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FROM THE LEGEND OF THE BANDIT TO TODAY'S NARCOCULTURE: ANALYSIS OF A CRIMINAL REALITY FROM A SOCIO-HISTORICAL APPROACH

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Summary: 1. INTRODUCTION 2. THE LEGEND OF THE "GOOD BANDIT". 3. FROM BANDITRY TO NARCOCULTURE. 4. FINAL REFLECTIONS. 5. BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES.

Abstract: The phenomenon of narcoculture is not new in Spain; although it has not been sufficiently analyzed yet. Drug trafficking, as well as smuggling, has been traditionally confronted with a policy mainly focused on judicial and police action. These policies, although necessary, can only be part of the solution and they are clearly not sufficient by themselves because they it only actually deal with limited possibilities of reality. Behind drug trafficking networks -or smuggling networks- there is more than a mere criminal company: there is a worldview, a culture, a mythology that not only justifies and feeds back the activity of its components, but also strengthens the gang itself, by providing values, turning it into a way of life, thriving on honest culture, putting neighbors against each other and, above all, questions the very foundations of the system, including the activity of the Security Forces. A similar phenomenon happened more than a century ago with banditry and its legend, although from a different sociocultural and technological parameterization, which may change the whole appraisal: if the determined action of the law enforcers institutions of that period, mainly the Guardia Civil, were able to eradicate banditry and its culture in just fifty years, it does not seem that the same strategy, no matter how many means and resources are available, may be able to address the complex problem of narcoculture today. This article, by rigorously observing the past, tries to delve into the reasons for the case with the intention of offering clues that may serve to a more efficient and targeted-future policies.

Resumen: El fenómeno de la narcocultura no es nuevo en España, pese a que no parece haber recibido hasta el presente un análisis profundo. El narcotráfico, así como el contrabando, se han afrontado tradicionalmente desde una política centrada en la acción judicial y policial que, siendo necesaria, solo es parte de la solución y no puede bastar por sí misma. Tras las redes del narcotráfico -o del contrabando- hay más que una mera empresa delincuencial: existe una cosmovisión, una cultura, una mitología que no sólo justifica y retroalimenta la actividad de sus componentes, sino que, además, fortalece la empresa misma, la dota de valores, la convierte en un medio de vida, medra en la cultura honrada, enfrenta a los vecinos entre sí y cuestiona las bases mismas del sistema, así como la actividad de las Cuerpos y Fuerzas de Seguridad del Estado. Un fenómeno similar al acaecido hace más de un siglo con el bandolerismo y su leyenda, si bien desde parámetros socioculturales y tecnológicos diferentes, que lo tornan todo radicalmente distinto: si la acción decidida de las Autoridades de aquel periodo, vía Guardia Civil, pudo erradicar el bandolerismo y su cultura en apenas cincuenta años, no parece que esa misma estrategia, por muchos recursos de los que se la dote, pueda servir para abordar el complejo problema de las narcoculturas. Este artículo, observando con rigor el pasado, trata de profundizar en las razones del caso con la intención de ofrecer pistas que reconduzcan hacia futuras políticas eficientes y ponderadas.

Keywords: Banditry, Drug Trafficking, Smuggling, Narcocultures, Sociohistorical Analysis.

Palabras clave: Bandolerismo, Narcotráfico, Contrabando, Narcoculturas, Análisis Sociohistórico.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Popular culture, art and literature have created an image of bandits and banditry, in whatever form, surrounded by a halo of romanticism that still lingers today, even if one delves into the journalistic, psycho-sociological and even criminological analysis of all organised criminal activities that could be considered, to some extent, as the "heirs" of traditional banditry. Certainly, expert analysts, regardless of their expertise and field of specialization, always tend to "fall in love", in a figurative sense, with their work and also, remotely and out of mere sympathy, even feel a sense of attachment towards the subject that drives them, no matter how unpleasant or disagreeable it may seem from an objective and logical standpoint. It is unsurprising that nineteenth-century romanticism continues to hold significant cultural influence in the Western world, as many of its emotivist and irrationalist concepts persist in various beliefs, theories, traditions, and socio-cultural, political, and scientific-technical practices. (Pérez-Fernández & López-Muñoz, 2023).

In a well-known book, the British historian Eric John Ernest Hobsbawn (1917-2012) tried to penetrate these considerations on banditry by referring, typologically, to "noble bandits", or, referring to another of the many characters he creates, to "expropriating quasi-bandits". Tragic characters, protected by the very people from whom they had emerged and, to some extent, admired by them, because in the course of their illegal activities they contributed to the redistribution of wealth and even, if you like, to the establishment of some kind of social, political or economic justice, however remote or dubious it might be (Hobsbawn, 2001). The legends and myths surrounding these characters have, in many cases, even become the inspiration of the plots of countless artistic and cultural creations (Figure 1). These works are typically centered around themes of socio-economic fatalism, the struggle against oppression, the tragic life of the main character, and the idea that under certain extreme conditions, individuals may feel compelled to resort to crime or violence as their only "honourable" or "dignified" option. Moreover, in these collective criminal activities often induced by low social status, disgrace, oppressive states, social disorder or disadvantaged background, is not difficult to find "honour", "courage" and even some kind of strange, committed and respectable "moral scale" (Sutherland, 1988). For example,

> "The [Mafia] initiation ritual shows that honour is a status to be earned. Until he becomes an honourable man, the aspiring mobster is closely watched, supervised and tested [...]. At the initiation, the new mafioso swears an oath of obedience, the first pillar of the code of honour. A man of honour is always obedient to his capo; he never asks why [...]. Honour also implies the obligation to tell the truth to other men of honour and, consequently, the Mafiosi's notoriously elliptical way of speaking. [...] Honour is also about loyalty. Membership of what the mafiosi once called the 'honourable society' entails new loyalties that are more important than blood ties" (Dickie, 2006: 36-38).

