

organizations themselves. There are good reasons for this. Mostly importantly, the Mafias need an ideological glue to hold them together, and we should not be surprised if they steal it from the legal world around them.

For example, when the Camorra was an Honoured Society, it used to believe that it was founded on the basis of a Spanish secret society called the *Guarduña*, which supposedly dated back to fifteenth-century Spain, but which actually made its first appearance in a historical novel in 1847, when the Camorra was emerging from the prison system. So that story has clearly been taken in and used by an organization that wants to pretend that it has ancient roots. The same is true of the Sicilian Mafia, with the *Beati Paoli*, the sect of medieval avengers to which Mafiosi like Totò Riina and Tommaso Buscetta traced back *Cosa Nostra's* origins.

Moreover, there existed a huge fashion in 1890s Naples for plays about the Camorra in the Teatro San Ferdinando, right in the heart of what is now Forcella, the most notorious quarter in the city for camorra influence. The police reports of the time say that the audience was absolutely full of Camorristi. So, they watched themselves on stage. Obviously, another famous case is *The Godfather*. We know that the film was partly funded by the Franklin Bank, which was laundering mafia drug money. Also, famously, the Mafia prevented Coppola from using the word 'mafia' in the film. As this roundtable on Italy's other Mafias attests, we see a similar pattern at work in mafia cinema at large: life imitating art, imitating life.

*University College London, UK*

## 2. ROMANZO CRIMINALE: ROMA CAPUT VIOLANDI

Allison Cooper

Traditionally, mafia movies have been set in the South, the territory of well-known criminal organizations like *Cosa Nostra*, the Camorra, and the 'Ndrangheta. This has changed recently with films such as Paolo Sorrentino's *Le conseguenze dell'amore* (2004) and Cupellini's *Una vita tranquilla* that have emphasized the global reach of criminal organizations through their settings in Northern Italy and beyond.<sup>7</sup> Placido's *Romanzo criminale* recounts the story of Rome's Banda della Magliana, combining aspects of two popular film genres, the mafia movie and terrorist film, to explore the collusion of organized crime and the state in the *anni di piombo*. The film's hybridization of genres underscores the violent historical union in Italy between mafia families and state, which together formed a redoubled hegemonic system that interpellated or, when expedient, eliminated its subjects. In this presentation I examine the symbolic uses of Rome in *Romanzo criminale*, in particular allusions to the city's imperial past, and demonstrate how they function to expose a modern authoritarian state that absorbs all who would harm it, Mafia included.<sup>8</sup>

Historical events dictate *Romanzo criminale's* uncommon Roman setting (the city was, after all, the territory of the Banda), but *Romanzo criminale* may also be understood as an attempt to reanimate Rome and imbue it with political and social relevance for twenty-first century filmgoers. Emphasizing the marketability of Italy's tainted heritage, Alan O'Leary observes in his analysis of 1970s

*poliziotteschi* that 'the metropolis envy which identifies the Italian urbs with the very exemplum of modernity, the American city, presents the degradation, criminality and political terrorism of contemporary Italy as essential to its vitality'.<sup>9</sup> As Catherine O'Rawe notes in her contribution to this roundtable on the *Romanzo criminale* series for television, the Roman setting may also be understood as an idealized re-evocation of a place and time associated (however erroneously) with ideological certainties and unambiguous social and political stances missed by many twenty-first-century Italians.

As capital of the Italian state and, traditionally, *caput mundi*, Rome's violence and corruption metonymically stand for the corruption of the country as a whole. *Romanzo criminale* transforms Rome from *caput mundi* into *caput violandi*, a modern capital of violence, by making provocative connections between the city's imperial past and its narrative present. An early example of this occurs in the opening title sequence, which identifies the Banda with a long line of Rome's would-be conquerors: 'A metà degli anni '70 una banda di delinquenti partì dalle periferie per conquistare Roma'. This language of conquest is made more explicit later in the film, when the liberation of Libano, the gang's leader, from prison causes his fellow gang member Dandi to declare enthusiastically, 'Roma! Ce la sfondiamo!'. There is an ironic gap between the gang members' audacious vision of themselves as successors to a long line of Rome's conquerors, and their subsumption by the state as they become instruments of its strategy to consolidate its own power. This irony is made clear when Libano is betrayed and stabbed to death by a fellow gang member, Gemito, in a *vespasiano* in Piazza Santa Maria in Trastevere.<sup>10</sup> Gemito's betrayal of Libano recalls, of course, one of Rome's most famous betrayals, that of the Senate against Caesar, but Placido's setting of the gang leader's murder in a considerably less exalted setting than the Theatre of Pompey ironizes Libano's ambitions to rule Rome, calling attention to the ignoble, transitory nature of his power and to the instrumental relationship between the Mafia and the state.<sup>11</sup>

