinės bei geografinės aplinkos ribų.

Introduction

This article aims at reconstructing the logic of honor by analyzing the classic example of Mediterranean societies, which on several occasions have been labeled, rightly or wrongly, “*honor and shame societies*”.

Consequently, we will show that honor strengthens the hierarchic order and class structure of these societies. And, far more important, we will highlight that honor is not so much a moral code as rather a language and set of rational social strategies whose purpose is the skilful management of one’s individual and group reputation by trying to avoid being publicly discredited

and humiliated. The struggle for recognition is thus strictly linked to the strenuous defense of one’s mask and façade, both against the constant threats of enemies and rivals acting in the arenas of public opinion. The final part of this article will show how these characteristics of Mediterranean honor – too hurriedly written off as archaic, obsolete, and dying out – can paradoxically be detected in modern societies’ management of reputation. The logic of honor will thus be presented as a transcultural phenomenon that goes beyond the historical context as well as the ethnographic and geographical ones.

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Mediterranean Honor. Between Artistic Production and Scholarly Reflection

Authors and film directors, travel writers and journalists, lawyers and criminologists, politicians and social scientists have all succumbed to the fascination of honor in Mediterranean societies. Many famous artists from Pedro Calderon de la Barca to Federico Garcia Lorca, from Molière to Nikos Kazantzakis, from Prosper Mérimée to Vitaliano Brancati, from Giovanni Verga to Luigi Pirandello, from Felix Lope de Vega Carpio to José Maria Eça de Queiroz, from Pietro Germi to Francesco Rosi and from Luis Bunuel to Michael Cacoyannis, have dealt with the theme in their works striking tragic, comical, satirical, ironic and sarcastic notes. Nor should the popular poets and the ballad singers be forgotten. In short, when it comes to Mediterranean societies there is hardly a more popular topic than honor.

When one looks at the scholarly work on the subject, it is striking that the first authors to concern themselves with it were lawyers. The code of honor as a typical self-help institution, which is in a constant relation of competition and sometimes of conflict with the legally established monopoly on force of the institutional territorial state, is a real challenge to lawyers as representatives of an etatist and legalistic social order.

Furthermore, from the socio-genetic viewpoint, such an approach is related above all to the emergence of centralized nation states, which in southern Europe, with a few exceptions, have the character of 'delayed nations'. Thanks to their explicit or implicit ideas of evolution, the positivist legal scholars of these state formations, which only came into existence in the 19th century, regard the Mediterranean code of honor as a relic, indeed even as a syndrome. They interpret it as the oppressive inheritance of an archaic epoch of social 'barbarism'. Concepts of honor, the corresponding norms, as well as related courses of action, are to be replaced by a state-guaranteed legal system, which, in the name of the relentless

civilization process, leads to the two desired goals of progress and the domestication of individuals and society. Late 19th century lawyers, as well as their 20th century successors, with few exceptions, have seen the honor complex as an expression of 'instinctive' modes of behavior, characteristic of 'lower' stages of civilization.

The Mediterranean Code of Honor: an "anthropological" novel?

Contemporary experts on Mediterranean honor, however, are the anthropologists. Their predilection for this theme is related to the assumption that the Mediterranean area is an aggregation of 'honor and shame societies' (Peristiany 1965; Herzfeld 1980). If this hypothesis is correct, then honor provides nomothetically oriented researchers, as anthropologists often claim to be, with the welcome opportunity to regard the Mediterranean area as by and large homogeneous, along with the promising possibility to depart from the level of ethnographic description and devote themselves to generalizations. One example is Julian Pitt-Rivers, who has made a particular effort to establish the common features of honor in Mediterranean societies through comparative analysis. According to Pitt-Rivers, however, the concept of honor is so complex that a clear-cut definition is virtually impossible. He distinguishes the following dimensions:

- a) Honor can be understood as a feeling or, more precisely, as a specific state of consciousness. This consists of a conviction that there is nothing one should reproach oneself and that consequently one can and indeed has a right to feel proud. This aspect takes into consideration only the 'individualistic' dimension, for the sole judge of one's own honor is the subject, that is, oneself. This characterization smacks, moreover, of a voluntaristic moral philosophy, which the social scientist cannot unhesitatingly adopt (Pitt-Rivers 1968; 503; 1977; 1).
- b) The second aspect refers to concrete behavior as a manifestation of the state of consciousness mentioned above. This state is, therefore, exclusively relevant, if courses of action are regarded

in relation to their reception and their appraisal by the society to which the actor belongs. Consequently, honor always has something to do with demonstration, competition, and above all reputation.

This view is ultimately held by Peristiany as well, who describes honor as one of the “universal aspects of social evaluation” (Peristiany 1965: 11). According to Peristiany’s generalizing perspective, in Mediterranean societies the actor who makes a claim to honor must display specific acquired and/or ascribed qualities or - put differently - comply with the strict, socially guaranteed norms of a code acknowledged by the community. At the same time, it is important to bear in mind that this system of norms involves a sharp separation of roles, because there is a specifically ‘feminine’ and an equally specific ‘masculine’ honor.

The experts proceed on the assumption that in Mediterranean societies man is considered superior to woman. In this context, Laffin adds that the gap between men and women is especially marked in cultures with Islamic traditions since modes of conduct demonstrating and fixing woman’s inferiority are already laid down in the holy scriptures, above all in the fourth sura of the Koran (Laffin 1975: 98).

There is general agreement that the inferiority of women with respect to men is reflected in all conceptions of honor in the Mediterranean area. Although a degree of compensation is involved in the separate role expectations (in the sense that the ‘stronger’, i.e. men, protect the ‘weaker’, i.e. women, from outside threats), biologically as well as morally intended and sometimes religiously anchored differences between genders assume unmistakable social inequality features.