Figure 1. *Scene of a Sale* (1855), oil painting by Manuel Cabral and Aguado Bejarano (Museo Carmen Thyssen, Málaga).

The question, accepting that these idealised beliefs about certain criminal activities could be true from an anthropological and even historiographical approach, of course, lies in asking the role this perspective gives to the actions of law enforcement officers. For when historical approaches that analyse human activity as a simple linear story of "good guys" and "bad guys" is accepted without criticism, such confrontational logic immediately gives rise to extravagant theses. For example: if the bandit is "the good guy", then the one who pursues him, as an agent of the oppressive power that seeks to crush the helpless plebs from whom he emerges, cannot be anything other than "the bad guy". This turns the problem into a labyrinthine and distorting issue that, ironically, transforms the advocate of such a law - basically "made for the rich" - into a prop that would inadvertently support the "villains" of the story. Thus, it is not that law enforcement officers are "bad people", but that they would inadvertently place themselves at the disposal of an evil institutional structure in the fulfilment of their duties. These are approaches which, as is to be expected, should not only be nuanced, but which, even from outside the fields of standardised scientific research, occasionally encounter more than reasonable counter-current questioning:

"Trying to look the other way cannot be the solution to a problem rooted in the depths of our society [the author refers to the problem of drug trafficking in Campo de Gibraltar], battered by unemployment, lack of infrastructure, lack of resources and historically abandoned by governments that have treated it like a broken toy, a rag doll that is slowly falling apart, with no intention of repairing it because it seems inevitable that its threads will continue to unravel. Beyond the economic and health deterioration caused by these illegal businesses, the main damage lies in the transformation it produces in various social sectors: the enormous profits generated lead to a generalised tolerance towards these activities, resulting in a poorly

qualified workforce, linked to early school dropout and absenteeism. Culturally impoverishing entire generations who hide behind administrative neglect to justify their shady business dealings; 'es pa come', as they say" (Fenoy, 2022: 225).

The fallacy behind this dichotomous way of presenting the issue, which is increasingly common in the media, as well as in various political and ideological environments will not have escaped the reader. Also among the workers - not the bosses - of the drug dealer who use it as an excuse to justify their *modus vivendi*: it begins with the epic necessity of the bandit to become involved in narcoculture - or vice versa -, thus inadvertently approving two very different socio-historical and criminological realities, which are nevertheless artificially interconnected through the same emotivist and romantic line of thought alluded to earlier - es*'pa comé'* (it's *for eating*). And this is precisely the sophism that should be dismantled, since neither the actions of the Guardia Civil who shot down Francisco Ríos González -*El Pernales*-(1879-1907), in Villaverde de Guadalimar (Albacete) (Figure 2), are the same as those of today, nor the circumstances in which the famous bandit was born and lived are similar to those in which those engage in drug or human trafficking networks live and operate. Furthermore, since we are discussing the dubious practice of historical parallelism, the Sicily of the early 19th century that saw the birth of La *Cosa Nostra* has nothing to do with the context in which Italian-American organised crime legends such as Alfonso Capone (1899-1947) or Charles "Lucky" Luciano (1897-1962) carried out their activities (Dickie, 2006). Comparing historical events and moments has the value of analogy, but inadvertently leads to errors such as indiscriminate approval and generalisation.

Figure 2. Photograph of anonymous authorship showing the corpses of the famous bandit Francisco Ríos González, 'El Pernales', on the right and marked with the number 1, and Antonio Jiménez Rodríguez, 'El Niño del Arahal'. The image was commissioned by the Guardia Civil after both were shot dead in Villaverde de Guadalimar (Albacete), in order to document and publicise the demise of one of the "most wanted" bandits in Spain at the time.

These sustained intellectual dysfunctions, which are not usually questioned in public debate or in artistic and cinematographic works - as is also the case with threats such as *presentism* and *revisionism* - must be addressed in order to understand, in their

proper measure, that the motives and circumstances for which the "noble" bandit of yesteryear was encouraged and praised by his neighbours are not the same as those behind the attitude of those who, in February 2024, filmed the dramatic ramming of a 14-metre long, 1,500 horsepower 'narcolaunch' against Guardia Civil officers in the town of Barbate, Cádiz with their mobile phones, killing two of them, while they cheered on the aggression (Cenizo, 2024). It is true that it was just a small group of young people representing nobody but themselves, but that does not detract from their attitude or impact or symbolism, and that is precisely why they made the headlines. Certainly, the more than one hundred years that separate both events make it impossible to equate them in material and, even more importantly, in formal terms. But if the fight against crime is to be rigorous, measured, considered and efficient, it is essential to understand precisely that we are dealing with a polymorphous, multifactorial and evolving phenomenon which, beyond the statism or comparisons "in bulk", to which the synthetic efforts of manuals are prone, requires adapted, flexible and well-honed approaches.

2. THE LEGEND OF THE "GOOD BANDIT"

Banditry has always been a ubiquitous historical phenomenon which, given certain socio-cultural circumstances, tends to have similarities wherever it is studied. It is a kind of endemic malady that all societies go through as they move at some point from a basically agricultural and subsistence model of production based on land ownership and personal status to a capitalist and industrialised one, based on the ethic of production, business and class mobility. With all the perhaps inevitable psychosocial, ideological, economic and cultural dysfunctions that such far-reaching transformations bring about in any society (Hobsbawn, 2001).

