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# Viewing the Foundations: Italian institutions and mafia through short stories and film

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Viewing the Foundations:  
Italian institutions and mafia through short stories and film

by

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Advised by

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## Part 1: Introduction

The institution of the modern mafia has been years in the making. Drawing its origins from a response to brigandage on the island of Sicily, the Italian mafia can be traced as far back as the unification of Italy in 1861 and has no foreseeable end. People around the world have observed, marveled at, and often times replicated the mafia model birthed in Sicily. As Tobias Jones notes in his acclaimed book "The Dark Heart of Italy", Italians themselves are often more concerned with the notion of beauty and ease than with that of legality (Jones,2004,22). This ethic can be seen through historical relations to the mafia and how it operates in spite of the supposed 'war' against it.

Within Italian culture, the mafia is ubiquitous. It is hegemonic in nature in that it is openly present or implied throughout the society's most defining cultural staples without great objection. In "The Dark Heart of Italy" we see the mafia's ties to key political figures such as Silvio Berlusconi who ruled as prime minister for seventeen years even under suspicion of his corruption (Jones,2004,3). This man's implied involvement with the organization gives one a sense of the mafia's formidability. By way of one man and his reputation, the mafia is able to dissuade citizens from trusting the government and demonstrate their dominance over important aspects of Italian life such as soccer and television, which Berlusconi controlled. We again see the all-encompassing nature of the mafia in the film, *Gomorra*, as the mafia's infiltration of modern industries such as fashion and waste management is highlighted (Garrone). These infestations have come to be a way of life for the Italian people because of their frequency and permanence within the Italian power structure. This depiction of the Italian power structure as corrupt greatly benefits the function of the mafia by intricately aligning what is best for the average Italian citizen with what is best for the organization and perpetuating the idea that the

mafia lifestyle is the Italian lifestyle. Through films and short stories, it is possible to closer examine both the social structures which uphold the mafia and the motivations of those who attempt to combat it, and in doing so combat their own way of life.

I argue that the mafia's power fixation and methods of obtaining power stem from the social constructs of patriarchy and capitalism. These structures of power exist within many Western countries, however; the mafia uses Italian cultural mores to extend its power by inducing strict adherence to the norms associated with these constructs. These norms in turn provide structural guidelines for what the mafia is, who can be *mafiosi*, and how to maintain power over those who operate within these power structures. With this reasoning, I argue that the most famous anti-mafia workers were driven by their inability to fit into the patriarchal and capitalistic moulds and were forced to fight against the mafia in order to have their personhood recognized.

The trouble with examining the constructs of patriarchy and capitalism within the mafia is that Italian culture, and therefore the anti-mafia media and rhetoric produced by it, is based upon the same constructs. Therefore, while short stories and films give us vivid accounts of instances involving the mafia, the ways in which the protagonists and the mafia are portrayed, especially through film, reveals more about the *comportamento* (mindset) of the mafia within Italian culture than it does about the historical events. This implies that in order to adequately address the plague of the mafia within Italy, one must first recognize that the systems which uphold Italian culture are the same ones from which the mafia draws its strength. By encouraging Italians' disdain towards the central government, films and short stories empower the mafia and reinforce the idea that the mafia is the only way out even if it is ill advised. By relegating the roles of protagonists to already established patriarchal tropes, films and short stories reinforce

and uphold the mafia's assertion of who is capable of holding power. By portraying the mafia as lucrative and enticing, films and short stories propagate the mafia's appeal and promote the value placed on wealth within the capitalist mindset. All of these instances exemplify the connection between mafia values and Italian values at large and demonstrate the conundrum that Italian anti-mafia workers face. Even when brazenly attempting to combat the mafia, the capitalist and patriarchal power structures underlying both mafia culture and Italian culture are supported, therefore undermining the anti-mafia rhetoric. The problem is how a united Italy, birthed under the influence of *Cosa Nostra*, will fully capable of a post mafia existence.

## Part 2: The Pillar of the Patriarchy

Patriarchy is defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary as “social organization marked by the supremacy of the father in the clan or family, the legal dependence of wives and children, and the reckoning of descent and inheritance in the male line; *broadly*: control by men of a disproportionately large share of power”(patriarchy). While we see this definition enacted within the Italian cultural structure and the structure of the mafia, via the limitations imposed on women within the mafia context and the chain of command within non-mafia affiliated Italian families, it is important to broaden our definition using feminist theory in order to adequately gauge the hegemonic effect on both how the patriarchy maintains control within the mafia and how it ultimately protects the mafia from further criticism when used to delegitimize women or the women-like characteristics of those who combat it. Therefore, for the purposes of my argument I will utilize the following definition: “patriarchy as an unjust social system that enforces gender roles and is oppressive to both men and women. It often includes any social mechanism that evokes male dominance over women. Feminist theory typically characterizes patriarchy as a

social construction, which can be overcome by revealing and critically analyzing its manifestations" (Richards,2013,143; Tickner,2001,1197). In this way, I expand the scope of my examination by including the motivations felt by men when operating within the structure of patriarchy and the consequences of challenging it. With this definition it is also possible to recognize the importance of critical analysis concerning not only the function of the mafia, but how it is portrayed.

As Dana Renga repeatedly states in her analysis of the Italian national trauma through film and the position of the woman, the mafia is often depicted and referred to as the *mammasantissima* or "holyholymother" while the state is seen to represent the Father (Renga,2013,153). This gendered dichotomy allows the mafia and the state to establish a clear opposition between systems that are, ironically, both patriarchal in nature. Mafias, specifically those of Cosa Nostra and 'Ndrangheta even utilize a male only "brotherhood" structure in which women have little to no active role.