In contrast, Placido highlights the enduring power of Italy's elite ruling class through the film's frequent establishing shots of the city's skyline, which focus on the complex of Trajan's Market and the Torre delle Milizie. These shots introduce scenes with the film's nameless agent of the state, visually linking him to the imperious and callous rulers historically associated with the imposing monolith.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Placido uses the Vittoriano, a monument that looms large in the Roman skyline and popular imagination, to suggest the monolithic and panoptic nature of the state. Commissioned in the late nineteenth century to honour Italy's founding father, Vittorio Emanuele II, the monument also served to confirm the legitimacy of the modern Italian state and of Rome as its new capital. The aforementioned agent of the state, who indirectly involves the Banda in the kidnapping of Aldo Moro, commands his subordinate, Carenza, to abandon the search for the hideaway in which Moro is being held in a scene that takes place just before the Brigade Rosse's announcement of his death. The shot following this scene is of the Vittoriano, with a sound bridge to the historical audio clip of the Brigade Rosse proclaiming Moro's death. The agent of the state appears to know Moro's fate, then, before it has been formally made public by his captors, and his seeming omniscience, combined with the imposing image of the Vittoriano, with its all-

encompassing perspective of the city, imply that the city and its citizens are under constant surveillance.

Via his proxy Carenza, the shadowy agent of the state colludes with the Banda to perpetuate and increase violence in Rome, and this relationship exemplifies the ways in which those in power use their enemies to destabilize opposition and strengthen their own position. *Romanzo criminale* performs this co-dependency of state and organized crime structurally, through its hybridization of the terrorist film and the mafia movie. The figure of Freddo, perhaps the film's most sympathetic character, is positioned at the nexus of this co-dependency, and as a result provides an interesting and unexpected commentary on its implications for the individual. The object of intense scrutiny in the film, Freddo is the subject of a panoptic state. His adult character is introduced by means of a high-angle shot that paradoxically suggests surveillance at the very moment of his liberation from prison. Editing in this scene suggests that the shot represents the point of view of Libano, who awaits his friend. Freddo's liberation from prison, then, is a false one as he steps directly from an existence rigidly observed and controlled by the state into one that will be similarly controlled and observed by his mafia family, as several later instances of him being observed by his fellow gang members demonstrate. The camera, like Libano, is complicit with the state. Placido's camerawork makes us complicit with the state as well, as the voyeuristic pleasure that we take in the presentation of Freddo, played by the attractive Kim Rossi Stuart, distracts us from the violence that his character and the Banda commit.

Freddo's lack of freedom as a subject of the state is impressed upon viewers when he is liberated from prison again in a parallel scene that occurs near the end of the film. This time, Freddo escapes confinement through an elaborate ruse that involves injecting himself with tainted blood that he knows will eventually kill him. The state builds immunity against those who would harm it — in this case, the Mafia — by incorporating them into its own body: Freddo's false 'immunization' symbolically mimics this process of control even as he attempts to resist it himself by choosing his own death.<sup>13</sup> Placido highlights the futility of his protagonist's attempt to escape late twentieth-century biopolitics when, at the film's conclusion, Freddo is denied even this act of resistance and is killed instead by a sniper, hired by the nameless agent of the state to protect himself and Italy's future leaders from the gang member's dangerous knowledge.

*Romanzo criminale* is marked by a combined repulsion for and attraction to state power. Through Freddo's narrative, Placido presents a critique of the state's repression of the individual, yet the state's control of an equivocal figure like Freddo is essential to the film's nostalgic evocation of the 1970s-style conspiracy thriller, a genre that Mary P. Wood has argued can 'be considered an attempt to impose order on a world which is perceived as difficult to understand, complex, mysterious, controlled by people who mask their control behind common-sense assumptions, coercion and ritual'.<sup>14</sup> Placido's recourse to Rome as a symbol of power and of those who abuse it reveals the film's inner tension, as well as the continuing relevance of social anxieties about living in a totalitarian state for twenty-first-century filmmakers and their audiences.

*Bowdoin College*