> "In the 16th century, there were bandits in all the countries bordering the Mediterranean: Naples, the coastal mountains of present-day Yugoslavia, France, where they were called *brigands*, Catalonia, Valencia, as well as Aragon, suffered the scourge of banditry in the same period. At other times we find bandits in regions such as Andalusia, where they were very prolific in the 18th and 19th centuries. In the last century and even in the present century we find forms of delinquency that could be assimilated to those of banditry. This is the case of the *cangaçeiros* in Brazil and also of certain forms of banditry in Peru and Mexico. A universal phenomenon, a characteristic feature of banditry is its rural character. Always latent in peasant societies where the rich-poor, powerful-humble, dominator-dominated differences are very marked, it explodes when the traditional equilibrium of such societies is ruptured" (Salas Auséns, 1989: 407-408).

In these changing societies, the economy is volatile and marked by uncertainty. Wealth tends to accumulate in the hands of a few and the poorer classes are often overpopulated by people without property and/or assets. People who also do not have adequate education to provide themselves with some other means of subsistence and only rely on manual labour to scratch a living. This means not only that upward social mobility is virtually non-existent, but also that any regular adverse event - such as a bad harvest, a drought, a war, or an epidemic - plunges the bulk of the population into famine and destitution very easily (Beltrán-Tapia and Martínez-Galarraga, 2015). Poverty from which, conversely, it is extremely difficult to escape. At this point, and history is replete with accounts, data and facts that certify the approach, necessity imposes on these people who have fallen into destitution the fact that they have to make a living any way that they

can honestly or dishonestly (Geremek, 1991; Pérez-Fernández & López-Muñoz, 2017) (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Oil painting by Eugenio Lucas Velázquez entitled Bandoleros (circa 1860), in the Museo Nacional del Prado (Madrid).

A high degree of rurality, poor infrastructure, low demography and the consequent endemic lack of significant population centres made a decisive contribution to the genesis of banditry and brigandage in these pre-industrial contexts. Also, the predominance of a system of agricultural exploitation based on the lord and the serfs, which induces the presence of a floating - and migrating - population of day labourers and low-skilled employees. In turn, the rugged, rough terrain is of great importance, whose roads and paths are scarce and deficient, which facilitates ambushes, flight and subsequent concealment. Last but not least, some important trade routes are poorly monitored, controlled and/or regulated due to poor - often dysfunctional for socio-political reasons - administrative, judicial, technological and "police" control of the territory. Conditions that, in general, were the norm throughout the Peninsula - not only in Andalusia, although the Andalusian bandit[1] was the most popular and common - from the Early Middle Ages and practically until the end of the 19th century (Bernaldo de Quirós, 1912; Rivas Gómez, 1977; Salas Auséns, 1989; Martín Polo, 2016).

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[1] The etymology of the Spanish word "bandolero" does not come from the Andalusian environment. The Latin term "bando" is a transliteration of the Gothic "*bandwo*"-BⱵNꟿ૪Ω-, meaning "sign", "flag" or"banner". Thus, the bandit was originally a person who put his weapons at the service of a 'side' or flag. Over time, as the actions of the bandit became associated with crime, "*bandolero*" became etymologically linked to the person whose name is recorded in a "*bando*", proclamation or edict issued by an authority. However,this is a later deformation of the concept linked to the emergence of contemporary socio-political systems (García Benítez, 2018: 625).

"During the 18th and part of the 19th century, Spain was *the terre classique des brigands*. This was established by the travellers who travelled through our lands during those years, creating legends that invariably included attacks by bandits, to the point that one of them stated: 'a pot without bacon would be as bland as a book about Spain without bandits'" (Martín Polo, 2016: 94).

In fact, given the general political instability, frequently, and in many contexts, bandits would jump from legality to illegality everywhere, as their actions were often merged and confused with raids, punitive operations and guerrilla actions in the service of higher interests. A confusion that the bandits themselves would find very fortunate in certain scenarios:

[...] at least during the 14th and 15th centuries, the name "bandolero" was given to anyone who belonged to a side, and the word "bandol" meant a group of individuals attached to a man or feudal lord and who fought in his defence. [...] On the other hand, it is impossible to draw the line between feudal struggles and banditry, for there was a time when they were all one and the same thing. Even when the nobility had lost its power, they continued to speak in Catalonia of 'nyerros' and 'cadells' for a long time, and each bandit-bandalero-bandido was attached to one of the two sides" (Rivas Gómez, 1977: 97-98).

All this is important, because it is easy to see that, from the very beginning, and regardless of the criminal result of his acts, the bandit always maintained a convenient halo of socio-political justification among his class and even, temporarily, the unquestionable support from his reference population which, logically, was not alien to the psycho-social process of the distribution "of" and the ascription "to" one or the other side in conflict. It is not surprising, therefore, that with the passing of time, the practice of banditry developed an adventurous, legendary and heroic side that was underpinned and rebuilt a posteriori, with the successive evolution of the historical and socio-demographic circumstances of each region and period. As Morreres Boix (1978) rightly pointed out, this delinquent linked to pre-industrial, impoverished societies imbued with a clear fatalistic spirit has a cathartic effect on the collective, as it operated as a projection of the hatred, impotence and rebellion repressed by the powerful, which the bandit channels through his bold and daring acts. It is no surprise, therefore, that it ends up with a *quasi-mythological* patina in which it is certainly surprising to separate fact from fiction. This is the case, for example, with the legend of the famous "Barquero de Cantillana", who inspired the biography of the famous television bandit Curro Jiménez[2] (Figure 4), of whom an infinite number of indubitable stories have been spread:

"According to oral tradition, el Barquero was astute and intelligent enough to always emerge triumphant from the persecution of the powerful to the hopeful