Here I argue that the idea of the *mammasantissima* allows the mafia to silence women further by replacing their role within the traditional family structure (comforter, provider, adviser) with the organization. This allows the mafia to then fully influence its male members as it begins to sublimate every member of the family. In practice the *mammasantissima* becomes the mother figure, an older man within the organization acts a surrogate for the biological father, and by joining the mafia the young male gains a "brotherhood" in which he can affirm his identity. Using these tactics the mafia erases the need for family, therefore erasing the need for any women roles within one, and replaces this need with an undeniable need for the Mafia Family

Most notably, Garrone depicts this process on screen through the film *Gomorra*. This film is a conglomeration of five different plot lines in relation to the Neapolitan mafia the Camorra. Maria, the only woman figure in the movie with significant screen time, is featured in two separate plot lines and signifies the only existing tie between plots other than the organization of the Camorra. Maria joins the story of Don Ciro, an older mafioso who is revealed to live by the codes of honor reminiscent of the earlier days of the organization, when he delivers her a monthly stipend to sustain her as her husband is currently in jail, having worked as a Cammorista. It is revealed that Maria is both client and friend to Don Ciro as they have the same understanding of how the organization works and Maria's husband was likely inducted into the "brotherhood" during the same period as Don Ciro. The second plot line Maria enters is that of Totò. Totò is a young mafioso that views Maria as a mother figure. Totò defected from the local clan to become a *scissionista*, effectively cutting off Maria's source of income through the local clan and rendering both his and Maria's protected status unviable. Don Ciro's clan must then decide how to deal with this betrayal, as it is a part of the mafia women's duty to indoctrinate her children within the current system. Here we see the rapidly changing mores of the Camorra as the older generation adamantly denies the option of harming Maria with the simple statement "We don't touch women" (Gomorra). This is held in stark contrast with the actions of the *scissionisti* as they demand that Totò kills Maria in order to prove his loyalty to the ultimate mother. Here Maria exemplifies the conundrum of the mafia woman. Though she has faithfully kept *omertà* and fulfilled her duties as a mafia woman, her fate is still subject to the actions and decisions made by the male figures around her. This lays bare the fact that removes what little power women are given within this system and can be taken away by men.

However, one should not conflate the absence of power for women with the absence of importance. Traditionally, women fulfill several vital roles within the organization, principally in regards to child rearing, the indoctrination of *omertà* (silence before the law), the position of a collaborator with denial plausibility, and a way in which to strengthen ties between clans or *cosche* through marriage or feminine friendship. Renga argues that there are four themes concerning mafia wives in particular. These include: “substantial endogamy or in-marriage among Mafia related households, bequeathing to each Mafia woman a dense web of relations that support but also evaluate and criticize her and her family’s behaviors; married men’s somewhat adolescent and at times homoerotic spheres of play outside the home in which absent wives are denigrated; wives’ substantial contributions to and rewards from the enterprises of organized crime; and the heavy psychological and cultural burden for wives of *omertà*” (Renga,2011,35). The significance of these functions of the mafia woman represents their centrality to the organization as a whole.

Within an organization so wholly founded on the patriarchal ideals of masculinity it is difficult for men to achieve certain goals without becoming seemingly feminine and therefore, lesser. In these instances we see either the use of the woman to bridge the lack of femininity within the man such as in case of Maria Occhipinti’s *The Carob Tree* (Pickering-Iazzi,2007,85) or the denigration of women to uphold one’s masculinity even when engaging in seemingly feminine or homoerotic acts. In the story of *The Carob Tree*, we see differences between the traditional male gender roles of Sicilian culture, are often shared by the Sicilian mafia, and those of the less stringent American mafia *La Mano Nera* (the Black Hand). Occhipinti begins the story by outlining the usual operations within a peasant neighborhood in Sicily. The mothers worked diligently at their home crafts such as weaving and embroidery while the fathers worked

the fields and the children played under the carob tree. When events happened the community engaged in them equally and everyone took equal interests in the joys and hardships of others. The tone of the story changes when a repatriated, supposed *mafioso* enters the small community and upsets the status quo. Though the man is widely criticized, we see the town's dynamics change in response to the example set by the "American". Ultimately, we see the effect of patriarchal standards on the neighborhood when Teresa, the young female whose perspective is highlighted in the latter half of the story, questions and hopes for the same affection shown by the *mafioso* to his family. However, adults within the neighborhood actively shame this type of public affection. The author writes that "in the peasant world, the father had to be respected and, most of all, feared, and therefore, relations were strict" (Pickering-Iazzi, 2007, 88). This reflects the value of stoicism and intimidation in order to gain power within the patriarchal structure of Sicily while commenting on the additional cultural differences across classes. I will mention this interlocking class divide later in my examination of capitalism within the mafia state.

One socialized in the American context could presuppose that due to the father's stated lack of intimacy with the children, the mother would step in to fulfill the role of the confidant and nurturer; however, as Occhipinti writes, this is not the case. The following excerpt exemplifies the strength of the patriarchal norms, which govern not only the actions of men, but those of women too, who in this way would not be seen as weak or disobedient: "The peasant women were strict, the mother was never a friend, and what woe if there were differences between their ideas and tastes. The mother wielded threats, and the daughter could not confide the secret that she was engaged on the sly, or there would have been a thrashing the father would have killed her. Children feared their parents like a thief fears the law. The mother, so as not to disobey her husband and not lose peace in the family, was the harshest tyrant of all over the

daughter”(Pickering-Iazzi,2007,89). This cultural lack of intimacy further exemplifies the woman’s lack of power. The definition of power according to philosopher Max Weber is “the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance...” (Allen,2016,1). Therefore we see that adult women within the Sicilian culture only have power over their female offspring in concordance with the will of the father and that the female offspring are left with no power at all.

