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978-0-521-55251-6 - Credibility in Court: Communicative Practices in the
Camorra Trials

Marco Jacquemet

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The Camorra criminal trials, held in Naples, involved more than a thousand people charged with belonging to a criminal organization, the Nuova Camorra Organizzata (NCO). In the winter of 1982–3 the NCO suffered the desertion of some of its key men who, once arrested, broke the code of silence (*omertà*), turned against their former associates and collaborated with the Justice Department. In the initial set of trials their testimony was found sufficiently reliable and convincing to determine the convictions of more than 800 defendants, but in the appeal their credibility was destroyed and the majority of people convicted solely on these witnesses' testimony were acquitted.

This study documents the shifting relationship between these witnesses – called *pentiti* – and the Justice Department. To investigate this dramatic reversal of the defendants' convictions, Marco Jacquemet combines analysis of talk and power technologies with a reflection on truth and credibility as communicative representations.

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Communicative practices in the Camorra trials

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For Giancarlo Siani
(1959–1985)

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We preserve and acquire not only so much truth but also so much
ignorance and error, as is appropriate for our practical activities.

George Simmel

There in this land no one is deemed absurd but who should speak the
truth. All defenseless he stands before the sneering, grinning herd,
which holds a sense of honor senseless.

Karl Kraus

Terra di baci d'onore e non d'amore

Land of kisses of honor, not love

Gabriella De Fina

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Acknowledgments

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