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[2] Starring the actor Sancho Gracia -Félix Ángel Sancho Gracia- (1936-2012), and produced by Radiotelevisión Española, the series, the epitome of fiction about Andalusian banditry, was created by the Uruguayan writer José Antonio Larreta (1922-2015), who was inspired by the story of the Barquero de Cantillana when creating the character. For example, and very cleverly, to avoid the many ideological conflicts that affected the Spain during the Transition, the character's adventures were set at the beginning of the 19th century, during the Napoleonic invasion and the Spanish War of Independence (1808-1814). It ran for three seasons and a total of 52 episodes. It was a renouncing success and even had a less successful sequel, *Curro Jiménez: The Return of a Legend*. The latter, produced in 1995 by the private channel Antena 3, already offered the image of a twilight and less attractive bandit.

applause of the people. Nothing could be further from the truth. With accredited documents, only one death can be attributed to the Barquero, that of Andrés Díaz, aged 22, resident of Cantillana, unmarried, the son of a widow and farm worker, on 11 July 1841 in a street brawl during which either could have died. Because of this, he is not pursued in the town and only under pressure from the Guardia Civil is he forced to flee. [...] The Armed Institute of the Guardia Civil, through its laudatory writers and exegetes, is the only one that presents the Barquero as a criminal and delinquent. In the history of the Guardia Civil published by José Díaz Valderrama in 1853, only four years after the death of Barquero, there is absolutely no mention of this character or that the Tercer Tercio purported to have killed him in 1849. It only mentions that the first corporal of the First Company of that Tercio, Antonio Moral, was killed by the bandit Francisco Manuel Cordón, alias 'El sordo' (the deaf man), nothing more" (García Benítez, 2018: 626-628).

Figure 4. Promotional poster for the RTVE series Curro Jiménez (1976-1979).

The same might be said of countless bandits of nineteenth-century Spain who, along this path of collective catharsis seasoned with romanticism, played the leading role in public perspectives of the criminal phenomenon that inevitably placed the persecutors of the day on the side of "the bad guys". The dubious anecdotes of deeds and "heroics" of bandits are therefore enormous. Thus, for example, it is a falsehood that Pernales' father was killed by a Guardia Civil when the future bandit was only twelve years old, as it has been proven that the man died in 1881, in his own bed, of a stroke (Bermúdez López, 2020). This novelistic image of the bandit's crimes, which justified his actions and rationalised his motives, would inevitably jump into the world of fiction, enduring in the popular imagination to the present day. It is hardly surprising, then, that in the preliminary note to one of several novelised biographies of the celebrated bandit Diego Corrientes Mateos (1757-1781) (Figure 5), the author wrote:

"[…] Despite his actions on behalf of the poor, Diego Corrientes chose the wrong path to achieve the justice he so longed for. His obsession with redeeming the poor led him to the fringes of the law. The only thing in his favour is that he has never had blood on his hands. And in the depths of his conscience he always engaged in an anguished struggle between good and evil. Legend and history tell of his assaults, robberies and daring raids on villages and farmhouses. They say nothing about his passions, his feelings, his inner life" (Lucas y Gallardo, 1959: 4-5).

Figure 5. Cover of the comic entitled Aventuras de Diego Corrientes, from the series Gente de Bronce (Ameller Editor, Barcelona, 1950).

It is, therefore, logical that, over the years, the Guardia Civil never employed the communication strategy of using publicity about the legends about the "village bandits" that were propagated among the population to justify their successes. This would probably have provoked an unwelcome reaction among a large part of the population, since accepting such rhetoric would have meant placing oneself undesirably on the negative side of history. For this reason, concepts such as "bandit" or "banditry" were not commonly used by the distinguished for decades, with the term "malefactor" being the usual name for those who were persecuted (Núñez, 2017). This fact had an important psychosocial effect by leading part of the population spectrum, especially the emerging classes, towards always healthy doubt. But which, retroactively, could also contribute to the perpetration of the romantic myth by the most consolidated supporters of the so-called *bandalero*, while at the same time justifying an infinite number of highly questionable instrumentalisations of police action: The common fallacious political thesis that the fight against this kind of "evildoers" was a "war without quarter" that honest society "as a whole" maintained against those who attacked it indiscriminately, perhaps even justified dubious outrages such as the famous trials of the Andalusian *Mano Negra (* Sanz Agüero, 1975) (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Pictorial recreation of a confrontation between the Guardia Civil and bandits in 1853. Detail of the lithograph *Attack on a bandit party*, by S.B. Bestard (Guardia Civil).
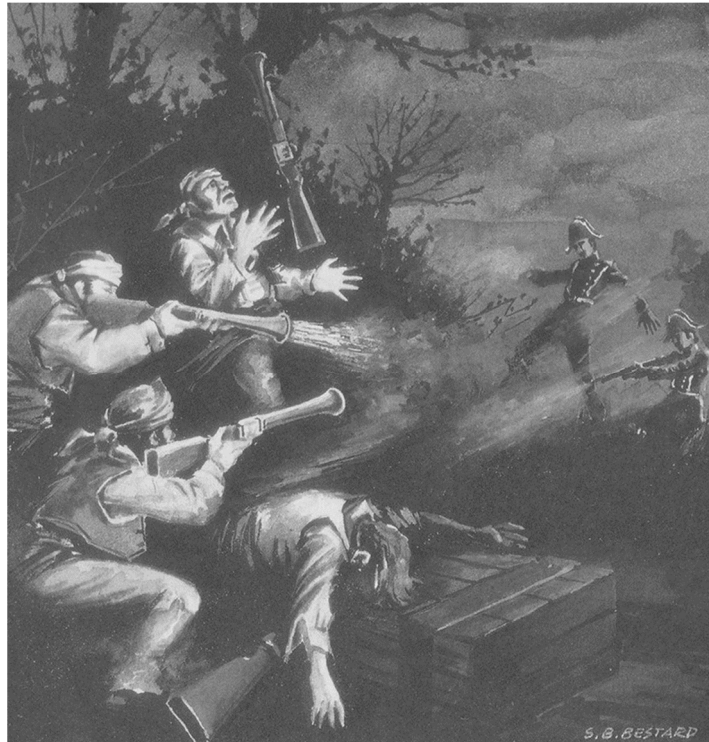
It should be remembered at this point that the Guardia Civil, when it was founded in 1844, as a police force, was born with a veiled warlike purpose for what was fundamentally socio-economic and political, as it was formed with the intention of securing roads, uninhabited areas and agricultural facilities, as well as the incipient industry, against attacks from the endemic banditry that secure the proper flow of money, goods, merchandise and people[3] (Figure 7). A task in which, precisely, the regular military machinery, designed both strategically, organisationally and humanly for conventional warfare, had failed completely and repeatedly because it was inadequate to the case (Martín Polo, 2016).