Viewing Teresa as an archetype of female children within Sicilian culture we see the desire for an “affectionate father” and a “loving mother”. This is denied to them because within the patriarchal structure female offspring are at the absolute bottom of the power structure. Within this story we see this lack of power and need for familial attention transform into an admiration for the actions and lifestyle of the mafiosi imbuing the mafia with even greater power over those whom it subjugates. Teresa’s description of the *mafioso* as a “wonderful symbol” indicates her search for significance within the greater Italian context and, ironically, uses the mafia's similar patriarchal structure against herself. This can be construed as Occhipinti’s commentary on the trend of Sicilian or otherwise disadvantaged women within a patriarchal culture romanticizing the life of the mafia woman without first performing a thorough examination of what it entails. By viewing the incomplete picture of the mafia lifestyle in which *mafiosi* present themselves as “men of honor” and “family men” women without power can be tricked into idolizing the mafia culture, ultimately perpetuating the prevalence of the mafia by marrying into the system in hopes of finding a position of greater power. However, what women and girls like Teresa fail to realize is that in choosing the mafia over their extant culture they enter an equally oppressive patriarchal system that appears more appealing, but in reality adds

the element of danger and abandonment through death or prison to the list of the stresses placed on the woman.

The most important of Renga's themes in regards to women's roles within the mafia and how these roles are used for their disempowerment is that of the "psychological and cultural burden...of *omertà*"(Renga,2011,35). *Omertà*, also known as the social more that enforces silence in the face of the law and a general attitude of secrecy among its members, even amongst the family, is one of the key instruments in silencing women. Due to the "cult of vendetta" within mafia culture and the power that can be gained from wholly understanding the inner workings of an organization, *omertà* is one of the most important aspects of the mafia *comportamento* (mindset). The importance of *omertà* can be seen in how the ideal infiltrates the mindsets and behaviors of those tangential to, but not directly engaged in the mafia. The knowledge that one of the mafia's core principles is vengeance upon those who harm both the organization and its members has strongly influenced how the people within neighborhoods of mafia strongholds conduct their daily lives. It is effective in not only preventing the coordination with police, but also the coordination within the community in which the ethic becomes that of "see no evil, speak no evil". For a community this phenomenon is corrosive, but for those directly engaged in mafia relations the pressure to remain silent is even higher and prevents the formation of true relationships due to the necessary amount of censorship between friends. This effect disproportionately affects women as it cripples their ability to process both their own traumatic situations and disallows them the comfort of a support group experiencing similar stresses. As Lynda Milito's book *Mafia Wife* states, "men of the Mafia are constantly gossiping among themselves about 'real issues'... women's gossip - moral talk, talk evaluating others - is inhibited by the fact that they know things they are not supposed to know, and are in the dark

about things they should know (Renga,2011,44) The result of this, as Milito alludes to in her text, is that women within the context of the mafia are rendered incapable of forming relationships outside of their nuclear families while men bolster their support system by benefitting from the addition of the Mafia Family in which men are wholly included. Therefore, the periphery position of the woman within the Family, not only disadvantages her in relation to men, but also harms the woman's ability to be socialized and warps the woman's idea of the norm, which in turn creates hegemony within the patriarchal system.

With this realization we begin to see how the mafia utilizes and depends upon the hegemony of patriarchy to uphold its system of power which imbues the men with the ability to not only control the daily operations and system's structure, but also how the system is perceived by everyone who observes it. Graziella Parati, in her book on Italian feminist theory, points to the "lack of a common myth to unite women" which makes "difference the most important and most crippling aspect of Italian feminism"(Parati,2002,39). Through enforcement of *omertà* among wives and daughters within the same *cosca*, the mafia reveals its patriarchal structure by limiting the flow of knowledge and kinship between women. Without the ability to engage in meaningful conversations about the realities of their lives, mafia women are left to imagine the circumstances of their counterparts in other homes. Luisa Muraro explains that the " crisis in [Italian] feminism is caused by their efforts to sustain patriarchal definitions of them. It is men, not women, who have decreed that all women are equal and alike... Women's fear of difference manifests itself through jealousy (*invidia*), a sentiment that prevents women from recognizing each other as sources of power and knowledge." (Parati,2002,39). Muraro offers another viable reason behind women's avoidance of conversation surrounding difference in the mafia. To break the script of the submissive wife and mother in order to talk about hardship within the home or to

criticize the operation of the *cosca* would require the mafia woman to risk becoming a symbol of difference and in so doing become a target of both jealousy and retribution. In this way the mafia makes it especially difficult for women to “recognize each other as sources of knowledge and power”, as any sign of insubordination is summarily silenced through ostracization or violence (Parati,2002,39). This act of force adds to the perception that breaking the mould of silence and submission is in the best interest of no one. Maria, in Garrone’s *Gomorra*, offers an example of a variance from the gendered norm, which threatens the established rituals of the *mammasantissima* by critiquing “blind obedience, ritualized murder, and clanship” (Renga,2013,120). Therefore she “becomes dangerous” by questioning the strict adherence to the pursuit of power and competition which are traditionally depicted as masculine values and remain at the core of many patriarchal structures including that of the Camorra. She then “must be contained” in order to prevent a rebellion that contradicts the narrative put forth by the dominant male power and that could trigger the circulation of values that are not perceived as masculine like compromise or mercy (Renga,2013,121 ).