If female honor is taken as a starting point, then most anthropologists emphasize first that the norms for women are more precisely formulated than the men’s ones. In this context, honor is regarded as shame; consequently, chastity and sexual purity constitute the most important qu-

alities (Campbell 1976: 27; Pitt-Rivers 1977: 22). In Mediterranean societies, a woman who shows herself too frequently in public or attracts attention through ostentatious behavior always appears suspect. In the traditional agrarian societies of the Mediterranean region, even labor outside the home such as work in the fields can mean a loss of honor. Thus, Davis relates that during the tobacco harvest the inhabitants of one south Italian community in the Basilicata usually employ laborers emigrated from Apulia. According to the author, however, paid laborers are expensive and ultimately, particularly when it comes to tobacco growing, uneconomic. Production costs could undoubtedly be lowered if the seasonal workers were made superfluous by the female family members’ assistance. The inhabitants of this community forego such financial advantages, in order - so Davis surmises - to avoid putting their own women’s respectability at risk (Davis 1973: 106).

If women make themselves far too conspicuous in public, it is assumed that something is amiss with their feeling of shame and hence also with their sexual behavior. Therefore, respectable women, i.e. those who behave modestly, as a rule are also shy, unassuming, and reserved. For unmarried women virginity, as guarantee of sexual purity, symbolizes female honor (Friedmann 1974: 291). In Mediterranean societies, women are regarded as extremely ‘weak’ creatures. They are physically and morally weak, because alone they are fundamentally incapable of successfully resisting either the hostile world outside the family or the nether world’s forces of demonic temptation. Therefore, female honor must be constantly guarded and monitored. Usually it is men, by definition ‘strong’, who function as the ‘agency of control’. In exceptional cases, when, for example, men cannot be present for work reasons, older female family members whose honor can no longer be threatened, assume the function of surveillance. The supervision of fe-

male honor by men is an important activity, and is ultimately the foundation of the acknowledged legitimacy of male authority in Mediterranean societies.

That touches on a central feature of male authority. Honor is regarded as the will and ability to guarantee and - if necessary - defend one's own reputation. Since the standing of a 'man of honor' depends on the honor of his family's female members (wife, daughters), he must constantly watch over and protect their reputation, foresee and prevent potential attacks on it, and be capable of taking revenge in case of serious damage to such standing. Male honor in Mediterranean societies may further be characterized by qualities like strength, courage, heroic bravery, but also by characteristics like generosity, hospitality, and pleasant temper. Nor, as some authors explicitly emphasize, should such features as quick-wittedness, repartee, and self-confidence be forgotten in any definition of male honor (Campbell 1976; 269).

As most researchers of Mediterranean societies point out, female and male honor from an analytical viewpoint can only be regarded separately. According to this line of argument, honor is not merely a gender specific and individual phenomenon; it is simultaneously a concern of the kinship group and of the family (Schneider/Schneider 1976; 86; Schiffauer 1983; 65). In this context, Pitt-Rivers talks of a 'moral division of labor' between man and woman that, in the end, guarantees the maintenance of collective honor (Pitt-Rivers 1977; 78). This means that male and female members of specific collectives - the agnatic kinship group in North Africa, the extended family in Asia Minor and the nuclear family in the European Mediterranean area - through their individual behavior strive for the group's honor since the latter is always reflected in family and kinship honor.

In recent years, however, the tendency to present Mediterranean societies purely and sim-

ply as 'honor and shame' societies has been questioned and vigorously criticized (Herzfeld 1984; 439; Herzfeld 1987a; 7). 'Self-reflexive' anthropology has also scrutinized what by now have become classic studies of the Mediterranean area's cultures and societies and has subjected certain assumptions, which were previously regarded as secure and self-evident but appear problematic today, to hermeneutically oriented text analysis. With reference to honor, two important reservations have been formulated which deserve to be mentioned in the present context.

Herzfeld reproaches researchers, especially those of Anglo-Saxon origin, who have made detailed studies of the honor complex of Mediterranean societies, with having an ethnocentric viewpoint tainted by both heterophile and heterophobic stereotypes (Herzfeld 1984; 440; Herzfeld 1987a; 9).

For these anthropologists, the discussion of Mediterranean honor ultimately proves to be a fatal trap because they project their fear of and their longing for an archaic world, which constantly appears to them as an ambivalent allegory, onto the 'alien' reality by which they are confronted. Thus, Mediterranean societies are made 'archaic' both artificially and arbitrarily. The reader gets the impression that these are a relic of past epochs, admittedly characterized by violent and bloodthirsty barbarism, along with uncompromising solidarity between people, a primitive purity of morals and finally, by an earthy simplicity of ways of life and social relations.

It becomes apparent, therefore, that the 'archaization' of Mediterranean societies by Anglo-Saxon anthropologists simultaneously always implies an 'exoticization' as well of these cultures (Herzfeld 1987a; 64). To support his thesis, Herzfeld adds that while the national ethnologies of this region do not entirely deny 'honor and shame', they do not regard it as a central element in the study of Mediterranean values. This is in ple-

asant contrast to the reports of travelers and researchers from Northern Europe and the United States, because the local folklorists attempt to resist this explicit or implicit 'exoticization' (Herzfeld 1987a; 64). Whether Herzfeld's assumption can be accepted without qualification is not something that can be addressed here. However, one should not forget that the individual variants of Mediterranean folklore studies provided welcome material for the construction and development of nationalist, separatist, and localist ideologies precisely through the 'archaization' and 'exoticization' of their own lower strata, particularly rural ones. However that may be, it is a fact that the unmistakable preference of northern European and North American anthropologists for honor as a theme perhaps conveys an 'alien' and hence 'exotic' image of Mediterranean societies. The whole Mediterranean region is thereby presented as un-European and an appendix of the 'wilderness' in both its positive and negative form.