"The problem of banditry [...] became a truly endemic evil in Spain for centuries, reaching its zenith in the mid-19th century. Neither the permanent Army nor the Militias, regardless of their class or status, were the ideal forces to confront and eradicate such a tremendous blight on the nation's development. They had neither the doctrine nor the training for it, nor was it really their mission or raison d'être. The solution was not of a military but of a police nature, but this required first of all the existence of a law enforcement agency of state scope. The local and regional forces creased and dependent on local or provincial corporations, proved to be ineffective. And those bodies, of a military or civilian nature, which had been born with aspirations of extending throughout the national territory, were poorly

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[3] All of this, with hardly any material means or resources, except for the intelligence and good work of the agents themselves, in a tremendously backward and indolent society and with manifest neglect by the authorities.

conceived and poorly supported, ending up, for one reason or another, being dissolved or extinguished" (Núñez, 2017).

Figure 7. *Pair of Guardia Civil officers on horseback in the 19th century*, by Augusto Ferrer-Dalmau.

If the aim is to understand this necessary communicative strategy, it is always worth asking what fed the myths surrounding the bandit-bandido-miscreant. One cannot be satisfied with the widespread folklore of Constancio Bernaldo de Quirós (1873-1959), who, in a panegyric of the national cultural panorama that would delight tourists, fans of *kitsch* and supporters of ethnic determinism, equated bandits - specifically Andalusian bandits - with good chaps and bullfighters (Bernaldo de Quirós, 1912; García Benítez, 2008). These arguments would probably make perfect sense for historiographical reflection in the early 20th century, but they are unacceptable, as hackneyed and biased, from a present-day perspective as far removed as possible from *psychological* vagaries, while at the same time tending towards the formal analysis of concrete facts and data. The obvious manifestation of nineteenth-century banditry, which saw a temporary boom in Andalusia at the same time as it declined in the rest of the Iberian Peninsula, had its raison d'être in a panorama marked by latifundism, despotism, the proliferation of a dispossessed agricultural proletariat caste, a peculiar orography and even a declared connivance between the bandits and the local public authorities that favoured a peculiar *status quo* (García Casero, 1979[4]).

"[...] caciques, mayors, municipal judges, watchmen and rural guards turned a blind eye to the phenomenon of banditry. Bandits were not always poor men who rebelled against the rich, nor were they men with the unsatisfied instincts of a

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[4] Reprint of the classic text of the same name, originally published in Almería in 1908. García Casero (n.d.), a career military officer who later joined the Guardia Civil and was stationed in Estepa (Seville), was familiar with and often denounced the close links between the bandits and the local authorities in various media.

capitalist. Bandoleros are somewhat more complex. In Andalusia, we can see the decline of banditry in the 19th century as we move away from the two countryside areas of Cordoba and Seville, towards the Sub-Baetic mountains between the former kingdoms of Jaén and Granada, and towards the massifs of the Penibaetic System, where the large estates give way and are broken down in the face of different geological and geographical conditions. Faced with social latifundism, in Andalusia in the 19th century, the great masses of the agricultural proletariat appeared, almost totally uprooted, dispossessed of land, suffering hunger and injustice that drove souls of a certain mettle to rebellion" (García Benítez, 2008: 14).

It is worth noting that, however it was approached, the problem was not only endemic because of its popular roots, but also very difficult to address because of its close affinity with the existing power structures. Remember what we have already said about the ancestral links between bandits, men-at-arms and lords in the Catalan context. This meant that in many locations ravaged by banditry, in whatever form, it was literature rather than history, criminology or sociology that dealt with the issue, thus consolidating currents of public opinion that were in favour of the "criminal", even before their persecution became a decisive event. The extolling of the Andalusian bandit is not, therefore, a phenomenon that could be described as "novel". There are, for example, publications dating from the 18th century that tell of the adventures of the bandits of the Montes de Toledo, as well as plays and romances from the beginning of the 19th century about these same criminals that praise and extol their virtues (Urda Lozano, 2014).

This means that when the Guardia Civil is confronted with the problem, it is confronted with a tainted and adverse scenario. Because not only must they fight a type of criminal, but also against a deeply rooted state of opinion and even against a *modus vivendi* that would require decisive action not only from the police, but also from political attitudes committed to socio-economic progress - such as that of the former governor of Córdoba, Julián Antero de Zugasti y Sáenz (1836-1915) - and the mass implementation of new technical advances, such as the railway, the telegraph and the telephone (Garramiola Prieto, 1999). Indeed,

"as El Vivillo said: 'We have been killed by the wire', i.e. the telegraph and the telephone. Banditry also disappeared with the development of the railways, new means of communication, the repressive efficiency of the modern state and the positive evolution of social conditions. The bandit, at the beginning of the 20th century, deprived of his romantic and revolutionary projection, lost the popular reputation of defender of the poor and the oppressed. Their gangs were thus reduced to simple criminal associations (García Benítez, 2008: 15).