This form of retribution, though, is not always used because in Maria Saladino’s testimony she relays a different outcome in the case of a woman defying the mafia of Camporeale, Sicily (Pickering-Iazzi,2007,138). The daughter of a retired mafioso, Saladino began as a school teacher who quickly recognized the poisonous effects the area’s two mafias were having on the local youth who were without many options other than joining the “business”. She then made it her mission to create institutes in the countryside to remove children from the violent influence of the mafia and other social ills and provide them with opportunities to study, work, and find other avenues of survival. The mafia stood in strict opposition to Saladino throughout her work, however; Saladino credits part of her survival and

success to her sex. In her testimony she states, “my mother always told me that the mafiosi didn’t kill me because I’m a woman” and “The women in this area are passive. They always bow their heads. When one of them rebels, like I did, the men are afraid, they’re taken by surprise. They end up confused and give in”(Pickering-Iazzi,2007,141). This evaluation of the common woman and apparent disregard for the appropriate behavior for her own sex is in line with Muraro’s further supposition that “women [as a whole] do not know how to deal with power and competition because we continue to believe that these are not feminine qualities” (Parati,2002,39). Saladino by upending the patriarchal norms in her life, disrupted the man’s ability to process reality and was able to gain power, not in spite of, but because of her sex. This deviance from the patriarchal mindset, that women within patriarchal systems usually internalize, is the true source of Saladino’s power, even if she does not name it. However, this recognition of the ability to disrupt the patriarchal system by identifying and rebelling against its repressive norms is central to deconstructing the system. The role of women and particularly mafia women such as Saladino, Rita Atria, and the fictional character of Maria in Gomorrah is paramount as Muraro asserts that “we cannot redefine ourselves...unless we establish a way for women to relate to other women” (Parati,2002,39). With this feminist mindset, the solitary acts of defiance, such as those of Rita Atria, which the current system praises and uplifts as exemplar, are in practice another tool of the patriarchy, and therefore the mafia. The divisionary results of such acts of martyrdom often break down relations between mafia women instead of building them up by forcing women still within the system to choose between their safety and their supposed solidarity with the martyr. In this instance, it is easier to outwardly condemn the martyr to confirm one’s adherence to the organization on which most mafia women are wholly dependent. An example is the case Rita Atria’s mother who disowned her daughter even after her

death and desecrated her grave in order to disassociate herself from the family shame and vengeance that would have accompanied her daughter's act. Muraro, instead, calls for the practice of *affidamento*, or loyalty, amongst women in order to overthrow the patriarchal state (Parati,2002,39). The position of Rita's mother further highlights the importance of *omertà* in subjugating women and upholding the patriarchal construct within the mafia.

Here I transition my analysis to examine how the greater Italian construct of patriarchy affects how women and non-traditional men are portrayed and erased on screen. I will tie how this misrepresentation and erasure bolster the power of the mafia by skewing the public's perception of whose lives are important in the cultural context and glossing over central issues facing those who oppose the mafia. Renate Siebert informs us that "mafia power is 'based on terror' and many surrender to the organization out of 'mortal anxiety'" (Renga,2013, *iii*). I argue that portrayals of the mafia in film serve to enforce this sense of terror in women by demonstrating the adverse effects of standing against the mafia or even being affiliated with those against the mafia as a woman, without allowing the audience to process the significance of women's fates. The most harmful aspect of films concerning the mafia, particularly those dedicated to the anti-mafia agenda, is as Kaplan points out, the reassurance of the viewer, "who leaves the cinema believing she is safe and that all is well in her world" (Renga,2013,*vii*). This leads even the best intentioned films that attempt to exemplify the lives of anti-mafia combatants to "suggest that the country is populated with male heroes ready to combat evil at all cost" which, however, forces the viewer into believing that the current societal structure is intrinsically fit to fight the mafia. Yet, this is not the case, because the Italian patriarchy reinforces the mafia's patriarchy in films that focus on women in or around the organization, but that sublimate their subversive potential into sentimental love stories (Renga,2013,*vii*). This sublimation

disempowers the Italian woman at large by intimating that women as a group are only as influential as their relationships with men allow them to be. By inserting imagined romantic subplots into the already complex stories of women around the mafia, the film industry's narrative suggest that women, even those who are bravely opposing a criminal organization, must strive to find meaning through patriarchal norms (i.e. relationships, motherhood, etc.) and cannot be complete persons without these constructs. Therefore, while the woman viewer may leave with bolstered anti-mafia sentiment, she has ultimately still been socialized to think that in order to be relevant she must be supported or otherwise assisted by a male.

The addition or exclusion of central plot points within films to put forth a collective patriarchal rendering of events can be seen through the “repression of the main protagonist's homosexuality” in films like *I cento passi* and through the seemingly random “rape, sacrifice and killing” of women in films such as *Placido Rizzotto*, *Gomorra*, and *La siciliana ribelle* (Renga, 2013, ix). This patriarchal rendering, which silences and stereotypes women and changes non-traditional men to fit into the cultural norms, gives power to the mafia by erasing or simplifying the reasons behind the protagonist's rebellion. I argue that in reality these rebellions were largely based on the character's inability to match central parts of their identity (such as homosexuality or the female aggression) to the accepted standards of gendered behavior of the mafia and Italian culture.

