



**8ème Journée des jeunes chercheurs du GREAM**  
**« Les musiques actuelles : société, politique, histoire »**

**Marcello Messina**  
**(Universidade Federal de**  
**Paraíba)**

*‘Mezzogiorno di fuoco e sangue’:  
Narratives of Organized Crime and  
Stereotypes of the South in Songs  
from Northern and Central Italy*



Popular Italian culture is more and more interested in the interpenetration between organized crime, state activities and transnational economic processes, and this is perhaps sufficient to explain the recent success of bestsellers such as Roberto Saviano’s *Gomorra*. However, while these narratives productively focus on the analysis and denunciation of the macroeconomic processes that articulate illegal and harmful practices, they often complement the economic analysis with stereotypical characterisations of the people involved in the crimes. Quite customarily, these tend to be the moments when the loaded signifier ‘South’ emerges – in one or more of its multiple Sicilian, Neapolitan, Calabrian, Apulian manifestations –, in order to provide the audience with familiar tropes of innate deviancy, criminal atavism, endemic backwardness, etc. In this paper, I analyse popular music across five decades in order to assess the ways in which the denunciation of state crime is persistently connected with clichéd representations of the modes of existence that allegedly characterise Southern Italian populations. Drawing upon the work of John Dickie, Gabriella Gribaudo, Joseph Pugliese, among the other authors that address, problematise and criticise the traditional othering of the South in Italian national context, I will focus on acclaimed

political songs and albums by Northern and Central Italian authors, namely, I Giganti's *Terra in bocca*, Fabrizio De André's *Don Raffaè*, Litfiba's *Dimmi il nome*, Frankie Hi-NRG's *Fight da Faida* and Fabrizio Moro's *Pensa*, with the aim of identifying the textual, musical and extra-musical elements that resort to stereotyping Southern Italians in order to make a point about state-driven illegality. Finally, I will argue that this type of ethnically biased narratives may paradoxically result in a symbolic absolution of the state, in a way that every responsibility for illicit and harmful practices is easily handed over to Southern communities.

*Marcello Messina is a Sicilian composer and academic based in João Pessoa, Paraíba, Brazil. He holds a PhD in composition from the University of Leeds (UK), and is currently Professor Visitante Estrangeiro in musicology and ethnomusicology at the Universidade Federal da Paraíba. He has been recipient of the Endeavour Research Fellowship at Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia, and of the PNPD/Capes post-doctoral bursary at the Universidade Federal do Acre, Brazil. His music has been performed in Australia, Brazil, Colombia, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, the UK and the US, and his scores and recordings are published by the University of York Music Press, Map Editions, Da Vinci Publishing and Huddersfield Contemporary Records.*