3. FROM BANDITRY TO NARCOCULTURE

However, despite the reduction of banditry to mere criminal associations, which led to their inevitable extinction, it is not uncommon that in countless Hispanic socio-cultural contexts the rascal, the racketeer, the rogue, the corrupt, the petty thief, the narco, the smuggler, enjoy a certain degree, depending on the case, of indifference, approval and/or support. They are almost automatically associated with the fatalistic legend of "that's the way we are" and "that's the way things are", or the anti-system predicament of the "justified bad guy", the "not-so-bad guy", the one who "turns the tables", the one who

"seizes the opportunity", the one who "gets away with it" or the one who "steals from the thief". It could even be argued, by way of justification, that in "Spanish culture" - and by extension in "Latin culture" - there is a powerful individualism that generates a predisposition towards these dubious attitudes and ways of earning a living, but this would only be a repetition of the poor folkloric, short, psychologist-like, vague and unprovable argument that Bernaldo de Quirós used more than a century ago. The problem goes far deeper and is strongly rooted in a past of deep needs, extreme misgovernment, clear inaction and opportunistic collusion.

In his popular - and controversial - book, journalist Nacho Carretero begins by telling the amusing story of the man who crossed the border between Galicia and Portugal on his bicycle every day with a sack of coal on his shoulder. The guy - also the sack - was scrupulously searched by the guards on both sides, but they never found any contraband on him, so they had to release him even though they suspected the old man of being a dirty trickster. He was never arrested. But the truth is that he smuggled bicycles (Carretero, 2015). The journalist explains that this story is told amidst wine, jokes and truth. The story of the mouse that beats the lion is always evocative and, moreover, reveals a state of opinion that takes the form of an ethic of resistance: a *modus vivendi* so old and ingrained in the collective mentality that it provokes general hilarity, but which also, inadvertently, gives shape to a terrible state of affairs that ends up being normalised:

"Hundreds of residents and families engaged in smuggling during the post-war period, using boats, unloading and weaving a network of land transport for subsequent distribution [...]. It was these original smugglers who set up a whole infrastructure and a culture of smuggling that eventually became a showcase for competition when Latin American cartels sought a gateway to bring drugs into Europe" (Carretero, 2015: 29).

It would be simplistic, and probably useless, to equate the banditry of the past with the present of the emerging narcoculture that is attempting to establish itself in some Spanish territories, such as the Campo de Gibraltar (Figure 8), but it is not so banal, nor would such an exercise make sense. Starting with the fact that even the use of the very concept of "narcoculture" or "narco-aesthetics", which is often used rather loosely in some media, needs to be qualified. It is not a question of affirming here that the customs and habits of a minority population in these areas - such as La Línea de la Concepción and other areas in the province of Cádiz, such as Barbate, or Sanlúcar de Barrameda, at the mouth of the Guadalquivir river - are comparable in criminal dimension, or in socio-cultural and political impact, to those of the genuine Latin American narcocultures. It would be an exaggerated scaremongering, as well as an unjustified magnification of the problem. On the contrary, what we are talking about here is the installation and gradual emergence in certain geographical areas of Spain of this way of life consisting of assuming and integrating into the routines of daily life practices and particularities that acquire meaning in relation to the activities of the narco. It should be clarified, and this is possibly the key element of the analysis, that it is not necessary to be a drug trafficker or to be involved in the drug trafficking business in order to practice narcoculture,

"... 'narco' as a compositional element has been commonly used to refer to the relations between different fields of society with drug trafficking and its socio-cultural derivations. They talk about the narco-economy, narco-society, narco-state [sic], narco-terrorism, narco-politics, among others. In the case of narcoculture or

narco-aesthetics, they seem to be more than simply linguistic compositions that associate narco with conventional forms of manifestation of culture, but have now acquired a categorical force of their own whose references and discussions make them polysemous notions with a broad spectrum, something like conceptual platforms built to analyse a phenomenon that has emerged with the arrival of drug trafficking in Latin American countries, mainly Colombia and Mexico, and which manifests itself in a particular way" (Correa Ortiz, 2022: 186).

In the opinion of some specialists, narcoculture, whatever its extent and impact, is based on the general thesis, somewhat vague but no less suggestive, that anything goes to escape from poverty, and its exercise is an attractive staging and public acceptance of this theory (Rincón, 2013). If this is so, then the aim of this paper is clear, since it is to show that the legitimisation mechanisms that the nineteenth-century bandits could find to generate a particular "aesthetic of combat" that gave them economic, socio-political and cultural support are not entirely dissimilar to those used by the mafia, drug traffickers, smugglers and criminal association employees to publicly justify their way of life. The fundamental difference between the ethics of banditry and the ethics of illicit association lies in the fact that, while the former is constructed from a subsistence context whose scope is limited precisely by its origin - local, close, closed -, the latter emerges from an industrial-capitalist and hyper-technical criminal sphere, whose scope - global, distant, open - even flirts with the central structures of power. Consequently, the legitimising strategy of both is equivalent, but they differ in terms of their scope and potential, as narcoculture, operetta romanticisms aside, has the capacity to generate the form of a genuine worldview that goes far beyond the personal circumstances of its protagonists in the individuals who embrace it (Villatoro, 2012). A worldview which, precisely because it makes use of the same resources that also serve - or could serve - its persecutors, cannot be defeated by them alone. Thus, to paraphrase *El Vivillo*'s words very graphically: drug trafficking and narcoculture can no longer be "killed by wire".

Figure 8. Promo for the documentary miniseries *La Línea*. Shadow of Narco, directed by Pepe Mora and distributed by Netflix (2020).