In the case of Giordana's *I cento passi*, the film follows the true story of the life and death of the anti-mafia activist Giuseppe (Peppino) Impastato. Peppino is depicted as a character personally touched by the horrors of the mafia in his native Cinisi through his father's debt to the mafia and his uncle's involvement in the organization. During the film, we see Peppino's divergence from the customary faith in the local mafia and his subsequent protest through anti-

mafia rallies and the creation of an anti-mafia radio station. The film also highlights the dynamic familial relationships in Peppino's life. Particularly his father's disapproval, the dedication of his mother, and the irreconcilable differences between Peppino and his brother Giovanni define Peppino's continued rejection of mafia values and the gendered norms they enforce. Finally, we are shown Peppino's brutal death at the hands of the mafia and given hope through the unifying aspect of his martyrdom. This film imparts a strong anti-mafia message to the viewer; however, we see the greater Italian patriarchal values at work through the film's erasure of Peppino's homosexual identity. As Renga explains "*I cento passi* allows Peppino's martyrdom at the expense of his sexual identity"(Renga,2013,2). This explicates the underlying social conundrum that in order to become a rallying point for anti-mafia causes the martyr must fit within the gendered norms of the patriarch that form the basis of Italian culture itself. This type of over simplification of motives can be seen across films regarding historical anti-mafia figures, but it silences the driving forces behind these figures rebellion: their inability to find a place for themselves within the patriarchal mafia culture. Through silencing the parts of Peppino's identity at odds with mafia culture, filmmakers also silence his opposition to the hegemonic Italian patriarchy and as Renga points out "Ultimately... for Peppino's status as a martyr to stay intact, his identificatory projection must remain normative and unthreatening"(Renga, 2013,14). This misrepresents historical fact, however; as Peppino explicitly ties his sexual identity and the repression thereof due to the patriarchal systems, to his political exploits by stating in his diary that he "constructed a large part of his political life up [his] schizoid condition"(Renga,2013,13) . To further acknowledge the significance of this exclusion we must recognize that *I cento passi* is shown throughout Italy as a bastion and organizer of the anti-mafia movement without reference to Impastato's true identity as a homosexual. In this act we see how the filmmakers and the

Italian state stand to sublimate Impastato's fight against the ostracizing systems upholding the mafia, such as that of the patriarchy, in order to "solidify viewer identification" and ultimately protect that same system within greater Italian culture (Renga,2013,15).

In the case of women within films criticizing the mafia, I argue that the harsh acts of violence against invented female characters act to further silence women within the mafia as they are forced to imagine the consequences of anti-mafia sentiment without being offered the same type of assuaging veneration that we see with male characters. Here I recall Dana Renga's invocation of Judith Butler's statements value: "One way of posing the question of who 'we' are in these times of war is by asking whose lives are considered valuable, whose lives are mourned, and whose lives are considered ungrievable"(Renga,2013,117). We will see that by the depiction of women's treatment in the films *Placido Rizzotto* and *Gomorra* the viewer can properly assume that within greater Italian culture, as in mafia culture, the life and hardships of the woman are considered invaluable and, ultimately, disposable.

In Scimeca's *Placido Rizzotto*, we are introduced to Placido, the title character and real life anti-mafia martyr, during his childhood as his father is dragged away from him. Soon after, grown Placido is seen running through a forest in an effort to stop the execution of five partisans by a group of Fascists. He arrives as the first four partisans are being hanged and engages in an epic battle with the Fascists in attempt to rescue the fifth, and only female, victim. Though he manages to defeat the Fascists, he is unsuccessful in saving the girl and is forced to watch as she dies in his arms. In this instance, we see the initial spark for the Placido's fight against injustice and his dedication to combating groups who impede justice such as the Fascists and the mafia. As Renga points out, "Her [the partisan girl's] assassination creates the story and sets Placido's quest in motion. Yet, paradoxically, she has no place within it"(Renga,2013,20). This paradox

serves to reinforce the use of women's bodies in film as plot points without the contributing any value to the woman herself. Throughout the rest of the film the idea of the partisan girl is absent and the viewer soon forgets her fictitious existence.

Later in the film, the act of violence against Lia, Placido's historical romantic interest, furthers the "male martyr's narrative" that the film creates. The viewer understands through the way the story is shown that Lia is being punished mainly for her association with Placido, however; Dana Renga states that Lia also "brought shame upon her family by rejecting the sovereignty of family honor" and "provoked vendetta as a means to punish and silence her [family] in perpetuity"(Renga,2013,24). This reading further underlines the double standard of women within the mafia context in which they are to be held responsible for both their own actions and those of the men they associate with. Though the reasons for Lia's rape could be interpreted as "practical" as Dana Renga points out, the rape sequence as a whole is detrimental in the fight against the mafia as it further silences the plight of the woman (Renga,2013,24). In her discussion on the effect the rape act has on the viewer, Renga calls on the work of Tania Modleski who maintains that "rape and violence effectively silence and subdue not only the women *in* the films -the one who threatens patriarchal law and order through the force of her anarchic desire- but also the women watching these films" (Renga,2013,25). The circumstances of this rape are particularly harmful to the woman psyche as Lia's mother is present during the event and does not step in to assist her daughter. This confirms the power of the patriarchal narrative within the mafia context and further harms the *affidamento* between women necessary for upsetting the patriarchal structure itself.