According to Herzfeld, the most serious consequence of the 'archaization' and 'exoticization' of Mediterranean countries is the artificial separation of European Mediterranean societies from other cultures of Europe, so that 'Mediterranean Studies' ends up regarding the region as an accumulation of autonomous, yet socio-culturally homogeneous 'tribal societies'. This also points to the second reservation, because such an approach reduces Mediterranean societies to a uniform 'culture area'. The obsessive attempt to demonstrate the invariance of the honor complex in this region, produces an anthropological fiction since, precisely thanks to its historically determined diversity, the Mediterranean region can never be regarded as such a monotonous unity.

It is certainly true that the 'Mediterranean Studies' of anthropologists, therefore also research on the honor complex, have suffered and to some extent still suffer from the influence of classical colonial anthropology. Ethnocentrism, an

inability to appreciate historical contexts, and the 'tribalization' of complex societies through an excessively strict adherence to the monographic principle, characterize in particular the first pioneering studies in the Mediterranean region. It is obvious that 'Mediterranean Studies' is an offshoot of 'exotic' anthropology and that the researchers want simply, in a naïve way, to apply methodological and epistemological instruments which have 'proved' themselves outside Europe to Mediterranean societies. Nevertheless, deeming the honor complex as the pure construct of 'archaizing' and 'exoticizing' anthropologists would be a serious error, since undeniably the social representations and norms of honor in the eyes of the actors themselves are considerably significant in developing numerous action strategies. In order, now, to refute the partly justified accusation of 'archaization' and 'exoticization', which undoubtedly call to mind spontaneous affective-emotional or even irrational behavior leading to distorted views, it is necessary and appropriate above all to regard Mediterranean honor as a society's cognitive instrument, because only then do 'alien' forms of conduct become meaningful, i.e. coherent and rational. The honor complex thereby also loses the appearance of an 'archaic' and 'exotic' relic, so that simultaneously its still topical function can be demonstrated from the point of view of the 'subjectively intended meaning' of the Mediterranean cultures' members.

Honor as a hierarchizing principle

The anthropological investigators of Mediterranean societies have repeatedly asked themselves whether conceptions of honor tend to favor an egalitarian or, rather, a hierarchical social order. Lison-Tolosana, a typical representative of the first view, in his monograph of a Spanish community maintains that honor represents an egalitarian principle resting on parity between the "status of the powerful" and the "virtue

of the weak” (Lison-Tolosana 1966; 198; Davis 1977; 90).

This line of reasoning is not very convincing, because it suggests that Mediterranean societies are conflict-free formations, characterized by the harmonious interaction of their members. However, both the views of society and the reality of Mediterranean cultures are anything but harmonious, although it must be conceded that antagonisms between conflicting groups are often defused by mediating mechanisms, such as the patterns of thought and the strategies of the patronage system.

It is in this context, therefore, that Bailey’s perspective can be judged as more differentiated because this author defines reputation, and hence also honor, as a competitive conduct “to remain equal” (Bailey 1971; 19; Davis 1977; 99). The struggle “to remain equal” is, however, constantly neutralized by the claim to be socially superior (Bourdieu 1972; 19).

An egalitarian social order, based on an even and fixed distribution of honor, is therefore regarded, in Mediterranean societies, above all, as an unattainable utopia (Herzfeld 1980). In the eyes of those involved, society is sharply divided into two groups, the “honorable” and the “shameless”, and organized in a corresponding hierarchy (Peristiany 1965; 10; Bourdieu 1972; 42).

Honor as Status and Reputation

Honor as “aspiration and validation of status” (Pitt-Rivers 1977; 21) is redefined daily in Mediterranean societies, so that the reputation of a person and/or a group does not represent a constant. Consequently, honor can grow and can also be lost. Such a “market quotation” of one’s own honor, always subject to change, in extreme cases every day, produces fierce feelings of rivalry, with respect to status, between groups and persons.

The observations made so far on the theme

of honor have shown that Mediterranean societies are shaped by their conflictual character. In other words, such social formations can be defined as systems of social relations between competing individuals and groups in the public sphere. In this sense, Mediterranean patterns of thought are constantly and almost obsessively dominated by the notion that society outside one’s own family and kinfolk circle is made up of potential rivals, who must unconditionally be outdone. Only thus can honor, reputation, and status be maintained and maximized.

Aglianò has described this state of affairs with respect to Sicilian society as follows:

Among Sicilians, rivalry is always present, and in itself that would be a good thing, if it were not so diverse, so systematic, and so general. There is the pretence, cost what it may, of trumping others, even when there are no available energies to establish this claim. Thus, there is a striving for the appearance of reputation, for the honorary post, for the admiration of all. Nevertheless, when such ambition is elevated into a system, it leads to dangerous, competitive tests of strength and a watchful fear, which can turn into arrogance and impertinence at any moment. This gives rise to a tense atmosphere, as if a thunderstorm were constantly being expected at any moment (Aglianò 1982; 89).

Laffin, who has a profound knowledge of public sphere in the Arabic Mediterranean world, also confirms the conflictual structure of social relations in North Africa and the Near East:

From top to bottom, Arab society is permeated by a system of rival relationships. It is fed by the simple fact that in the Arab value system a major attribute of prestige is the ability to dominate others (Laffin 1975; 84).