Certainly, this problem penetrates any host society through necessity. Firstly, the activity of traffickers and smugglers germinates coherently and naturally through the lack of opportunities, endemic neglect, poor education, unmet basic needs, marginalisation and, in short, it serves as a facilitator of means of survival for depressed local populations that tend to integrate these activities as a way of life, for better or for worse, to the point

that they begin to manifest themselves in a veiled way to some extent in all social practices (Simonett, 2004). However, once the basic structures of the business are consolidated and the contexts are stabilised, the game of identities, sides, ideologies and pretexts must begin which, beyond the specific consolidation of the business, will allow it to survive in the long term, something that can only be achieved through inculturation: making a living from these illegal activities will no longer be just a question of money, but also of hope, of a way of life, of a *way of being*. In other words, drug trafficking not only becomes part of society, but also transforms it insofar as all the elements of the business meet, connect and end up forming links that penetrate the socio-cultural structure itself, so that countless events begin to function by, for and around drug trafficking (Villatoro, 2012).

> "We should start asking ourselves what percentage of the rate of unemployment are actually due to drugs, i.e. how many workers voluntarily bypass the labour market to engage in an illegal business that gives huge profits, free time, little workload in exchange for the risk of a prison sentence that, in the case of hashish, rarely exceeds four years. Let us not believe that the drug trafficker has no other way of life and that, on the brink of death and anguished at not being able to feed his family, he turns to crime. Let's not allow him this social justification because it is false. The narc does it because it is easy and because real work is difficult, it is generally poorly paid, it consumes a good part of one's life and, in addition, it requires the continuous effort of training" (Marqués Perales, cit. in Fenoy, 2022: 237).

The cartels, by mere praxis, are well aware that narco-culture has to be fundamentally rural at its base in order to become properly established. It is precisely in these rural, small contexts, where there is a greater degree of economic and political disinterest and neglect, as well as a construction of identities based more on neighbourliness, loyalty, religion and family than on intangibles such as "democracy" and "institutions", that provide opportunities for their penetration and establishment. Because the benefits, progress and goods of urban life are also desired in the village, but they are impossible without a neo-capitalist restructuring of existence that makes it possible to finance them. And this especially affects young people in a modern, global, digitised society - the world of *Tik-Tok* in which it is now completely impossible to isolate people and their interests in their particular contexts. In fact, and through this "resuscitation" mechanism of traditionally depressed environments, narcoculture gives rise to the subjective internalisation of ideologies and social representations that manifest themselves in the form of stereotyped behaviours: generalised attitudes that take the form of beliefs, values and thoughts; and, finally, objectified behavioural - and even material - forms or realisations of all of these that have a multiform appearance. A specific jargon, gestures, habits, dress, articles of consumption and status, and communicative products of their own, such as certain forms of musical (Córdova, 2011).

All these events are renowned in relation to Colombian and Mexican narcocultures (cartels, maras, etc.), where the problems are endemic and have therefore been extensively studied (Figure 9) (Correa Ortiz, 2022). On the contrary, these issues are scarcely observable - or are considered "one-off" incidents - in the Spanish context, where, because they are isolated, emerging issues, they still cause a certain perplexity among analysts who are very familiar with the sociological and criminogenetic events of the so-called First World, but seem to have more difficulty in gauging the weight of anthropological and cultural events on this type of phenomena. This explains, perhaps,

the minority attitude of the young people who filmed and cheered the attack on the Guardia Civil boat which, despite being an apparently anecdotal event, collateral to the event itself, was particularly newsworthy in the media. Consequently, banditry and narcoculture may have their origins in the same sources and are therefore similar in their forms of justification, but they do not make use of the same mechanisms, nor do they pursue the same objectives, nor do they have the same power and scope. In a global context, therefore, it seems to make less and less sense to be tempted to engage in local analysis.

Figure 9. Poster for the US feature-length documentary *Narco Cultura*, about Mexico's explosive narco culture, directed by Shaul Schwarz in 2012.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Once the game of distant analogies that has been played has made it possible to typify, or at least to detect the intimate form of the problem, the question of how to approach it inevitably arises. And the strategy of direct confrontation does not seem to be the only option, as this places the State Security Authorities and Bodies in an oppositional, coercive, restrictive and pre-war dynamic, which is precisely the worst way to deal with socio-cultural crises. This is not to say that these criminal activities should be allowed to go unchallenged, but rather that, in addition to police action and adequate staffing and resources, other parallel actions are needed to enable a multi-faceted approach to a problem that is neither simple nor linear. Just as the Benemérita never wanted to talk about "bandoleros" in its beginnings, because this denomination could inadvertently serve as a feedback element for the pretexts justifying the delinquent (Figure 10), as well as placing it in the inevitable role of the "bad guy", it is quite possible that the first step to take has to do with understanding the underlying socio-cultural problems that underlie the issue. An issue that necessarily involves actively changing the discourses and approaches to it. It should not be forgotten that, in today's world, all political and social action is also, as Jürgen Habermas (b. 1929) established, a communicative action (Garrido Vergara, 2011).

There is a serious fundamental error, therefore, in the idea that legitimate and honest society tends to "naturally" reject the message of crime when it manages to permeate socio-cultural and artistic practices, either because it is attractive, amusing or simply entertaining. The genuine identity of narcoculture lies not only in the lower classes

who "live" in it, but also in the appropriation of its discourses by the cultural, economic, journalistic and artistic elites who make it an appropriate object for creation and/or reflection. In contrast to the old survivalist model of banditry, the narco sells paradise: it is the search for immediate pleasure, get-rich-quick and prosperity, adventurous risk and also, why not say it, a certain expression of post-modernity (Correa Ortiz, 2022).

Figure 10. Close-up of the work *Cambio de parejas de la Guardia Civil (* 1874) by Luis Franco y Salinas, which illustrates the roles of the Guardia Civil in driving prisoners and identifying people on the roads in the early years of its foundation (Museo del Prado).