Besides the inclusion of a fictitious rape scene to reduce the significance of an otherwise powerful female character, we can also see the patriarchal influence on Italian culture

as a whole and its support of the mafia mindset playing out through the way in which the reviewers of the film discuss the rape scene. Instead of questioning its inclusion or further vilifying the mafia, attention was turned to Lia's supposed "brief moment of pleasure". This type of discourse further places blame upon the woman figure for her traumatic experiences and reinforces the cultural stigma against women who dare to defy patriarchal norms. The reviewers in the case of *Placido Rizzotto* either erase the strength and defiance of Lia, similarly to how Maria's defiance of the patriarchy within the mafia was erased through her unmourned death, or turn her into the cause of her own subjugation.

The final plot point that exemplifies patriarchal norms, and therefore unintentionally supports the narrative of the mafia, is that of the sacrificial woman as seen in the biopic of Rita Atria, *La siciliana ribelle*. At first take Rita's act of sacrifice at the end of the film seems appropriate as the historical Rita Atria ends her life in a similar fashion, though without the accompaniment of a man. However, what is troubling in the case of *La siciliana ribelle* is the simplicity with which Rita's story is told and the lack of her real life opposition to the patriarchy. *La siciliana ribelle*, the film by Marco Amenta, chronicles the life of real life anti-mafia martyr Rita Atria. We first see Rita in the present day trying to retain one of her last vestiges of her father's memory: his gun. We soon recognize the importance of this "keepsake" as we learn of Rita's close ties with her father and brother through flashbacks to her childhood. The film progresses in this manner and we see that Rita's motivation for turning state's witness is to gain retribution for the deaths of her father and brother at the hands of the mafia. Rita then moves to Rome, under protected status, in order to collaborate with the court and with the famous Judge Borsellino. As Rita works within the law, we see her come to the realization that her father and brother were a bloody part of the system she is now working to overthrow. We then witness a

shift in Rita's ethic as her motivation changes from that of vengeance to a true yearning for justice. Rita enters a relationship, but eventually, after the death of Judge Borsellino, then supposed abandonment by her boyfriend, and the attempted coercion by an ex-lover, jumps to her death in order to secure her testimony against those being persecuted.

Though packaged as a simplistic story in which the passion for "truth" and "justice" lead to a young girl's ultimate sacrifice, *La siciliana ribelle* largely silences the Rita Atria's condemnation of the patriarchy in favor of the anti-mafia rhetoric. As Renga comments on the films erasure of Rita Atria's internal struggle, Rita's personal writings as recorded in her diaries are so challenging to the patriarchy that "female perspective must be first domesticated" through Rita's supposed peace of mind concerning placing blind trust in the state to bring about justice, and "then violently and abruptly repressed at the film's close" through Rita's unexpected and shocking suicide (Renga,2013,140). The proposition made by filmmakers that Rita sacrificed herself for the sole purpose of encouraging justice "obliterates her difference and reinforces 'the impossible position of women in relation to desire in a patriarchal society'" (Renga,2013,137). This rendering encourages the viewer to further vilify the mafia without examining the similarities between the "two diametrically opposed patriarchies" of "the Mafia and the Italian legal system" in the middle of which Rita Atria stands (Renga,2013,137). With this lens, it is deducible that Rita threw herself from the ledge not because it was in the best interest of justice, but instead due to the realization that upon combating one patriarchal system from which she turned because she could not fit within the woman's mould she found herself trapped within another which still excluded her.

Further evidence of how the mafia is in fact bolstered by the hegemonic patriarchy present within Italian mainstream society once again manifests itself in the telling of Rita's story

through her relationship with the men in her life. The director, Amenta, highlights and even invents how relationships with male figures shaped Rita's life and *allowed* her to become the martyr that we see by the end of the film. This telling completely excludes Rita's personal belief in the necessity of the fight against "*the mafia dentro*" or the mafia inside and her interactions with "best friend, former roommate, and fellow collaborator of justice", Piera Aiello (Renga,2013,144). This erasure once again refuses to portray women holding power in the absence of the man. The refusal to recognize Rita's call to identify "the mafia inside" also allows the viewer to stand firmly against the mafia and on the "side" of Rita without threatening the central construct that the historical Rita opposed: that of the patriarchy. This mitigates self-examination and ultimately perpetuates the socialized behaviors and hegemonic beliefs regarding the patriarchy both in mafia and mainstream Italian culture that Rita tried to warn against.

### Part 3: The Pillar of Capitalism

Capitalism as defined by the Merriam - Webster dictionary is "an economic system characterized by private or corporate ownership of capital goods, by investments that are determined by private decision, and by prices, production, and the distribution of goods that are determined mainly by competition in a free market". The simplified definition adds the specification that the capital goods are not owned "by the government"(capitalism). Even from this simplistic definition the similarities between the capitalist system and that utilized by the mafia begin to unfold. As we saw in the section concerning the patriarchy, the mafia is generally painted on one side of the dichotomy (the mother) and the state on the other (the father), the

same principle will begin to apply in this section as I align the mafia with the free market and the state with more regulatory economic systems.