This last passage elucidates the quintessence of the theme sketched in this section. In Mediterranean societies honor is an instrument of social differentiation, because it is through honor that the never-ending attempt is made to document both personal superiority and that of one’s own group in the social sphere.

The fierce competition for honor also im-

plies, however, an extraordinary fear of social demotion, which in turn is an indicator of the extremely developed sense of members of Mediterranean societies with respect to stratification and ultimately to hierarchical structure. The claim to social and moral superiority together with a fear of social decline, that is, honor as an instrument of social differentiation, considerably increases the importance of that social institution which in everyday language is called "public opinion". It is precisely this "tremendous social pressure" which Laffin emphasizes in the Mediterranean Arab societies of North Africa and the Near East (Laffin 1975; 90).

This author's conclusion can unhesitatingly be applied to European Mediterranean societies. The "public opinion", which ultimately determines the position of individuals and groups in the social hierarchy based on their honor, also plays a prominent role as an organ of control in these cultures. As in Sicily, for example, where actors are daily confronted with problems like "fama" and "diceria" (Mühlmann/Llaryora 1973; 23). "Fama" can be described as the good name of the honorable as constantly redefined by "public opinion"; "diceria", on the other hand, is the subtle rumor, which establishes the "shamelessness" of a person or a group. In Sicily, there are hardly more popular conversations than the ones dealing with the "fama" of individuals and collectives. "Diceria" is correspondingly a favored strategy of discreditation, in order to create problems for the reputation of potential enemies.

On the subject of honor as an instrument of social differentiation, the importance of the media through which "public opinion" as social control articulates itself must also be stressed. Thus, in all Mediterranean societies there are specific social spaces in which the construction or destruction of reputation, of status and hence of honor is carried out. Thus, in Sicily "fama" and "diceria" would be inconceivable without "piazza" or "corso" (Mühlmann/Llaryora 1973; 35).

Going for a walk along the main streets and on the main square of a southern Italian commune offers a welcome opportunity to demonstrate one's own "fama" and at the same time to observe and scrutinize others - above all one's rivals. Simultaneously, in the very same social spaces, on the one hand, "dicerie" is circulated through gossip, and on the other, the rumors about victims are neutralized by those affected through exemplary behavior. The promenade (Spanish *paséo*) in southern Spain, the coffeehouse (Greek *kafeneion*) in Greece, and the public bath (Arab *hammam*) in the Islamic sphere function as media of social control in a similar way.

It has already been mentioned that what is at issue in contests for honor as processes of social differentiation, is the achievement of a certain social position and its acknowledgement by the other members of society. Neither the claim to social and moral superiority, nor the fear of social decline can be attributed solely to affect or to the mechanical reproduction of handed-down models, since these attitudes are constitutive elements of a "politics of reputation" (Bailey 1971), which is perceived as rational by the protagonists themselves and based on the notion of a dichotomous division into "honorable" and "shameless".

With respect to Mediterranean honor as an instrument of social differentiation, it can, therefore, be said that the actors conform in their behavior not only because they have internalized the system of norms, but also in order to "administer" their good name in the presence of the judging organs of social control as skillfully as possible. Accordingly, the actor does not absolutely have to be convinced of the moral rightness of the code of honor. More relevant to him is the acknowledgement of his own "social identity"; i.e. an individual's actions and attributes, which allows the "public opinion" of the society in which he is living to recognize which position

he occupies in the dichotomous order of the “honorable” and the “shameless”.

Put more concretely: the members of Mediterranean societies feel and are considered dishonored or “shameless” only when the damage to honor has become public. Likewise, the “shameless” person will recover his honorableness only when he demonstrates publicly that he can defend his reputation following an affront. In the Italian “Mezzogiorno” and in southern Spain for example, a husband will already be seen – not least in his own eyes – as “cornuto” or “becco” or as “cabrón”, i.e. as one of the “negative notables” of a community, even when there is no more than gossip circulating about his wife’s unfaithfulness (Mühlmann/Llaryora 1973, pp 24; Pitt-Rivers 1971, p 224; Pitt-Rivers 1977, p 26; Blok 1982, pp 165). Here it is relatively unimportant, whether it is a matter of facts or the product of an unfounded “diceria”.

Members of Mediterranean societies can certainly not be considered typical “other directed” persons in Riesman’s sense. However, the extremely careful attention to one’s own “social identity” as a “rational politics of reputation” is based, with respect to honor, on a meticulously exact emphasis on external formalities (Agliano 1982; 88).

The outstanding significance of a “politics of reputation” as rational calculation for the skilful management of status, position, and honor, raises the question of the role of “façade” or “mask” for individuals and groups in Mediterranean societies.

In the Mediterranean countries, this topic is and was dealt with largely by literature, but the latter can once again both anticipate and simultaneously confirm the findings of anthropologists.

“Façade” and “mask” are two of the favorite subjects of authors of the Mediterranean region. Significantly, however, both concepts are implicitly or explicitly associated with strategies

of the maintenance of reputation and honor. The following examples from modern Mediterranean writing may suffice as illustration.

The most succinct case, the play “The House of Bernarda Alba” by the Andalusian writer Federico Garcia Lorca (1898-1936) deals with the subject of virginity. Bernarda Alba, the unbending representative of the Andalusian code of honor, stops at nothing to conceal the sin of her no longer “undefiled” daughter; she does not even intervene to prevent the latter’s suicide. She endeavors at all costs, therefore, to demonstrate the sexual purity of her daughter to society; her effort is intended to maintain the status and the honor of the family dynasty. To her the “façade” is more important than feelings.