While thousands of residents are demonstrating "for dignity" and "in favour of the Guardia Civil" (Nachett, 2024), expressing the mistreatment they suffer from the media and denouncing the systematic neglect of the public authorities, others - a minority, although not without a voice - have complained about what they consider "repeated police brutality" bordering on a "state of exception"*(La Voz*, 2019). It is just one simple example - and not an isolated one, as many more could be found - that illustrates a point: on this issue, divided opinions on the street are the norm. This play of manifestations and counter-manifestations that enter into a singular paradox is, in reality, the effect of the internal contradictions that these cultural conflicts - traditionalism versus modernity - provoke in the daily lives of small communities in which, moreover, almost everyone knows everyone else. What is most interesting is that these protests mistakenly define themselves as "non-political" when that is precisely what they are, as social actions arising from ongoing conflicts that seek to influence several areas of political activity or, at the very least, to draw the attention of the authority in power (Lutz, 2010).

It should also be considered that the real and perceived crime figures rarely coincide, and that diffuse effects such as the "black figure" and the "grey figure" mean that the objective estimation of the problem in a given context is often very complex. Furthermore, objective and subjective considerations of criminality do not affect all criminal typologies equally, due to events such as the differential social tolerance and normalisation to which they are subjected (Zúñiga Rodríguez, 2021). This is obvious when it comes to criminal ecosystems such as the one created by the emergence of narco-cultures, which have enormous capacity to colonise:

"[…] criminal groups [once they have established their basic business conglomerate] tend to develop clientelistic networks that allow them to take over

certain sectors of the legal economy. Among other things, when their businesses are successful, criminal groups need to channel their profits into the flow of the legal economy in order to make use of them by laundering money. There are groups specialised in this activity, and there are sectors in the formal economy with low regulatory intensity that are particularly suited to this task. The sectors with the highest penetration are hospitality and tourism, real estate and certain activities within the financial sector" (Noguera Gracia, 2018: 11).

It is more interesting to understand that the peculiar struggle between the "good" and "bad" guys, than between perceptions, which in times of bandits and romanticisms was merely a question of class and property - rich and poor; landowners and labourers; possessors and dispossessed - and which forced a simple taking of sides, as it confronted sides with perfectly delineated boundaries, is now an inter-class and trans-generational phenomenon. A conglomerate of theses and beliefs that questions everything and everyone, that pits neighbours - and even families - against each other and that threatens the very foundations of the system and of coexistence, because, beyond the unequal distribution of wealth, political neglect, lack of resources and social injustice, it takes root in cultural worldviews, from which it thrives, grows and expands. Let us now establish a clarifying comparison between the Andalusia of nineteenth-century banditry,

"[…] the new structures had become more firmly established in Andalusia than in the rest of Spain. The landed oligarchies and the bourgeoisie, which in Barquero's time were forming in the south, supported the liberal constitutional regime with the firm determination to dominate it, thus controlling political power as well as economic power. Power relations are thus established between two groups, "rich" and "poor". Among the former are the aforementioned groups and among the latter are the small peasants, day labourers, artisans and, in general, the incipient rural and urban proletariat" (García Benítez, 2018: 630).

... And the Andalusia of the emerging narcoculture of Campo de Gibraltar,

"It is important to note that in the midst of this context of unemployment and inequality, etc., the work of the smuggler and the work derived from smuggling is no longer a deviant behaviour in this area, it is not a labelling, there has been a process of normalisation, [...] because we are in a contemporary social organisation, which is increasingly individualised as a result of a society influenced by the prevailing neoliberalism, freedom, consumerism, materialism, selfishness, egocentrism, more sporadic and self-interested relationships. The process of normalization of smuggling and indirect work in the area has been carried out by various social institutions, first and foremost by the family: culture, ideas, neutral or positive values about smuggling motivated by the impunity with which they have operated for years in the area, even because there are always direct family members, indirect, acquaintances who are engaged in smuggling and its derivatives, as well as peer groups that are groups of friends, in which the materialistic and capitalist vision in which we live, where money is the most important thing to obtain almost everything, as well as power and authority, smuggling being a way to earn money without much effort, without much effort, they see as a future this way of life, as well as media: social networks, YouTube videos, in which market values have been transmitted that promote corporate class economic elites, where musicians show the wealth of smugglers with a high status, series about smugglers that show a way to

become rich, and to have the power, authority and trappings of a high social class. Many young people tend to mythologise the smuggler" (Vázquez Lozano, 2022: 11-12).

With the diagnosis made, the treatment to be applied must be clarified: if in the case of banditry it is a coherent political response, unified, determined and strategically delineated which will lead inevitably to the end of the activity of the bandit, this response, in itself, does not appear to be sufficiently useful to address the problem of narcoculture. The bandit was a mythologised but isolated character, who embodied certain popular values that many expressed, but that only very few dared to put into action. He was also a criminal trapped in a confined space-time which, with the evolution of psychosocial, economic and technological progress, inevitably entered a twilight decadence. This is not the case, however, with contemporary drug trafficking which, beyond the excuse of the "good outlaw", feeds on the same mechanisms, at all levels, that mobilise the honest society in which it penetrates, germinates and thrives. In such a context, police response alone (Figure 11), no matter how many means are made available to the agents, far removed from the scenario of systemic interactions in which the problem unfolds, are doomed to failure, as they will only affect one of the flanks of the issue. It would be beneficial if the public administrations, usually lost in unnecessary political confrontations and spurious partisan interests that lead nowhere, as well as the actors in the private sector, whose collaboration is now essential for the development and improvement of the socio-cultural contexts in which they operate, could understood this.

Figure 11. Archive image of a pursuit by agents of the Maritime Service of the Algeciras Command (EFE/Guardia Civil).

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