Though over the centuries the mafia has passed through various economic systems, I will show that the capitalist ethic was at the heart of the mafia's business operations and capitalism is the system that imbued the mafia with the economic power it uses in order to exert influence over the different classes. The mafia was birthed from the agrarian system and the need of local landowners for protection of the land against bandits. This was largely due to the failure of the state to provide security for the lands from which it profited, leaving the protection of their livelihood solely up to the landowners and the local community. The birth of the mafia therefore was a direct consequence of, and in direct contrast to the state. The mafia then imposed upon local landowners a model of demand more similar to that of capitalism, within which they firmly took the advantage and established themselves as the ruling class. According to a study by Oriana Bandiera on the early Sicilian mafia, it was "optimal for each landowner to voluntarily buy protection even if this results in worse equilibrium for the landowning class" and that "other things equal, mafia profits were higher where land was more fragmented" (Bandiera,2003,1). This was due, as Bandiera describes to "the fact that protection involves an externality, in the sense that by buying protection, each landowner deflects thieves on others' properties" (Bandiera,2003,1). In this way, the mafia modeled its organization around the free market system. By creating externalities, the traditional mafia essentially disempowered the local community's sense of cohesion and inserted its own benefit of commoditized protection. This, in turn, made each individual into a "private owner" who depended on a market monopolized by the mafia in order to produce his own goods. I argue that this individualization tactic has bolstered and continues to bolster the strength of the mafia by making it both an appealing source

of goods for “investors” and an undeniable avenue to economic salvation. This deconstructs the very idea of community and reconstructs it around the central economic power of the mafia.

Through this method the traditional mafia was able to increase loyalty and reconstitute itself as a desirable good.

When considering the mafia in this context, short stories help us to recognize the power drawn from the capitalist structure and the ability of the mafia to fill in the gaps of the state’s failures. Here I discuss the depictions of the mafia as they relate to the class struggle and the disbandment of local communities through the endowment of mafia values surrounding class. I also delineate how the mafia uses capitalism as a tool to assert itself as the dominant power within a community. In the story *Testagrossa Agrees* by Giuseppe Ernesto Nuccio, we are introduced to a young street child named Testagrossa or literally ‘large head’ who though clearly homeless and lacking in food security, being that his name implies the condition of malnutrition, appears to live a jovial life among those with more fortunate lots in life (Pickering-Iazzi,2007,51). Throughout the story, we are shown the discrimination Testagrossa faces due his status in the lowest class of society. People avoid him, assume he is a thief, and even once chase him through the street. Testagrossa friends are far and in between and the value of his life in the eyes of the capitalist society is almost zero. The one exception is that of the low ranking *mafioso*, Serpentera. For Serpentera and, more importantly, his bosses within the clearly criminal organization Testagrossa is the prime recruit. He is clever, quick, and perhaps most importantly poor. Testagrossa continuously denies Serpentera’s offers of admittance into his “friendship” though Serpentera clearly lays out the economic benefits. This results in the use of the mafia’s other greatest strategies: violence. After this confrontation, Testagrossa is presumed dead until he encounters Serpentera at a local puppet show and purposefully gets arrested in the place of a

working class boy (of more value within the capitalist system) to avoid him. While Testagrossa is in jail, we see the extent of the mafia's power both within the community and in terms of capital as he meets the "maestro" Don Lucio and is convinced to submit to Serpentera in order to escape the prospect of jail. The story of Testagrossa exemplifies a failure of the state from which the mafia stands to gain capital. As human capital, Testagrossa has value only to the mafia in that they are capable of controlling him directly through their economic power. The level of corruption within the town's infrastructure, indicated by the release of Don Lucio after his discussion with Testagrossa, leaves the valueless members of society to be devoured by the ever-hungry mafia.

The second story in which the mafia's capitalist moral affects the local community is that of *The Carob Tree* by Maria Occhipinti (Pickering-Iazzi,2007,85). As previously discussed, the story of the *Carob Tree* paints the picture of a local impoverished community and the everyday occurrences of their lives. During the story's action we note that this community is bound together through their shared experience and recognition that they are all bound to the same social class. This is shown to strengthen the community as it placed everyone on equal footing. "Families tried to help each other out as best they could" because in the end everyone "shared the same poverty and the same hope" (Pickering-Iazzi,2007,87). In this way the community functioned as a sort of extended family. However, upon the arrival of the aforementioned *mafioso*, the capitalist mindset overtook the town. After the arrival of the mafia, and therefore of affluence, the people differentiated themselves by class, as denoted by the new use of the terms "working class" and "peasants" within the text. In this way the insidious mindset of capitalism, through the carrier of the mafia, infected the town. The women "became selfish" and "luxury and haughtiness were born" (Pickering-Iazzi,2007,88). Ultimately, the arrival of the mafia resulted

in the dissolution of the “extended family” structure and diverted the focus to the nuclear, which created an avenue for competition amongst the population. According to a study of a similar town by Banfield, the failure of this type of "extended family structure ...was a function of behavior aimed at maximizing benefit for one’s own restricted family circle”(Fazio,2004,273) . This is strikingly similar to the function of the capitalist system in which each private company vies in the interest of their individual gain and the greater social good is forgotten. Ideally, the social good would be prioritized by the state, but in the mafia and capitalist contexts, the state is stripped of its intervening powers. Paul Ginsborg connects the strength and cohesion of the Italian family to the possibility of using it as a substitute for inadequate institutions. If we replace his idea of family with that of the Family within the mafia we also see this to be true; where the substitution for the state is made not necessarily because of inadequacy, but due to the societal structures put into place by the mafia itself that bars the state’s influence. This substitution, says Ginsborg, “explains the failure to develop a civic consciousness”. Due to the mafia’s position as “an accessible, strong and widespread substitute” to the institution of government, those within the Mafia Family do not have to stop to consider the consequences of their perpetuation of a system that excludes state assistance (Fazio,2004,273).