A second interesting example is the play “The Fool’s Cap” by the Italian author Luigi Pirandello (1867-1936). The drama is set in an agro-town in Sicily and tells the story of a clerk who, with the greatest effort, has risen from humble origins to attain a respected position. This, however, is threatened when a legal case makes it publicly known that his young wife is deceiving him with his employer. The clerk, who had long known of the adultery but had assented to it since it was secret, would now have to take revenge and, according to the prevailing norms of the code of honor, at an extreme, murder his wife and her lover.

In the course of the plot, however, it becomes clear that he would only have acted in conformity with the code of honor if there had been no other way for him to preserve his acquired status and his reputation as “uomo d’onore”. Thus, at the end of the drama he is prepared to dispense with the obligatory act of revenge, if the relatives of the lover declare the person who had brought the matter to court, that is, the jealous wife of the employer, of unsound mind and have her placed in a lunatic asylum for a while.

It is, therefore, a matter of relative indifference to the protagonist of the play that his wife

is deceiving him with his employer. Pirandello gives expression to the fact that it is far more important to the clerk to preserve the “façade” or the “mask”. Ultimately, “façade” and “mask” represent two unavoidable forms of “hypocrisy” for they are simultaneously two essential social-psychological defense mechanisms that, in a milieu like Sicily’s in which social control by “public opinion” is so dominant, guarantee the good name as well as the honorableness of persons and groups. Consequently, the “The Fool’s Cap” also clearly expresses the tremendous fear of social decline, which marks most Mediterranean societies.

While the first case deals with the subject of female virginity, the final example tackles male virility. This motif is described with mordant irony and a distinct feeling for tragi-comical paradox in the novel “Handsome Antonio” by the Sicilian author Vitaliano Brancati (1907-1954). Thanks to his good looks, which are admired by the women of fashionable society in Catania, Antonio is held to be a particularly virile lover. According to “public opinion” he is a true man, someone “che sa farsi onore con una donna – who does himself honor with a woman”.

Two years after his wedding to the daughter of a respected notary, it emerges by chance that his wife has remained a “signorina”, that is, a virgin, because Antonio suffers from chronic impotence. His family is only able to keep this stigmatizing reality secret until the day Antonio’s wife files for Church annulment of the marriage. The wife’s petition is undoubtedly seen as proof that the marriage was never consummated. So the protagonist’s impotence becomes public. It is a tragedy: Antonio loses his “fama”, and his family comes to know the bitter feeling of dishonor and of social decline, because the “façade” has collapsed, the “mask” has fallen. Antonio’s character is passive, one might almost say depressive, so that he does absolutely nothing to rehabilitate the family’s standing in any way what-

soever. It is his father who sees to the re-establishment of the family honor and to the restoration of the “façade”. In order to demonstrate the virility of the family, he goes to a prostitute’s house, although there is a risk of an Allied air attack on Catania. During this raid he is killed in the brothel quarter of the city. Subsequently “public opinion” acknowledges his deed nevertheless; a few days after the burial Antonio discovers the following sentence written on the white gravestone by an unknown hand:

“Fallen on March 6th 1942 while attempting to cleanse the family honor that had been stained by his son”.

Brancati’s novel, “Handsome Antonio”, diverges from the two other examples, because fundamentally it tells the story of an at least partially failed attempt to preserve the “façade”. Yet the plot is at the same time instructive, in that it shows what disastrous consequences an “unmasking” by the institutions of social control has for those affected. In other words, the reversals in the situation of Antonio, the impotent man, and of his dishonored family provide the explanation as to why the protagonists of the other two works have behaved in conformity with the code of honor, though perhaps they did not absolutely feel committed to it.

It may be that these cases are literary constructions, that is to say exaggerations of reality. This short excursus demonstrates, however, in ideal typical terms, that the “façade” or the “mask” as a calculated presentation of self in public can never be based on the idea of an egalitarian social order. Accordingly, the fictional motifs referred to confirm yet again the assumption that ultimately the actors themselves consider honor as an instrument of social differentiation.

Thus far, honor in Mediterranean societies has been investigated in relation to the struggle for reputation, status, and position. The impression could legitimately arise that an accent was

placed on forms of competition, which could, as it were, be defined as ideal, without having sufficiently taken into consideration the material implications of the phenomenon of honor. The credit for drawing attention to the fact that competition for honor, as well as the “politics of reputation” and therefore also “façade” and “mask”, is connected to access to economic resources goes to J. Schneider (Schneider 1977; 1; Davis 1977; 101). It could also be said, using Bourdieu’s terminology, that for the members of Mediterranean societies honor represents a “symbolic capital” (Bourdieu 1972; 239), which can be invested in the material sector.

Put more concretely: it is evident that the “respectability” of a virgin girl can also involve financial advantages particularly with respect to her marriage prospects. In Mediterranean societies, honor and virginity open up perspectives of marriage with members of the economically privileged group, so that an adroit use of the “politics of reputation” certainly offers families with limited financial resources the possibility of economic improvement.

Similarly, it is practically inconceivable that a successful politician can be a “cornuto” or a “cabròn” at the same time. The successful politician who – as is so often the case in Mediterranean societies – expects considerable financial benefits through his career, will, therefore, attach importance to his honorableness, not only because he is afraid of social decline, but also because if he were “shameless”, a “negative celebrity”, he would no longer have access to the economic resources offered by the political system, legally or manipulatively.

Ultimately, the material dimension of the “politics of reputation”, which is undoubtedly based on a conception of the unequal distribution of economic chances, also confirms that honor is perceived by the members of Mediterranean societies as an instrument of social differentiation. Namely, it is hardly possible to separate economic inequality from social hierarchy.

Honor and Class Belonging: Differences and Similarities of Representations and Action Strategies

Herzfeld’s second reservation is finally not tenable either, because even a superficial survey of the literature on the subject reveals that almost all authors who have used a comparative perspective are fully aware of the variations in Mediterranean norm codes. This is precisely Peristiany and Pitt-River’s argument in their last book ‘Honor and Grace’, for they explicitly underline the fact that practically every social group has its own divergent conceptions of honor (Peristiany/Pitt-Rivers 1992; 4). According to these authors, who were subject to particularly fierce criticism by Herzfeld, there is, therefore, no such thing as a Mediterranean ‘culture area’ (Peristiany/Pitt-Rivers 1992; 6).

In Mediterranean societies, the competition for honor is not kindled between two or more arbitrary actors (Schneider/Schneider 1976). Much the same is true of injuries to honor as well as subsequent revenge actions by the offended party. Empirical research and the ethnographic material prove that competitive and conflict situations only arise where the social distance between the persons involved is not too great. Thus, as Davis writes, based on his experiences in Pisticci (Lucania), a man can seduce the wife or daughter of a social “inferior”, without having to be greatly afraid of the reaction of the “other man”. If there is a great social distance between the actors, there may also paradoxically be the honor of being dishonored, as is reflected in the picaresque novel “Gil Blas”. It is, therefore, ultimately more or less inconceivable that a competition for honor should take place between a “galantuomo” and a “villano”, between a “senorito” and a “campesino” or between a rich man and a poor man. In Mediterranean societies, the contest with respect to honor always has a class specific component. There are, therefore, not only differences bet-

ween the individual Mediterranean cultures, but also within each society itself.

Pitt-Rivers has been the most careful investigator of this phenomenon and has established that in Andalusia, for example, there are several nuances of conceptions of honor, which also imply differing modes of conduct (Pitt-Rivers 1977; Herzfeld 1980). At the same time, he observed a very evident relation between conception of honor and class belonging. This implies that within the entire Mediterranean honor complex, class specific norm and behavioral codes can be recognized, in addition to the many regional variants. In terms of social history, the southern Spanish complex of honor – according to Pitt-Rivers – can be divided into at least three variants, which approximately correlate with the traditional social hierarchy of the area. Aristocracy, agrarian bourgeoisie, and rural lower orders each had their specific understanding of honor: a state of affairs that still has some weight today (Pitt-Rivers 1977; 46).

Similar class-specific codes of honor can also be observed in the Italian “Mezzogiorno” and in Sicily, though it must be added that this phenomenon appears in its almost ideal-typical purity when the society is still clearly determined by the hierarchy of estates (Stände).

In Sicily, as can be gathered from contemporary travel accounts, an aristocratic and a plebeian understanding of honor could undoubtedly be distinguished in the period immediately preceding the abolition of feudal rights (1812). In the competition for honor, the Sicilian high aristocracy emphasized, for example, privileges of precedence usually based on lineage and the demonstrative display of luxury. Hence the aristocratic competition for reputation always implied an extravagant “gare di precedenza” and “gare di fasto” (Mühlmann/Llaryora 1973; 90; Giordano 1982; 68). The sexual morality dimension of the honor complex appears, on the other hand, to have played a relevant, but definitely subordinate part for this estate.

Some 18th and 19th century foreign reporters were astonished and sometimes even shocked at the sexual permissiveness that prevailed in the aristocratic circles of Palermo (Tuzet 1945; 445). Travelers were impressed in particular by the behavior of male aristocrats, who displayed an unexpected degree of tolerance (Tuzet 1955; 451).

The opposite of this permissiveness of the elites is the “Puritanism” of the people. In Sicily, ideas of the sexual purity of women are the dominant motifs of the honor complex among both urban and rural lower orders. Presumably, this exceptional, indeed sometimes even obsessive, emphasis on norms of sexual morality is related to the fact that, as has already been suggested, sexual purity can be economically translated by the lower orders into “symbolic capital”.

In conclusion, and with reference to Sicily, it may be noted that the transition from “onuri” to “rispetto”, sketched by Mühlmann and Llaryora as a long-term consequence of the feudal system’s abolition, also has a class specific component. In other words, the epoch of an aristocratic conception of honor is gradually replaced by a new age in which the code of honor of the rural bourgeoisie occupies a dominant position.

Conclusions: transcultural aspects of the concepts of honor and reputation

As already mentioned at the beginning of this article, practically from the 1980’s on anthropology begins, with good reason, to deconstruct the paradigm of “honor and shame societies” in the Mediterranean area. If such critical questioning born of the “reflexive” or “postmodern” wave in our field of studies might appear legitimate to some extent, the present total neglect of anthropological research on honor appears less plausible and therefore less acceptable. Given other similar attitudes, as the one concerning the deconstruction of the notion of culture, one might psychologically consider anthropology responsible for a not quite covert pen-

chant for the discipline's self-destruction and suicide. Obviously, such a provoking statement has hardly any epistemological value. Let us look into the reasons and above all the consequences of this neglect.