The next form of government the mafia’s capitalist methodology faced was that of Fascism. The fascist ideas almost diametrically opposed those of capitalism and as a result we saw the persecution of the mafia during the *ventennio*. As Rockwell explains “Fascism is the system of government that *cartelizes* the private sector, centrally plans the economy to subsidize producers, exalts the police state as the source of order, denies fundamental rights and liberties to individuals, and makes the executive state the unlimited master of society”(Rockwell,2013,11). Fascism crippled the mafia’s way of life by centralizing the economy and giving undue power to

the mafia's opposition: the state. Rockwell further describes the fascist mindset explaining how "individual rights, and the individual himself, are strictly subordinate to the state's great and glorious goals for the nation" (Rockwell,2013,11). This directly contradicts capitalism and fueled the fascist state's fight against capitalism and the mafia-like organizations. Pickering-Iazzi explains the clash between the Fascist state and the Mafia state as a result of Mussolini's search for "complete loyalty and obedience of its citizens"(Pickering-Iazzi,2007,9). She goes on to explain the "anti-mafia campaign" headed by Cesare Mori beginning in 1925. Though largely ineffective, this campaign led to the declaration of the eradication of the mafia in 1927. As we see in excerpts from De Stefani's autobiography, *La mafia alle mie spalle*, eradication was not successful. In the excerpt provided by Pickering-Iazzi, we see how a mob boss that leverages both violence and economic ruin of the lower class for power confronts De Stefani during this period. This depiction, however; erases the image of the *onorevole mafioso* (honorable mafioso) and paints one of a criminal exploiting the poor. This reframing of *mafiosi* was the most important outcome of the war against the mafia because it was first necessary for the *mafiosi* to be villainized before they could be reborn into the phenomenon of today.

It was with the newfound image of an organization of criminals and thugs that the mafia entered the 1950's and 60's. It was this image, Arlacchi argues, that forced *mafiosi* to "attach more importance to the pursuit of wealth, since for them money... offer[s] the only way back to power and honor"(Arlacchi,1986,85). This sense of power is central to the mafia mindset and therefore must be obtained through any measure. The mafia is drawn within the confines of capitalism as money is the way through which they achieve power. According to Arlacchi, the mafia was able to optimize the capitalist system through "the discouragement of competition", the "holding down of wages", and "access to financial resources"(Arlacchi,1986,89). We see

examples of all three of these techniques within Garrone's film *Gomorra* which sheds light on the operations of the Neapolitan mafia, the *Camorra*. In this film we see the discouragement of competition through clan wars, the holding down of wages through the subjugation of the fashion designer and his workers, and a greater access to financial resources through the scale at which the eco-mafia must operate in order to be effective. The most damaging aspect of the overtly capitalist system within the mafia is its ability to funnel “considerable capital sums acquired in the course of illegal activity into its legal entrepreneurial operations” (Arlacchi,1986,102). *Gomorra* also offers us an example of this confounding trend within the ‘facts’ on the screen that point to the mafia’s economic involvement in the building of the Twin Towers memorial. This tactic allows those within the mafia structure, particularly those at the top of the patriarchal structure, to remain ‘clean’ and in power. This modification of truly illegal acts is reminiscent of how the mafia’s narrative is modified in other ways in favor of capital gain. Pickering-Iazzi addresses the growing number of tourists attractions surrounding mafia tales (Pickering-Iazzi,2015,3). This commercialization of the mafia sites, along with that of its portrayal as an honorable, profitable tradition in films, depicts the hegemony that capitalism has over the truth and the best interest of Italian people. It is this commercialization in favor of capitalism that makes the mafia hegemonic.

#### Part 4: Conclusion

Foucault’s analysis posits that power is a kind of “power-over”. He writes, “if we speak of the structures or the mechanisms of power, it is only insofar as we suppose that certain persons exercise power over others” (Allen,2016,1). Following Foucault's ideas it becomes clear that the mafia draws this “power over others” from two structures: capitalism and patriarchy. As independent pillars each mechanism is a bastion of subjugation and exerts great power through

this “power-over” method. However, when they intertwined to form what Eisenstien terms the “capitalist patriarchy” as in the mafia, the strength of these oppressive systems grows exponentially (Eisenstien,1977,196). “Capitalist patriarchy emphasizes the ‘mutual dependence of the capitalist class structure and the male supremacy”(Eisenstien,1977,196). Within the mafia capitalism, in fact, acts as a means to prove and support male supremacy. These hegemonic inequalities are difficult to identify as the strength of the mafia reaches deep within Italian culture as a whole. Rita Atria’s exemplified the above when she: “Before fighting against the Mafia you have to examine your own conscience and then, after you have defeated the Mafia inside yourself, you can fight the Mafia that is in your circle of friends. We ourselves and our mistaken way of behaving are the Mafia”(Pickering-Iazzi,2007,161). We see a similar line of thinking in Pitrè’s description of the mafia:“The mafia is a certain consciousness of one’s own being, an exaggerated notion of individual force and strength as ‘the one and only means of settling any conflict, any clash of interests or idea’; which means that it is impossible to tolerate the superiority or (worse still) the dominance of others" (Arlacchi,1986,6). Once the rhetoric disseminates that the mafia is within the *comportamento* instead of instilled within the organization itself, there will be hope for a change in the mafia’s domination of the Italian mindset, and therefore; a hope for Italy. Until then, we must again draw inspiration from Rita Atria and live by her philosophy: “Perhaps an honest world will never exist, but who prevents us from dreaming. Perhaps if each one of us tries to change, perhaps we will succeed” (Pickering-Iazzi,2007,162).

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