First of all, along with the critique of the Mediterranean societies' paradigm as "honor and shame societies", a marked taste for detail has evolved favoring a veritable cult of difference while implicitly rejecting the comparative research of affinities and equivalencies. A fitting example in this context is Herzfeld's standing expressed in one of his articles already in 1980 (Herzfeld, 1980). Through the study of the terminology regarding honor and shame, this author stresses the existence of major differences between the moral systems of two Greek villages, thus pointing out to the reader the basic pointlessness of generalizations. This reduction to the "isolated fact" and the "unique case", which over the following years became evermore popular, has been the undoing of theoretic observation of Mediterranean societies' "logic of honor". Actually, using such a perspective, emphasizing "specificities", automatically makes the research of homogeneity hardly adequate. In this case however, one should examine whether such an approach has brought forth more creative and stimulating analysis or has hindered theoretic conceptualization. Personally, I side with the latter hypothesis since I believe that the anthropology of Mediterranean societies by now is based only upon the "arbitrariness" of the predilection for ethnographic extravaganza.

The second reason is far more relevant however. Over the last twenty years, in other words after what might be called the post-modern turning point or the "after writing culture", anthropology has come round to an "anthropologically correct" phraseology to avoid ethnocentric forms. An anthropological "populism" (or a "goodism", i.e. "buonismo" as one would say in Italian) has developed by which representations of

the "other" that might put them in a bad light or hurt their feelings are carefully dodged. For the sake of siding with or acknowledging the "other", reckoned as such as a "minority" and thus weak and oppressed, the anthropological "main stream" has set itself a self-censorship, deemed legitimate, by piecing together ethic and epistemological reasons. As such though, this anti-ethnocentrism has not only paradoxically brought forth another and far more serious sort of ethnocentric essentialism, i.e. the idea that the anthropologist is almost by definition in a dominating position compared to the "other". At the same time, implicitly or explicitly, this "new" anthropology has professed its ostracism to research paradigms, which, according to the "anthropologically correct" course of thought, could be embarrassing. Thus, the studies on honor and the patronage system in Mediterranean societies have disappeared from the anthropologist's agenda while new studies, endeavoring to illustrate the existence of more contemporary approaches - because more "anthropologically correct"-, have asserted themselves.

In this sense, a typical example are all those authors who would rather use terms as "gender" to avoid the term "honor" or, as in Herzfeld's case again, in good faith have created the stereotype of Mediterranean "hospitality" (Herzfeld, 1987b; 75 ff.).

The reference to the annoying relish for ethnographic variations, besides the hypocrisy of the "anthropologically correct" inherent to the new anthropological trends, does not fully expose why the neglect of the concept of honor is not plausible enough. As mentioned in the previous chapters, anthropological critique's crucial fault has been to regard honor as a "moral system" or value set mainstay, and not as a social resource to publicly justify ones conduct ensuring ones reputation and social standing. Unfortunately, caged within its "moralistic Puritanism", anthropology, and especially the Mediterranean socie-

ties' one, has disregarded, and continues to do so, the suggestions of one of its foremost representatives: F. G. Bailey (Bailey 1971).

By way of the transactional analysis paradigm proposed by the above-mentioned author, the research on honor can be broadened, thus avoiding the epistemologically limited context of ethnographic descriptions and burdensome obsessions of *anthropologically correctness*.

As such, we can legitimately set forth to prove that honor is not merely a moral code comprising values, norms, and representations, and a set of practices pertaining to Mediterranean societies alone. Rather, it is an idiom and a combination of social strategies found in several public arenas of other societies. The language of honor and its associated behaviors are transcultural phenomena put to use, even beyond the specific Mediterranean context, for the purpose of managing one's reputation and thus of defining (better yet, redefining) the social identity of individuals and groups. Therefore, honor cannot be downgraded to something archaic, obsolete, and dying out. Quite the opposite, honor is a still relevant way to express oneself and to act, though admittedly it is alien, if not contrary, to the idea of *modernity*.

Consequently, the rhetoric of honor, with its specific expressions such as "I give my word of honor" or "I swear upon my honor" or "lose one's face", and its likewise specific terms such as honorable (i.e. respectable), honorary of office), to honor in terms of respecting someone or something, dishonorable (in terms of behavior) is still a feature of the public management (in everyday life, as well) of reputation, even in societies beyond the Mediterranean area and unanimously acknowledged as the most advanced and modern ones. This language therefore cannot be regarded as a set of meaningless formulae that by now has lost its sense and social purpose.

The fact that the rhetoric of honor has recently been used in two different contexts by two

significant German public figures, i.e. former Chancellor Helmut Kohl and soccer coach Christoph Daum, proves its unmitigated strength.

In fact, in the face of public opinion, the former Chancellor adopted the line of keeping his "word of honor" as grounds for his reserve concerning the names of those covert significant financial backers who had illegally supported his party with lavish contributions.

Kohl's recourse to the 'word of honor' had a nearly magical effect since, besides some quite unconvincing criticisms, his wish to hold back the names of those who gave him the money was honored. Concurrently, thanks to the rhetoric strategy based on the "word of honor", his reputation was not much tarnished and is still nearly unscathed. In spite of everything, the former Chancellor is still a sort of spiritual father of the CDU, is considered the promoter of the national reunification, and one of the makers of the EU.

Christoph Daum instead, celebrated soccer trainer, had to give up the offer to coach the German national team since a press campaign accused him of taking drugs. It wasn't so much the fact in itself that made him lose the important post but rather his having unwisely given his word of honor that he had never taken cocaine, knowing full-well that he was lying. As he was proven guilty by a specific test, media and public opinion condemned his dishonorable behavior, unworthy of such a prestigious role. Paraphrasing Dante, honor had more power than drugs. If he had not tried to hide behind a concept with so much symbolic consequence as the word of honor, and had made a clean breast about taking cocaine, he could probably have limited the damage done to his reputation and maybe coach one of the world's most titled teams. Despite his undeniable competence, Christoph Daum left Germany after the scandal that made him lose honor and reputation and is currently coaching in Turkey.

In complex societies where a great social differentiation prevails, such as those in the Mediterranean area and those of modernity, reputation, prestige and thus honor as well, are crucial features of that struggle for recognition linked to the individual's and group's repute in the social ranking. Honor's strategies and corresponding languages are used to confirm one's good reputation and prestige for oneself and/or one's own group, while concurrently trying to socially discredit if not stigmatize other individuals and groups. Obviously, such idioms and social practices vary from one society to another and from one culture to another, and the idea of honor at times is expressed only implicitly and covertly.

Such strategies of dishonor and humiliation can currently be observed very often in political arenas and specifically in the various practices of impeachment. From the French term *empechement*, which literally means impediment, this word, sociologically speaking, implies not only applying the juridical procedure but also the systematic spread of rumor, allusions, illations, *innuendo* - true or not- whose goal is to harm the prestige, reputation, and thus honor, in the eye of public opinion of the person who finds himself entangled in this procedure.

Besides the strictly institutional aspects, impeachment is based on legitimate or alleged evidence that the person under accusation is guilty of dishonorable conduct unworthy of such a prestigious appointment.

To make an impeachment work, one must be able to create, rightly or not, a public scandal that can discredit the accused and thus one that can annihilate his prestige and honor. As such, the impeachment procedure is always a negative management of the other's reputation too. Impeachment therefore re in some cases resembles as a modern form of the medieval pillory.

The fact that the systematic annihilation of a public figure's honor and reputation can still bring about highly dramatic situations with a tra-

gic ending is proven by the case of two German politicians, Uwe Barschel and Jürgen Möllemann, who took their own lives because of their involvement in a scandal and the resulting public scorn. Barschel committed suicide in a hotel room in Geneva, while Möllemann airdropped without opening his parachute. In their case, only death could atone for their lost honor.

However, in modern societies honor cannot be relegated to a personal issue. In past times, classified as premodern ones, collective honor in Western societies (not only in these, however) was certainly predominant and for the most part concerned class, family, and profession. Nowadays, in modernity, other types of honor must be added to the previously mentioned forms, which haven't completely disappeared; i.e., national or ethnic honor, regime or political system honor (as under National Socialism, fascism, and communism) and finally even sports honor (as the one of soccer or basket clubs).

We need only recall the ethno-national honor/dishonor during the recent wars in former Yugoslavia. The so called "ethnic rapes" during the war in Bosnia, which were publicly perpetrated by all parties at war, were appalling metaphors used to humiliate the entire other group, the enemy's one, and destroy its national honor. The same goes for the Abu Ghraib tortures, which were also demonstrative acts of symbolic violence, beyond the sheer physical violence, whose explicit purpose was primarily to humiliate and target the honor of the enemy as a member of a national community and not only as an individual.

Given the previous reflections, honor must be considered almost a standard feature of social configurations by which people and groups have unequal prospects as far as status, prestige, power, and wealth are concerned. This means that honor is inherent to all those societies with a hierarchic order of social ranking. Thus, honor is a useful if not necessary tool, intentionally and

permanently employed in those public arenas where the struggle for recognition of social ranks is carried on through the manipulation of one's own and one's competitor's reputation. The idea of honor along with its representations and strategies in a given society cannot be adequately interpreted from a socio-anthropological perspective without bearing in mind that there are major and perceptible social disparities. The concept of honor would probably be utterly pointless without the separations among groups and categories of persons with different rankings within the hierarchic order created by the society itself. The separation into strata, classes, genders, ethnic groups, nations, professional groups, generations, etc. gives rise to differences in reputation, prestige, social status, power, and wealth, which, to this very day, spark off wars (both symbolic and non) for recognition fought with the weapons of honor. Besides, inclusions and exclusions constructed by the society and imagined as natural differences are often the outcome of the manipulation of the concept of honor, which thus becomes an efficient means of social selection.

When we speak about modern societies, the concept of honor is rightly set up against the concept of dignity, which is regarded as one of the great achievements of those Western societies that rose from the ashes of the ancien régime. According to this point of view, honor and dignity are the key elements of two incompatible social orders, which in short characterize two contrasting models of society.

As Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor points out (Taylor 1992; 37 ff), dignity is a universal potential shared by all men. Dignity is a principle on which modernity is grounded. It gu-

arantees respect for all because all men per se are worthy of respect on equal terms. As a language and social strategy, honor instead implies, justifies, and furthers the classification and separation of people and groups into several categories with a different value. According to the logic of honor therefore, there are those who are respected and those who are dishonored, masters and servants, superiors and subordinates, the powerful and the powerless, winners and losers, supervisors and supervised. As a means of social regulation and normative system, honor allows unequal treatment as well as private justice and privileged jurisdictions. Dignity instead can make the struggle for recognition unnecessary and can be based exclusively on the principle of equal individual rights for all.

However, from a socio-anthropological point of view, we must emphasize that the principle of dignity did not assert itself in modern societies as instead could have been expected; though an important idea, it turned out to be too abstract. Dignity has not taken the place of honor, therefore the latter to this day cannot be regarded as a relic of times past, but rather as a socio-cultural model that coexists and rivals with dignity. Since honor in modernity has not been replaced by dignity, as a too narrow evolutionist scheme would have it, we can justifiably hypothesize the presence of a permanent dialectic between these two opposing paradigms of sociability, which ultimately furthers modern societies' dynamics. Dignity therefore can be interpreted as a necessary corrective that should be able to lessen conflicts, taking the edge off the struggles for recognition imposed by the antagonistic logic of honor.

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